

**BETWEEN THE PARTY LINE AND THE BOTTOM LINE:
REFORM, COMMERCIALIZATION, AND DEMOCRATIC
PROSPECTS FOR NEWS MEDIA IN CHINA**

by

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COMMERCIALIZATION, AND DEMOCRATIC PROSPECTS FOR NEWS
MEDIA IN CHINA

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the intertwining of political control and market forces in China's news media.

The analytical framework draws on Western critical media scholarship that argues for media democratization beyond the liberal model of press freedom through the market. The research included extensive documentary research both inside and outside China; interviews with Chinese media scholars, administrators, and journalists; case studies of print and broadcast media institutions and practices; as well as analysis of media contents.

Economic reforms and an open door policy introduced the market logic into China's Party-controlled news media system and led to the emergence of discourse on media democratization in the mid-1980s, which threatened to challenge the Party's monopolistic control of the news media. While the crackdown on the democracy movement in 1989 suppressed democratic discourse and reimposed tight political control, market forces gained momentum especially after the Party's unreserved embrace of a market economy in 1992. These developments produced the current intermingling of Party logic and market logic in the news media.

Market forces have undermined the Party's traditional methods of ideological control, created some openings for relative autonomy in some areas, and led to the emergence of a commercial sector within the media system. The oppositional potentials of the market, however, have largely been contained by tight political control. Rather than substantially altering the dominant mode of political communication, market forces have contributed to a shift in the Party's ideological work from crude political indoctrination to more subtle forms of ideological domination. Moreover, market forces themselves contain significant anti-democratic tendencies, which have been amplified in forms of media commercialization with special Chinese characteristics.

The study concludes that the current fusion of political control and commercialism in the Chinese news media is undemocratic; the triumph of market forces alone cannot lead to a democratic system of media communication in China. The dissertation explores alternative possibilities and proposes a multi-sector, multi-tiered, pluralistic news media system organized around different principles and logics.

Dedication

For my father Zhao Ruqi, my mother Qin Yujiao, my husband Qian Jianxing, and my
daughter Linda

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Chapter One

Introduction

Is the practice of journalism in China changing? and if so, what are the chances that a western, liberal model of the press will take hold?¹

China is a nation of moods, and the swings in mood are wide and dramatic. They are both reflected in and driven by the press, and they are tied to political events: "liberation" in 1949 when the Communist Party took control of the country, the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957, the Great Leap Forward of 1958-1960, the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76, or the meeting of the Party Congress in December 1978 when Deng Xiaoping assumed supreme power.² The new mood dates to January 1992 when Deng Xiaoping went south to the thriving city of Shenzhen and urged the rest of the country to emulate the Shenzhen model of rapid growth and a decidedly capitalist market mentality. When Deng's talks were published, the people of China latched on to his message with enthusiasm. Every description of China today begins with "after Deng Xiaoping went south." After Deng Xiaoping went south, it seems, everything - and everyone - in China has changed.

Except for the press. Clamped under hardliners' control following the June 4 massacre of 1989, the national media was slow to pick up on Deng's new call for a "socialist market economy," and the drive for economic liberalization has yet to translate into more political or press freedom.³

These two quotes, the first introducing a symposium on communication in China, the second introducing a report on press freedom in China, are illustrative of the dominant theoretical framework and approach in the analysis of news media in China.⁴ A critical analysis of this literature serves as a necessary introduction to this thesis, which examines the intertwining of Party control and the growing influence of market

¹Mark R. Levy, "Editor's Note," *Journal of Communication* (44:3, Summer 1994), p. 3.

²In fact, the above reference to the event in 1978 should be the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Party Committee, not the Party Congress. The Party Congress meets every five years. It elects a Central Committee, which holds plenary meetings.

³Anne Thurston, "Frenzy for Money Masks a Dynasty in Decline," in Alison L. Jernow, *Don't Force Us to Lie* (New York: Committee to Protect Journalists, 1993), pp. 7-8.

⁴One notable exception to this dominant theoretical framework is S. S. Kim's unpublished Ph.D. thesis: *The Communication Industries in Modern China: Between Maoism and the Market* (Leicester, University of Leicester, 1987). Kim's thesis analyzes the structure of the Chinese mass media and the transformation of the media industry in response to market mechanism in the first half of the 1980s from the perspective of Marxist political economy. Indeed, the title of this thesis inspires that of my own. While Kim offers many insights on the Chinese news media system, his occasional romantization of the Cultural Revolution is rather problematic and much of material is dated.

forces in the news media in China. I will focus on three main limitations of the literature and through a critique of these limitations, introduce my own analytical framework.

Content versus Structural Analysis

A great deal has been written on the news media in China, especially on media reform and the struggle for press freedom in the 1980s. Much of the analysis, however, focuses on what the Chinese news media actually say rather than on the structure of the news media system. Such a focus has roots in administrative research. The objective of such research is to determine to which side the Chinese pendulum has swung, to predict the policy behaviour of government leaders so that governments and businesses outside China can act accordingly in dealing with the Chinese leadership. Factions within the Party are constantly being analyzed, and the drama of political struggle is constructed as between the "Reformers" and the "Conservatives" or "Hardliners," between Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng, and so forth. The news media are studied as both instruments and sites of factional struggles within the Party.⁵

Although analyses in English attempt a detached understanding of China's news media, a political stance is always implicit. During the reform era, this political stance has exhibited two prominent perspectives: 1) an overall rejection of the Party's ideological control as part of the totalitarian versus freedom characterization of the international political landscape, still largely influenced by the Cold War mentality and 2) a sympathy with the liberal reformers and their policy orientations in the "Reformers versus Hardliners" account of the Chinese domestic political struggle. Two different levels of analysis (an implicit structural critique of the Party's overall model of political

⁵See for example, Merle Goldman, "The Role of the Press in Post-Mao Political Struggles," in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed.), *China's Media, Media's China*, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1994, pp. 23-35; and Marlowe Hood, "The Use and Abuse of Mass Media by Chinese Leaders During the 1980s," in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed.), *China's Media, Media's China*, pp. 37-57.

communication and the role of the news media on the one hand, and on the other hand an analysis of the struggle for control over the news media between different factions within the Party) are often fused and have led to difficulties and inconsistencies in some analyses. Such inconsistencies and ambiguities are evident both in interpretation of specific media contents and in the analytical framework of some studies.

One case in point is Alison L. Jernow's interpretation of the famous "Huang Fuping" editorials in *Liberation Daily*. In late 1991 and early 1992, while the "rest of the press was still belaboring the dangers of peaceful evolution"⁶ following the 1989 crackdown, Shanghai's *Liberation Daily*, the organ of the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee, published a series of editorials under the pseudonym Huang Fuping, calling for accelerated opening up and commercialization.⁷ These editorials were interpreted by Jernow as "cracks" appearing "in the wall of propaganda." But if Huang Fuping "had the backing of Deng Xiaoping himself," as Jernow notes, then these articles do not represent a breakaway from the nature of propaganda.⁸ They are simply propagating a different line within the Party. They signify a change in the content of propaganda rather than in the nature of the news media as instruments of the Party's policy initiatives.

Jernow goes on to describe how other media outlets quickly jumped "on the reform bandwagon" and promoted the Deng line and how, "[d]espite this display of solidarity, the media remained far from uniform in its thinking."⁹ This collapsing of the

⁶"Peaceful evolution" is a Cold War political terminology that is often invoked by the Chinese Communist Party. According to Chinese Party propaganda, it describes a Western strategy, initiated and championed by the U.S. government since the late 1940s, to transform existing socialist regimes into capitalist formations through systematic, gradual and peaceful political, economic, cultural and ideological penetration.

⁷Alison L. Jernow, p. 79.

⁸Actually, these editorials expressed ideas formulated by Deng Xiaoping. During the Spring Festival in 1991, Deng visited Shanghai and stated that in order to develop Shanghai's Pudong district, Shanghai should take bold measures and leave behind the debate on whether certain reform measures are capitalist or socialist. *Liberation Daily* used three editorials (March 2, March 22, and April 12, 1991) to carry the main ideas of Deng's talks in Shanghai. See, Wu Jianguo, Chen Xiankui, Liu Xiao, and Yang Fengcheng (eds.), *Ideological Winds in Contemporary China* (Beijing: Police Education Press, 1993), p. 574.

⁹Alison L. Jernow, p. 83.

distinction between analysis of structures of domination that limit press freedom and content analysis that reveals conflict within the highest circle of power is typical.

Such analytical confusion is also evident in Hsiao Ching-Chang and Yang Mei-Rong's study of the famous Shanghai-based *World Economic Herald* (1980-1989).¹⁰ The *World Economic Herald* started out as a weekly tabloid specializing in economic issues in 1980. It gradually shifted its focus to politics, however, and became the most outspoken newspaper in the country in the mid-1980s. It was co-sponsored by two research institutions, the China World Economics Association, and the World Economic Research Institute of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. Qin Benli, a veteran Party member and journalist, was the editor-in-chief of the newspaper. Supported exclusively by advertising and subscriptions, the paper was relatively free from formal institutional links to the Party and government.

But the *Herald* was no ordinary tabloid. The majority of its readers were the country's "political elite, scholars and entrepreneurs."¹¹ Prominent intellectuals and important government officials in the country were frequently interviewed by the newspaper or were contributors to the paper. It had a powerful board of directors and advisors, including members of the Central Committee, directors of special commissions under the State Council and many of the country's prominent economists and political scientists. More specifically, as Kate Wright notes, among the newspaper's powerful allies were then Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang and his think tanks.¹² The paper was in the forefront of political controversies. In April 1989, the newspaper became a battleground of different political forces in the country. Jiang

¹⁰Hsiao Ching-Chang and Yang Mei-Rong, "Don't Force Us to Lie: The Case of the *World Economic Herald*," in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed.), *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990), pp. 111-121. See also Kate Wright, "The Political Fortunes of Shanghai's '*World Economic Herald*,'" *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* (No. 23, January 1990), pp. 121-132 and Alison L. Jernow, pp. 31-49.

¹¹Two provincial Party secretaries even sent memoranda to government officials in their provinces urging them to read it regularly. See Li Cheng and Lynn T. White III, "China's Technocratic Movement and the *World Economic Herald*," *Modern China* (17:3, July 1991), p. 350.

¹²Kate Wright, p. 121.

Zemin and the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee first attempted to censor the newspaper and then fired Qin Benli. These events and the subsequent closure of the newspaper became a focal point in the struggle for press freedom during the 1989 democracy movement.

After June 4th, the government condemned the *Herald* as a "hotbed" of rebellion and a "trumpet" of an international reactionary "cantata."¹³ Hsiao and Yang, on the other hand, portray it as "a symbol of press freedom" in China during the 1980s.¹⁴ There is, however, ambiguity and inconsistency in their conceptualization of press freedom. To be sure, the *Herald* published some articles other newspapers would not have dared to print.¹⁵ But Hsiao and Yang fail to clearly define exactly what they mean by press freedom. From their conclusion that "the *Herald's* ability to publish sharp criticisms and possible solutions to problems demonstrated openness and some degree of press freedom," it is clear that such freedom is assumed on the basis of analysis of what the paper was able to say rather than on the basis of analysis of structures of authority and political intervention.

It is clear from available evidence that the degree of freedom the *Herald* was able to enjoy had much to do with the fact that in one way or another it acted as an informal mouthpiece of the Zhao Ziyang administration and had Zhao's protection for some time. Such freedom, therefore, must be contextualized and qualified. While the paper was able to survive several political storms with the help of Zhao Ziyang in

¹³Xinhua News Agency, "The True Face of the *World Economic Herald* Incident," *People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (August 19, 1989), pp. 1, 4.

¹⁴Hsiao and Yang, "Don't Force Us to Lie," pp. 119-120.

¹⁵These articles range from an essay written by U.S. Ambassador Winston Lord which "bluntly criticized the Chinese for their role in the Sino-American trade and economic problems," to a report in which the Mayor of Yantai city "had found that some people were so dissatisfied with the state of affairs in China that they wished the Nationalists would return to take over China." See Hsiao and Yang, pp. 116-119.

1987, by the end of 1988, nobody in the Party could protect it anymore.¹⁶ The freedom it had enjoyed was finally taken back by the Party.¹⁷

While Hsiao and Yang view editorial intervention by Jiang Zemin and the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee as problematic, they fail to analyze critically Zhao Ziyang's earlier interventions in defense of the paper and to examine a set of "complex relationships that often put the *Herald* closer to Zhao Ziyang's administration than were other newspapers."¹⁸ In short, although the *Herald* was not an official Party organ, it was closely implicated in the political struggles inside the Party. If the *Herald's* freedom is defined as its ability to pursue a particular editorial orientation vis a vis conservative elements within the Party, then such freedom ended in April 1989, when Jiang Zemin's Shanghai Municipal Party Committee attempted to censor the newspaper. If press freedom is defined as freedom from political intervention, then such freedom had ceased to exist long before 1989, when Zhao Ziyang rescued the paper from conservatives who had wanted to close it. Zhao at different points acted as an irresponsible patron of the newspaper and used it as an instrument to advance his own causes.

¹⁶Hsiao and Yang reported that even "Zhao Ziyang had to say that Qin Benli had 'made a serious mistake and must be dealt with sternly'." See "Don't Force Us to Lie," (p. 120).

¹⁷Hsiao and Yang's article on the *Herald* appears in C. C. Lee's first anthology on the news media in China and American media reporting of China (*Voices of China*, The Guilford Press, 1990). It is worthwhile to note that articles in Lee's second anthology on the same theme (*China's Media, Media's China*, Westview Press, 1994) have substantially contextualized the kind of press freedom described by Hsiao and Yang. Marlowe Hood, in particular, points out that the Chinese press during the extraordinary moment of April and May 1989 "was operating roughly within the perceived guidelines of a particular faction, albeit a losing one, within the central leadership." (p. 38.) Hood even goes so far as to suggest that "we must recognize the extent to which the explosion of 'press freedom' was politically guided and manipulated by Zhao Ziyang and his allies." (p. 52) See Marlowe Hood, "The Use and Abuse of Mass Media by Chinese Leaders During the 1980s," in *China's Media, Media's China*, pp. 37-57.

¹⁸This quote is from Cheng and White, p. 345. Hsiao and Yang (1990, p. 118) made one mention that "General Secretary Zhao Ziyang spoke out in support of the *Herald* for being on the front lines of reform, and helped it weather the storm [of those inside the Party who want to close the newspaper]." Jernow documented more evidence which suggests that the direction and fate of the newspaper was closely related to Zhao Ziyang. For example, the *Herald's* adoption of a more radical stance was the result of an affirmation Qin received "from above, most likely from someone affiliated with Zhao Ziyang, that it was okay to promote political reform." Moreover, when the newspaper was under pressure from hardliners, Zhao twice came to its rescue. See, Jernow, pp. 34-35. Merle Goldman recently concludes more definitively that "The *Herald* was only able to survive because of Zhao's protection." See Merle Goldman, "The Role of the Press in Post-Mao Political Struggles," in *China's Media, Media's China*, p. 30.

Finally, the political stance underlying the analysis is also evident in Hsiao and Yang's suggestion toward the end of the article that "[i]f China's leadership had humbly listened to the opinions offered in the *Herald* and improved their work, the student demonstrations of 1989 would probably never have occurred."¹⁹ Underlying such a line of analysis is an assumption shared by many Chinese dissidents that "all their country basically needs is better, more civilized, compassionate, and properly educated leaders."²⁰ Instead, as Lynn T. White has suggested, "China may need a structure strong enough to work fairly for most of the people."²¹ The same applies to the news media. Rather than a newspaper that can offer a specific set of advice to the government, what China needs is a news media structure that "works fairly" for not just one newspaper with a specific editorial orientation but for a wide range of news media outlets that speak with a plurality of voices.

Chinese journalists have fought very hard for press freedom. The point is not to discredit the *Herald* and the heroic struggles of its staff against certain forces within the Party but to point out the necessity for a clear distinction between evidence derived from structural analysis and content analysis in the study of press freedom in China. There is a significant analytical difference between the struggle against the Party's model of political communication and the struggle between the different factions within the Party in terms of what is permissible.

After the Mass Propaganda Model, What?

In addition to the confusion of analytical frames discussed above, the literature on the news media in China commonly operates with a narrow definition of ideology and ideological processes in China. This is the case both with studies using an early mass propaganda model and more recent analyses that have gone beyond this model.

¹⁹Hsiao and Yang, "Don't Force Us to Lie," p. 120.

²⁰Lynn T. White III, "All the News: Structure and Politics in Shanghai's Reform Media," *Voices of China*, p. 109.

²¹Ibid. Ideally, China *must* have a structure that is strong enough to work fairly for *all* the people.

Until the late 1970s, the dominant perspective in the English literature on news media in China had been the mass propaganda and persuasion model.²² It operated with a particular notion of ideology as a rigid system of political doctrines. It conceived the Chinese news media as tightly-controlled instruments of ideological indoctrination and mass mobilization.²³

Most notable in this tradition are studies of how the Party used the radio and press to propagandize its goals and promote changes in the attitudes and behaviour of the people in the early 1950s and early 1960s.²⁴ The Party's own conceptualization of the news media, especially the mouthpieces metaphor, which describes the news media as mouthpieces of the Party, provides credibility to such a model.

Such a model still persists today. Guo Liyu, a former *China Daily* reporter, for example, concludes her 1990 study of the mass media in China by saying that despite changes in the communication system, such as its control, its content and even some of its components, the mass media in China "strictly serve as tools of political propaganda and ideological indoctrination for China's one-party system."²⁵

²²Tsan-Kuo Chang, Chin-Hsien Chen, and Guo-Qiang Zhang, "Rethinking the Mass Propaganda Model: Evidence from the Chinese Regional Press," *Gazette* (51, 1993, pp. 173-195), p. 175; see also, S. S. Kim, p. 6.

²³Su Shaozhi provides a penetrating account of the Party's ideological control in China from this perspective. See Su Shaozhi, "Chinese Communist Ideology and Media Control," in *China's Media, Media's China*, pp. 75-88. It is worthwhile to note that the concept of ideology in the mass propaganda and persuasion model is the one shared by the "end of ideology" theorists in the 1950s and 1960s in the West. In this view, as John B. Thompson notes in his *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 81), ideologies "were comprehensive, totalizing doctrines which offer a coherent vision of the social-historical world and which demand a high degree of emotional attachment. For many of these theorists, Marxism was the epitome of ideology in this sense. According to these theorists, while ideologies continue to flourish in less developed societies (the Chinese version of Marxism would be a perfect example), the age of ideologies is over in the West. The concept of ideology has been and continues to be at the centre of theoretical debates in media and cultural studies. See Chapter 2 of Thompson's above-cited book (pp. 74-121) for an account and critique of the "end of ideology" thesis. For short overviews of the concept of ideology in media and cultural studies, See Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran and Janet Woollacott (eds.) *Culture, Society and the Media*, London and New York: Routledge, 1982, pp. 56-90; and Yuezhi Zhao, "The 'End of Ideology' Again? The Concept of Ideology in the Era of Post-Modern Theory," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 18:1, Winter 1993, pp. 70-85.

²⁴See, for example, Franklin Houn, *To Change a Nation* (New York: Free Press, 1961); Alan P. L. Liu, *Communication and National Integration in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Frederick T. C. Yu, *Mass Persuasion in Communist China* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger), 1964.

²⁵Guo Liyu, *Mass Media as an Instrument of Propaganda: The Press and Socio-Political Change in Contemporary China*, unpublished M.A. Thesis (Queens University, Kingston, Ontario, 1990), p. 112.

However, a growing body of literature has either implicitly or explicitly challenged the adequacy of this model for the analysis of news media in China. A number of factors, including significant changes in the news media in China itself, the Chinese news media's increasing accessibility for researchers, the emergence of a wide range of theoretical perspectives in news media research in the West, as well as the changing composition of researchers in the field have all contributed to this challenge. Rather than having to rely exclusively on secondary data and focus on a single Chinese elite print medium, usually *People's Daily*, or on interviews with emigrants from China for data about Chinese audiences, researchers, many of whom have either gained residence in China or have grown up in China, can now collect a wide range of firsthand data, interview and survey Chinese journalists, and conduct ethnographic research of Chinese audiences. Studies on journalists, media institutions, media content as well as media audiences have all contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the news media in China.

Judy Polumbaum, for example, has examined in great detail the process of socialization and re-socialization of Chinese journalists in the reform era as well as their predicaments and discontent in the difficult task of having to serve the Party and the people at the same time.²⁶ Her fieldwork, involving interviews with journalists and questionnaires during the relatively open period of 1987-1988, convinced her that

...the system of media control and direction, which some western scholars would have us believe was monolithic and watertight, in fact leaked like a sieve. Press controls could be described as informal, flexible and largely uninstitutionalized, and the manner and severity of their exercise was largely dependent on time, place, political winds and personalities. Furthermore, journalists had a large and growing repertoire of tactics for averting, avoiding, subverting or circumventing controls.²⁷

²⁶Judy Polumbaum, "The Chinese Press and Its Discontents," *China Exchange News* (December 1988); Judy Polumbaum, "Outpaced by Events: Learning, Unlearning and Relearning to Be a Journalist in post-Cultural Revolution China," *Gazette*, (48, 1991), pp. 129-146; "The Tribulations of China's Journalists After a Decade of Reform," in *Voices of China*: pp. 33-68.

²⁷Judy Polumbaum, "Outpaced by Events," p. 140.

In the area of media organization and structure, Lynn T. White presents a detailed analysis of the changing structure of the reformist Shanghai media in the 1980s, noting more specialized audiences, improved technological resources, diversified content, and widened sources of revenue and staffing.²⁸ Jinglu Yu's study of the structure and function of television in the 1980s also departs from the mass propaganda and persuasion model. Yu concludes that television, profiting from a more open period, "was relatively free from the rigid and dogmatic Maoist control."²⁹ More specifically, Yu identifies three characteristics that distinguish post-Mao television from newspapers and radio under Mao: commercialization, the growing autonomy of local stations vis-a-vis the China Central Television Station (CCTV), and responsiveness to audience wants.³⁰

Supported by detailed audience ethnography and with a sensitivity to the active role of the audience in the interpretation of media messages, James Lull's study of television in the 1980s marks a further departure from the mass propaganda and persuasion model. Drawing from Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsh's conceptualization of television as a "cultural forum," Lull argues that Chinese television is far from being a monolithic instrument of mass propaganda of the Party and the state. Despite the intention of Chinese leaders to control the medium for propaganda purposes, television has given rise to "a diversity of cultural and political sentiments in China at a speed that disrupts stability and control."³¹ It has, according to Lull, become a medium of contradiction and resistance to autocratic rule.

In the area of content research, Glen Lewis and Sun Wanning focus on specialized management journals emerged since the economic reforms and demonstrate how these journals function as "a loophole" in the media system and make "a small

²⁸Lynn T. White III, "All the News."

²⁹Jinglu Yu, "The Structure and Function of Chinese Television, 1979-1989," in *Voices of China* (pp. 69-87), p. 86.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹James Lull, *China Turned on: Television, Reform and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 209.

contribution to the gradual pluralization of the Chinese media" by promoting the interests of the technocrats.³² Tsan-Kou Chang and his collaborators' analysis of the Chinese regional press more explicitly challenges the earlier mass propaganda and persuasion model. In their view, while useful in early studies, such a model is now outdated, in light of the fundamental changes in the structure and practices of the contemporary Chinese press as a result of China's reforms and openness to the West.³³ More specifically, as the co-authors note, "instead of carrying out the sole ideological mission dictated by the needs of the authority or acting as a mouthpiece, the mass media in China now have a market to attract and an audience to serve."³⁴

These diverse studies have all pointed to the inadequacy of the mass propaganda and persuasion model in analyzing the news media in China. All take important notice of the changes in the media system as a result of the reforms. Nevertheless, there is not yet a coherent new theoretical framework that can adequately explain the role of the news media in the reform era in China. There is a common understanding that the Chinese news media are increasingly moving away from the Party's prescription of political and ideological indoctrination. Chin-Chuan Lee captures this change very well in his introductory essay to the *Voices of China* anthology. Lee notes three differences in media and ideology under Mao and Deng. First, while Mao ensured that state influence and radical revolutionary ideology pervaded every domain of social life, now the state is less intrusive. Second, the post-Mao regime's relative de-emphasis of ideology has made it possible for various cultural genres, livelier media entertainment and other less ideologically loaded materials to flourish.³⁵ Third, while Mao repeatedly launched mass mobilization campaigns to pursue his ideological vision as well as to bolster his own power, his successors have "promoted the media to focus on promoting

³²Glen Lewis and Sun Wanning, "Discourses about 'Learning from Japan' in Post-1979 Mainland Chinese Management Journals," *Issues & Studies*, 30:5 (May 1994), p. 76.

³³Chang, Chen, and Zhang, p. 189.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 176.

³⁵Chin-Chuan Lee, "Mass Media: Of China, About China," in *Voices of China*, p. 5-6.

economic modernization instead of class struggle."³⁶ Thus, China is now "far less totalistic in the ideological arena."³⁷

But there is a lack of reconceptualization of the role of the news media in the reform era. This is evident in Leonard L. Chu's introductory essay to the *Journal of Communication's* symposium on communication in China. Chu quotes J. Stapleton Roy, the U.S. Ambassador to China, and uses his statement to summarize the articles in the symposium:

"The economic and technological revolution promoted by Deng Xiaoping since 1978 has stripped away much of the ideological prison in which the Chinese had lived for three decades." The articles in this Journal symposium surely concur in that assessment.³⁸

This change is certainly significant. But what is the nature of this change? What are the implications of this change for an understanding of the role of the news media in China in the reform era? The "end of ideology" in China? Perhaps not. The grand narrative of the Party's ideological control versus freedom from ideological constraints that seems to have emerged from this recent literature is rather one-dimensional. For one thing, the Party has not willingly relinquished its grip over the news media and given up its attempt to achieve ideological uniformity. Indeed, it has tightened since 1989, and many of the characteristics of the mass media in the Mao era remain intact. Most importantly, although the news media have played an increasingly important role in promoting economic modernization and have offered less ideologically loaded material, they may still serve the purpose of political domination, by the Party elite and a raising economic elite.

As mentioned earlier, the operational notion of ideology in the mass propaganda and persuasion model is a narrow and reductionist one, where ideology is defined as a set of political dogmas, while the ideological process is simply seen as a process of

³⁶Ibid., p. 6.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Leonard L. Chu, "Continuity and Change in China's Media Reform," *Journal of Communication* (44:3, Summer 1994, pp. 4-21), p. 17.

political indoctrination. As can be seen from the use of the term by Lee and Chu, their notion of ideology is similarly narrow. What is needed for a re-conceptualization of the role of the news media in the post-Mao period is a more broadly defined concept of ideology and the ideological process. In his *Ideology and Modern Culture*, John B. Thompson proposes to

conceptualize ideology in terms of the ways in which the meaning mobilized by symbolic forms serves *to establish and sustain* relations of domination: to establish, in the sense that meaning may actively create and institute relations of domination; to sustain, in the sense that meaning may serve to maintain and reproduce relations of domination through the ongoing process of producing and receiving symbolic forms.³⁹

Although Thompson develops this concept to study symbolic phenomena in the era of mass communication in developed industrial societies in the West, it has relevance to the study of news media in China as well. It casts the findings of the above-reviewed research in a new light and constructs a more useful theoretical framework for analysis of the media in China. There are a number of reasons.

First, although the Party has not relinquished Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, it has lost its revolutionary character and its totalizing power. Even the Party itself is relying less and less on it for its legitimacy. Since the economic reforms, especially since Deng Xiaoping's Spring 1992 talks, the regime is relying on delivering the goods rather than relying on traditional Marxist doctrines alone for its legitimacy. Even the ill-defined vision of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," with both a material and cultural component, has vanished into the background in favour of the even more pragmatic, banal objective of becoming "well to do" (xiao kang). Within this specific social and historical context, symbolic forms that serve to sustain the domination of the Party elite and/or establish new forms of domination by the new economic and technological elite, even though they are not explicitly promoting political doctrines and not aiming at political mobilization, should also be considered as

³⁹John B. Thompson, p. 58, emphasis original.

ideological, in the pejorative sense of the word, consistent with its use in the mass propaganda and persuasion model.

Moreover, an argument can be made that while the ideology of Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought has lost its grip on the population, a new ideology, that is, the ideology of national and personal development through the market, has replaced traditional Marxist doctrines as the dominant ideology in China. While this ideology is more implicit, its grip on the people is no less totalistic.⁴⁰

Second, as the literature reviewed above has suggested, the rise of mass communication, especially the rise of television as a popular mass medium in the context of economic reforms, has brought profound changes to the ideological landscape in China. The flourishing of various cultural genres, livelier entertainment formats and other less ideological content represents a proliferation of new symbolic forms. Such a shift in media form and content, however, does not mean that the news media are no longer doing ideological work. For example, news about war and violence in the former Yugoslavia on Chinese television, have

...persuaded many Chinese that the price of ending Communist Party rule would be political and economic chaos... The prospects of political upheaval and economic collapse are sufficiently daunting to compel compliance to the current regime."⁴¹

In this case, news is ideological, not because it promotes the doctrines of Marxism, but in the sense that it creates meaning that helps to sustain the current regime and current form of Party domination.

Third, a less reductionist understanding of ideology makes it possible to achieve a more sophisticated critique of the ideological role of the news media, one that perceives effects beyond the intentional control of the Party. Think again about the above example. It is possible that reporting of war and conflicts in the former Yugoslavia is motivated by goals of political manipulation. But it is also highly possible

⁴⁰I am indebted to Pat Howard for the formulation of this idea.

⁴¹Anne Thurston, p. 14.

that, given commercialization and the importation of news values from the West, news about war and conflicts are considered by journalists in an increasingly commercialized media system as newsworthy and appealing to the audience. Notwithstanding their struggle for press freedom and their desire to break away from the mouthpiece role, journalists may also unwittingly perform an ideological function for the Party in bringing such news to the Chinese audience. Thus, rather than limiting the analysis of the Chinese news media to the dichotomy between ideological control by the Party and the journalists' struggle for freedom and autonomy, a broadened concept of ideology makes it possible to see beyond such a dichotomy and to analyze the political implications of recent changes in the news media, including commercialization.

The Liberal Press Model as a Normative Standard?

When the *Journal of Communication's* editor poses the question about the possibility for the emergence of "a western, liberal model of the press" in China, he is, like many scholars who have written about the news media in China, using a western, liberal model of the press as a normative model against which to analyze and evaluate the news media in China. Yet, what is "a western, liberal model of the press"? What are the defining characteristics of such a model? Why should it be an unquestionable normative model for China? The Communist Party in China rejects "bourgeois liberalism" for fear of losing its monopoly of power. But one does not have to share such a perspective to take a critical view toward liberalism. The brutality and bankruptcy of Stalinism and Maoism does not invalidate critiques of the blindspots and contradictions of liberal-democracy and its liberal model of the press.

The core concept in the western, liberal model of the press is freedom of the press, which is defined in negative terms as freedom from state interference. A good portion of the literature on the reform of the Chinese news media is framed around the question of press freedom. But "a western liberal model of the press" means more than

this. In his discussion of liberal democracy, C. B. Macpherson notes that one of the facts that is often overlooked about liberal democracy is that "liberal-democracy and capitalism go together." It is a fact "which some people find admirable and some people would prefer not to have mentioned."⁴² The same applies to conventional invocations of the liberal model of the press, especially in the context of offering it as a normative model for others to follow.

In the West, freedom of the press from the direct control of the government and the organization of the press as a privately owned, profit-oriented commercial enterprise go together. As Denis McQuail has noted, a "libertarian" or simply "free press" model is actually a "press market model of editorial freedom."⁴³ The essence of this model requires that there be no 'prior restraint' "in the form of advance censorship, screening or licensing, nor any retribution for what is published, aside from what any citizen might have to answer for before the law."⁴⁴ Within this model, however, "[t]he freedom offered is essentially an individual right to free speech which has been translated into an economic right to run a publishing business with as much freedom as any other business, and often with certain special privileges added."⁴⁵ In other words, press freedom appears predominantly in a market form. The press becomes independent from the state through the market mechanism.

Yet this fact is often overlooked by those who look at the news media in China through the selective lens of the liberal model of the press. It is precisely for this reason that Anne Thurston claims that everything and everyone has changed except the press in China since "Deng Xiaoping went south" in 1992 in the passage quoted in the beginning of this chapter.

⁴²C. B. Macpherson, *The Real World of Democracy* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1965), p. 4.

⁴³Denis McQuail, *Media Performance* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), p. 103.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

In fact, just like everything and everyone in China, the press has also changed drastically, not in terms of increased press freedom, but in terms of advancing themselves along the road of commercialization and turning themselves into business enterprises. Thus, while the news media have not been able to copy the western model by gaining institutional independence from the State, they have at least partially imitated the western model by becoming increasingly commercialized. Some commentators have already noted the influences of market forces on the Chinese news media in the 1980s. Since 1992, market forces have taken a greater role both in theoretical discussions and in the practices of the news media. Indeed, "go to market" (zouxiang shichang) has been the call of the day for the news media in China since "Deng Xiaoping went south." The market logic of selling audience's attention to advertisers has gained further importance in the Chinese news media system and has resulted in many forms of media commercialization with special Chinese characteristics. But the influences of market forces on the news media go far beyond the increasing importance of the market logic. Many Chinese news organizations and journalists who struggled against being the mouthpieces of the Party and official corruption in 1989, have, for a set of complicated reasons, offered their editorial space (in addition to advertising space) for sale and become no less corrupted than other Party and government bureaucracies and officials.

Indeed, Hongkong-based media scholar Joseph M. Chan claims that "1992 will be remembered as the year of commercialization" in the field of mass communication in China.⁴⁶ Chan further argues that the importance of media commercialization "paralleled that of the organized demand for freedom of expression as witnessed during the pro-democracy movement in 1989."⁴⁷ Similarly, Xu Yu, another Hongkong based

⁴⁶Joseph M. Chan, "Commercialization without Independence: Trends and Tensions of Media Development in China," in J. Cheng and M. Brosseau (eds.), *China Review 1993* (Hongkong: Chinese University Press, 1993, pp. 25.1-25.21), p. 25.2.

⁴⁷Ibid.

media scholar, also observes that the Chinese press since 1992 "seems to be undergoing a quiet quasi-revolution."⁴⁸

Thus, *where* one looks for change will determine the answer to the question: "Is the practice of journalism in China changing?" Moreover, the most important fact about journalism in China is not that the practices of journalism have changed from one mode to another but that a new mode has been superimposed on an old one, without actually replacing the old one. More specifically, the Chinese news media since the 1980s, especially since Deng's southern trip in 1992, have been caught between the iron fist of the Party on the one hand and the invisible hand of the market on the other. While the literature has paid considerable attention to the struggle for press freedom and prospects for the emergence of a western, liberal model of the press, there is little systematic and thorough analysis of media commercialization and its profound implications. An understanding of the news media in China must take into account the dynamics of the interplay between the mechanisms of Party control and market forces. It must analyze the different forms and manifestations of commercialization in the Chinese news media system. Moreover, it is important to study the accommodations, containment and conflicts between the two mechanisms of control and new media institutional formations, as well as media forms and contents growing out of the interaction of the two forces.

The selective lens of the liberal model of the press has not only blinded some observers to the changes in the Chinese news media system. There is also an important question to be asked about the adequacy of a western, liberal model of the press as the ultimate goal of the struggle for press freedom in China, leaving aside the question of the feasibility of imitating such a model.

⁴⁸Xu Yu, "Professionalization without Guarantees: Changes of the Chinese Press in post-1989 Years," *Gazette* 53, (1994), p. 24.

The struggle for press freedom is part of the struggle for the democratization of Chinese society. While definitions of democracy abound, and I shall return to this issue toward the end of this thesis, as Norberto Bobbio notes, even a "minimal definition" of democracy requires the realization of basic rights such as freedom of opinion, of expression, of speech, of assembly, and of association.⁴⁹ There is no question that liberal democracy and its companion model of press freedom through the market is in many ways superior to the political system and the news media system in China today. State control of the means of communication has been and remains the most important obstacle to the democratization of communication in China. Indeed, if there is one single important idea that a western liberal model of the press has to offer for a democratized Chinese media system, it is its relative autonomy from the State. The struggle for such relative autonomy on the structural level must be the first step toward the democratization of media communication in China. But equally important is the question, how can the relative autonomy of the news media be secured? On what basis? Who should have control over and access to means of communication? While the news media should definitely not be left in the hands of the Party, can and should the news media be left to private entrepreneurs and the market?

In the West, the market model of the press has long been modified in broadcasting. As Denis McQuail has noted, the broadcasting model of editorial freedom has taken either a public service or a regulated commercial form. In both cases, this model "gives relatively more priority to the rights of the receiver than to those of the communicator and also establishes rights of access for would be 'external' communicators."⁵⁰ In addition to the freedom of broadcasters, the freedom of receivers, especially those in a weak market position have been in one way or another

⁴⁹Norberto Bobbio, *The Future of Democracy: A Defense of the Rules of the Game* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 25, cited in Slavko Splichal, *Media Beyond Socialism: Theory and Practice in East-Central Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 1.

⁵⁰Denis McQuail, p. 105.

formally recognized and secured in broadcasting regulation regimes in the West, including in the United States, where the tradition of public service broadcasting is among the weakest among Western industrialized nations. As Douglas Kellner puts it, "From the beginning, broadcasting in the United States combined commercial and democratic criteria, mixing private ownership and competition with government regulation and mandates to serve the public interest."⁵¹ While the notion of "the public interest" has often been vague and ill-defined, it has long been accepted that commercial interest is not the same as the public interest. Despite the wave of broadcasting deregulation since the 1980s and technological developments that seem to have invalidated one of its major rationales - the scarcity of available spectrum frequencies, as Denis McQuail has noted, this model shows few signs of withering away.⁵² Indeed, it can be argued that the fundamental concepts in this model, such as the rights of receivers and the right of access, have become widely accepted values of media communication in the West.

More recently, a growing critical literature has raised serious questions about the adequacy of the market model of the press as a sufficiently democratic form of communication. Profound contradictions between the democratic ideals of the liberal model of the press and the institutional arrangements of modern news media have been identified.⁵³ The mass media have been linked with a "decline of democracy" or "the crisis of democracy."⁵⁴ Strong arguments have been made that, despite formal

⁵¹Douglas Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1990), p. 184.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³This body of literature ranges from theoretical works such as the Frankfurt School's critique of the culture industry to Jergen Habermas' analysis of the transformation of the bourgeois public sphere to Marxist and neo-Marxist analysis of media and ideology.

⁵⁴See for example, Robert G. Picard, *The Press and the Decline of Democracy: The Democratic Socialist Response in Public Policy* (Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1985); Douglas Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*; R. M. Entman, *Democracy Without Citizens: Media and the Decay of American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). James Curran provides a critical assessment of the traditional liberal arguments about the democratic role of the news media. See James Curran, "Mass Media and Democracy: A Reappraisal," in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds.), *Mass Media and Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1991), pp. 82-117. John Keane's critique of the blindspots in the liberal conceptions of press freedom and limitations of the commercial

institutional independence, the news media act more like lapdogs than watchdogs due to a set of institutional pressures. The media's effort to satisfy the audience is not democracy of the one-person-one-vote variety. Advertising systematically favors consumerism and affluent consumers. As John Keane declares,

Market competition produces market censorship. Private ownership of the media produces private caprice. Those who control the market sphere of producing and distributing information determine, prior to publication, what products ... will be mass produced and, thus, which opinions officially gain entry into the 'marketplace of opinions'.⁵⁵

Moreover, within the market model of the press, "individuals are treated as market-led consumers, not as active citizens with rights and obligations."⁵⁶ Through detailed empirical analysis of local television stations in the U.S., John H. McManus recently concludes that "[g]iven the peculiar nature of news as a commodity, the logic of maximizing return often conflicts with the logic of maximizing public understanding."⁵⁷ In short, as McManus puts it, "serving the market was not the same as serving the public."⁵⁸

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve deeply into this diverse body of critical literature, it is clear that the liberal concept of press freedom through the market is not sufficient for a fully democratic system of communication. Albert Camus' 1944 statement that "[t]he press is free when it does not depend on either the power of government or the power of money" has been strongly felt in democratic circles in the West.⁵⁹ Normative theories of the press, for example, have long gone beyond the "Four Theories of the Press" proposed by Sieber and his colleagues.⁶⁰ Already in the

logic is particularly relevant in this context. See John Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

⁵⁵John Keane, p. 90.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁵⁷John H. McManus, *Market-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware?* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), p. 90.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁵⁹Cited in John Keane, p. 150.

⁶⁰These four theories are: the authoritarian theory, the Soviet communist theory, the libertarian theory and the social responsibility theory. See Fred Sieber, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Shramm, *Four Theories of the Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963).

early 1960s, rather than adopting the "us-versus-them" cold war mentality and the liberal framework, Raymond Williams proposed four models of the press (authoritarian, paternal, commercial, and democratic) that problematized the equation of the market model with a democratic model of communication.⁶¹ More recently, within the category of "Western" models, Denis McQuail has added a "democratic participant" model to take into account emerging democratic media theories and practices.⁶² Drawing from the experiences of the Nordic press, Robert Picard has distinguished a "social democratic" version, which, in contrast to "libertarian" and "social responsibility" theories, provides legitimation for such policy instruments as public intervention and collective ownership to ensure media independence not only from the State but also from other vested interests, as well as the realization of such values as access and diversity.⁶³ James Curran has elaborated a "radical democratic tradition" of the media that can be differentiated from the traditional liberal model on the one hand and from both Stalinist practices and Marxist critiques of the media in western liberal democracies on the other hand.⁶⁴

There have been important developments in theoretical conceptualizations of media and society as well. Traditional liberal theory typically defines the role of the news media in an individual versus state dichotomy and conceives the news media primarily as vertical channels of communication between private citizens and government.⁶⁵ In contrast, the emerging body of critical literature cited above views the news media as "a complex articulation of vertical, horizontal and diagonal channels of communication between individuals, groups and power structures."⁶⁶

⁶¹Raymond Williams' four communications systems were first discussed in *Communications*, first published in 1962. See *Communications* (revised edition, London: Chatto & Windus, 1966).

⁶²Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction* (London: Sage Publications, 1987).

⁶³Robert G. Picard, *The Press and Decline of Democracy*.

⁶⁴James Curran, "Rethinking the Media as a Public Sphere," in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (eds.), *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 27-57.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

Two concepts, civil society and the public sphere, in particular, have gained significance in recent theoretical debates and have important implications both for critical media analysis and the struggle for the democratization of media communication, both in the West and in the East. Civil society refers to "a non-state sphere comprising a variety of social institutions - productive units, households, voluntary organizations, and community-based services - which are legally guaranteed and democratically organized."⁶⁷ John Keane has noted that the revolutionary theme of "civil society against the state" was present in European societies as early as the middle of the 18th century.⁶⁸ More recently, the emergence of an autonomous civil society played a fundamental role in the political transformation of former socialist states in East Europe. As Tae-Kyoung Lee has put it, civil society is

the fundamental basis for the working of participatory democracy for which freedom of the press is a central requirement. It is through various elements of civil society that the people practically claim power, organize social movements, and exercise influence over public matters. Without a strong presence of civil society, individual liberty and democratic principles are likely to be subject to arbitrary definition by the state, and freedom of the press will also hinge on the "benevolence" of government.⁶⁹

The notion of the public sphere is closely associated with civil society. As defined by Habermas, the public sphere is a space which mediates between society and the state.⁷⁰ It is a realm in which public opinion is formed and "popular" supervision of government is exercised. The news media are important forums of the public sphere. From Habermas' work on the "bourgeois public sphere," James Curran extrapolated a model of a public sphere

as a neutral zone where access to relevant information affecting the public good is widely available, where discussion is free of domination by the state and where all those participating in public debate do so on

⁶⁷David Held, and John Keane, "In a Fit State," *New Socialist* (16, 1984, pp. 36-39), p. 38, cited in Tae-Kyoung Lee, "Press Freedom and National Development," *Gazette* (48, 1991, pp 149-163), p. 159.

⁶⁸John Keane, *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 38.

⁶⁹Tae-Kyoung Lee, p. 161.

⁷⁰Jurgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article" (1964), *New German Critique* (Fall 1974, pp. 49-54), p. 50.

an equal basis. Within this public sphere, people collectively determine through the processes of rational argument the way in which they want to see society develop, and this shapes in turn the conduct of government policy. The media facilitates this process by providing an arena of public debate, and by reconstituting private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion.⁷¹

Although these theoretical developments grew out of the context of liberal democracies in the west, they should also be relevant both for those who study press freedom and those who struggle for democracy in China. For media scholars, in addition to measuring press freedom in terms of what a newspaper is able to say, as in the above discussed case study of the *World Economic Herald*, concepts of civil society and the public sphere, as Kea-Kyoung Lee has argued, "offer fruitful structural indicators of freedom of the press" in developing countries.⁷² For media reformers in China, when looking to the west for inspiration in conceptualizing reform, it is important not only to look at century-old liberal ideas and the liberal model of press freedom, but also to look beyond this model, to seek inspiration from emerging models of democratic communication both in theoretical discussions and practical media experiences.

The Present Project

Like many other studies on news media in China, this thesis is concerned with the media reform movement and the struggle for the democratization of political communication in China. It undertakes to analyze the most important features of the news media in China today, that is, the continuing dominance of the Party's paternalistic and undemocratic model of political communication and Party journalism on the one hand, and the growing influence of market forces on the news media on the other hand. In other words, the thesis analyzes the intertwining of Party ideological

⁷¹James Curran, p. 83.

⁷²Tae-Kyoung Lee, p. 159. Lowell Dittmer presents a penetrating analysis of the Chinese media by using the framework of a Chinese public sphere. See Lowell Dittmer, "The Politics of Publicity in Reform China," in C. C. Lee (ed.), *China's Media, Media's China*, pp. 89-112.

control and market forces in China's news media. It addresses the following questions: In what ways do market forces influence the Chinese news media system? How does the Party both introduce and at the same time attempt to contain the influence of the market logic on the news media? How does the commercial imperative both accommodate and challenge Party control? To what extent does the market present a democratizing alternative to Party control in media communication? Can there be a stable Party-controlled but commercialized news media system? What are the prospects for the democratization of the news media system in China?

The analysis focuses on structural changes in the news media system; it is informed by the broad concept of ideology outlined above as well as an appreciation of both the achievements and blindspots and limitations of a western liberal model of the press. Rather than replacing the mass propaganda and persuasion model and its associated freedom versus totalitarian cold war perspective with "another set of abstract and grossly reductive generalities," this study, following Chin-Chuan Lee's suggestion, attempts to pursue a "contextualized and concretized" mode of understanding of the media landscape in China.⁷³ The focus is on the news media, both the press and broadcasting. While the study covers the entire history of journalism under the Communist Party, it updates most existing literature by focussing on media developments since "Deng Xiaoping went south" in 1992.

Chapter Two provides an overview and critique of the Party's model of political communication and the Party's journalism theories and practices. With both historical and current examples, it describes the general structure and characteristics of the news media under the domination of the Party. At the risk of oversimplification, if the whole thesis is conceived as an analysis of the accommodations and tensions between Party logic and market logic, then this chapter is about Party logic. The time frame of this

⁷³Chin-Chuan Lee, "Ambiguities and Contradictions: Issues in China's Changing Political Communication," in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed), *China's Media, Media's China*, p. 16.

chapter stretches across the whole spectrum of journalism theory and practice under the domination of the Communist Party in China, from the early 1920s to the present.

Although the market logic was introduced into the news media system in the early 1980s both as part of the media reform movement and as a result of the diffusion of the reforms in the economic sphere, the influence of market forces on the news media did not gain momentum until 1992. Chapter Three analyzes the twisted path of media reform since the early 1980s and the political and economic contexts that led to the rapid commercialization of news media in 1992. It critically examines the media reform literature during the theoretical and political ferment in the mid-1980s and the emerging democratic discourse on news media reform. In particular, it examines the extent to which this literature challenged the Party's model of political communication. This chapter then discusses the suppression of this discourse in 1989 and the subsequent turn to the market both in media theory and practice after early 1992.

After the necessary historical, theoretical, as well as political and economic contexts are developed in Chapters Two and Three, Chapters Four and Five provide overall descriptions of media commercialization with distinct Chinese characteristics. They analyze the different ways in which market forces influence existing news media institutions and practices, particularly the traditional Party organs and broadcasting stations. Chapter Four is a more general discussion of media commercialization on the structural level, focusing on such aspects as the media's increasing reliance on advertising and sponsorships for their financing and the growth of news media organizations into business conglomerates. Chapter Five examines the influence of market forces on news reporting and the widespread phenomenon of corruption in journalism. The issues it raises are no less structural.

While Chapters Four and Five analyze the intertwining of Party control and market forces and its consequences in pre-existing media outlets and production units, Chapters Six and Seven examine newly-established or (re-established) commercialized

news media institutions, formats and content in the broadcasting and newspaper sectors respectively. Although these newly commercialized popular media outlets are not outside the Party-controlled media system proper, unlike traditional Party organs, they are completely dependent on the market for financial support. Many of them are driven by the profit motive. The market logic of financing through advertising (and in some cases, through direct newsstand sales, which has its own logic) functions more or less "normally" within the confines of the Party's political control.

Chapter Eight discusses the implications of the intertwining of Party control and market forces in the news media system in China. It explores the possibility for the emergence of a propagandist/commercial model of journalism in light of current developments as well as internal and external challenges to the current media structure.

Chapter Nine returns to the theme of media reform, offers a critical evaluation of current theoretical and practical developments toward commercialization, and discusses alternative possibilities for the democratization of media communication in China.

A Methodological Note

The primary data for this dissertation was gathered through a period of fieldwork in China. The fieldwork was conducted between September 1994 and February 1995 in Beijing, Shanghai, and Zhejiang province. The research involved three aspects: the monitoring of print and broadcast media content, documentary research, and interviews.

Monitoring of media content: in addition to television viewing, radio listening, and newspaper reading, my monitoring of media content involved several specific projects for analysis in different chapters. These projects included a survey of national and provincial Party organs available on a specific date in a university newspaper and periodical reading room in Beijing, the monitoring of one week's CCTV 7:00 p.m.

news, the monitoring of one week's CCTV *Focus* program, as well as a survey of newspapers from newsstand operators in Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou on three different dates. These exercises are described in more detail in the chapters.

Documentary research in China: this involved extensive survey of Chinese books, Party and government documents, press reports, and academic and trade journals published between the late 1980s and 1994 in China. Journalism and broadcasting yearbooks, academic journals published by journalism schools and journalism research institutions, and trade journals published by major news organizations served as primary sources for tracing the trends and developments in the Chinese news media. They also provided the basic material for analyzing the debates in journalism theory and for describing the specific reforms carried out by different media organizations.⁷⁴ Journalism trade journals and internal policy publications such as the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television's *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting*, in particular, provided a rich source for policy instructions by Party and government authorities and for views and comments about media theory and practice by media critics, media officials, as well as rank and file reporters and editors.

Without doubt, the debates and discussions in these publications were published under various constraints and these sources have to be read "between the lines," just as a perceptive reader would do with Chinese newspapers. Nevertheless, they not only contained rich and detailed factual descriptions but also revealed a considerable level of critical discussion of issues concerning the news media and self-reflections on journalism practices by journalists. By publishing under pen names, many writers are able to convey their commentaries on various aspects of the news media.

Interviews: my extensive media monitoring and literature research were supplemented by thirty-one extended in-depth interviews. My interviewees included a

⁷⁴See the bibliography in the end of this dissertation for a list of the major Chinese academic and trade journals used in this study.

wide range of people from Beijing, Hangzhou, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Among them were top journalism and broadcasting scholars, journalism educators, media administrators, radio and television producers, and ordinary journalists. Rather than using a standard questionnaire, the diverse roles and backgrounds of the interviewees determined that open-ended interviews were more appropriate. Different interview techniques were used for different purposes. For example, semi-structured interviews were used to get specific descriptions of journalism practices, while speculative questions were sometimes directed at media scholars to get specific perspectives and comments on a particular issue. In all cases, an attempt was made to engage in an extended dialogue about the issues. Interview data provided a valuable material by which I could critically evaluate and contextualize print sources. Due to the politically sensitive nature of the subject, however, most of the interview data has to be used as background material. Whenever possible, I use comparable material from trade journals. In order to protect my interviewees, I use different letters to represent the actual name of different interviewees in the presentation of interview data throughout the thesis.

In addition to interviews, informal discussions with journalism students and newsstand operators on the streets, attendance at Beijing's annual newspaper promotion fair in October 1994 where I talked with a wide range of people in the newspaper industry, as well as discussions with acquaintances who are close to media circles all contributed to my understanding of the news media landscape in China.

Chapter Two

Party Journalism in China: Theory and Practice

Commercialization is being superimposed on a news media system that has been shaped and controlled by a single political party for more than seventy years. An understanding of the Chinese Communist Party's conception of the news media and its ways of organizing and practicing journalism serves as an important background for analysis of media commercialization in the current context.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the development and structure of the news media under the leadership of the Party. It then discusses the ways in which the Party and government exercise ideological and administrative control of the news media. Finally, it critically examines the role of the news media in the Party's model of political communication and the resulting character of news discourse and the news production process. While certain specific aspects of the news media system have changed as a result of news media reform since the 1980s, the defining characteristics of Party journalism remain intact. The past continues to shape the present.

James Curran observes that the functioning of the Soviet media before Gorbachev "was at times more restricted in theory than in actual practice (thus reversing the pattern of the west where the media has long been more restricted in practice than in theory)."¹ The same is true with news media theory and practice in China. While Party and state apparatuses have had their theory of news media and their system of control and direction, as Judy Polunbaum has argued, the system "leaked like a sieve."² Such is particularly the case during periods of relative political stability. Neither journalists nor Chinese readers and audiences are passive dupes. They have

¹James Curran, "Rethinking the Media as a Public Sphere," in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (eds.), *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 35.

²Judy Polunbaum, "Outpaced by Events, Learning, Unlearning and Relearning to be a Journalist in Post-Cultural Revolution China," *Gazette* (48, 1991), p. 140.

their ways of communicating and reading the news despite the Party's tutelage and surveillance.³ This chapter aims more at providing an "ideal type" of media theory and practice as defined by the Party than a detailed account of the history of Party journalism.

The Legacies of Party Journalism

The roots of the Party press can be traced back to radical journals of the late 1910s and early 1920s in which critical students and intellectuals voiced their opposition in a movement against imperialism and Chinese warlords. Many future Party leaders, such as Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao and Mao Zedong, were involved in the publication of radical journals before the founding of the Communist Party in 1921.⁴ The first Party organ, *The Guide* (Xiangdao) was published in 1922. During the period of the Party's first united front with the Nationalist Party between 1924 and 1927, the Party created a number of labour and peasant journals in its effort to mobilize and organize labor and peasant movements.⁵ Journals for youth and women were also created as part of the Party's mass work. From the very beginning, therefore, the Party established a news media structure that consisted of both Party organs and non-party media outlets that were nevertheless under its leadership. Such a structure is still the dominant feature of journalism today.

The Party press collapsed as a result of the disintegration of the first united front in 1927, when the Party was forced underground. The failure of urban uprisings compelled the Party to change its strategy to rural-based guerrilla warfare. By the latter

³Edward Friedman provides numerous examples of oppositional reading of the official media by readers in China. See Edward Friedman, "The Oppositional Decoding of China's Leninist Media," in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed), *China's Media, Media's China* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 129-146.

⁴For an overview of the development of radical students' press and the communist press in the 1920s, see, S. S. Kim, *The Communication Industries in Modern China: Between Maoism and the Market*, Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation (Leicester, University of Leicester, 1987), pp. 36-41.

⁵Fang Hanqi, Chen Yeshao and Zhang Zihuang, *A Brief History of Chinese Journalism* (Beijing: Chinese People's University Press, 1982), pp. 104-119.

half of 1933, more than ten revolutionary base areas had been established in the border areas of fourteen southern provinces. Guerrilla forces in these base areas expanded and became divisions of the Red Army. Party organizations in these areas published a number of journals, which grew out of Red Army publications.

On November 7, 1931, the Party established the central government of the Chinese Soviet Republics in the town of Ruijin, Jiangxi province. It was known as the Jiangxi Soviet. On the same day, the central soviet government established its first news agency, the Red China News Agency, the predecessor of today's Xinhua News Agency. The agency reported to the outside world about the establishment of the Chinese Soviet Republics. At the same time, it used the army radio to receive outside news, mainly news dispatches of the Nationalist government's Central News Agency. These news dispatches were edited and printed in a publication called *Reference News*, provided to the Party leaders for their reference in deciding strategy for the struggle against the Nationalists. This practice of the Party's news agency providing intelligence for high-level Party leaders continues today.

In addition to the news agency, central level Party, government, army, youth and labor organizations established their own organs. By the fall of 1933, there were thirty-four different newspapers and journals in the Jiangxi Soviet. The most influential was the newspaper *Red China* (hongse zhonghua), which was established as the organ of the central soviet government on December 11, 1931. The paper later became the joint organ of the Party, the government, the All China Labor Union, as well as the Chinese Communist Youth League. The paper lasted until the start of the Long March in October 1934 and played an important role in the Party's war effort as well as the political and economic construction of the revolutionary bases.⁶

The beginning of the Long March marked the end of most of the Party press established in the Jiangxi Soviet. But during the Long March army units continued to

⁶Ibid., pp. 152-153.

publish journals and pamphlets, which reported war news and celebrated the bravery of soldiers. Party journalism revived as soon as the Red Army reached northern Shanxi and established a revolutionary base. *Red China* resumed publication in January 1936. To adapt to the new situation of the Party's second united front with the Nationalist Party against the Japanese, the name was changed to *New China Journal* (xinzhonghua bao). At the same time, the name of the Red China News Agency was changed to the "New China" or Xinhua News Agency.

Yan'an, the capital of the Party-controlled area in the border areas of Shanxi, Gansu and Ningxia, became of the centre of the Party press. Here again, newspapers and journals for cultural affairs, youth, women, and peasants and were published in addition to the main Party organs. In 1941, the Party consolidated its news operations by combining *New China Journal* and a Xinhua publication and published its first daily newspaper, *Liberation Daily*. This newspaper became the organ of the Central Party Committee. The theories and practices developed by the Party in Yan'an as reflected in this paper are still relevant today.⁷ In 1942, *Liberation Daily* reformatted its pages. Originally, the four-page paper carried international news (mainly news about the Soviet Union) in its first two pages. Domestic national news and local news were on pages three and four respectively. In an effort to make the newspaper more closely reflect social life in the base area so as to be more relevant to the ordinary readers, and as part of the Party's attempt to assert independence from the tutelage of Stalin and the Comintern, the paper moved news about the revolutionary base areas to the front page, local news to the second page, and international news to the third page. News about revolutionary activities gained primary importance in the newspaper. For example, the peasants' creation of a new form of self-organization, which would be of interest to

⁷Timothy Cheek provides an excellent discussion of the Yan'an legacy for propaganda and newspapers under the Party. He argues that the Party's current model for propaganda and newspapers was set in the Party's rectification movement and the re-organization of the Party press in April 1942. See his "Redefining Propaganda: Debates on the Role of Journalism in Post-Mao Mainland China," *Issues & Studies* (February 1989), pp. 56-58.

other peasants became the most important news on the front page.⁸ This innovation was revolutionary at the time. However, it has become anachronistic. Despite years of reform, international news seldom appears on the front page of a Party organ. The Chinese news media's failure to report the US moon landing in 1969, which became the subject of derision both inside and outside China, is only the most notorious example.⁹

On December 30, 1940, Yan'an Xinhua Radio Station began trial broadcasting. It was the Party's first radio station. The station was affiliated with the Xinhua News Agency. All the broadcasting material was provided by the news agency. Its contents included important Party documents, editorials and articles from the Party's main newspapers and magazines, news, music, speeches by well-known personalities, music, and revolutionary stories.¹⁰

The Party press continued to grow during the anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) period and the civil war (1945-1949) years in the areas controlled by the Party. It also continued to publish underground publications in areas not under its control. The Party also gained concessions from the Nationalist government during the Anti-Japanese War period allowing it to openly establish publications in the Nationalist-controlled area. Most notable among these publications was *Xinhua Daily* published in the Nationalists' war capital Chongqing under the leadership of Zhou Enlai.

The News Media in the People's Republic

News media in the new China after 1949 were established on the basis of the Party's journalism cadres and the material and technological infrastructures left over from the old regime. Some of the Party organs created in revolutionary base areas were moved to big cities and became central and provincial Party organs. In many cases, the

⁸Ibid., pp. 205-206.

⁹Judy Polunbaum, "The Chinese Press and Its Discontents," *China Exchange News* (December 1988), p. 4.

¹⁰Fang Hanqi, Chen Yeshao and Zhang Zihuang, p. 199.

Party simply took over newspaper facilities from the old regime, changed their names, replaced their staffs, and turned them into Party organs.

The Party's journalism (*dangde xinwen shiye*) during the revolutionary war years became the journalism of the party state without much change either in conceptualization or in structure. Although the Party press dominated the news media system in the People's Republic, it did not initially monopolize journalism throughout China. A small number of commercial newspapers and radio stations were allowed to continue their operations in the early 1950s. The Party realized that it was necessary to keep a few independent commercial newspapers in the big cities because the Party press, which had developed in remote revolutionary base areas, where the readers had been Party officials, soldiers and peasants, might not suit the tastes of an urban readership.

However, eventually co-existence proved impossible. The commercial newspapers became part of a planned Party-dominated news media system, with a special role assigned by the Party. A private national newspaper in the city of Wuhan, for example, was required to devote sixty percent of its coverage to local affairs and the city's central tasks.¹¹ These newspapers were forced to adopt the Party's standards of journalism, to design their news in such a way that the Party could play a guiding role in political and social life. Moreover, the interviewing style of journalists from commercial newspapers, the type of questions they asked, were considered too intrusive by Party and government officials. These journalists were often refused access to news sources. Private newspapers were also unable to get much advertising support.¹² As a result, although the Party encouraged the existence of private newspapers in its policy, these papers could not survive in the new environment. More importantly, as

¹¹Zhang Tao, *A History of Journalism in the People's Republic of China* (Beijing: Economic Daily Press, 1992), p. 59.

¹²Sun Xupei, "The Take-over and Transformation of the Old Press in the Years after Liberation," *Journalism Research Material* (No. 43, 1988), pp. 43-61.

journalism scholar Sun Xupei notes, the Party did not have a long-term plan for the continuing existence of commercial newspapers. Socialist transformation was soon carried out in these newspapers. Party committees were established in these enterprises. Thus, while there were fifty-eight commercial newspapers in March 1950, the number had been reduced to twenty-five by August 1951. By 1952, commercial newspapers had disappeared in China.¹³

Private commercial radio stations from the old regime suffered a similar fate. In early 1950, there were thirty-three private commercial radio stations. By the end of 1953, they had all disappeared. A network of people's radio stations was established. At the central level was the Central People's Radio Station. Underneath were radio stations run by provincial and municipal governments. Each radio station was a monopoly of a government administration. Wired radio stations were established at the county level. When television was introduced in 1958, the same hierarchical and monopolistic pattern was followed.

While private newspapers and radio stations did not survive long under Party tutelage, the press in the People's Republic was not entirely monolithic initially. In 1949 and in the early 1950s, some political and social organizations as well as government departments began to publish special interest newspapers. Most notably, the Chinese Democratic League, one of China's democratic parties, began publishing its official organ, *Guangming Daily* on June 16, 1949 in Beijing.¹⁴ *Wenhui Bao*, originally published by non-Communist progressive intellectuals in Shanghai's foreign concessions in 1938 and closed by the Nationalists during the civil war years (1945-1949), resumed publication on June 21, 1949 in Shanghai. These two non-Party

¹³Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁴In 1953, the newspaper became the joint organ of China's eight democratic parties (Revolutionary Committee of the Kuomintang, China Democratic League, China Democratic National Construction Association, China Association for Promoting Democracy, Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party, China Zhi Gong Dang, Jiu San Society, Taiwan Democratic Self-Government), the All China Industrial and Commercial Association, and a number of non-partisan political personalities who were delegates to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

newspapers were both supported by the Party and considered as integral parts of the socialist press system in the People's Republic. Newspapers published by the Party's mass organizations also become an important arm of the socialist news media system. The All China Workers Federation began publishing its official organ, *Workers Daily* on July 15, 1949. The Chinese Communist Youth League created two newspapers in 1951, *China Youth News* and *China Juvenile News*. Government departments began publishing their own newspapers as well. The Ministry of Health, for example, initiated *Health News* as its official organ in 1950. By 1954, in addition to 151 Party organs, there were seventeen worker's newspapers, twenty-three farmers newspapers, seventeen youth and juvenile papers, fourteen specialized trade newspapers, and fifteen newspapers published by social organizations and other political parties.¹⁵

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), almost all these special interest newspapers ceased publication. Many Party organs also disappeared, while Red Guard tabloids flourished. There were only forty-three regular newspapers in the whole country in 1967.¹⁶

Since the launching of economic reforms in the late 1970s, China has experienced an unprecedented media boom. Radio and television stations, which were mostly limited to central and provincial levels in the early 1970s, were established on the municipal/prefectural and county levels. By the end of 1991, there were 724 radio stations and 543 television stations in the country.¹⁷ The network of Party organs was also extended to local levels. By the end of 1991, there were 432 Party organs at the central, provincial, municipal/prefectural and county levels.¹⁸ Governments at these levels also established their own radio and television monopolies. Non-party special interest newspapers came back with unprecedented vigor. These newspapers are

¹⁵Zhang Tao, p. 33.

¹⁶Sun Xupei, *New Theories of Journalism* (Beijing: Contemporary China Press, 1994), p. 318-319.

¹⁷China Statistics Bureau, *China Statistical Yearbook* (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 1993), p. 785.

¹⁸Journalism Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (ed.), *China Journalism Yearbook 1992* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1992), p. 467.

published by government departments at different levels, business enterprises, and other political and social organizations. Some of these newspapers cater to specific readers -- workers, farmers, women, youth, seniors, police, students, minority language or English readers. Some specialize in a particular subject area -- sports, economics, science and technology, health, culture, education, law and order, environment, etc. Still others are general interest evening papers and digests. By the mid-1980s, their total numbers had already far exceeded the number of official Party organs. Of the total 1, 008 new newspapers published between 1980-1985, for example, there were only 103 Party organs, accounting for 10.2 percent.¹⁹ By 1992, there were 1,230 non-party newspapers.²⁰ However, Party organs still dominate the press by their size, frequency of publication, and number of employees. They are still the central element of the newspaper industry.²¹

By the end of the 1980s, China had developed a rather elaborate news media network. The Xinhua News Agency is the largest news organization in the country. Its news operations consists of three major departments: domestic news, with bureaus in all provinces; international news, with more than ninety foreign bureaus all over the world, and a translation service that provides news reports from foreign countries for restricted distribution in the Party and government bureaucracy. *People's Daily* is the organ of the Party Central Committee. The Central People's Radio Station (CPRS) and China Central Television Station (CCTV) are the country's radio and television monopolies. CPRS's 6:30 to 7:00 morning news and CCTV's 7:00 to 7:30 evening news are transmitted nationwide every day. They are the most important news

¹⁹Journalism Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Readership Survey Team of the Capital Journalism Society, "A General Survey of Newspapers," *China Journalism Yearbook 1986* (Beijing, Chinese Social Sciences Press, 1986), p. 122.

²⁰Journalism Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (ed.), *China Journalism Yearbook 1993* (Beijing: Social Sciences Press, 1994), p. 373.

²¹Li Liangrong, *Theory and Practice of the Chinese Press* (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 1992), p. 163.

programs in the country. These four national news organizations are at the very top of the Chinese news media hierarchy.

In addition to these four major national news organizations, there are a number of important special interest national newspapers. *Guangming Daily*, originally a paper published by the democratic parties, is now the Party organ for the country's educated elite. *Reference News* is published by the Xinhua News Agency. It carries mainly news from foreign news agencies. *Economic Daily* is the organ of the State Council. Its specialty is reporting of economic policy and economic issues. *People's Liberation Army Daily* is the organ of the Party's Central Military Committee and the General Political Department of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. In addition to *Workers' Daily*, *China Youth News*, and *China Juvenile News*, the category of special interest newspapers has been expanded to include such titles as *Farmers' Daily*, affiliated with the government's agriculture department, and *China Women's Journal*, published by the All-China Women's Federation. Many government bureaus, such as culture, sports, education, health, industry and trade, science and technology, have their own news organs.

This media structure is more or less reproduced at the provincial and municipal levels, although without as much complexity. The news media structure is both hierarchical and monopolistic. Typically, a province and a city (or prefectural district) has a Party organ, a radio station and a television station. These three main outlets are the most important local news media outlets, and they are under the direct control of a local Party Committee.

The four major national media organizations are the agenda-setters of other media. Xinhua reports of major national and international events are carried by news media all over the country. Important editorials of *People's Daily* are frequently transmitted by the Xinhua News Agency, summarized on the national radio and television news broadcasts, and reprinted by provincial Party organs. During the

Cultural Revolution, it was a common practice for local news outlets to reprint stories and editorials from the national news media verbatim. This practice was reflected in a popular saying -- "Small papers copy big papers, big papers copy Liang Xiao." Liang Xiao was the pen name of a writing team controlled by Jiang Qing, Mao's wife. This practice is still prevalent. On October 14, 1994, for example, *Hainan Daily*, the Party organ of Hainan Province, China's newest and arguably most liberal province, reprinted the entire *People's Daily* editorial of the same day under the headline: "Strengthen and improve the construction of the Party's grassroots units."

The Party Principle

The central concept that underlies the Party's leadership of the news media is the Party principle (*dangxing yuanze*). A typical journalism textbook describes it as comprising three basic components: the news media must accept the Party's guiding ideology as its own; they must propagate the Party's programmes, policies and directives; and they must accept the Party's leadership and stick to the Party's organizational principles and press policies.²²

Following the directives of the Third International, the international communist organization that played an important role in the formative years of the Chinese Communist Party, the Party exercised strict control over its publications from the very beginning. The first resolution of the Party's founding congress (1921) clearly stated that "journals, daily publications, books and booklets must be managed by the Party's central executive committee" and that "no central or local publications should carry any article that opposes the Party's principles, policies and decisions."²³

Lenin's notion that the Party newspaper should be the Party's collective propagandist, agitator, and organizer also played an instrumental role in shaping the

²²Tong Bing, Cheng Mei, (eds.), *A Teaching Programme for Journalism Theory* (Beijing: Chinese People's University Press, 1993), p. 148.

²³Cited in Tong Bing and Cheng Mei, p. 147.

Party's journalism policy. In an April 1, 1942 note to its readers, *Liberation Daily* explained that in order to be the Party's propagandist, a newspaper must not only make *all its contents* - each commentary, each feature, each news item - embody the Party's views, but also make the newspaper closely connect with the Party's programme, policy and directions, and make the newspaper an advocator for the realization of the Party's every single policy and every single call. At the same time, to be the Party's organizer means that the newspaper must increase the knowledge base of the masses, raise their consciousness, educate them, support and provide guidance to mass movements and their struggles. The Party proclaims itself to be the vanguard of the proletariat representing the interests of the people. Within this ideological construct, the media serve as the voice of the Party and, by definition, serve as the voice of the people too.

The Party principle and the mouthpiece theory are constantly being emphasized and reinforced as the Party struggles to maintain its control over the news media. Because the Party's many local authorities were scattered in different base areas during the war years, the Party's central authority had to rely on newspapers to propagate its policy directives and maintain unity. Mao Zedong himself, for example, issued many directives to high-level Party leaders on the importance of maintaining complete Party control of the press and overcoming tendencies to seek independence among the Party's propaganda workers. In 1942, he criticized high-level Party organizations for paying little attention to the fact that the Party's news agency and newspapers lacked direction in their work. Then again in 1948, he issued another directive criticizing Party leaders for relinquishing their responsibility for leadership, for failing to take this leadership seriously, and for allowing "erroneous" ideas to spread unchecked. He insisted that the press must unconditionally propagate the Party's policies and suggested strict measures

of press control. Mao proposed that a leader with a correct understanding of the Party's policies must read the galley proof before a newspaper is published each day.²⁴

The post-Mao leadership continued to stress the mouthpiece theory. Even Hu Yaobang, considered the most enlightened post-Mao leader, stated plainly that "the Party's journalism is the Party's mouthpiece" in a widely publicized speech in 1985.²⁵ He included in "the Party's journalism" both Party organs and non-party newspapers. While the Party grants more latitude to writers of literature, who are free to choose creative subjects and develop main themes with "completely comradely suggestions and advices" from the Party, journalists must speak strictly on behalf of the Party.²⁶ Jiang Zemin, gave a speech in November 1989 on "the issue of the Party's leadership in journalism" which could have been taken from a Party document of the Mao era:

Party Committees at various levels should frequently discuss and study news work. Issues such as propaganda policy, guiding ideas, focus of news reporting, effects of propaganda in each period must be discussed in Party Committee meetings. The chief responsible comrade of the Party Committee must take personal charge of news work. He must provide timely information to the news media, issue orders, . . . ; moreover, he must personally preview important editorials, commentaries, and news reports.²⁷

The Party has developed a series of mechanisms for controlling and directing the news media. First of all, it sets general rules and parameters for news operations. These rules can be found in Party resolutions, directives, and announcements, and in a more informal form, in Party leaders' comments and speeches. Some of these rules are very constricting and strictly enforced. A 1953 resolution prohibits a Party organ from criticizing the Party committee with which it is affiliated;²⁸ In 1980 in "Several

²⁴Mao Zedong, "Strengthening the Party Principle in Newspaper Propaganda," in Journalism Research Institute of Xinhua News Agency, (ed), *Selections from Documents on Journalism* (Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House, 1990), pp. 68-69, 76-77.

²⁵Hu Yaobang, "On the Party's Journalism Work," *People's Daily* (August 14, 1985), p. 1.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Jiang Zemin, "Issues on the Party's Journalistic Work," in *Selections from Documents on Journalism*, pp. 189-200, p. 199.

²⁸"Central Party Committee Circular on the Writing of Reference Material by Xinhua News Agency Correspondents," July 1953, in *Selections from Documents on Journalism*, p. 262.

Principles Concerning the Party's Internal Political Life," the Party reiterated its rule that the news media should unconditionally propagate the Party's policies and that the news media cannot publish any views opposing the Party's major decisions nor open any discussion on important theoretical and policy issues about which the Party has already made a decision.²⁹

The Party sometimes sets very specific guidelines on news reporting. For example, a 1987 document discussed and passed by the Party's Central Secretariat provided detailed guidelines on the reporting of important domestic political and social issues.³⁰ For example, the death of leaders and important personalities should be reported both to domestic and international audiences on the same day; traffic accidents involving foreigners and overseas Chinese should be reported to overseas audiences on the day they happen. If the whole situation is not clear, the event should be reported in a "brief and objective" manner right away, followed by detailed reporting after more thorough investigation.

Party leaders' speeches have also been an important medium for transmitting the Party's directives regarding news reporting. Party leaders such as Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and in recent years, Hu Yaobang and Jiang Zemin all made important speeches that defined the nature of journalism, set out general and specific guidelines for news media practices. These speeches were carefully studied by news media workers and constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by media theoreticians in their theoretical work.

In addition to setting general rules and parameters, the Party often defines topics to be given broad media attention for a given period. These topics become the focus of media campaigns. The subject can be very broad, such as law and order or economic

²⁹The relevant passage from this document is printed in *Selections from Documents on Journalism*, p. 276.

³⁰Central Party Propaganda Department, Central Party External Propaganda Group, Xinhua News Agency, "Several Suggestions on Improving News Reporting," issued on July 18, 1987, in *Selections from Documents on Journalism*, pp. 303-312.

construction, or it can be more specific, for example a campaign for eliminate pornography, reflecting the Party's priorities and preoccupations at a given time. There are two regular channels for the transmission of the Party's propaganda priorities. First, since major news media organizations, such as central and provincial level Party organs, and radio and television stations, are an integral part of the Party apparatus itself, their leaders occasionally participate in important Party meetings and thus learn the Party's media agenda firsthand. More often, however, topics to be reported are passed down from the Party's propaganda department to media institutions.

Despite the fact that officials of major news media organizations, including Party organs, radio and television stations, are all appointed by the Party,³¹ news directors and chief editors do not always have the final say in important editorial matters. Important items are previewed by Party officials in charge of propaganda.

Party propaganda departments, however, are not necessarily the highest media authority. On crucial issues or at crucial moments, the Party Secretary at each level will directly supervise media work. Thus, when Qin Benli, the editor-in-chief of the *World Economic Herald* refused to accept the censorship of certain material ordered by the Shanghai Party official responsible for propaganda, it was Jiang Zemin, then Party Secretary of Shanghai, who directly talked to Qin and forced him to accept the censorship.³²

On important occasions, Party leaders themselves become directly involved in the writing of news and editorials. During the war years, Mao himself wrote many news dispatches for the Xinhua News Agency and published many of his articles as unsigned editorials in *Liberation Daily*. For example, Mao's news dispatch headlined "300,000 of our soldiers triumphantly across the Yangtze River" is still considered as a

³¹A newspaper's editor-in-chief and deputy editors-in-chief are appointed by the Party committee at the same level and approved by the Party committee at the next higher level.

³²Xinhua News Agency, "The True Face of the *World Economic Herald* Incident," *People's Daily* (August 19, 1989), p. 4.

classic textbook example of news writing. During the political struggles in the 1950s, Mao, apparently unhappy with the moderate tone of *People's Daily* editorials on certain issues, took over the job and wrote a number of important editorials himself.³³ In a more recent example, during the 1989 student movement, the notorious April 26th *People's Daily* editorial, which defined the student demonstrations as "counter-revolutionary turmoil" and played a crucial role in the subsequent development of the movement, was widely believed to have been written by Party officials over the heads of the editorial board.

In addition to pre-publication and pre-broadcast control, the Party closely monitors media contents. Media monitoring (shendu, shenting) is usually performed by special teams of veteran Party ideological workers. For editors and journalists, the danger of post-publication retribution is omnipresent. Punishments range from the writing of self-criticisms to demotion or loss of job. Under the constant pressure not to commit political "mistakes" in their work, many media professionals learn to play it safe and to be obedient.

Non-Party newspapers are published under the ideological leadership of the Party. China's democratic parties have weak power bases. Initially, they had some voice in the press in the early years of the People's Republic. In 1956, Mao called for constructive criticism saying "Let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thoughts contend." *Guangming Daily*, then jointly run by China's eight democratic parties and other non-partisan coalitions of industrial, commercial and political forces, published some of the boldest criticism of the Party in a truly democratic fashion. Its editor-in-chief Chu Anping and other non-Communist intellectuals openly challenged the Party's monopoly of political power. The Shanghai-based *Wenhui Bao*, another non-Party newspaper oriented toward Shanghai's intellectual and cultural elites, also voiced some of the harshest criticism against the Party. As a result, both newspapers

³³Zhang Tao, p. 125; p. 141.

were severely attacked by the Party and were forced to make self-criticisms. The criticism culminated in Mao's own editorial in *People's Daily* on July 1, 1957. During the subsequent anti-rightist campaign, the critical writers from these two papers, together with many other intellectuals, were labelled "rightists," with their careers and personal lives devastated for more than twenty years.³⁴ *Guangming Daily* is now under the direct control of the Party's central Propaganda Department, while *Wenhui Bao* is now under the control of the Shanghai Municipal Communist Party Committee. The prominent role of these two non-Party newspapers in the early 1950s, their containment, and their eventual takeover by the Party serve as an important footnote to the Party's ascendancy to ideological monopoly. The 1993 *China Journalism Yearbook* listed only two obscure newspaper titles under democratic parties, with average circulation rates below 50,000 per issue.³⁵ Indeed, one of these two titles, *Tuanjie Bao*, published by the Revolutionary Committee of the Kuomintang, is perhaps one of the most boring newspapers in the entire country.

Organizations such as trade unions and women's federations are not autonomous civil organizations. They are "mass organizations," which serve as "bridges" and "transmission belts" between the Party and a special social group. Special interest newspapers, under the control of these organizations, primarily function to transmit Party policies and perspectives to their particular readers. Sometimes, they are able to reflect different perspectives to a certain degree and to speak for the interests of their special groups. *China Women's News*, for example, has been consistently concerned with women's equality in the work place, women's health, and family issues. It has also taken a critical stance against the commodification of women. But such newspapers are obligated to unconditionally accept and propagate Party policies in their specific areas.

³⁴Zhang Tao, pp. 134-143; see also, Fang Hanqi and Chen Yeshao, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Journalism (1949-1988)* (Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House), pp. 99-113.

³⁵*China Journalism Yearbook 1993*, p. 386.

Other special interest newspapers all have official affiliations and are under the leadership of the Party committee within their affiliated institutions. They do not constitute an independent public sphere. They are all ultimately subject to the control of the Party. The *World Economic Herald* was the best known of these non-party special interest newspapers in the 1980s. The Party did not exercise any pre-publication censorship over the paper before April 1989.³⁶ But as noted in Chapter One, it was inextricably linked with the power struggle within the Party. It was eventually subjected to overt censorship and forced to close down.

Government Administration of the News Media

The intricate relationship between the Party and the state in China's party state system makes news media administration especially complicated. Before 1949, the Party controlled all aspects of news media operations in areas under the Communist's control. When the Party came to power in October 1949, the administrative and technical side of news media operations were shifted to the government, while the Party controlled the ideological aspects of the news media. A new government agency, the General Press Office, was established on October 19, 1949. It was charged with responsibilities for the administration of print and broadcast media in the new China.³⁷ Xinhua News Agency changed its official affiliation from the Party to the state, under the direct leadership of the General Press Office. The Party's Central Broadcasting Bureau also changed its hat, becoming the Broadcasting Bureau under the General Press Office. In 1952, however, perhaps as a result of the disappearance of private commercial newspapers and the fact that the Party had never stopped exercising overall

³⁶See Hsiao Ching-Chang and Yang Mei-Rong, "Don't Force Us to Lie: The Case of the *World Economic Herald*," in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed.), *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990), pp. 116-120.

³⁷Fang Hanqi, Chen Yeshao, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Journalism, 1949-1988* (Beijing: Xinhua Press, 1992), p. 27.

control over the news media, the General Press Office was dismantled.³⁸ Xinhua News Agency officially became a department under the State Council, China's cabinet; but its daily operations rely heavily on instructions from various levels of the Party bureaucracy, from the Politburo to the Central Propaganda Department. It is thus under the dual leadership of both the Party and the government.

The Broadcasting Bureau has evolved into the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television.³⁹ Unlike any other government department, however, the Ministry has a dual identity as both a news media institution and a broadcasting administrative bureaucracy. Like Xinhua News Agency, it also is under the dual leadership of the Party and the government. The Ministry directly controls the three national broadcasting networks: the Central People's Radio Station (CPRS), the China Central Television Station (CCTV), and China International Radio Station (Radio Beijing). Its Editorial Board, under the leadership of the Ministry's Party Committee, is directly in charge of the news, features, and arts programming of the three stations. Members of the Editorial Board include the Minister, responsible deputy ministers, heads of the three radio and television stations and leaders of other departments such as the Film Bureau, the Broadcasting Publishing House, and the Television Arts Committee. The Minister is the editor-in-chief of this Editorial Board. Its duties include delivering Party and government policy directives to the news outlets; drafting strategies for carrying out these directives; organizing and coordinating large-scale media campaigns; approving major media activities, propaganda plans and program changes initiated by the broadcasting stations; and exercising editorial control of important news items and programs. For example, if CCTV wants to initiate a major change in its programming, its proposals will typically go through the following power hierarchy: the Ministry's General Editorial Office, which is responsible for the day-to-day work of the Editorial

³⁸Ibid., p. 29.

³⁹Film was originally under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture. It was shifted to the Ministry of Radio and Television in 1986.

Board, the Editorial Board itself, the Party Committee of the Ministry, the Propaganda Department of the Central Party Committee, possibly, the Member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo in charge of media and ideology.

At the same time, the Ministry is also a huge government bureaucracy in charge of every aspect of the country's broadcasting operations, such as making broadcasting policies and regulations, controlling the allocation of broadcasting frequencies and setting the technical standards of broadcasting, controlling the establishment of broadcasting stations, training broadcasting personnel, and coordinating research and development in broadcasting technology. Its policy directives can be as specific as the number and qualifications of staff in the smallest unit of China's broadcasting network, the broadcast station in a township, because such staff members are considered government employees.

For the print media, the government (re-)established the State Press and Publications Administration in 1987. This agency is charged with drafting and implementing press regulations and policies, licensing, regulating press and publication markets, monitoring news media texts, and other responsibilities. This agency, however, has no authority over central Party newspapers such as *People's Daily* and *Guangming Daily*. But if a Party organ at the provincial or county level wants to expand its pages or change its publication schedule, then it must seek the approval of the agency.⁴⁰

Just as the media structure on the national level is more or less copied on the local levels, the above administrative structure on the national level is also copied at

⁴⁰The agency was established in January 27, 1987, at the height of the Party's "Campaign against Bourgeois Liberalization." For this reason, Timothy Cheek ("Redefining Propaganda," p. 60) argues that the agency is "a child of Party conservatives and the struggle against bourgeois liberalism. Although there is perhaps some truth in this point, it must be noted that it is also a child of political reform, especially the move toward the separation of government from the Party and the bureaucratization of media management in China. The agency is, as Judy Plumbaum observes, an important administrative innovation that contributes to the institutionalization of media management through bureaucratic organizations. See Judy Plumbaum, "Striving for Predictability: The Bureaucratization of Media Management in China," in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed.), *China's Media, Media's China*, (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 113-128.

lower administrative levels to certain degree. Each province and municipality, for example, has its own broadcasting bureaus, which are under the dual leadership of both the government and the Party.

Political Communication in Party Journalism

Behind the above described history, control and structure of the news media is the Party's theory of political communication, and embedded in it, the Party's notion of the role of the news media in the political process.

The Party's approach to political communication is the mass line. As Pat Howard points out, the mass line defines three distinct power relations: between cadres and the masses, between Party cadres and the mass of ordinary Party members, and between the Party as the revolutionary vanguard and the masses, or the people.⁴¹

Although elements of the basic concept can be found in Lenin, Mao provided the most definitive statement of its essence in the following passage:

In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily "from the masses, to the masses." This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the mass embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge.⁴²

Thus, the masses provide the raw material and basis for policy making by the Party on their behalf. Although *their* concerns, *their* aspirations, *their* well-being are supposed to be the sole concern of the Party's policies, they themselves do not participate in decision making. Nor do they exercise control over policy formation. The

⁴¹Pat Howard, *Breaking the Iron Rice Bowl: Prospects for Socialism in China's Countryside* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1988), p. 21.

⁴²Mao Zedong, "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership," *Selected Works*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967) p. 120, cited in Pat Howard, *Breaking the Iron Rice Bowl*, p. 20.

Party, composed of the most farseeing and revolutionary elements of the masses, is supposed to be able to define the general interests of the masses by remaining close to them. The masses themselves, on the other hand, are often muddle-headed and short-sighted. The Party studies their situations, collects their opinions and turns them into systematic policies. Once a policy is made and a correct line is determined, the Party gives it back to the people, who in turn implement it. The task of the Party is to conduct effective political education to win mass support for and active participation in implementation of Party policies. During the process, of course, the masses' creativity, initiatives and concerns will be again noted by the Party, who again synthesizes them and incorporates them into policies.

Clearly, such a process of decision making is far from being democratic either in the representative or the participatory form. As Pat Howard points out, the mass line is both paternalist and undemocratic. "It does not mean democracy in the sense of autonomous self-government. Rather, it is government on the people's behalf by leaders who, in the final analysis, are not responsible to the people, but to the Party."⁴³

The Model of Communication in Party Journalism

Journalism is one means of communication whereby the Party implements the mass line. Journalism is integral part to the Party's work. As Timothy Cheek puts it, journalism has both transformational/agitational and administrative roles under the Party.⁴⁴ As early as 1938 during the anti-Japanese war, *Resistance News*, a newspaper published in the Jinchaji base area (in northern Shanxi province), articulated the basic concept of Party journalism, which Timothy Cheek quite appropriately identifies as "mass line journalism."

Of course, the production of *Resistance News* has its mission. It must become the propagandizer and organizer of the border region's mass

⁴³Pat Howard, p. 20.

⁴⁴Timothy Cheek, p. 57.

resistance [and] salvation movement, it must represent the needs of the broad masses, reflect and pass on the real conditions and experience of the broad masses' struggle, promote various aspects of work, [and] educate the masses themselves. At the same time, from the promotion and assistance of the broad masses, [the paper] itself progresses It teaches others, and at the same time is taught by others.⁴⁵

This symbiosis between the newspaper and the masses is mediated by the Party. Also the newspaper plays a role in facilitating communication among the masses themselves, in terms of exchanging work and life experiences; however, it is the Party who decides what experiences are to be exchanged and which ones are to be promoted or condemned.

The dominant mode of communication is thus a two-way process. On the one hand, the news media are supposed to report the people's concerns and their aspirations as well as the performance of lower-level cadres to the Party leadership. They are supposed to describe the concrete realities and report the opinions of the people. As Pat Howard has noted, in the mass line theory, the greatest threat to the Party's leadership is the Party's detachment from the people.⁴⁶ The news media are supposed to be the Party's link with the people. Liu Shaoqi, in his capacity as the Party's General Secretary, provided a good explanation of the role of news media in this regard in a speech to the northern China press corps in 1948.⁴⁷ In his view, the Party has nothing to fear but its detachment from the people.⁴⁸ Among the Party's links with the people, journalism is key.

You travel to all locations. The people depend on you to give voice to their demands, difficulties, experiences and even describe mistakes in our work. You turn them into news, features, and reports to Party Committees at various levels, and to the Central Committee. In this way, you make a connection between the Party and the masses.⁴⁹

⁴⁵Teng Tuo, "Review and Prospects of Resistance News upon Its Fiftieth Issue," *Resistance News* (June 27, 1938), cited in Timothy Cheek, "Redefining Propaganda," p. 58.

⁴⁶Pat Howard, p. 20.

⁴⁷Liu Shaoqi, "A Talk to the Northern China Press Corps," in *Selections from Documents on Journalism*, p. 94.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 96.

In order to fulfil their role as a bridge between the Party and the masses, Liu instructed that journalists must serve the people with their whole heart, must convey the truth without exaggeration, sensationalism, or prejudice. He even provided detailed advice on how to write a comprehensive rather than one-sided, in-depth rather than superficial, report and how to interview the people so that they will tell their true feelings and situations.⁵⁰

Clearly, the purpose of such reporting is not to inform the people but to provide the necessary information for decision-making by the Party. Thus, Andrew Nathan has interpreted this function of the press as an intelligence mission for the leaders.⁵¹ Within this model of political communication, there are no such concepts as the people's right to know or an informed citizenry in a representative or participatory democracy. The Party's concept of communication explains the news media's practice of writing internal reference materials (*nei can*) for Party and government leaders at various levels.

Indeed, an important job of the news media is intelligence gathering for the Party state apparatus. This work appears in the form of internal reference news which is distributed among high level Party leaders.⁵² In a 1953 Party directive, the Party Central Committee instructed journalists from the Xinhua News Agency and Party newspapers to write internal reference material in areas such as: situations and sensitive problems in the implementation of Party policies, especially difficulties, deviations, mistakes and shortcomings that are important for the leadership to know; the political thinking of all types of people, their opinions on important domestic and international events, their difficulties in their daily life and work, their opinions of the leadership,

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 93-103.

⁵¹Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 154.

⁵²For a more detailed description of China's restricted publications, see Robert L. Bishop, *Qi Lai! Mobilizing One Billion Chinese: the Chinese Communication System* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), pp. 144-148; see also Marlowe Hood, "The Use and Abuse of Mass Media by Chinese Leaders During the 1980s," in *China's Media, Media's China*, p. 40.

detailed information on natural disasters, the activities of counter-revolutionaries, and so on.⁵³ Although a cynical view is to see such an approach as a manipulative effort to systemically conceal bad news and thus maintain the image and credibility of the Party, it has a historical reason (the intelligence function of the Xinhua News Agency in the early 1930s) and a deeper root in the Party's fundamental conception of the role of the news media and its theory of political communication.

But just as there is no right of recall and no mechanisms by which the masses can make the Party accountable to them, there are no institutional mechanisms in the design of the news media system that would ensure their accountability to the people. Mass line journalism, therefore, is highly paternalistic in theory. In reality, its performance is shaped by irresponsible and unaccountable Party leaders and the power struggles within the Party. At the height of the Cultural Revolution, columns such as "letters from readers" were cancelled. Even those who wrote "internal reference" material to report problems to the Party were investigated and even prosecuted.⁵⁴

To be sure, there is a certain version of participatory journalism which, at least in its original theoretical intention, provides some grassroots access to the news media. This is the amateur correspondents system. This system derived from Mao's theory that the press must be run by "all the people, the whole Party," rather than a few professionals behind closed doors (*quandang banbao, qunzhong banbao*).⁵⁵ Although elements of such a theory and practice were already in place in the 1930s, it was *Liberation Daily* in Yan'an that first systematically articulated and instituted this model of participatory journalism. The newspaper declared in an editorial that the Party's newspaper is also the newspaper of the masses. Therefore, "our newspapers should not only have capable editors and reporters, but more importantly, should have

⁵³"Central Party Committee Circular on the Writing of Internal Reference Material by Xinhua News Agency Journalists," in *Selections from Documents on Journalism*, pp. 262-64.

⁵⁴Fang Hanqi and Chen Yeshao, p. 226.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 71-75.

correspondents who live among the masses and participate in various kinds of practical activities."⁵⁶ In 1944, there were approximately 2,000 amateur correspondents in the Yan'an area, more than half of them ordinary workers and peasants.⁵⁷ Such a system is still in place today for major Party organs and national newspapers.

The amateur correspondents system contains a kernel of a participatory model of communication and the combination of professional and non-professional elements in news production. They greatly expanded the horizons of news reporting and, in theory, they could have played an important role in democratizing news reporting. But the model suffered drawbacks as it was implemented within a context of maximum Party control in political communication. These grassroots correspondents are not the same as free-lance writers in the West. Most of them are affiliated with grassroots-level Party committees. Conventional procedures require that they first get approval of their news reports from propaganda departments in their own units.⁵⁸ Just as journalists at a Party newspaper cannot criticize the Party committee to which it is affiliated, it is almost impossible for a correspondent in a factory to criticize the factory's Party committee. Often, amateur correspondents become the publicists for grassroots-level Party organizations.

Since policy formation remains the Party's prerogative, and policy making is highly centralized within Party leadership, the mass media, being a channel of communication between the top Party and government leadership and lower-level Party cadres and the masses, do not play any significant role in reporting the policy making process, especially debates within the Party on important policy issues. They only

⁵⁶Cited in Fang Hanqi, Chen Yeshao and Zhang Zihuang, p. 209.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸When I worked as an intern news editor in Jiangsu People's Radio Station in 1984, I personally processed many news reports supplied by local amateur correspondents. Andrew Nathan noted that these amateur correspondents "submit their own work to their own party secretaries" before sending it to the news media. (see Andrew Nathan, p. 153.) The more common practice is to simply get a seal from the unit's propaganda department. Officials at the propaganda department rather than the Party secretary, usually preview such news items.

report the results of the Party's policy making. This leads to the second aspect of the two-way communication role of the news media.

While Liu Shaoqi provided a good definition of the role of the news media in facilitating bottom-up flow of communication, it is Mao Zedong who provided the clearest expression of the top-down flow of communication as required by the mass line. Mao expressed his idea in a talk to the editorial staff of *Jinshui Daily*, a Party organ in a revolutionary base area in northwest China in 1948, in the same year that Liu Shaoqi gave his talk to journalists. In this talk, Mao defined the function of newspapers in this way:

The role and power of newspapers consists in their ability to bring the Party program, the Party line, the Party's general and specific policies, its tasks and methods of work before the masses in the quickest and most extensive way.⁵⁹

Mao also said, "You comrades are journalists. Your job is to educate the masses, to *let them know their own interests*, their own tasks and the Party's general and specific policies."⁶⁰

This propagandist and instrumentalist conception of the news media was given full play in journalism practice. However, as Timothy Cheek has argued, the concept of propaganda in the Chinese context should not be understood in the pejorative sense but in the literal sense of the word: "Propaganda is nothing more than the attempt to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people's thinking, emotions, and thereby behavior."⁶¹

The news media are instruments to propagate the Party's policies and directives, to persuade people about the correctness of the policy, to tell them the good results of a particular policy. The news functions to mobilize people and sustain morale as in the

⁵⁹Mao Zedong, *Selected Works*, 5 vols (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1961-77), 4:241.

⁶⁰Mao Zedong, "A Talk to the Editorial Staff of *Jinshui Daily*," in *Selections from Documents on Journalism*, p. 72. My emphasis.

⁶¹Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 4, cited in Timothy Cheek, p. 52.

case of war propaganda, which definitely left its imprint on the Party's approach to journalism.

Indeed, notions such as "stimulating" and "encouraging" often appear in discussions about the functions of the news media. For example, in a note to Guangxi provincial Party leaders in 1958, Mao wrote: "When it comes to the work of the whole province, a newspaper has the greatest effectiveness in organizing, stimulating, criticizing, and motivating."⁶² The Party Central Secretariat in 1981 defined the "basic nature and role" of broadcasting in a similar fashion. "Radio and television are the most powerful modern instruments to educate and stimulate the whole Party, the whole military and people of all nationalities in the construction of socialist material and cultural civilizations."⁶³

This notion of "education" is also significant for an understanding of the paternalist role of the news media. As Timothy Cheek has noted, China has a long tradition of scholar-officials "propagating" the moral teachings of the dynasty and fostering a good and moral society.⁶⁴ Journalism emerged at the turn of the century in a context that ensured the "polemical and educational nature of the venture." Indeed, "Chinese journalism was already educational journalism" before Marxism had any impact on China.⁶⁵ The Party infused this Confucian belief with the Leninist conception of the vanguard whose task is to enlighten the masses and help them to see their own interests. To educate the people to embrace socialist values, to recognize their own interests, and to provide role models for the people is the responsibility of journalism as defined by the Party. Journalism must have a "guiding character" (zhidao xing). Journalism professor Gan Xifen summarizes this notion of journalism quite well:

⁶²Mao Zedong, "A Letter to Liu Jianxun and Wei Guoqing," January 12, 1958, in *Selections from Documents on Journalism*, p. 88.

⁶³Cited in Zhu Yan, "The Guiding Role of the Theory of Socialist Market Economy in Broadcasting Reform," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1994:4), p. 5.

⁶⁴Timothy Cheek, p. 53.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 54.

Being a powerful tool of opinion, news media should guide the people to elevate their consciousness and spirit, to become more united, and to make improvements. News media must not do the opposite by publishing wrong materials to create political division or ideological backwardness among the people. This is the lofty sense of responsibility of our socialist journalistic enterprise.⁶⁶

The Notion of News in Party Journalism

As early as August 1942, a *Liberation Daily* editorial had made it clear: "We already know that newspapers do not only report the news, they are also sharp weapons in constructing our nation and Party and in reforming our work and our lives."⁶⁷ The news media report activities in the implementation of policies, innovations in the technical and organizational aspects of policy implementation, creative experiences in the interpretation and local adaptation of policies, and the achievements of individual and institutional role models. News, therefore, not only embodies ideological and cultural values and serves a socializing function, but also transmits practical and operational information on policy implementation and aspects of everyday life. In other words, news reporting has an administrative role.

The leading news story in the January 17, 1995 issue of *People's Daily* (overseas edition) is typical. It reports how Party and government authorities in Shandong Province try all means to increase farmers' income. The story states that the province "correctly deals with the relationship between increased productivity and increased income," "makes the production of grain and cotton its central task," and takes the development of high-output, high-quality and high-efficiency agriculture as a goal. The news story then summarizes five concrete measures for increasing income. Such a story, of course, is designed not merely to praise Shandong Province and boost its image. More importantly, it is meant to provide an example for Party and

⁶⁶Gan Xifen, "Debates Contribute to the Development of the Journalistic Science," *Journal of Communication* (44:3, Summer 1994, pp. 38-51), p. 45.

⁶⁷Cited in Timothy Cheek, p. 58.

government officials and other productive units to emulate in carrying out their own work.

News, therefore, is often selected on the basis of its relevance to the central task of the Party and government and reported from the Party's perspective. Its subject is narrow and sometimes very technical. Its mode of presentation is straightforward and serious.

The news media's role in propagating policies also means that news items are not usually about breaking events. The majority of news is about trends, tendencies, and achievements over a certain period of time. Often a news story summarizes quarterly and annual reports of various production units and government departments. News is conclusive and comprehensive. It provides an overview of an industry, a unit, or an aspect of the Party and the government's work.

Here again, an example is useful. In the October 14, 1994 issue of *Hainan Daily*, four news stories were grouped under the headline: "Major Effort to Develop Hainan's Tourism Industry." The first story reports how Wenchang County took measures to attract foreign and domestic investments in construction of tourist attractions. The second story reports similar developments in another county. The third story is about financial institutions in Shanya city that actively support the development of tourism by providing loans for tourism projects. The fourth story reports the construction in progress of a specific tourist project. There is not a specific date on any of the stories. There are only summaries, statistics and descriptions of current situations. Typically, news is not presented with a story-like narrative structure.

While critical media scholars have painstakingly analyzed how news, rather than being objective and value free, actually carries certain ideological orientations and embodies a set of enduring values, journalism in China openly declares that news is value-laden and indeed, it demands that news must carry the ideology and value orientations of the Party. Values can be and should be expressed through the selection,

juxtaposition, and presentation of news.⁶⁸ Indeed, a "good" news item is one that has a clear political orientation, that advocates or criticizes, that makes an explicit or implicit value judgment.

Even a seemingly innocent weather report can carry a political message. A classic textbook example is a 1957 Xinhua news dispatch about extremely cold weather in Shanghai.⁶⁹ After a brief description of the cold, the story constructs a comparison between a pre-liberation snowstorm in 1947 that caused the deaths of hundreds of children on the streets overnight and the much colder conditions in 1957, when nobody froze to death. The story reports that the city's welfare department arranged to aid the poor and the elderly. Thus, through the use of background material, this news about the weather is turned into a strong political message that the current system is better than the previous regime.

The Creation of a Role Model

The typical news story is highly positive, didactic, non-event oriented, serious, and openly value oriented. As a further illustration of the role of journalism as defined by the Party, it is useful to look at a specific case of news production, based on an article published in *China Journalism Yearbook 1993*.⁷⁰ Like news that summarizes the successful experience of a production unit, this piece is obviously intended to provide a useful model of news reporting for other journalists.

The article describes how a team of three reporters, one from *People's Daily*, one from the Central People's Radio Station, and one from a local military newspaper, discovered and reported the story of a contemporary role model. The hero is Su Ning, a young army officer in the northeastern city of Harbin. The journalists initially learned

⁶⁸Tong Bing and Cheng Mei, p. 98.

⁶⁹Cited in Tong Bing and Cheng Mei, p. 94.

⁷⁰Pei Zheng, "People's Daily Emphasizes the Reporting of Role Models That Reflect the Spirit of the Time," *China Journalism Yearbook 1993*, pp. 175-177.

that Su had died while rescuing a comrade and that he had led a simple life and served the people with his whole heart just as Lei Feng, a famous soldier role model, did before him. These elements alone, the journalists thought, were not enough to make Su the most desirable, most persuasive role model under the current context of reform and openness. Later, the journalists learnt that Su had published a number of research articles in military affairs and, in particular, that he published three articles analyzing the Gulf War within one month after the ending of the War. Thus, the journalists reasoned, Su is not only loyal and selfless but also serves his country with knowledge and intelligence and with a spirit of exploration and a sense of dedication. These elements in his character make him a contemporary hero, an ideal successor to the Party's cause, a hero that meets the demands of modernization. Moreover, the journalists learnt that although Su's father and father-in-law were both senior military officials, he did not take advantage of his good social relations and chose to live a simple unprivileged life. In the current context of widespread corruption, of excessive pursuit of material pleasures, Su's spirit stands out as particularly valuable. Thus, he should be considered as a role model in opposing corruption and "peaceful evolution."

Based on the above reasoning, the journalists believed that they had found a perfect role model worthy of emulation by individual cadres. Moreover, the model would provide a useful reference for the Party and the military in terms of the political and moral qualifications of the next generation of Party and military cadres. According to the *Yearbook* article, there were a number of other reasons for the journalists to pursue the story. First, as journalists, they have been looking for contemporary Lei Fengs and Jiao Yulus for many years.⁷¹ Second, the editor-in-chief of *People's Daily* called on journalists in early 1991 to focus on discovering new socialist role models. Third, in order to improve the credibility of the Party and socialism among the people

⁷¹Both Lei Feng and Jiao Yulu are famous role models set up by the Party in the 1960s.

and to raise morale, it was not only necessary to reform and to revise faulty policies but also necessary to make a great effort to establish new role models.

The first reason is a reflection of the professional values of Party journalists. If you successfully promulgate a role model for the society, then you have done a good job as a Party journalist. Just as the journalist hero in the West is often a "watchdog" exposing government wrongdoing, the ideal type of a Chinese journalist is one who discovers a role model. The second reason suggests the journalists' assimilation of specific news reporting priorities transmitted from news organizations. The third reason is consistent with the positive news reporting tradition of Party journalism.

What is significant about this process is the journalists' effort to contextualize, to relate a news event to the broader political situation, to take into consideration the Party's propaganda needs, its current concerns and objectives (modernization, corruption, legitimacy). The construction of a news story is a process of abstraction, of elevation, of injection of political meaning into a news personality or, more bluntly, of developing an example to fit the propaganda needs to the Party. This process is crucial in the writing of "good" journalism. It tests the sensitivity of a journalist's "nose for the news." Exaggerations, twists, distortions are common in this process. Many of the role models set up during the Cultural Revolution were twisted in a particular direction to meet particular political needs.

In any event, the journalists who discovered Su Ning spent two weeks gathering material and writing a feature story. The story was the collaborative work of three journalists from different media organizations. It is characteristic of the cooperative, non-competitive working relationship among different news organizations, especially among news organizations across different media and on different levels. The journalists believed that they must have a "high sense of responsibility" in treating the hero and that their report must be "in depth," "truthful" and "vivid." They took the fourth draft of their report to Beijing and received instructions from the editor-in-chief

and a deputy editor-in-chief of *People's Daily*. They instructed the journalists that the story should emphasize Su's dedication to the modernization of the country. The journalists followed this instruction and produced a fifth draft, which was published in *People's Daily* and broadcast by the Central People's Radio Station respectively.

People's Daily made an organized effort to promulgate Su as a hero. The editorial committee not only approved the journalists' initial proposal for the story but also decided to devote considerable space to the story. The paper published three commentaries and set up a special editorial team consisting of heads of news and domestic politics departments. The team was led by the editor-in-chief and his two deputies. In addition to the three journalists already involved, two more journalists from *People's Daily* were sent to Harbin to gather more material. Following the first feature story, the newspaper published at least six more features on Su with commentaries and photographs.

The *Yearbook* article suggests that these reports had a major impact on people. General Party Secretary Jiang Zemin read the reports and was "deeply moved." University students said that they had "found a true model." Elementary school pupils determined to be like Su Ning when they grew up. "Workers speeded up their production; military officers become more devoted to national defense, the study of science and modernization; private entrepreneurs improved their service and put trust before money...." The article concludes: "Many facts demonstrate that to put forward a model such as Su Ning is indeed a big boost to the construction of two civilizations!"

The story does not end here. In the Spring of 1993, the Party's Central Military Committee and the military's General Political Department launched a movement to learn from Su Ning. Jiang Zemin, the Party General Secretary and Chairman of the Party's Central Military Committee signed an order to name Su as a model cadre in the modernization of the country's defense. At the same time, *People's Daily* published an

editorial and a long feature story on the social effects of Su Ning on people of all walks of life.

The credibility of the *Yearbook* article is unimportant for this discussion. Here we are presented with a casebook example of Party journalism "at its best," a description of a journalism effort evaluated as well done, a social engineering effort believed to have brought about changes in people's beliefs and behavior.

Limitations, Attempted Reforms and Disasters

As Pat Howard points out, the Party's mass line "does not extend to allowing 'the masses' to organize autonomous interest groups or political forces that could challenge, check, or even supervise the Party's exercise of state power."⁷² Neither do the news media play such a role. They do not act as an independent public sphere that mediates between a civil society and the State. Rather, they are totally assimilated into the Party state apparatus and act "in the service of the state."⁷³ Of course, there is room for criticism and self-criticism in the news media. But this critical function of the news media is different from the role of the news media as independent watchdogs. As mentioned previously, the Party explicitly forbids the news media from criticizing the Party committee responsible for the news organization. Once a decision is made, the news media are not allowed to report dissenting views regarding a policy. Consequently, media criticism is necessarily insubstantial and operates in a top-down fashion. Often these criticisms are aimed at lower-level Party officials and bureaucracies for failing to follow the Party's policy directives, for poor working style and/or failing to live up to the standards set by the Party.⁷⁴

Throughout the history of the Party, the two-way mass line model of communication has been severely lopsided in practice in favor of top-down

⁷²Pat Howard, p. 181.

⁷³Andrew Nathan, p. 8.

⁷⁴For a more extended account of this type of criticism and self-criticism, see Andrew J. Nathan, pp. 155-156.

communication. That Liu Shaoqi, who provided the most definitive statement on the journalists' role in bottom-up communication, was purged by Mao, who emphasized top-down communication, is perhaps itself a significant fact. But even if the two-way communication model were implemented in a more balanced way, the model itself is fundamentally flawed. Like the mass line itself, journalism under the leadership of the Party is undemocratic and paternalist.

First, the masses are excluded from policy formation. The news media do not report the process of policy making. They only report the final policies themselves, and their implementation, and their impact.

Second, although journalists play a role in providing important information relevant to policy making, the practice of restricting this to internal reference reports or "intelligence" - rather than writing for a general readership, means that citizens are systematically excluded from vital information for meaningful participation in policy making.

Third, within the model itself, it is the Party, not the people, who are the initiators of communication. The news media propagate the Party's policy among the people from top down; and the news media report the concerns of the people from bottom-up to the Party so that the Party can do something for the people. The people are not supposed to be informed about the raw material for decision making, indeed, they have no recognized right to such information, which may even be treated as official secrets if divulged. The Party's participatory model of journalism is very limited. Despite mechanisms such as letters to editors, the people are not communicative subjects, using the media to communicate between them and their leaders and among themselves.

Finally, as with the mass line itself, notions of "the masses" and "the people" homogenize needs and interests and conceal fundamental conflicts. As Pat Howard argues, these notions "sabotage prospects for building a socialist society on a

foundation of pluralist solidarity and diverse democratic forums for the articulation of differing needs and negotiation of agreements (plans and policies) for the utilization of productive resources."⁷⁵ Notwithstanding the Party's claim that there is no fundamental conflict of interests among the people, the process of "taking from the people" in the mass line model is unavoidably selective. The interests of the urban population, for example, have always been the primary consideration of the Party, and are often promoted at the expense of the rural peasantry.⁷⁶

Indeed, constant struggles within the Party over the control of the media suggest that it is rather difficult for the news media to be the mouthpieces of *the Party*. It is even more impossible for the news media to be the mouthpieces of *the People*. The existence of different newspapers for different political and social groups (in contrast to different market segments) is potentially conducive for democratic communication in that they provide channels of communication for different publics organized around common political and economic interests. But here again, the Party's political domination over state and society means that organizations such as trade unions and women's associations are not independent political and social forces. Their newspapers cannot articulate independent alternative perspectives.

Like the history of the Party itself, the history of journalism under the control of the Party has been a twisted one. There were periods in which the Party engineered reforms in the news media in an attempt to make the news media closer to the people.⁷⁷ However, when the Party becomes totally detached from the people and acts against the interests of whole sectors of the population, the media, without any form of relative autonomy, can only rise and fall with the Party. Two episodes in the recent history of

⁷⁵Pat Howard, p. 15.

⁷⁶For example, during the famine in the early 1960s, the peasants who grew the grain suffered massive starvation, while the urban population did not starve because they were protected by the state's ration and grain coupon system.

⁷⁷See Leonard L. Chu, "Continuity and Change in China's Media Reform," *Journal of Communication* (44:3, Summer 1994), pp. 12-14 for a brief account of the Party's past and present media reforms. While Chu emphasizes that past reforms aimed at reinforcing Party control, it is also important to note that all these reforms also simultaneously aimed at bringing the media closer to the people.

journalism in the People's Republic are noteworthy: the media reform movement in 1956 and the role of the news media in the Cultural Revolution.

As noted previously, Leninist press theory played an important role in the formative years of the Party's concept of journalism in China. After the Party came to power in 1949, news media began to copy the Soviet model in every aspect from their conception of news to their standards for news selection to their styles of presentation.⁷⁸ However, the negative side of this wave of imitation was gradually realized by the Party. Thus, in 1956, after the Soviets officially exposed and criticized the mistakes of Stalin, the Party began to seek more indigenous ways of developing Chinese socialism. A media reform movement was attempted.⁷⁹

The reform was initiated by *People's Daily* under the close leadership of the Party. The newspaper solicited opinions from a wide range of people and studied the characteristics of other newspapers, including Chinese commercial newspapers before 1949 and a number of Western newspapers.⁸⁰ The reform was heralded by an editorial in *People's Daily*, which called for expansion of news reporting, free discussion and debate of different opinions, and better writing. The editorial expressed a desire to bring the Party newspaper closer to the people by reflecting people's lives and concerns and by providing more diverse content to meet the different needs of its readers.

Significantly, this editorial revised *Liberation Daily's* rigid concept of being a Party organ. Rather than arguing that every article should follow the Party's perspective, *People's Daily* suggested that from then on, only editorials and those articles written by officials of the Party Central represented the Party's stand, while other content would not necessarily reflect the opinions of Party leaders. It even suggested that opinions opposing the Party could also be published. At the same time,

⁷⁸Fang Hanqi and Chen Yeshao, p. 78.

⁷⁹In contrast to Leonard L. Chu's (p. 14) argument that this reform movement was "modeled after the former Soviet Union's media concepts, structure and operation," this reform was actually an attempt to rethink the Soviet model.

⁸⁰Fang Hanqi and Chen Yeshao, pp. 83-84.

following *Liberation Daily's* tradition of participatory journalism, it also stressed the people's participation in the newspaper's work. Rather than reiterating the Party principle, it asserted that "Newspapers are opinion institutions of the whole society." Furthermore, it claimed, "Our name, *People's Daily*, means that it is the common weapon and property of the people. The people are its masters. We will run a good newspaper only if we depend on the masses."⁸¹

The Xinhua News Agency and broadcasting stations also took a number of measures to broaden the scope of their reporting to reflect a wide range of opinion on various topics and, in the case of broadcasting, to provide more knowledge-based, service-oriented and entertaining programs. Although these reforms did not alter the basic news media structure and the Party's mode of communication, it was nevertheless a significant shift toward a more pluralistic press and an attempt to address the lopsided emphasis on top-down communication. This reform movement, however, ended prematurely in 1957 with the anti-rightist campaign. By 1958, the news media had already abandoned their reform commitments.⁸² Following the Party, they become very divorced from the people during the "Great Leap Forward" movement as demonstrated in news reports of absurdly high outputs and impossible achievements.

The Cultural Revolution brought radical changes to the news media system and news practices. During this period, news media became the instruments and sites of power struggle. Control of the news media was confused and chaotic. It was, as Kenneth Starck and Yu Xu note, "perhaps the 'dark age of Chinese journalism history."⁸³ The undemocratic tendencies in the Party's conception of the news media were fully exposed and amplified. In the heat of the personality cult and in the absence of internal democracy within the Party itself, news media, the tool of the vanguard

⁸¹"To Our Readers," *People's Daily* (July 1, 1956), cited in Fang Hanqi and Chen Yeshao, p. 82.

⁸²For a more detailed discussion of the 1956 media reform, see Jinglu Yu, "The Abortive 1956 Reform of Chinese Journalism," *Journalism Quarterly* (65:2, Summer 1988), pp. 328-334.

⁸³Kenneth Starck, Yu Xu, "Loud Thunder, Small Raindrops: The Reform Movement and the Press in China," *Gazette* (42:143-159, 1988), p. 146.

party in the realization of its political objectives, became the sites of political struggle within the Party. The Party's instrumentalist concept of news media, when taken to its extreme, meant that they engaged in deliberate manipulation, falsification and exaggeration, so long as it served certain political needs and policy objectives. The emphasis on the organizing and mobilizing function of the news media led to a situation in which a single editorial in *People's Daily* could shape the development of a whole mass movement. The polemical tradition of Chinese journalism was also taken to its extreme. News media were full of single-minded expressions of opinion and sweeping generalizations. A narrow notion of policy relevance led to a particular form of didactic media presentation. Political slogans, "great criticisms" (dapipan), "falsehood, big talk and empty talk" (jia, da, kong) became the daily media fare. There were even such practices as "quotation journalism" (yulu xinwen) in which quotations, usually printed in bold typeface, from Marx, Lenin and Mao Zedong were used in news reports. The required political uniformity and the lack of any form of editorial independence led to the extreme practice of local newspaper night editors checking against central Party papers for the placement of important political news, the making of headlines, the choice of font, and size of photos.⁸⁴

Party orthodoxy insists that the "Cultural Revolution" was a deviation, a mistake, and, indeed, even that the Party itself was made a victim of Lin Biao and Jiang Qing's ultra-leftist political groups. It is interpreted as a period when the "glorious traditions" of "the Party and people's journalism" were violated, a period when the press was not under the leadership of the Party but in the hands of a few individuals in pursuit of power.⁸⁵ However, the very fact that ten years of Cultural Revolution happened at all, and that the country's news media system did nothing but amplify ultra-leftist policies and practices suggests that something was fundamentally

⁸⁴Fang Hanqi and Chen Yeshao, p. 182.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 223.

wrong with the political system, and within it, its media system. Such fundamental flaws eventually fuelled movement toward media reform in the post-Cultural Revolution era, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

The Trajectory of Media Reform in China

Media Reform in the Early 1980s

News media reform in China in the late 1970s and early 1980s first began as an attempt to correct specific theories and practices of the Cultural Revolution and return to the earlier ideals of the Party press such as "seeking truth from facts" and relevance to the everyday lives of newspaper readers. The view of the news media was still instrumentalist, but the objective was different under the new era of economic reform and openness. The definition of the news media as instruments of class struggle was officially dropped. Instead, news media were defined as instruments of economic and cultural construction. In addition to the propaganda function, other functions of the news media, such as providing business information and entertainment, were emphasized.

News reporting began to emphasize such basics as "truthfulness," "brevity," "timeliness," "liveliness," and "readability." The scope of news reporting was broadened; human interest stories, disaster news, and crime news, for example, became acceptable news categories. News that criticizes the daily work of government authorities and the wrongdoings of officials also increased. In 1980, major national media even exposed a 1979 oil rig accident, leading to the State Council decision to punish a vice premier and the removal of the petroleum minister. Rather than just looking at government reports for news sources, journalists were encouraged to investigate situations and write "on the spot" news reports.

In theoretical discussions, ultra-leftist media theories -- for example, the idea that "facts should serve politics" -- were criticized. Early mainstream American communication theory, with its seemingly scientific character, its abstraction of the

communication process, as well as the absence of such concepts as "class" and "ideology," found a receptive audience among journalism students in the early 1980s. Concepts such as "information transmission," "sender," and "receiver" gained considerable circulation in literature on news media reform. The role of the audience in the communication process received more attention. Media are to be more "reader-oriented rather than leader-oriented."¹ The western concept of "news values" as a set of professionally defined standards of news selection, such as prominence, proximity, and timeliness, gained wide circulation. The factuality of news was also emphasized. Gan Xifen's assertion that "[f]acts are thus primary and ideology secondary" in news reporting may sound naive to critical media scholars in the West, but within the specific context of news media reform in China, it was subversive and emancipatory.²

Despite changes in media content and practices, however, the fundamental concept of political communication and the role of the media within the process remain the same. The Third Plenary Session of the 11th Party Congress in 1978, a historic meeting that ushered in Deng Xiaoping's economic reform and open door policy, explicitly reasserted the mouthpiece theory and the Party principle. For the most part, media reform in the early 1980s was a case of "loud thunder, small raindrops."³ Much of the effort was concentrated on the operational and technical levels.

Theoretical Ferment in the Mid-1980s

The news media reform movement reached a new stage after the mid-1980s. As Judy Polumbaum observed, by 1985, the analysis had shifted to the role and the

¹Bradley S. Greenberg and Tuen-Yu Lau, "The Revolution in Journalism and Communication Education in the People's Republic of China," *Gazette* (45, 1990, 19-31). p. 23.

²Gan Xifen, "Debates Contribute to the Development of the Journalistic Science," *Journal of Communication* (44:3, Summer 1994), p. 45.

³For overviews of news media reform in the 1980s, see Kenneth Starck and Yu Xu, "Loud Thunder, Small Raindrops: The Reform Movement and the Press in China," *Gazette* (42, 1988), 143-159; see also, Junhao Hong and Marlene Cuthbert, "Media Reform in China Since 1978: Background Factors, Problems and Future Trends," *Gazette* (47, 1991), pp. 141-158.

structure of the news media.⁴ There were several reasons for this new development. In the practice of journalism itself, although reforms on the technical and operational levels brought some fresh changes, it was difficult to move any further. Despite all the new ideas about news reporting, the basics of journalism practice remained the same. Even basic reform goals such as timeliness were difficult to achieve. The reasons were clear. First, despite efforts to promote news reporting as a more professionally oriented practice, news media were still subjected to the Party's propaganda objectives. As a result, professional values such as timeliness were treated as secondary. Secondly, timeliness as a news value is closely connected to a competitive news media environment in the West. With the absence of such an environment, there is simply not much incentive to pursue such a goal. The continuing dominance of instrumentalism in the reform era means that propaganda for economic prosperity simply replaces, or more accurately, supplements the previously narrowly defined task of political propaganda, while the patterns of news reporting remain the same.

After the initial years of economic reform, political reform was pushed on to the Party's agenda. Discussions as well as concrete steps to separate government administration from Party ideological leadership meant that the Party's dominant role in nearly every aspect of life was declining. There were also discussions on such issues as the need for more openness in the government process, democratic decision making, and public participation.

The years of 1986, 1987 and 1988 were a period of theoretical and political ferment. In 1985, Hu Yaobang, then Party General Secretary, reaffirmed the mouthpiece role of the news media in an important speech. He also warned against too much critical reporting and controversy in the news media.⁵ Yet just a year later, the Party leadership was tolerating discussion of ideas that Hu Yaobang's 1985 speech had

⁴Judy Polumbaum, "The Chinese Press and Its Discontents," *China Exchange News*(December 1988), p. 4.

⁵Hu Yaobang, "On the Party's Journalism Work," *People's Daily* (August 14, 1985), p. 1.

explicitly discouraged.⁶ Chief editors of national newspapers openly expressed their desire for greater editorial independence and relative autonomy.

Under the leadership of Zhao Ziyang, the 13th National Party Congress in October 1987 put political reform and, as part of it, journalism reform on the national agenda. Significantly, in Zhao's report to the Party Congress, mention of the press's role as the Party's mouthpiece, apparently in early drafts, was dropped in the final version after extensive discussion and debate within the Party.⁷ The term "political transparency" was used to advocate greater openness in government and more reporting of the political process.

More specifically, Zhao affirmed three concepts that were to have significant implications for the process of political communication and the role of the news media. The first concept was "supervision by public opinion" (yulun jiandu), meaning that the work of the Party and government should be open to more public scrutiny. The second concept was that the Party and government should inform the people about important events (zhongda shiqing rang renmin zhidao). The third concept was to give people a participatory role in the discussion of important issues (zhongda wenti jing renmin taolun).

While the above three notions did not challenge the fundamental assumptions of the Party's model of political communication, they nevertheless suggested significant changes in the direction of a less paternalist and more democratic political communication and decision-making process. The Party leadership did indeed give news organizations more editorial autonomy. As one journalist in a major national news organization recalled to me in an interview in late 1994, Party control over the news media was relatively relaxed during the period between 1987 and 1988.⁸ Zhao's

⁶Judy Polumbaum, "Tribulations of China's Journalists", in Chun Chuan-Lee (ed.), *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics of Journalism* (New York: the Guilford Press, 1990), p. 41.

⁷Ibid., p. 42.

⁸Liu Binyan traces this period back to 1985. He observes that Chinese journalists had the greatest amount of press freedom between 1985 and 1987. He suggests that "by the mid-1980s the expanded freedom to publish made it

phrases not only provided "rhetorical ammunition that sanctioned more aggressive reporting" and ushered in significant breakthroughs in terms of openness in news reporting and attention to sensitive issues but also invigorated theoretical discussions.⁹ Some journalism reformers, however, went much further than the new Party line and began to raise fundamental questions about the process of political communication itself. The Party principle was challenged by an emerging democratic discourse on the news media.

Freedom of the Press

By the mid-1980s, freedom of the press had become an important issue for advocates of news media reform.¹⁰ While journalists pursued press freedom by asserting and demanding more editorial autonomy, journalism theorists tried to define press freedom and elaborated the theoretical grounds for such freedom. They particularly stressed that press freedom means freedom within the constitution and law, which in fact suggests that the press should be free from the arbitrary power of the Party. Such freedom, some of them further pointed out, was for all the people, for people of the whole nation exercising their democratic rights. As Hu Jiwei, former editor-in-chief of *People's Daily*, argued:

The kind of press freedom we want to advocate is press freedom for all the people and not just press freedom for news workers. Freedom of the press for citizens is the right to be kept informed as masters of the country, their right of political consultation, their right of involvement in government and their right of supervision over the Party and government.¹¹

possible for several Party organs to have taken on the character of private newspapers." See Liu Binyan, "Press Freedom: Particles in the Air," in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed.), *Voices of China*, p. 135. Gerry Sperling provides many interesting examples of openness in the Chinese press during this period. See Gerry Sperling, "'Glasnost' in the Chinese Press," *Encounter* '87, pp. 39-47.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Judy Polumbaum notes that whereas the phrase "freedom of the press" was only used by a few bold pathbreakers earlier in the 1980s, by the fall of 1987, journalists and scholars were talking casually about it. See, Judy Polumbaum, "Tribulations of China's Journalists," p. 43.

¹¹Hu Jiwei, "There Will Be No Genuine Stability Without Press Freedom," *World Economic Herald* (May 8, 1989), p. 8.

Underlying such an argument is an assumption contrary to the Party's long-held notion of the press as a tool for educating and mobilizing the people for the causes it has chosen for them. By introducing the concept of "rights," Hu also went further than Zhao's enlightened paternalism of "letting" (rang) the people have more information and more participation.

According to Hu and other reform theorists, press freedom is not only the right of the people but also conducive to political stability. Addressing the Party's fear that greater press freedom would cause instability, some reformers not only advanced their case for press freedom as a basic democratic right of the people but also on utilitarian grounds. Wang Ruoshui, famous for his theory of Marxist humanism and alienation under socialism, pointed out that instability is caused by bureaucratism, corruption, and degeneration, which can be checked by a free press.¹²

This point was carried further by Hu Jiwei. In a widely circulated article published during the student movement in May 1989, Hu made a strong argument that "there will be no genuine stability without press freedom."¹³ He said that a free press could not only prevent and correct Party and government wrongdoings and therefore eradicate destabilizing factors but also promote mutual understanding between the people and the government and among different segments of society. It provided a safety valve for people to vent their dissatisfaction. His points were well-summarized in an introduction to his essay by the *World Economic Herald*.

Without freedom of the press, the people are helpless in the face of policy mistakes and the phenomenon of increasing corruption. If what they say is moderate, it serves no purpose. If what they say is tough, it is not published in the press. As time goes on, many people will cherish an attitude of saying and thinking nothing, and even taking things as they come, bending to fate. Such a phenomenon gives a false impression of stability and unity. But it actually has people's numbness, indifference and their repression as a price. Hidden therein is an even greater risk.

¹²"Mainland Scholars Talk Freely about Freedom of the Press," *Da Gong Bao* (July 29, 1988), p. 2.

¹³Hu Jiwei, p. 8.

Can a leader with a head for modern politics really be reconciled to this kind of superficial stability and unity?¹⁴

In a direct appeal to the Party and the government, Hu argued that press freedom would help to establish the democratic authority of the Chinese political leadership. He believed that only a leadership authority established under the condition of a free press is a democratic authority truly supported by the people. Otherwise, he warned, there can only be an autocratic authority which is mostly unstable.¹⁵ The reformers, therefore, attempted to persuade the leadership that not only had they nothing to lose by allowing a freer press, they could actually increase their credibility and, consequently, gain greater legitimacy among the people.

The "People Principle"

While arguments for a freer press involved an appeal on behalf of the people for their democratic rights, the argument was couched in the context of the Party's own political agenda to preserve political stability and leadership authority. The debate on the "Party principle" versus the "people principle" (renmin xing) of the press contained a more radical challenge to the Party's exercise of control over the news media.

The "people principle" was put forward by some media scholars in the early 1980s and criticized by the Party in the middle of the decade during the campaign against "bourgeois liberalization." It resurfaced after the Party's 13th Congress in 1987 and was widely discussed in academic and trade journals. In contrast to the notion that the news media should unconditionally follow the Party, this concept claims that the news media should speak for the people and represent the interests of the people. Proponents of the concept argued that when the Party makes mistakes, the press should not blindly follow the Party. Instead, it should stand with the people and speak for their interests. As Gan Xifen states:

¹⁴*World Economic Herald*, May 8, 1989, p. 8.

¹⁵"Hu Jiwei Says That Freedom of Press Must Not Be Wrongly Regarded as an Unstable Factor," *China News Service* (March 27, 1989), translated in *FBIS* (March 27, 1989), pp. 47-48.

...the lesson of the holocaust of the ten-year Cultural Revolution has taught us that the Party's leadership, even the Party Central, may commit mistakes. When mistakes are committed and when the Party's press blindly executes the leadership's intentions, newspapers would be committing serious mistakes. Therefore, upon discovering mistakes editorial departments should not blindly implement their instructions. Newspapers should put the interests of the people above everything else and be run accordingly upon reaching the Communist society even the Party will be eliminated. Yet the people are permanent, they live forever!¹⁶

While Hu Jiwei, the original author of this concept, seemed to advance the idea as an antithesis to the Party principle in his argument that it is the people, not the Party, who should control the press, many others advocated the idea in a less radical way, seeing it as a supplement to the Party principle. Qian Xinbo, deputy director of the Journalism Research Institute under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, for example, argued that news media in a socialist country have a dual character of representing both the Party *and* the people. He apparently did not see the two as identical, as the Party maintains. He argued that when the Party was struggling for power and had to rely on the media it controlled to publicize its ideas and to wage its political struggle, it was totally justifiable that the news media should act as its mouthpiece. Such a lopsided stress, however, was no longer appropriate when the Party had come to power. He argued that news media in a socialist country should shoulder the task of overseeing the Party and the government, that is, they should function as the people's watchdog over the Party and the government.¹⁷ He criticized those who "took too lightly the idea prevalent in Western countries which regards media supervision as the fourth force in the society" and dismissed it as a bourgeois media view.¹⁸ Gan Xifen, senior professor of journalism at People's University in Beijing, believed that newspapers should belong to both the Party *and* the people, and

¹⁶Gan Xifen, pp. 41-42.

¹⁷Qian Xinbo, "Media Supervision Is the Duty, Not a Favor Granted to the Media," *World Economic Herald* (April 24, 1989), p. 3, translated in *FBIS* (May 25, 1989), 44-46.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

in a very brave way, he articulated the idea that "journalists should be courageous enough to say that socialist newspapers are also the papers of the people."¹⁹

Underlying this seemingly innocent call for representing the people in the name of the "people principle" is something that the "Party principle" cannot accommodate. It is a fundamental challenge to the Party's claim to be the vanguard of the people. It expresses a distrust in the Party's ability to serve the interests of the people. It also signals journalists' desire to act as a more independent force, speaking directly for the people, instead as the mouthpiece of a party who claims to speak for the people.

Indeed, as the theoretical ferment in media circles reached a climax just before the 1989 student movement, some authors were already putting the "mouthpiece" theory itself into question. Wu Tingjun, for example, argued that the "mouthpiece" theory suffered a number of limitations in practice.²⁰ First, because the theory itself was the product of political struggle, it subjected the news media to narrow political calculation, and as a result, the basic requirements of news reporting, such as truthfulness and timeliness became secondary. News and propaganda become one and the same. Second, news content became overly politicized, even sports news, science news and human interest stories are not exceptions. Third, the theory led to a one-sided emphasis on top-down, one-way communication. Fourth, news media become completely dependent on the political Party, just as the tongue is subjected to the control of the brain. Wu argued that after the Communist Party came to power, the mouthpiece theory led to two negative consequences. The news media completely lost its watchdog function, and when the Party made policy mistakes, the news media always acted as accomplice, amplifying the mistakes. Thus, he concluded that "the tragedy of Chinese journalism is perhaps rooted in this mouthpiece theory."²¹

¹⁹Quoted in Zhang Kewen, "Role of News Media: a Debate," *China Daily* (January 22, 1988), p. 4.

²⁰Wu Tingjun, "Revisiting and Rethinking the "Mouthpiece" Theory," *Journalism Research Material* (No. 46) (Beijing, Chinese Social Sciences Press, 1989), pp. 143-152.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 152.

Journalism "Laws" and Western Media Concepts

While some theorists confronted the Party's press theory directly, others took an intellectual detour by promoting journalism as a science and by advancing the notion of "laws" in the positivist tradition, a tradition consistent with the Chinese interpretation of Marxism. The underlying political project was clear. Rather than subjecting journalism to the arbitrary control of the Party, journalism should follow "laws" of its own.

An article in the *Chinese Journalists*, for example, argued that just as work in science and technology must follow its "laws," the "laws" of journalism should also be followed. These "laws", according to the author, included some of the following principles:

News is a report on an event that has occurred lately and people are generally concerned about. News is intended for the broad masses of readers. If enterprises regard their customers as "God," then news media and journalism units (newspapers, press agencies and radio stations) should view readers and audiences as their "God," serving them, satisfying their needs, and winning their confidence. A news medium is an important means by which public opinion in society is expressed, or we may say that it, in itself, is a major component of public opinion in society.²²

Professor Gan Xifen acknowledges that it is "the very fundamental law of journalism" that it is "subordinate to politics" and is always "an opinion tool of a given class," nevertheless, he argues, there is more to journalism and there are a number of "most frequently observed universal laws of journalism," such as:

1. News reporting must be objective and true, reflecting reality as it is.
2. News reporting must be speedy and timely.
3. Journalism must reduce its distance from the audience, making itself easy for the audience to accept.

²²Mo Ru, "Acting According to Laws of Journalism," *Chinese Journalist* (March 15, 1989), p. 1, translated in *FBIS* (May 3, 1989), pp. 56-57.

4. Audience's feedback or evaluation should determine the survival of journalism.²³

Clearly, these "laws", except for Professor Gan's first "very fundamental law," are implicitly drawn from liberal press theory in the West and are abstractions based on mainstream news media practices in the West. There is even a touch of the consumer sovereignty concept in both writers. Whether there are indeed such "laws of journalism" is perhaps not really important. What is significant is that all these newly-discovered "laws" are missing from the currently dominant theory and practice of journalism in China. More to the point, underlying the various arguments for journalism to follow its own "laws" is a call for the recognition of the internal logic of news discourse and the relative autonomy of the news media. Liu Binyan, a well-known investigative journalist now in exile in the United State, was more straightforward in using the western model as the standard model of journalism. He pointed out that "China's newspapers are not newspapers at all" and that they must eventually follow the western model by becoming the "fourth estate."²⁴

Independent Newspaper Ownership

Theoretical challenges to the Party's media theory and practice were accompanied by a more concrete demand for an independent news media sector outside the Party/state proper. However, it was such a sensitive issue that even the outspoken Hu Jiwei did not treat this issue as a top priority in his public speeches and writings on press reform, although it was clearly on his agenda.

At first we thought the Party had to lead everything, including the press. We used to think the press was equivalent to the Party press. But this is wrong, because the Party's news operations -- such as People's Daily -- is only a part of the press work.²⁵

²³Gan Xifen, p. 44.

²⁴Cited in Lu Mu, "Adhere to Our Newspapers' Party Principle - Comments on Liu Binyan's Views on the Nature of Newspapers," *Journalism Front* (1987:2), pp. 3-4.

²⁵Quoted in Marlowe Hood, "Effects of Press Law Reform on Media Viewed," *South China Sunday Morning Post* (April 24, 1988), p. 4, reprinted in *FBIS* (April 25, 1988), pp. 25-26.

Implied in this passage, then, is the understanding that Party journalism is only one form of journalism, and there can be and should be other forms of journalism.

Technically speaking, there were already a large number of non-Party newspapers by the mid-1980s, as discussed in Chapter 2. But these newspapers were still under the control of the Party, and "all newspapers throughout the country have unified propaganda lines."²⁶ What the reformers were looking for, therefore, were independent newspapers that would not have to follow the Party's unified propaganda line.

In fact, arguments for private and other types of independent newspapers outside the Party/state apparatus proper (*min ban*) had been advanced during the "hundred flowers" movement in 1957, but they were criticized as the most extreme example of rightist views during the Anti-Rightist campaign in the same year.²⁷ And the topic remained a taboo until the mid-1980s, when the Party's reform policy encouraged the growth of private industrial and trade enterprises and its call for the supervision of the Party and the government by public opinion made some outspoken intellectuals feel that it was again time to raise this issue.

Wu Zuguang, a dramatist and a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which could be described as the upper house of China's parliament), put forward a proposal at a CPPCC meeting in 1987 calling on the government to allow publication of independent newspapers and journals.²⁸ An opinion poll was conducted in 1988 by the Journalism Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Capital Journalism Society of all members of the NPC and the CPPCC. The designers of the poll boldly ventured a new interpretation of

²⁶Gan Xifen, p. 45.

²⁷While the term "*minban*" certainly includes private newspaper ownership by an individual, it can also mean other forms of non-state ownership such as non-governmental organizations. Although some reformers used the narrow term "newspapers run by private individuals" (*si ren ban bao*), others used the broad term "*min ban*" in the news media reform literature.

²⁸"The Government Must Be Constrained by Public," *World Economic Herald* (May 8, 1989), p. 4, translated in *FBIS* (May 25), pp. 50-51.

the constitutional guarantee of freedom of the press by asking subjects whether they agreed that freedom of the press means that citizens can publish newspapers.²⁹ The idea was also written into one of the drafts of the proposed press law.

Theoretical arguments for private and other forms of independent newspapers rejected the Party's fundamental concept of news media as tools for class struggle. Journalism theorist Chen Lidan, for example, argued that the notion of the press as instruments of class struggle is wrong and the Party must discard this instrumental mentality and adopt the concept of news media as an "information dissemination industry."³⁰ With such a re-definition, of course, the ideological barriers to the establishment of private or other forms of independent newspapers are removed. If news media were to be treated as an industry, then the Party should certainly allow different forms of ownership to exist, for this was what had happened in many other economic sectors in China.

Reflecting a common strategy in political discourse in China, advocates for private or other forms of independent newspaper ownership found theoretical ground in the Party line of the day, that is, the Party's theory that China was still in an "initial stage of socialism."³¹ According to this theory, during this initial stage, the central task is industrialization, which requires coexistence and competition between various forms of ownership wherein the market should be the main mechanism for mobilization and allocation of resources. This theory became the ideological underpinning of reform and in a *de facto* way, as Timothy Cheek notes, had been interpreted as a basis for social diversity and ideological pluralism.³² Proponents of private or other forms of

²⁹Journalism Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Survey Group of the Capital Journalism Society. "People's Calls, People's Expectations," in Chen Chongshan, Er Xiuling, (eds.) *A Perspective Study of Media Communication Effects in China* (Shenyang: Shenyang Publishing House, 1989), p. 85. See also Chen Lidan, "Why Is the Issue of Private Newspaper Ownership Avoided," *World Economic Herald* (May 8, 1989), p. 4.

³⁰Chen Lidan, p. 4.

³¹This theory was put forward by two scholars in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. It received the endorsement of the Party at its 13th National Congress in October 1987.

³²Timothy Cheek, "Redefining Propaganda: Debates on the Role of Journalism in Post-Mao Mainland China," *Issues & Studies* (February, 1989), pp. 47-74.

independent newspaper ownership, therefore, based their arguments on this theory. As

Chen Lidan wrote:

Since the initial stage of socialism will extend for more than one hundred years, during which various types of economic reforms and interests will coexist with one another, we should also allow divergent views to coexist with one another. This is because a particular ideological form should always be compatible to a particular social structure and a particular economic structure.³³

He argued that the existing government-controlled structure would inevitably clash with the idea of ideological pluralism and private or other forms of independent newspaper ownership were unavoidable.

Contextualizing the Democratization Discourse

The crusade for press freedom, the articulation of the "people principle," the construction of journalism "laws," and the call for independent newspapers constituted some of the main thrusts of an emerging discourse on the democratization of media communication in China. Underlying these different strands of argument regarding news media reform was a common desire to break away from the Party's monopolistic, arbitrary control of the news media and, consequently, the complete subordination of the news media to the Party state apparatus. In their call for a freer press that is restricted only by the constitution and other laws, a press that speaks for the people and expresses ideological diversity through different forms of ownership, and a press discourse that has relative autonomy and its own internal coherence *vis-a-vis* Party propaganda, progressive forces within the news reform movement expressed their desire for the establishment, through such a press, of a more active and autonomous civil society, where different interests could be more effectively communicated and through which the public could exercise some control over the Party and the government. If these were the directions that news media reform were to take, the news

³³Chen Lidan, p. 4.

media would become an important force in recasting the relation between political leaders and civil society and reshaping Chinese society in a more democratic form. It would bring significant change to the model of political communication in China.

On the other hand, since most of these ideas were in their formative stages and their expression was constrained both in trade and academic journals, they remained elementary, fragmentary and unsystematic. The intellectual project of redefining communicative relations in Chinese society and the role of news media in these relations was still in the initial stage. For example, press freedom is primarily conceived as freedom within the constitution and law and freedom from the overt editorial intervention of the Party. Virtually nobody raised the question as to whether the press could advocate changes in the fundamental structure of the State. Many of these ideas were slogan like, and it is not clear how these ideas could be institutionalized and implemented. For example, how is the people's principle to be operationalized? Does it simply mean that the Party should loosen its control of the news media and allow journalists to represent the interests of the people, or should there be new institutional arrangements that structurally secure the people's principle? If it is the first case, can the people rely on a group of professional journalists to reflect their interests and speak on their behalf? If the Party's claim to represent the people is elitist and its use of the term "the people" conceals differences among the people, the same can be said of those who claim to speak on behalf of the people. There are a number of unexplored questions regarding the issue of non-state newspaper ownership as well. What about the financing of such a newspaper? What should be the organizational structure of such a newspaper? Does people-run (minban) simply mean private newspaper ownership by an entrepreneur or other forms of non-state ownership such as journalists' co-operatives or citizen's co-operatives? Can it also mean a new form of public ownership?

Indeed, this emerging democratic discourse on the news media is burdened with potential contradictions and inconsistencies. Residues of and over-reactions to the Party's media theory and practices are both apparent. In proposing his "laws of journalism," for example, Professor Gan is not even bothered by the potential contradiction between his first "very fundamental law" about the class nature of journalism and the inevitable subordination of journalism to politics and his more operational "laws" of journalism, especially the notion that news reporting must be "objective and true."³⁴ In fact, while arguments for "laws" of journalism underscored a critique of the Party's political reductionism which acknowledges journalism only as a political instrument, they did not pose a critique of the Party's model of political communication as such. Moreover, democratic sensibilities were often intermingled with elitist sensibilities. For example, while Hu Jiwei's theoretical arguments for "press freedom for all the people" appears rather democratic, his ideal newspaper of the future - newspapers that are established and run by entrepreneurs who are at the same time politicians or have the power to influence politicians³⁵ - is rather elitist and undemocratic.

³⁴The struggle for objectivity in news reporting is part of the struggle for the relative autonomy of the news media in China. Viewed from this perspective, the call for the practice of western style objective journalism in the context of Chinese journalism definitively has a progressive face. For an analysis of the struggle for "objective reporting" in China, see Li Liangrong, "The Historical Fate of 'Objective Reporting' in China," in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed.), *China's Media, Media's China* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 225-237. In the context of journalism in North America, however, the conventions of objective reporting have substantial conservatizing implications. For critical analyses of objectivity in North American journalism, see, Gaye Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity," *American Journal of Sociology* (77:4, 1972), pp. 660-679; Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Dan Schiller, *Objectivity and the News: The Public and the Rise of Commercial Journalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); see also, Yuezhi Zhao, *Objectivity and Commercial News: An Examination of the Concept of Objectivity in North American Journalism*, unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Communication, Simon Fraser University, 1989; Robert Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao, "Are Ethics Enough? Objectivity versus Sustainable Democracy," in Valerie Alia, Brian Brennan and Barry Hoffmaster (eds.), *Deadlines and Diversity: Journalism Ethics in a Changing World* (Halifax: Fernwood, 1995), and Robert Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao, *Regimes in Crisis: News Objectivity and Sustainable Democracy* (Toronto: Garamond, forthcoming).

³⁵See Chen Yang, *People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (April 5, 1990), p. 2.

Such inconsistencies not only reflect the preliminary nature of the discourse but also reflect the broad political and intellectual divisions in China at the time. The political landscape in China during the mid-1980s was a rather complicated one. In addition to the conventional "reformers versus hardliners" division within the Party, there were different strands with the reform camp, most notably neo-authoritarians, technocrats and democratic reformers, although western news media often use the single label "liberal reformers" to describe all reformers. These different groups held different perspectives on Chinese politics and modernization during the intellectual ferment in the mid-1980s, especially from mid-1988 to the government crackdown in the spring of 1989.

Neo-authoritarians argued that China was not ready for democracy, claiming the people have inadequate political skills and qualifications and a very weak sense of citizenship after centuries of paternalist rule. They argued that democracy can only be achieved by moving the nation through a transition period of authoritarian rule and that economic growth cannot be achieved simultaneously with democratization.³⁶ They believed that the development of a market economy under neo-authoritarian rule will necessarily lead to a democracy, because "[a] democratic regime and a market economy are like twins."³⁷ They promoted the idea of the need for a middle class of independent entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, technological and cultural elites who become the dominant forces of the society and are capable of securing and maintaining the foundations for democratic governance.

Technocrats are people with three traits - scientific training, professional occupations, and actual or putative positions of power because of their education and

³⁶Mark. P. Petracca and Mong Xiong, "The Concept of Chinese Neo-Authoritarianism: An Exploration and Democratic Critique," *Asian Survey* (vol. XXX, no. 11, November 1990, pp. 1099-1117), p. 1112-1113. This article provides a concise overview of the main thrusts of the neo-authoritarian and democratic perspectives on China. The following account of these two schools is drawn from this article.

³⁷Wu Jiayang, "Neo-Authoritarianism: A Special Express Train to Democratization," in Liu Yuan and Li Qing (eds.), *Neo-authoritarianism: Debate on Theories of Reform* (Beijing: Institute of Economics, 1989), pp. 45-46, cited in Mark P. Petracca and Mong Xiong, p. 1109.

profession. According to Li Cheng and Lynn T. White III, political development in China in the 1980s was primarily technocratic. Dramatic shifts in cadre policy since 1978 had promoted technocrats to practically all of China's top posts and fostered a technocratic movement in China.³⁸ Technocrats believed that their technical training, usually in science and technology, legitimized their claims to office and power. They believed that "national progress depends on technological development; thus, experts should rule." Their elitism, technological rationality, and anti-democratic ideals thus often resonate with the views of neo-authoritarians.

Democratic reformers, on the other hand, maintained that democracy is the essential prerequisite to Chinese modernization. They argued that China needs to move to forms of participatory democracy immediately and that "enough of a foundation for a viable pluralistic system is in place to make democratization in China a possibility."³⁹ Rather than seeing democracy as an end product of a market economy developed under neo-authoritarian rule, democratic reformers questioned the neo-authoritarian assumption that economic growth will necessarily lead to democracy and insisted that democracy is both a means to shape and motivate political development and an end for political governance. "As a result, this school argues that economic growth, political stability, and democratization are different aspects of modernization that are both interdependent and interactive."⁴⁰ In response to the neo-authoritarian claim that the Chinese people are not ready for democracy, democrats argued that only from a genuine participatory experience in the process of public policy making will the Chinese people come to understand democracy and make a commitment to it. Rather than relying on the creation of a middle class to be the agents of democratization,

³⁸See, Li Cheng and Lynn T. White III, "China's Technocratic Movement and the *World Economic Herald*," *Modern China* (17:3, July 1991, pp. 324-388), p. 344. This article provides an excellent analysis of China's technocratic movement in the mid-1980s and its relationship with the democracy movement in 1989 and the *World Economic Herald*, which was seen as the main forum of this technocratic movement.

³⁹Mark. P. Petracca and Mong Xiong, p. 1111.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 1112.

democrats saw mass-based political pressure from below - students, workers and others who participated the 1989 democracy movement, for example - as the main engine of democratization. They believed that "mass-based political pressure must be deployed to stimulate, coordinate, and facilitate political and economic reforms."⁴¹

Many reformers who took part in the pro-democracy movement were neo-authoritarians and technocrats.⁴² Thus, there is a fundamental gap between these reformers, many of whom are within the Party, and grassroots elements who participated in the democracy movement:

While the students, workers, and intellectuals demanded participatory democracy and freedom of assembly, of expression, and of the press, the neoauthoritarian Party members advocated iron-fisted rule with only a modicum of democracy. Reformists in the Party openly opposed mass democracy; they considered the powerful, the entrepreneurs, and the intellectual elite to be the backbone of China. Seeing the mass of people as backward, these Party reformists decided that "only a majority of the best may represent the interests of the majority, only this elite may be leaders and control the direction of the nation's development for the near future."⁴³ Lacking a theoretical foundation for discussion, the reformists and the democracy movement participants had no basis for communication and could not ally against conservatives.⁴⁴

While reformers within the Party such as Zhao Ziyang initially provided an opening for democratic reformers, in the fall of 1988, Zhao Ziyang and his think tanks attempted to avoid a crisis in economic reform by sacrificing political democratization and embracing the theory of neo-authoritarianism.⁴⁵ During the political struggles in the spring of 1989, Party reformers failed to make alliances with democratic forces.⁴⁶ They failed to promote conscientious dialogue with the democracy movement, failed to

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²See Li Cheng and Lynn T. White III (1991) for an excellent analysis of the different political orientations of China's intellectuals and conflicts and divisions between government technocrats and dissident intellectuals.

⁴³This quote is from Chen Yizi, Wang Xiaoqiang, and Li Jun, "Establishing the Developmental Model of a Hard Government and a Soft Economy," in Liu Yuan and Li Qing (eds.), *Neo-authoritarianism* (Beijing: Institute of Economics, 1989), p. 248.

⁴⁴Ruan Ming, "Press Freedom and Neoauthoritarianism: A Reflection on China's Democracy Movement," in *Voices of China* (pp. 122-131), p. 130.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 129.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 127-128. Ruan Ming attributes the passivity of Party reformers to their embrace of the neo-authoritarian theory.

legalize their reform activities and failed to make full use of the news media to gain popular support.⁴⁷ As a result, the movement for democratic reform was defeated in 1989. Even reformers within the Party were crushed by more conservative elements within the Party, as symbolized by the downfall of Zhao Ziyang.

The Struggle over Press Legislation

The news media reform movement was also implicated in this broad political struggle. The struggle over press legislation was illustrative of the different forces and perspectives within the press reform movement.

Despite the 1982 Chinese Constitution's formal endorsement of free speech and free expression for all citizens, the Party's ideological control over the news media means that the Party exercises press freedom on people's behalf.

As the news media reform movement progressed, journalists felt the need for a press law that could protect them from the arbitrary power of the Party and elaborate the terms of press freedom by defining in detail what they could and could not do.⁴⁸ Democratic reformers wanted press reform to be legalized as part of the transition from the rule of man to the rule of law in China. Discussions had been taking place since 1980, but the actual drafting of the legislation did not begin until 1984, when Hu Jiwei, in his capacity as a member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and vice-chairman of its Education, Science, Culture and Public Health Committee, was entrusted with the task. But there were deep divisions over the substance of the legislation, particularly over the role of the news media and the purpose of the legislation.

Democratic reformers such as Hu Jiwei wanted legislation that would change the existing structure of the news media system and define and protect the rights of

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 128.

⁴⁸Alison L. Jernow, *Don't Force Us to Lie* (New York: Committee to Protect Journalists, 1993), p. 158.

journalists and the public to present their views and offer criticisms. They wanted at least part of the news media to become a public sphere independent of the Party state apparatus. They wanted a press law that would allow non-official publications. For example, Yu Haocheng, a legal expert, argued that

[t]he tools of information must be independent of the rulers, otherwise the people will not be able to enjoy freedom of expression and publication, the two freedoms which guarantee their rights to know what is happening, engage in political discussion and supervise the government.⁴⁹

Similarly, Sun Xupei, a prominent journalism scholar, also believed that the primary objective of press legislation was to define socialist press freedom. While the Party press would still play a dominant role, socialist press freedom would expand the arena of journalism to independent publications.⁵⁰

This democratic perspective fundamentally challenged the Party's monopolistic control over the process of political communication. Hu Jiwei proceeded with his work on press legislation in consultation with journalism scholars from the Journalism Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He had the backing of scholars such as Sun Xupei and "a majority of newspaper editors, journalists and the public."⁵¹

Neo-authoritarian reformers, however, believe that the Chinese people, including journalists, are not ready for press freedom. The deep division between the democratic perspective and neo-authoritarian, paternalist and elitist perspectives was clearly reflected on the issue of independent newspaper ownership. For example, a 1988 survey found that while 33.5 percent of NPC delegates and 55.9% CPPCC delegates agreed that press freedom means that citizens could publish independent newspapers, 60.1 percent of NPC delegates and 30.7 of CPPCC delegates did not agree

⁴⁹Cited in Alison L. Jernow, p. 158-159.

⁵⁰Sun Xupei has written extensively on press legislation. See Sun Xupei, *New Theories of Journalism* (Beijing: Contemporary China Press, 1994), pp. 131-171. Kenneth Starck and Yu Xu (1988, pp. 153-155) provide a brief summary of the democratic perspective on press legislation.

⁵¹Alison L. Jernow, p. 158.

with this view.⁵² Conservative Party ideologues, of course, were even more adamant in rejecting this idea.

In January 1987, with the creation of the State Press and Publications Administration, the responsibility for drafting the press legislation was shifted to this government agency. Under the leadership of Du Daozheng, who was believed to be a conservative, this agency saw the press law mainly as a means of control. Du stressed the duties and obligations of journalists to the government and society. While democratic reformers wanted a law to protect journalists from the arbitrary power of the Party state, Du wanted the law to define the limits of journalists and protect the government from journalists. He stressed order and control. Du also reportedly opposed the idea of independent publications.

In addition to fundamental disagreement over the role of the news media and the purpose of the press law, Hu and Du also disagreed over the procedures by which press legislation should be drafted. While Hu wanted wider discussion and more public participation in the process and wanted it passed by the NPC as a whole, Du wanted it passed by the more restricted NPC Standing Committee and consultation with specialized groups.⁵³

With the political openness created by the 13th Party Congress in October 1987 and the re-grouping of political forces in the top leadership of the Party, Hu Jiwei resumed his task in drafting the press law and shared this responsibility with Du Daozheng.⁵⁴ As a result of deep divisions, different drafts of the press law were circulated in 1987 and 1988. After many delays and intensive debates, in early 1989, the discussion of a draft press law was put on the agenda of an NPC Standing

⁵²Journalism Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Survey Group of the Capital Journalism Society, p. 85.

⁵³See Alison L. Jernow (1993:58-63) for a more detailed discussion of the division between Hu Jiwei and Du Daozheng. Timothy Cheek also provides a good analysis of the different perspectives of Hu Jiwei and Du Daozheng, see his "Redefining Propaganda," p. 58-63.

⁵⁴Timothy Cheek, p. 59.

Committee meeting scheduled for late June. Reportedly, Du's more conservative version had been adopted for discussion. But the suppression of the pro-democracy movement led to the removal of the press law from the NPC Standing Committee's agenda.

Media Reform After June 1989

The media reform movement suffered a major setback which was apparent both in the practice of journalism and in theoretical discussion. The Party attributed the pro-democracy movement to the influence of "bourgeois liberalization" and the western strategy of "peaceful evolution" and the partial takeover of the news media and the ideological front by liberal and democratic reformers. With this suspicion reinforced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, the Party tightened its ideological and communication policies. As Joseph M. Chan observes, combating "bourgeois liberalization" and "peaceful evolution" remained priority concerns in the two years following 1989.⁵⁵

Two speeches made by Party leaders in late 1989, one by Jiang Zemin, the Party General Secretary, the other by Li Ruihuan, a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo in charge of propaganda and ideology who was appointed in June 1989, effectively reimposed the Party principle on news media and closed any theoretical debate on news media reform. Both speeches were made at a seminar for high-level media officials, including editors-in-chief of provincial Party organs. The seminar was designed to reflect on media performance before and during the pro-democracy movement and to unify thinking among media officials.

Jiang's speech basically reiterated the "mouthpiece" theory. He claimed that the goal of serving the Party and the people were invariably one and the same goal and criticized those who advocated the "people principle" and press freedom for maliciously

⁵⁵Joseph M. Chan, p. 25-2.

trying to undermine the Party principle and overthrow Party leadership. Party committees were asked to take an active role in supervising the news media.⁵⁶ Even Zhao Ziyang's popular notion of "political transparency" was under criticism.

Li Ruihuan's speech not only stressed the Party principle but also emphasized Party journalism's tradition of positive propaganda. The news media were again instructed to fulfill didactic and exhortatory responsibilities by providing "correct" direction to the public and arousing people's confidence in and enthusiasm for the socialist system. Li said that as far as news media reform was concerned, it was not a question of whether they wanted to reform or not but rather a question of how to reform. However, his outline for media reform did not touch on any of the substantial issues that had been pushed onto the political agenda before and during the democracy movement. The idea of a press law was not even mentioned; nor was the issue of separation of Party and government in the administration of the news media. There was not going to be any structural reform that aimed at redefining the communicative relationship between the news media and Chinese society, just minor improvements in content and style of presentation.⁵⁷ The focus of reform was to be on the operational and technical levels. News media reform, after a decade of intense debate and struggle, seemed to have returned to its starting point of a decade earlier.

In addition to the two speeches which reasserted the Party's leadership and the tradition of Party journalism, the Party made new appointments to many senior posts in the news media and the ideological field.⁵⁸ Hu Jiwei was stripped of his position in the National People's Congress and expelled from the Party. Work on drafting a press law was suspended. Many news organizations were criticized for their "liberal" tendencies

⁵⁶Jiang Zemin, "Issues in the Party's Journalism Work," in Journalism Research Institute of Xinhua News Agency, (ed), *Selections from Documents on Journalism* (Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House, 1990), pp. 189-200.

⁵⁷Li Ruihuan, "Stick to the Principle of Positive Propaganda," in *Selections from Documents on Journalism*, pp. 217-218.

⁵⁸Joseph M. Chan (p. 25-3) provides a brief summary of the post-June 4 personnel change in media and ideological field.

in their reports and for their sympathetic reporting of the student movement. Some publications were closed and some re-organized at the top level.⁵⁹ Rebellious journalists and theorists experienced investigation, work suspension, job re-assignment, and even imprisonment.⁶⁰

Restrictions on editors and journalists increased. The news media were required to closely follow the Party's line and directives. The preview system, which had been relaxed considerably during the mid-1980s was again enforced more strictly. *People's Daily*, for example, was required to report its main news content to the Party's Propaganda Department on a daily basis, just before its four o'clock editorial committee meeting. The same rule was applied to the two most important news programs on the national radio and television networks respectively. The relaxed control of the news media during the mid-1980s, it turned out, was another mistake committed by the Party. It was because Zhao Ziyang, the General Party Secretary, did not exert equivalent force with both hands; while his grip on economic development was firm, his grasp on the ideological front was "soft," according to the Party. The Party set up a special "Leadership Group on Ideological and Propaganda Work" consisting of top leaders of major national news media under the leadership of Politburo member Ding Guangen. During the two years following 1989, there was little substantive discussion of news media reform as a political project in Chinese journalism studies. The "people principle" became a taboo again. Reference to "press freedom" and "supervision by public opinion" virtually disappeared from discourse on media reform. Despite resistance from rank and file journalists, the news media were dominated by positive propaganda.⁶¹

⁵⁹Alison L. Jernow (p. 140) listed eight publication closures following June 4, 1989.

⁶⁰For a list of journalists arrested in 1989, see Alison L. Jernow (p. 137).

⁶¹See Alison L. Jernow (pp. 69-79) for an account of the Party's imposition of ideological control and the resistance of news organizations and journalists after June 4, 1989.

The Turn to Commercialization

Although the introduction of the market mechanism had been part of media reform from the very beginning, the issue of media commercialization was not a focus of the news media reform movement. Demands for more press freedom focused on the loosening of Party control of the news media. Nor did those who advocated adopting Western press concepts such as the watchdog role of the news media explicitly advocate the commercialization of news media in China. Even those who argued for the establishment of private newspapers did not pay much attention to the economic basis of the news media. This situation changed dramatically in 1992. After two years of economic consolidation and readjustment following 1989, the Party decided to speed up economic reform once again. In 1992, the Party issued a resolution on speeding up the development of tertiary industry, which officially included the news media.

The most important turning point was the publication of Deng Xiaoping's talks during his inspection tour to south China in early 1992 and subsequently, the 14th National Party Congress in October 1992, which officially adopted Deng's policy of more economic openness and formally embraced the concept of a "socialist market economy." Joseph M. Chan provides an excellent account of the main thrusts of Deng's talks:

Brushing aside the conservatives' urge for taking anti-peaceful evolution as the central task, Deng reiterated the primacy of the policy of "one centrality, two basic points": Of central importance was economic construction whereas reform and open-door policy, and the maintenance on the Four Cardinal Principles were the two basic points. Deng called for faster economic growth and boldness in experimenting with reforms. At the same time, he directed that practice should take precedence over theoretical debates and that controversies over the nature of Chinese reforms and other historical-political issues should be shelved. While he continued to maintain that rightism was an undesirable tendency, he unprecedentedly emphasized that leftism was posing a more imminent danger.⁶²

⁶²Joseph M. Chan, p. 25.3.

In typical pragmatic fashion, Deng overcame ideological barriers to commercialization by arguing that the market is only a mechanism for economic development that does not determine whether a system is capitalist or socialist. The 14th Party Congress formally adopted Deng's total embrace of the market and declared that the objective of China's economic reform was to establish a "socialist market economy." With this new claim, the Party's economic policy completed its fifteen-year journey from a planned economy to a market economy. In the early 1980s, the economy was to be a planned economy supplemented by the market mechanism. During the mid-1980s, the economy was to be a "planned commodity economy." Now the market has finally triumphed. It is to play a dominating role not only in the allocation of consumer goods and services but in the allocation of resources.

Deng's talks defined the new mood of the country. Suddenly, commercialization assumed an unprecedented pace of development in every aspect. The speed of economic growth reached unprecedented levels.⁶³

While Deng himself brushed aside the ideological issue and single-handedly closed the debate on whether the reform was capitalist or socialist, Pei Minxin, a Harvard-trained political scientist, has already put a definite label on the nature of the change spurred by Deng's talks. According to Pei, Deng's 1992 speech had the effect of "reenergizing China's capitalist revolution after Tiananmen" and it marked the "semiformal takeover" of capitalism in China.⁶⁴ Pei provided a number of reasons for his claim that "the economic developments in China in 1992-1993 marked the near total victory of its society-led capitalist revolution." 1) China's political leadership openly endorsed the market economy as a goal despite the rhetoric of a "socialist market

⁶³According China's Statistics Bureau, the growth rate for 1990 was 3.9 percent. It reached 8.0 percent in 1991 and jumped to 13.6 percent in 1992. The rate for 1993 and 1994 was 13.4 percent and 10.1 percent respectively. The average rate for the whole world for the five year period (1990-1994) was 2.2%, 0.8%, 1.4%, 2.3% and 3.1 respectively, while that of the developed countries was 2.0%, 0.3%, 2.0%, 1.8%, 2.7% respectively. *People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (August 31, 1995), p. 2.

⁶⁴Pei Minxin, *From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 84.

economy. 2) The government permitted the take-over of small and medium state-owned enterprise by private entrepreneurs and foreign investors. 3) There was a huge exodus of technical and political elites from the state sector and bureaucracies into the private sector. 4) There was an unprecedented expansion of the private sector into previously closed sectors such as real estate, commercial aviation and the financial market. 5) Many provincial and local governments passed liberal laws expanding the formal private sector. 6) There was a massive infusion of new foreign investments.⁶⁵

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to dispute Pei's interpretation. The changes in the economic sphere were indeed profound. The news media, however, have been in the paradoxical situation of both remaining the same and being changed at the same time. Although the Party has gone a long way in yielding its control over the economy to the market, it has not yielded political control nor changed the pattern of political communication. To be sure, there has been change in the content of propaganda in the news media since Deng's talks.⁶⁶ In responding to Deng's call for accelerated economic growth and for taking economic construction as the central task, Li Ruihuan gave instructions that the key point of propaganda work in 1992 was to give prominence to the task of economic construction rather than dry and empty sermons. He also pointed out that the news media should be more informative and should meet the needs of various audiences.⁶⁷

But the Party has not changed its pattern of control over the news media. Thus Anne Thurston is partially right when she claims that since Deng's talks, everything and everyone has changed except for the press. Indeed, some observers suggested in late 1994 that Party control was tighter than during the Cultural Revolution.⁶⁸ Although this is perhaps an overstatement, there is some truth in this observation. The media's

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Alison L. Jernow (79-83) provides a description of this change on the Chinese press.

⁶⁷Joseph M. Chan, pp. 25.3-25.4.

⁶⁸This observation was made by at least two interviewees in my confidential interviews in October 1994 in Beijing.

handling of a September 20, 1994 shooting incident in the east suburb of Beijing is revealing. In the early morning of September 20, 1994, a frustrated, heavily armed military officer managed to hijack vehicles all the way from his camp in Tong County to the east suburbs of Beijing. Unable to reach Tiananmen Square on his suicidal mission, he went on a shooting rampage and killed more than ten people, including foreigners, until armed police arrived and shot him to death on the site. The event happened during the morning rush hour in a busy traffic area; moreover, it involved foreigners. The site is close to foreign embassies and foreign media offices. Thus, it attracted foreign media reports and was widely discussed among the people in Beijing.

Such an incident would definitely not be reported during the Cultural Revolution. But now it is the age of reform and openness, and in fact, the Party in 1987 prepared a clear instruction on how to report this kind of event.

A breaking event that may be reported by foreign media and may cause wide circulation among the people should be reported openly in a timely and a continuous manner; moreover, effort should be made to report it before foreign media do.⁶⁹

The media's handling of the event, however, did not even live up to this pre-1989 requirement. Neither the national news media in Beijing nor the Beijing broadcasting media were allowed to report the event. Brief reports of the event did appear in *Beijing Daily* and *Beijing Evening News*. But they were identical copies apparently prepared by some authority other than the two newspapers themselves. The news desk at Beijing People's Radio Station received at least three orders from above, the first from the station's News Director, the second from the station President's office, the third from the city's Party propaganda department, all prohibiting the reporting of the event.⁷⁰ The argument here is not that such an event necessarily should be the focus of the national news media nor that a news media system that gives

⁶⁹Central Party Propaganda Department, et al, "Suggestions for Improving News Reporting," in Journalism Research Institute of Xinhua News Agency, *Selections From Documents in Journalism* (Beijing: Xinhua Press, 1990), p. 305.

⁷⁰Confidential interview with "D," October 1994, Beijing.

maximum coverage to such an event is necessarily desirable. The important point here is whether a news outlet has the autonomy to decide whether to report (and if so, how) or not to report such an event. The fact that the event was reported by the two Beijing newspapers at all and the way it was reported illustrates the degree of openness.⁷¹

News in the major news media in late 1994 and early 1995 remained typical of Party journalism - monolithic, positive and highly predictable. A casual glimpse of thirty-six different national and provincial newspapers in Beijing reveals little variation.⁷² The leading news stories in these newspapers included policy directives from provincial and national leaders; visits of Party and government leaders to specific provinces; study of government policies and the works of Deng Xiaoping; achievements of a specific factory, a specific county, or an individual; good agricultural harvests despite drought; the grand openings of a construction project and a highway; how banks provide good service to the economy; education in patriotism; model Party members; and an expert in economics wishing to join the Party in the last minutes of his life.

Similarly, domestic news on *CCTV Evening News* consists of the daily activities of Party and government leaders; meetings, plans, or announcements of various government departments and agencies; achievements and prosperity in different areas. During the five days between January 16, 1995 and January 20, 1995, for example, four of the five leading news stories were about a daily activity of Jiang Zemin, the Party General Secretary, whether it was important or not.⁷³ Reports of the activities of

⁷¹This example is not an isolated one. Xu Yu relates two other examples of media censorship in 1992 and 1994. One is about the Party's prohibition of publication of anything negative about Shanghai's stock market by major Shanghai newspapers in November 1992. Another relates to lack of any domestic news reporting about the government's release of Wang Dan, an important student leader of the 1989 democracy movement in February 1994. See Xu Yu, "Professionalization without Guarantees," *Gazette*, 53, 1994, p. 36.

⁷²These newspapers were all available in Beijing on October 22, 1994. While some of these newspapers were published on the same day, many provincial newspapers arrived in Beijing one to a few days after the dates of publication.

⁷³The only exception was the night of January 17, with a leading story about a meeting commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Party's Zunyi Meeting, a historical meeting in which Mao assumed full leadership of the party. But the story was immediately followed by two reports of Jiang Zemin receiving foreign guests.

the Premier and other leaders followed. There was not a single example of negative news or analytical reporting in the five newscasts. A January 16, 1995 item about court decisions on two corrupt officials came the closest. But the story was initiated neither by the crime nor by the trial. It was a case that had already been decided. The whole nation was concerned about Deng's health and the power struggle at the top. While more sophisticated news readers in Beijing guessed the state of Deng's health on the basis of news reports about one of his daughter's overseas travel schedules, some people in the countryside are more straightforward. They assumed that Deng was dead but that the media did not report it! Both were interpreting what they read as though nothing had changed.

And yet, something has changed. Rapid commercialization is evident throughout the news media. Although the Party and government still rejects terms such as "commercialization" (shangyehua) and "commercial radio stations" (shangye diantai) and uses terms such as "industrialization" (chanyehua) or "go to the market" (zouxiang shichang), the market has taken a more prominent role. During the National Working Conference on Press Management on October 21, 1992, three days after the closing of the Party's 14th National Congress, Liang Heng, an official responsible for newspaper management at the State Press and Publications Administration, openly talked about the "commodity nature" of the press and the imperative of "eventually pushing newspapers to the market."⁷⁴ Liang proposed a process of gradual transformation. That is, the process of commercialization would begin with the cutting of subsidies to newspapers that mainly carried information about consumption and daily life, while Party organs would still receive subsidies. Among the nine categories of newspapers, Liang proposed that party organs, general interest national newspapers, special interest newspapers run by social organizations, enterprise newspapers and army newspapers would "remain intact" at the beginning, while evening papers, news digests, papers

⁷⁴Liang Heng, "Newspaper Management under a Socialist Market Economy," *Chinese Journalists* (1992:12), p. 5.

specializing in culture and lifestyles as well as trade newspapers should be "pushed to the market" first.⁷⁵

Liang's discussion lagged far behind the actual situation. As will be discussed in the next chapter, many newspapers, including some provincial Party organs, had been cut off government subsidies long before 1992. As Liang himself reported to the meeting, of the 1750 newspapers in 1992, one-third had already achieved financial independence.⁷⁶ Based on Hong Kong press reports of this meeting, Joseph Chan concludes that "[t]he policy to commercialize publications was reported to have been formalized" at the meeting, which "produced a schedule for the transformation of the Chinese press."⁷⁷ My own reading of Liang's original speech and authoritative accounts of the meeting suggests that no concrete policy was formulated. Commercialization was at the stage of theoretical discussion (wuxu).⁷⁸ Nevertheless, that such a discussion occurred was itself significant.

In the area of journalism theory, media scholars quickly responded and began to push for commercialization. Much of the energy for media reform is now being channelled into commercialization. The reform discourse has changed dramatically. A new vocabulary informs discussion about news media reform in academic writing and trade journals. While lip service is still paid to the mouthpiece theory, the focus is on the commercialization of news media. "The market economy and news media reform" has become the hottest topic in Chinese journalism circles. Nation-wide seminars that include the nation's top media scholars, essay competitions in academic and trade journals, as well as numerous individual articles all focus on the same theme.⁷⁹

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Joseph M. Chan, p. 25-4.

⁷⁸See a summary of the meeting in *China Journalism Yearbook 1993*, p. 3.

⁷⁹For a range of articles on the topic "market economy and the news media," see Journalism Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, *Wuxi Daily*, and the Propaganda Department of the Jiangyin City Party Committee (eds.), *Market Economy and The News Media* (Shichang jingji yu xinwen shiye), Beijing: Yanshan Press, 1993.

Media theorists advance their new arguments for media reform in a typical orthodox Marxist fashion. The base is being transformed from a planned economy to a market economy. As a result, the current news media system, whose basic principles and operating mechanisms are largely the product of a planned economy, must also be changed to make it compatible with the economic base, so the argument goes. Moreover, since the news media have been officially designated as part of the tertiary sector, they are also part of the economic base and should be treated as such, that is, to be commercialized and developed in accord with market principles. It has become fashionable to assert the commodity nature of the news. Some have even cited Marx to support this view. They argue in favour of introducing market mechanisms into the news media, organizing news production in accord with the demands of the market, replacing old concepts and an outdated mindset. They call for a cognitive shift from media as "propaganda instruments" to media as an industry, from being "tools" to being "service providers," from "leading the masses" to "serving the consumers."⁸⁰ Some have even gone so far as to say that even the Party and the government should pay for media services.⁸¹

While media theorists' embrace of commodification is quite striking, it is in the actual practice of journalism that the extent and significance of the cognitive shift is most apparent. News media organizations and journalists have gone even further in subjecting themselves to the forces of the market than any theorists have actually recommended. Media practitioners took the road to commercialization long before 1992, but Deng's talks provided a catalytic rationale. This transformed practice of journalism will be examined in the chapters to follow.

⁸⁰See, for example, Liu Xuede, "Market Economy and Journalism Reform," *Young Journalists* (1993:1), pp. 12-13; articles under the same title by Li Chuangmin, *Press and Publications Herald* (1993:2), pp. 20-22 and Li Renchen, *Journalism Front* (1993:2), pp. 7-9; and Shen Shiwei, "Socialist Market Economy and Journalism Reform," *Journalism Practice*(1993:1), pp. 4-6.

⁸¹Yu Tonghao and Zhu Yan, "Market Economy and Broadcasting Reform," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1993:1), p. 11.

Chapter Four

Media Commercialization with Chinese Characteristics

Until the beginning of the economic reforms in 1978, news media in China were totally subsidized by the state, except for a brief period in the early 1950s, during which the news media accepted advertising and some Party organs, including *People's Daily*, became totally self-financing.¹ Although the Party has continued to attach great political and ideological importance to the news media, as the economic reforms were implemented, it became increasingly clear that the state could no longer subsidize the news media as it used to even if it wanted to. The broader context of economic reform set the stage for the commercialization of the news media.

Although commercialization was not actively promoted as an explicit media policy until 1992, economic development since the 1980s has created a growing demand by enterprises for more effective advertising channels. Media commercialization, therefore, is a necessary spin-off of economic reforms aiming at the development of a market economy.

In addition, two important developments have made the commercialization of news media an economic necessity. First, although the economic reforms have created economic prosperity in the country's overall economy, governments at all levels have been relatively deprived. As part of the early reform measures to encourage local initiatives, the government pursued a policy of economic decentralization, which led to redistribution of wealth from the central government to local governments, enterprises and individuals.

The effect on government budgets of this official policy of economic decentralization is augmented by the unauthorized flow of wealth away from the state

¹Fang Hanqi, Chen Yeshao, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Journalism* (Beijing: Chinese People's University Press, 1992, pp. 65-66.

(most of this never made it into government accounts) and into private pockets as a result of fraudulent business practices, massive evasion of corporate and individual taxes, and even more bluntly, the unauthorized transfer of state assets to collectives and individuals, including a massive amount of theft. As Robert Weil observes, the loss in asset value from fraudulent practices and market forces has been staggering.²

As a consequence of these developments, while in 1981 the share of revenues going to the central government was 57 percent, by 1993 this had dropped to under 39 percent. Thus the national state bodies of socialist China are greatly underfunded compared to the United States and Japan, the leading capitalist countries, where the percentage of taxes going to the centre is 55 and 70 percent, respectively. It is this massive loss of revenue that has fueled the almost desperate drive to cut government responsibility for social security, health and education, and to force all state institutions to make their own way economically.³

Within the limits of government revenue, the priorities of government investments have been in such areas as science and education rather than for the news media and other cultural institutions.

The government's increasing inability to invest in the media has been compounded by a second development, that is, the public's growing demand for more media services. With increasing economic prosperity, people have more money to spend on culture and entertainment. Indeed, for many Chinese families, urban and rural alike, one of the first things they have purchased with their savings is a television set. Thus, while there were only 3.4 million television sets in China in 1978, by 1992, the number had reached 230 million.⁴ The emergence of "television villages" - villages

²Robert Weil, "China at the Brink: Class Contradictions of 'Market Socialism'" -- Part II, *Monthly Review*(46:8, January, 1995), pp. 11-43. According to Weil, non- or under-evaluation of joint ventures alone is estimated to cost the government 30 billion yuan or U.S. \$3.4 billion per year. Over the past decade, the total state assets lost by all means amounts to some 500 billion yuan or U.S. \$57.5 billion, despite overall growth of the public sector. In addition, the growing epidemic of outright tax evasion and non-reporting of income are estimated conservatively to be costing the State 100 billion yuan or \$17.2 billion a year. See pp. 31-32.

³Ibid., p. 33.

⁴By 1994, there were eighty-six colour television sets per one hundred urban households in China. There were 73.3 television sets (13.3 colour television sets) per one hundred rural households. *People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (October 2, 1995), p. 2.

where every household has a television set - in the rural areas in the early 1980s was still treated as news in the media, by the mid-1980s, it was no longer news.

The rapid growth of television viewers stimulated more investments in new television stations, in more channels and in extension of daily broadcasting hours. The state, with a shrinking purse, was increasingly unable to provide the necessary funds for the regular operation of the news media, not to mention technological innovation and expansion of services. Throughout the 1980s, government funds could only provide fifty to seventy percent of what was actually needed to maintain the regular operation of the existing broadcasting channels. It could only provide nine percent of what was actually needed by the newspaper sector for technological improvements.⁵ News media organizations, especially the broadcasting media, suffered severe financial difficulties. To reform the existing system of complete dependence on state subsidy and to find other sources of financing was thus more an economic necessity than an espoused political principle.

In fact, reform of the economic management of the news media began almost as early as the economic reform itself. Although the first appearance of advertising on Shanghai Television in February 1979 is often considered as the beginning of media commercialization in China, the introduction of market mechanisms into the news media sector actually began a year earlier. In this year, the Ministry of Finance approved a proposal to introduce the business management system into the financial administration of *People's Daily* and a number of other newspapers published in Beijing. From then on, although these newspapers were still regarded as political and cultural institutions and still received government subsidies, they began to be managed financially as business enterprises. In addition to adhering to the Party line, they had to pay attention to the bottom line as well. They were forced to save money by

⁵Hao Jianzhong, "An Overview of Debates on Newspaper Management," in Journalism Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (ed.) *China Journalism Yearbook* (Beijing: Social Sciences Press, 1987, pp. 78-80), p. 79.

streamlining their operations and were subjected to cost analysis, profit targets and government taxation.

Indeed, many newspapers lost government subsidies in the early 1980s. The Jilin provincial Party organ, *Jilin Daily*, for example, stopped receiving government subsidies and began to implement enterprise management reform in 1983. In 1985, the newspaper earned a net profit of more than four million yuan and paid the government more than one million yuan in taxes and profits.⁶

Aside from funds for fixed assets such as buildings and equipment, inputs such as newsprint and ink, which had previously been allocated by the government, were gradually left to be funded by the invisible hand of the market. At the other end of the production process, the return of newspaper vendors on city streets in the early 1980s served as a reminder that newspapers had indeed become a commodity. The monopoly of the post office in the distribution of newspapers was challenged when *Luoyang Daily*, the Party organ of Luoyang city, started its own delivery system in an attempt to increase subscriptions and sales in 1985. By 1987, more than five hundred medium to small newspapers had set up their own distribution net.

In the newspaper sector, the government adopted a policy of gradually cutting subsidies and encouraging commercialized financing. Since 1992, the process of newspaper marketization has accelerated. In November 1992, Liang Heng, Newspaper Bureau Chief of the State Press and Publications Administration, declared that "conditions are ripe for newspapers to be marketized" and that the old way of the state paying for newspaper publishing and for newspaper subscriptions could no longer be continued.⁷ A UPI news dispatch reported in April 1993 that the government would cut all state subsidies to top newspapers as of July 1, 1993.⁸

⁶Guang Dongzheng, "Reform of Newspaper Management," *China Journalism Yearbook 1987*, pp. 95-96.

⁷*Workers' Daily* (November 17, 1992), p. 1.

⁸"China's Press to be Cut From Government Subsidies," *UPI*, April 11, 1993, cited in Junhao Hong, "The Resurrection of Advertising in China: Developments, Problems, and Trends," *Asian Survey* (vol. XXXIV, no. 4, April 1994), p. 334.

In the broadcasting sector, although governments at all levels continue to invest, the central government encourages broadcasting organizations to earn money and fill the gap themselves between what the government can provide and what is actually needed for regular operations, technological innovation, and expansion of services. In a 1983 document on broadcasting, the Party suggested that broadcasting organizations at all levels should explore other sources of income. In 1988, the Party and the government for the first time clearly stated that broadcasting should depend on multiple channels of financing.⁹ At the same time, the government also grants broadcasting media preferential tax rates.

Although the majority of broadcasting media have not adopted the enterprise management system, which is widely adopted by many newspapers, they have in one way or another established responsibility contracts with their respective government financial departments. In accord with these contracts, the government provides a certain amount of subsidy, while the broadcasting station or bureau with its affiliated stations projects a certain amount of self-generated income. These two portions of money become the operating budget of the broadcasting organization. If a station or bureau earns more income than anticipated in the contract budget, it can dispose of the money in accord with certain rules regarding the allocation of surplus. But if a station or bureau fails to achieve the projected revenue, it will have to cover its own losses.

In order to fulfil financial objectives, many news organizations in turn set up internal financial responsibility systems and sign financial responsibility contracts with subordinate units. By means of these contracts, the overall amount of the projected self-earned income of the whole news organization is divided into different portions and allocated to different departments. Here again, if a department earns more than the assigned amount, the surplus can be allocated by the department itself. In some media

⁹Shun Fudi, "A Preliminary Exploration into the Overall Benefits of Radio and Television Broadcasting," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1990:6, pp. 45-47), p. 45.

organizations, not only advertising departments, but editorial departments, and even individual journalists are assigned revenue quotas.¹⁰ Indeed, since the mid-1980s, "creating income" (chuangshou) has become one of the most frequently circulated terms in the Chinese news media. Everybody in the media is talking about "creating income." Slogans such as "running the two wheels [publishing news and editorial contents and creating income] at the same time" (liangge lunzi yiqi zhuan), "one hand on editorial quality, one hand on creating income" (yishou zhua zhiliang, yishou zhua chuangshou) and even "an editor-in-chief who does not know how to make money is not a good one" gained wide circulation within media circles. Indeed, the news media have explored all means of "creating income," and this movement toward financial independence have in turn brought profound changes to the news media themselves.¹¹

Advertising and the News Media

Advertising has become the single most important non-governmental source of media revenue since it was re-introduced to the Chinese news media in early 1979. Indeed, advertising, once condemned as the tool of capitalism, has not only been rehabilitated but also promoted by the Party and the government as "a potential tool for economic reform, the four modernizations, and social change."¹² The government's

¹⁰This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

¹¹Typical of the ideal being promulgated is story of a rural broadcasting station, the Wuma township station in Sichuan province. The financial subsidy from the township government was two thousand yuan per year, barely enough to pay the salaries of the two staff members. From 1985 onwards, the station began the process of acquiring capital for self-development. It started with opening up wasteland and growing grain and tobacco and then moved on to establish a grain processing service, a grocery store and finally to a hotel, a restaurant and a transportation service. With an annual net profit of more than 30,000 yuan from these business operations, the station was able to establish a standard broadcasting network, replace old broadcasting facilities, set up a satellite ground receiving station and relay stations, hire seventeen employees and produce a variety of programs. By 1992, the station boasted 400,000 yuan worth of fixed capital. Its experience was widely promoted and the station became a model broadcasting station for the whole country. See He Douwen, "Once Again on Broadcasting from a Macro-Perspective," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1992:6, pp. 89-90), p. 89.

¹²Xuejun Yu, "Government Policies Toward Advertising in China (1979-1989)," *Gazette* (1991:48, pp. 17-39), p. 20.

1982 "Provisional Regulations for Advertising Management" formally stated that advertising has the capability and responsibility to

promote production, increase commodity circulation, guide consumption, invigorate the economy, increase consumer convenience, develop international economic activities, serve the needs of socialist construction and promote socialist moral standards.¹³

The Party and the government's great enthusiasm for advertising culminated in China's hosting of the Third World Advertising Congress from June 16 to 20, 1987 in the most prestigious political meeting place in China, the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. "Admen in China Get Red Carpet," an article in *Advertising Age* exulted. During the Congress, China's then Head of State, President Li Xiannian paid a surprise visit to nearly 15,000 delegates from all over the world, and acting Premier Wan Li celebrated advertising as "an indispensable element in the promotion of economic prosperity."¹⁴

Advertising as a Source of Financing

With favorable government policies and a rapidly growing market economy, advertising has become China's fastest growing industry since the early 1980s. Between 1981 and 1992, national advertising sales volume grew from 0.118 billion yuan to 6.786 billion, with an annual growth rate of forty-one percent. During the same period, the number of advertising agencies grew from 2,200 to 16,683, with an average annual growth rate of twenty percent, while the number of people employed by the industry grew from 16,000 to 185,000, with an average annual growth rate of twenty-six percent.¹⁵

¹³Central Administration for Industry and Commerce, "Provisional Regulations for Advertising Management," (Beijing: the State Council of China, 1982), cited in Xuejun Yu, p. 21.

¹⁴*Advertising Age*, "Admen in China Get Red Carpet," (June 22, 1987), p. 89.

¹⁵State Administration for Industry and Commerce and State Planning Commission, "An Outline of the Schedule for Speeding up the Development of the Advertising Industry," *Chinese Advertising* (1993:4, pp. 3-6), p. 6.

The mass media, with their special status as the producers, solicitors and exhibitors of advertising, have been the most important recipients of advertising money. In 1992, the four major media of television, newspapers, radio and magazines received four billion yuan of advertising income, or sixty-four percent of the total advertising sales of 6.78 billion yuan. Television alone accounts for 2.05 billion, or 30.2 percent of total advertising sale.¹⁶ This amount is almost the equivalent of the 2.38 billion yuan of broadcasting operating funds provided by governments at all levels in the same year.¹⁷

Media advertising has grown steadily since the early 1980s, although 1989 saw a slight slowdown, due, apparently, to political reasons. The rate of growth has accelerated since 1992, with another wave of economic growth inspired by the Party and government's unreserved embrace of a market economy. Many media organizations doubled their advertising income in 1992. Overall television advertising increased by ninety-four percent between 1991-1992. Television for the first time surpassed newspapers as the number one advertising medium, with a total advertising revenue of 2.5 billion yuan.¹⁸

By the end of 1993, advertising volume in the whole country reached 13.4 billion yuan, a ninety-eight percent increase over 1992.¹⁹ Advertising income for the news media increased dramatically. In the newspaper sector, for example, the range of the ten newspaper organizations with the highest advertising revenues was between 27 million and 81 million in 1992.²⁰ By 1993, the advertising revenues for these ten newspapers passed 100 million yuan. The highest figure was 170 million yuan, which

¹⁶Wu Dongbin, "A Brief Introduction to China's Advertising Business in 1992," *Modern Advertising* (1994:1), pp. 18-19), p. 18.

¹⁷*People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (October 21, 1993).

¹⁸Wu Dongbin, "A Brief Analysis of Advertising Operations in China in 1992," *Modern Advertising* (1994:1), p. 18.

¹⁹"The Country's Advertising Industry Grows Rapidly," *People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (February 28, 1994), p.

2.

²⁰Pang Wangxiong, "An Analysis of Newspaper Marketization," *Knowledge of Journalism* (1994:4), p. 13.

again doubled the highest figure for 1992.²¹ As a result, advertising income has replaced government funding as the most important source of finance for many news media organizations.

The rapid growth of advertising has largely been responsible for the growth of the media industry in China since the early 1990s. Newspaper publishing has become a potentially profitable business, and many institutions are jumping in to reap the profits.²² The motivation for the publication of a newspaper has in some instances been changed from political to economic. On December 5, 1925, Mao Zedong opened an inaugural editorial for a new political journal by asking, "Why publish the *Political Weekly*?" His answer? "To make revolution."²³ Today, the same question gets a completely different response: "It is a money-making business. A newspaper with 20,000 or 30,000 subscribers can well support the livelihood of its employees with advertising income alone." This is an answer given by an applicant for a newspaper registration number.²⁴

In the latter half of 1992, the Chinese news media began experiencing another "newspaper publishing fever."²⁵ At the end of 1991, the number of registered newspapers openly published in China was 1,543. By the end of 1993, this number had reached 2,039. The total number of issues and pages of newspapers printed in the first half of 1993 were respectively five and eighteen percent more than those of the same

²¹ *Press and Publications News* (January 28, 1994), p. 7.

²² There are no individual media tycoons yet, since the government prohibits private newspaper ownership and only allows state and collective ownership. The government still monopolizes the broadcasting media by only allowing governments at each administrative level to operate broadcasting stations.

²³ Mao Zedong, "Reasons for Publishing the *Political Journal*," *The Political Journal* (December 5, 1925), reprinted in Research Institute of Journalism of Xinhua News Agency, *Selections from Documents on Journalism* (Beijing: Xinhua Press, 1990), p. 56.

²⁴ Zhu Mingzou, "A Preliminary Analysis of the 'Newspaper Publishing Fever'," *Press Reports* (1994:5, pp. 4-6), p. 5.

²⁵ The first one occurred in the early 1980s. 1,008 newspapers were published between January 1980 and March 1985, with an average growth rate of one new newspaper in every two days. See, Journalism Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Readership Survey Team of the Capital Journalism Society, "A General Survey of Newspapers in China," *Chinese Journalism Yearbook 1986* (Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press, 1986, p. 121.

period in the previous year, setting a record high.²⁶ During the 1980s, the average rate of newspaper growth was one new title every three days. Between 1992 and 1994, the rate increased to one new title every one and a half day.

In addition to increased newspaper titles, existing newspapers expanded their pages to meet advertisers' demands for more space and to reap profits from the "advertising fever" fuelled by a growing market economy. In 1992, the traditional four-page broadsheet format, which had been typical of Party organs in China since *Liberation Daily* in the early 1940s, began to be transformed. Many daily newspapers began to publish eight pages and special weekend supplements, while weeklies increased their frequency of publication. In 1992 alone, more than two hundred newspapers expanded their pages or increased issues.²⁷ This trend continued in 1993 with 130 newspapers increasing their pages or issues. Another 150 newspapers took the same action simultaneously on New Year's Day in 1994.²⁸ Some newspapers jumped from four pages to eight pages and then to twelve pages in two years.

Prominent Display of Advertising

Advertising has left no media space untouched. "Too much advertising" has become the most common complaint of television audiences. Because television stations still resist the practice of inserting commercials within programs, advertisements are packed between programs. As a result, the average length of each commercial "break" is as long as seventeen minutes on some local stations. A four-hour session of prime time television viewing includes one hour of advertising.²⁹

²⁶"Registered Newspapers Number 2,093 Nationwide," *China News Service* (January 1, 1994), translated in *FBIS* (January 14, 1994), p. 13.

²⁷Yang Wenzhen, "1992: A Wave of Newspaper Expansion," *Journalism Front* (1992:4, pp. 10-11), p. 10.

²⁸"Newspapers Boost Issues, Pages amid Competition," *Ming Bao* (January 7, 1994), p. 7.

²⁹Sun Xianghui, "Rapid Growth in Television Advertising, Its Problems and Solutions," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (92:4, p. 41-43), p. 42.

CCTV is the hottest advertising medium in the country, due to its protected status as the only national television network. In 1992, its advertising revenue was five hundred million yuan, accounting for twenty-five percent of the nation's total television advertising revenue.³⁰ Because of its monopoly control of access to a national audience, CCTV was able to rapidly increase its advertising prices in 1993 and again, in 1994.³¹ In 1995, the station introduced a bidding system in advertising pricing.³²

Although the overall daily advertising time for CCTV was eighty-two minutes in 1993 (out of more than fifty hours of broadcasting over different channels), fifty percent of the advertising was broadcast during prime time on the most watched general interest channel, CCTV-1.³³ During the seventy minutes between 7:00 pm, the beginning of *CCTV Evening News* and approximately 8:10 pm, the beginning of the popular television drama series, *The Story of the Three Kingdoms*, between late 1994 and early 1995, CCTV managed to create eight advertising breaks and broadcast at least eighteen minutes of advertising, which accounted for nearly half of the total advertising time for the whole evening. With the length of each advertisement ranging between five seconds to thirty seconds, the television viewer was bombarded with more than seventy different commercial messages that introduced all kinds of consumer products, sometimes with ten to twenty commercials in one slot. It is thus fair to say that CCTV offers perhaps the most intensive advertising viewing hour in the world.³⁴

But this is not yet the whole story for this most commercialized television hour. In addition to the eight commercial breaks, the weather forecast at the end of CCTV

³⁰Wu Dongbin, p. 18.

³¹The cost of prime time advertising in a thirty-second spot on CCTV grew from 11,000 yuan in 1992 to 25,000 yuan in 1993. In 1994, the highest prime time advertising price had reached 42,000 yuan for a thirty-second spot. See CCTV Advertising Department, "CCTV Advertising Price List," March 1, 1994.

³²A liquor advertiser paid thirty-eight million yuan for a one-year prime-time advertising contract with CCTV in 1995.

³³Jing Hao, "The Readjustment of Advertising Prices on CCTV and Issues Related to Advertising on CCTV," *Chinese Advertising* (No. 47, 1993:1), p. 19.

³⁴The above information was based on my own monitoring of CCTV programming during the five days between January 16, 1995 to January 20, 1995.

7:00 pm news was also completely commercialized. The television screen was divided into two parts. While the larger part carried the national weather map and satellite weather pictures, a smaller portion, usually at the bottom or to the right of the screen, flashed advertising messages.³⁵ Moreover, the picture that accompanied weather reports for most provincial capitals was also a hidden commercial. Rather than taking a bird's eye view of the whole city or a picture of a scene that symbolizes a city, for example, Beijing's Tiananmen Square, Shanghai's waterfront, Hangzhou's West Lake, each picture of a city was a silent commercial. It focused on a specific hotel, a shopping centre, a company tower, an industrial zone, or other spot that carried obvious advertising value for a specific business.³⁶

In newspapers, advertising, the profane, has conquered the sacred, the political and ideological aloofness of the traditional Party organ. Although advertising accounts for between twenty-five to thirty percent of the total newspaper space, which is still far below the percent of advertising space in North American commercial papers, the enthusiasm for advertising and the treatment of advertising by major Party organs would make even the most commercially aggressive North American newspapers appear timid.³⁷

Unlike North American newspapers, the masthead of a typical Chinese newspaper does not run across the whole page. It usually occupies only the left half of the top of the front page. The right half is an empty space, which is often called the "eye of the newspaper," due to its eye-catching position as the first spot seen by most

³⁵In early January 1995, one such message promoted a particular brand of hard liquor, another promoted a brand of monosodium glutamate.

³⁶The most extreme example in January 1995 was a scene of Taiyuan city, the capital of Shanxi province. There was no landmark of the city, just a common street scene with a huge red banner carrying the name of a local liquor manufacturer.

³⁷In 1988, a survey of three major Shanghai dailies found that their advertising space accounted for 23.4% of the total newspaper space. See Yu Zhengwei, "Newspaper Advertising: Trends, Patterns and Characteristics," *Journal of Shanghai University, Social Sciences Edition* (1989:6, pp. 103-108), p. 104. There are no other statistics available for the 1990s. Since Shanghai newspapers are usually ahead of newspapers in the rest of the country in the extent of commercialization, this 1988 figure might be taken as the national average for the early 1990s. Examples of Party organs I read in late 1994 typically devoted approximately thirty percent of their space to advertising.

readers. During the Cultural Revolution, this space was reserved for Chairman Mao's quotations or political slogans. Today, advertising has replaced the holy script and taken over this important space in many Party organs. A casual survey of twenty-four different provincial Party organs in October 1994 revealed that one third of them carried advertising in this space. Moreover, as in the CCTV weather forecast, advertising has even entered the square containing the date of publication next to the newspaper title. In the October 17, 1994 issue of *Shanxi Daily*, for example, this square carried a drug advertisement in the form of a classified ad, with company logo, telephone number and the name of a salesperson.

Perhaps the most radical advertising practice is that of a Party organ selling its entire front page to an advertiser for a day. Since 1993, one Party newspaper after another has taken this extreme action and caused one sensation after another within news media circles.³⁸ Other newspapers have auctioned off their entire advertising space for a particular day. A Tianjin Party organ even created a series of ongoing news reports about its one-month-long advertising auction activity and thus turned all its readers into spectators of its advertising sale.³⁹ The highest bidder got one day's exclusive rights to all the advertising space in the newspaper for one million yuan. Many other bidders got publicity through news reports. A commentator in a journalism trade journal characterized this as an exercise in the "the emancipation of the mind" and an important step toward the introduction of market mechanisms in advertising pricing: "As a special commodity, newspaper advertising must be marketized and party newspapers must take a leading role in this regard."⁴⁰ According to this writer, the Party newspaper should no longer fix a reasonable advertising price so that a small

³⁸For example, *Beijing Daily* sold its entire front page for U.S. \$50,000 to a foreign advertiser. Shanghai's *Wenhui Bao* and *Liberation Daily* sold their entire front pages for \$200,000 and \$150,000 respectively. See Hong Junhao, p. 334. *Shenyang Daily* sold its entire front page for five million yuan. See "Shenyang Party Paper Front-Page Ad Breaks Tradition," *China News Service* (May 28, 1993), translated in *FBIS*, June 11, 1993.

³⁹Ruo Chen, "A Report on the Auction of Advertising Space," *Journalist Monthly* (1993:8, pp. 38-39), p. 39.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

business might get a chance to publish an advertisement. Its advertising operation was to function strictly in accord with the rule of the market. In other words, "sell the advertising space to the client who can pay the most."⁴¹

"Type II" Advertising

The commercialization of the Chinese news media, however, goes far beyond conventional advertising. In addition to regular advertising, there is also hidden advertising in the news media. Since the economic reforms, news media organizations in China have gradually developed into a growing information industry providing information services to government and business clients.

One important aspect of the news media's information business is paid information services that are integrated into regular media content. Just like advertising, news media charge their clients for the display of such information. The difference is that there is no advertising agency intervening between the media and the clients, and the audiences usually do not know that the information they receive was actually paid for by a client. Moreover, unlike regular advertising in the mass media, which usually targets individual consumers with consumer goods and services, these programs provide a combination of advertising of goods and services that is aimed at both industrial and commercial enterprises and individual consumers. In the broadcasting media, these information programs are referred to as "type II" advertising (*erlei guanggao*), but this term only circulates inside the media industry itself.

In the broadcasting media, paid information services usually appear in the same format as a regular news or current affairs program, with regular anchors. The names of these programs usually contain the word "economy" or "market," such as *Economic Kaleidoscope*, *Economic Overpass*, *Economic Life*, *Golden Bridge over the Sea of Businesses*, *Consumer Guide*, *Information Service*, and *Television Market*, all programs

⁴¹Ibid.

current in 1992. The content usually consists of paid and unpaid parts. The unpaid parts are reports of economic policies, overall trends in economic development and market trends. This is macro-economic information that cannot be charged to a particular client. The other part of the program is paid business information, i.e., micro-business information that has advertising value. The clients can either send in their own material to be edited by the station staff or the station can send reporters to do on site interviews and video taping. Each piece of information is assessed a price, which is usually less expensive than advertising.

For many years, the flagship business information program was CCTV Economic Department's *The Economy in a Half Hour* which charged 3,000 yuan for thirty-seconds of information. It began in late 1989 and soon became very popular with certain audiences, especially among the business community and individual entrepreneurs.⁴² The program, as described by the CCTV itself,

closely ties itself to the country's central task of economic construction, propagates the Party and the government's economic policies and directives, promotes model individuals in all walks of the country's economic life; introduces successful business management and the experiences of individuals who have recently become wealthy; transmits various kinds of domestic and foreign business information; makes connections between producers, distributors, and retailers, and serves the socialist market economy and consumers.⁴³

The program is thus the most direct expression of the use of news media as instruments of economic construction. Among the many features in the half-hour daily program, some achieved almost legendary status in providing useful business information for individual entrepreneurs and enterprises. "May You Become Wealthy" (zhu ni zhifu), a short segment that provided practical wealth-generating information and advice to farmers, was praised as "farmers' golden key to become wealthy through science and technology."⁴⁴

⁴²The program received several hundred of letters and inquiries each day from its audience.

⁴³Yu Guanghua (ed), *A Brief History of CCTV* (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1993) p. 140.

⁴⁴Lu Ye, "Chinese Television News Amidst Reform," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Shanghai: Fudan University, 1994), p. 11.

Since 1992, the program has organized an annual television trade fair each year. In turning the television screen into a huge trade mall, the program aims to serve as the "matchmaker" in the marketplace and provide a "golden bridge" between businesses.⁴⁵ The four-day special program is broadcast live nationwide from a huge exhibition hall in Beijing, where new inventions, patented technologies, idled equipment, as well as human resources (presumably files and not actual human beings!) are on display. Twenty telephone hot lines are set up so that television viewers can participate in the trade. In 1992, the anticipated trade volume during the four-day television trade fair was more than one billion yuan.⁴⁶ Today, the nation's most talked about business information program is another CCTV Business Department creation *Joint Business Information Broadcasting*, a joint production between CCTV and provincial television stations across the country.⁴⁷ The program was initiated in August 1992, inspired by Deng's talks.⁴⁸ This thirty-minute program carries more than seventy items of business information each day. The information is divided into five categories: macro-economy, new products, finances, services, and international. Each category is further divided into different segments according to the subject area of the information. Most of the information is provided by provincial television stations and CCTV shares the fees it charges for each item with provincial stations.⁴⁹

Like *The Economy in a Half Hour* before it, this program is also very well received by government departments and the business community. It received more than 15,000 letters during its first three months on air. A county Party committee in Hunan Province even issued a circular requiring government officials and the business community to watch the program regularly and use the program to publicize local

⁴⁵ *People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (December 18, 1992), p. 1.

⁴⁶ Yu Guanghau, p. 144.

⁴⁷ Perhaps because of this program's success and the need to avoid overlapping, CCTV reformatted its "The Economy in Half an Hour" in February 1995 to focus more on macro-economic news and broad market trends.

⁴⁸ Yu Guanghua, p. 146.

⁴⁹ Lu Hong, "A Television Program That Influences China's Economic Development," *Journalism Front* (93:1, pp. 5-6), p. 6.

products.⁵⁰ The program's fame can also at least partially be attributed to Deng Xiaoping, whose secretary phoned CCTV on October 21, 1992 to say that Deng watched the program almost every day. Deng's comments about the program were widely circulated and gave the program great legitimacy. Deng was reported to have said:

The "Joint Business Information Broadcasting" program discusses business exclusively, its creation is very timely. Although the program is not very long, only 30 minutes, the content is very rich, fast-paced, with a high volume of information. It will be conducive to the economic development of the country and to the cultivation of the market economic system."⁵¹

CCTV President Yang Weiguang explained that CCTV's aim was to make the program "a propagandist of the Party's economic policy, a promoter of factory products, and a purchaser of raw materials for enterprises."⁵²

Local broadcasting stations have imitated CCTV, going even further in serving business needs. In Beijing TV's *Television Market*, the anchorperson takes the audience directly into department stores and introduces commodities on display.⁵³ A survey of the *Chinese Broadcasting Yearbook's* listing of selected new programs created by provincial television stations reveals that almost all the stations added at least one such program in 1992. These programs are politically both safe (in the sense that they do not explicitly deal with politics at all) and correct (in the sense that they faithfully fulfill the Party and government's objective of making the news media instruments of economic construction). They are also easy to produce. Most important of all, they generate revenue. Thus, it is perhaps no surprise that some have suggested that broadcasting stations should condense regular news content, cut news broadcasting time, and increase paid business information broadcasting. Zhuang Hongchang of Dalian

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 5.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Cited in Yu GuangHua, p. 148.

⁵³Not surprisingly, the program attracted foreign media attention when it first appeared on the screen in November 1992. See Editorial Committee of Chinese Broadcasting Yearbook, *Chinese Broadcasting Yearbook 1993*, (Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press, 1993), p. 174.

Broadcasting Bureau, for example, suggested that regular news programs be divided into two parts, the first half for regular news, the second half for paid business information.⁵⁴

Commercial Sponsorship of Media Content

On public television in the United States, the McNeil/Leher News Hour is often "brought to you" by AT&T and other business sponsors. The sponsoring company does not put its logo or name on a specific news item, and the commercial sponsorship is announced before or after the newscast proper. Commercial sponsorship of newspaper content in China, however, goes much further. Company name, logo, product, and sometimes, address, name of salesperson and phone number are packed in a stamp-like square and attached to a news story, a commentary, or a column and become an integrated part of the journalism to which it is attached. The work of journalists thus often carries a specific business "stamp." It is "specially printed" (teyuan kandeng) by a company or "printed with the assistance" (xie ban) of a business firm or a government department.⁵⁵ In the case of this sort of commercial sponsorship, not only regular advertisers, but tobacco manufacturers, whose products are prohibited from regular advertising in the news media, are able to get their commercial message across. If paid information contents are "type II advertising," then it is perhaps fair to say that commercial sponsorship of news and opinion contents in newspapers is the ultimate form of advertising because here commercialism has reached the core of news media content. It makes a direct link between the leading news story of the day and a specific

⁵⁴Zhuang Hongchang, "Using Market Mechanisms to Promote Reform in Broadcasting," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1993.5, pp. 35-37). p. 36.

⁵⁵In the broadcasting media, it is common for entertainment programming to have sponsorships.

business and a specific product. Thus, as Xu Yu observes, "China is more capitalist than many senior capitalist countries" in this area.⁵⁶

When and how this specific form of business sponsorship started is not clear. What *is* clear, however, is that this practice has become very pervasive in Chinese newspapers since 1992, apparently another "bold step" taken by the news media on the road to commercialization. Just as almost all the newspapers in China carry advertising, almost all the newspapers in China in one way or another carry some sort of sponsorship. Differences are only a matter of degree. For example, the Ministry of Health official organ *Health News* carried one sponsored item on October 13, 1994. On the same day, *Xinhua Daily*, the provincial Party organ of Jiangsu, carried sponsored news items and columns on seven out of its eight pages. The only exception was page 5, which was devoted exclusively to regular advertising.

There are several types of sponsorship. A sponsor can put their stamp on news, photos, feature articles, and opinion pieces on every page of the newspaper by sponsoring some sort of competition. In this form, the sponsor usually offers some money to the newspaper for organizing the competition and provides cash awards to the winners. The most eye-catching competition is the "best leading news story competition" in which a sponsor is able to put their stamp on the leading news story of the day. A casual survey of twenty-four major national newspapers and provincial Party organs between October 15 and October 18, 1994 revealed that of the twenty-four, eight or one third held a "best leading news story competition." Some of these competitions are named after the sponsor. For example, *Shanxi Daily* on October 16 held the "Hanzhong Cup Leading News Competition," co-sponsored by the Hanzhong prefectural Party committee and Hanzhong prefectural government; *Qinhai Daily* on October 15 held the "Welding Flower Cup Leading News Story Competition,"

⁵⁶Xu Yu, "Professionalization without Guarantees: Changes of the Chinese Press in post-1989 Years," *Gazette*, (53, 1994), p. 29.

sponsored by a welding materials factory. Its stamp carries details about the factory's current stock, product specifications, address and telephone number. It occupied a space that was not much smaller than the news story itself. *Ganshun Daily* on October 17 held the "Construction Bank Cup Leading News Story Competition" with the logo of the Construction Bank and a small line "celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the Ganshun Branch of the Construction Bank." *Zhejiang Daily's* best leading news story competition stamp carried a company name, products and telephone number. *Ninxiang Daily's* news story competition carried a factory name, the name of the factory director, and phone number. *Guizhou Daily's* competition was sponsored by a tobacco manufacturer, also with the name of the factory director.

The news stories in competition are regular news items, usually written by staff reporters and/or amateur correspondents. In most cases, the news content is not necessarily related to the sponsor. But in the case of *Ganshun Daily* in the above examples, the story appeared to be a public relations piece for the sponsor, the Construction Bank. It lauded the bank's Lanzhou Railway Branch for doing a good job in loans management while providing funds for railway construction. There is an old Chinese saying that, "big awards produce heroes" (zhongshang zhixia you yongfu). With all these awards and prizes from businesses, it might be thought that journalists will strive to produce superior news writing. But, in fact, the opposite appears to be the case:

Some units, after providing money, attach specific conditions to the newspaper's propaganda, for example, in the form of a requirement that the newspaper carry specific content or a specific number of items provided by the unit itself. Even without these specific conditions, the two parties may reach some sort of agreement.... Thus, the newspaper must take special care of news reports about the sponsoring unit: downplaying critical reporting, making a big deal of any good news.⁵⁷

In addition to competitions, sponsors can also sponsor a regular newspaper column or create a special column under a sponsor's name on a chosen subject. In the

⁵⁷Fang Zheng, "Questioning 'Co-sponsored Essay Competitions'," *Journalism Front* (1991:3), p. 23.

October 13, 1994 issue of *Economic Daily*, the organ of the State Council, the page one *Reports on the Asian Games* column was sponsored by a tobacco manufacturer; its page two feature column *I Am the Same Age as the Republic* was sponsored by a medical equipment supplier; and its page six *Stock Market Reports* was sponsored by a real estate company.

In some cases, a sponsor only wants to have their name and/or their products publicized through association with a specific column or article. In other cases, a sponsor may establish a specific column and promote a specific type of content in their own interests. The Personnel Bureau of the Ministry of Culture, for example, sponsored a specific column, *China Cultural News*, publicizing personalities in literature and the arts.

Thus, a sponsor can buy a spot in virtually any place in the newspaper. In some cases, even the most sacred parts of the newspaper, the commentaries and the news analysis written by reporters and editors, are published with the help of sponsors. For example, in the October 21, 1994 issue of *Liberation Daily*, the page four "Special Commentary" on the nuclear issue in Northeast Asia was "specially printed" by a Shanghai laundry equipment manufacturer. On the same day, *People's Daily* carried a page six "International Forum" commentary about Russia's presence in the Middle East which was "co-sponsored" by the China Golden Coins Corporation. Perhaps readers will not have to wait much longer to see the page one editorial in *People's Daily's* being "co-sponsored" by a business.

Since many news and editorial departments have a direct responsibility for "creating income," they have to seek sponsorship for news stories and editorial commentary beyond regular advertising revenue, which belongs to the advertising department. Indeed, among the many popular sayings about "creating income," one is

"if you want to get rich, solicit sponsorships" (yao xiang fu, la zanzhu).⁵⁸ As will be discussed in the next chapter, since individual reporters and editors receive bonuses from such sponsorships, there is a strong financial incentive for them to court such sponsorships.

In the broadcasting media, a common form of commercial sponsorship is joint program production. As an official policy, joint-program production was first approved by the Central Party Committee and the State Council in 1988. This practice was originally limited to entertainment and educational programs.⁵⁹ But the practice has since expanded to feature and information programming in recent years. In fact, broadcasting officials have actively promoted this practice. Xu Chonghua, deputy minister of Radio, Film and Television, for example, instructed local broadcasters in the following straightforward language in 1992:

Government departments want to expand propaganda; enterprises want to promote their products. They are willing to spend money on programs.... There is no problem with joint program production.⁶⁰

Many feature programs on the broadcast media are "joint" programs with government departments and businesses, i.e. government departments and businesses pay a certain amount of money in exchange for programs that promote their causes and their enterprises. The Central People's Radio Station, for example, ran a feature program called *Shanming City in Progress* for a fairly long period of time in 1994. Insiders suggested that the program was a "co-operation" between the station and the city, with money and at least some of the material provided by the city. The city, of course, may have obtained most of the money from local enterprises. What such a

⁵⁸Chan Ming, "Sponsorship Makes One Rich," *Ming Bao*, (November 11, 1992), cited in Joseph M. Chan, "Commercialization without Independence: Trends and Tensions of Media Development in China," in J. Cheng and M. Brosseau (eds.), *China Review 1993* (Hongkong: Chinese University Press, 1993), p. 25.6.

⁵⁹For example, the Public Security Bureau would provide money to make a television drama series that portrayed the "heroes on the public security front," or the government's Family Planning Commission would provide funds for the production of an educational program on family planning.

⁶⁰Deputy Minister Xu Chonghua Demands Open-Mindedness and Increasing Income by Taking Advantage of Broadcasting," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1992:99), p. 1.

program means, of course, is that a small city can virtually buy a regular broadcasting spot on the national radio network to promote its image and local businesses.

Local broadcasting stations usually take this practice one step further. The president of a local radio station in Hunan province, for example, reported how his station invited "nearly eighty factory leaders, managers, and directors to the broadcasting studio to be interviewed and to co-sponsor programs."⁶¹ A local radio station in Sichuan province signed contracts with a number of government departments in which they provided money and broadcasting material on a regular basis, while the radio station accepted responsibility for the broadcasting of these materials. Another local radio station in the same province has gone even further by establishing a special editorial committee consisting of representatives from forty-eight government departments and businesses. These organizations paid an annual fee and provided program material for the radio station.⁶² The significant point about all these examples is that they are all presented as successful cases in academic and policy-oriented trade journals analyzing the broadcasting industry. There is no discussion whatsoever of the political and social implications of these practices. The very fact that news media have become the mouthpiece of whoever can pay has not been a subject of concern in academic and trade literature. Many just do not perceive it as problematic and even promote it enthusiastically. Others are concerned, but find that there is not much that they can do.

⁶¹Shen Jiachun, "Developing Local Characteristics, Exhausting Service Functions," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1994:1), pp. 15-17), p. 17.

⁶²Indeed, so long as there is money, local stations can cooperate with virtually anyone. On a county-level radio station in Zhejiang Province, the regular daily fare of joint programs during the summer months in 1994 included feature programs sponsored by the local beer brewer. These programs popularized knowledge about beer and beer drinking and celebrated the great nutritional and health value of beer.

Direct Business Involvement in the News Media

Some enterprises are not satisfied with sponsoring a particular newspaper column or a television or radio program any more. They have expanded their involvement in the news media industry in more substantial terms. While business enterprises can publish their own newspapers for circulation within the enterprise itself (these newspapers are called "enterprise newspapers" (qi ye bao), the government prohibits direct business investment in the news media in general. But businesses have entered the mass media industry in one way or another. In Guangdong province, thirty newspapers, or twenty-nine percent of all the newspapers in the province have some sort of open or behind-the-door "cooperative" relationships with business enterprises. These relationships take various forms. For example, a business enterprise may cooperate with a newspaper with both financial and editorial inputs. It may provide financial investment in a newspaper which either pays it back with advertising or has its name published on the newspaper's masthead.⁶³

On February 5, 1993, *Wenhui Bao* reported in a page one story that the first shareholding newspaper in the country had been established in Sichuan Province. The newspaper, *Sichuan Sports News*, was established as a shareholding company, with investment from a musical instrument manufacturer. According to the story in *Wenhui Bao*, the business would provide money and management expertise to the newspaper and the two parties would "jointly run the newspaper and at the same time explore business opportunities in sporting goods and culture."⁶⁴

In addition to open press reports of increasing business involvement in the news media, there are many unconfirmed reports that newspapers and radio stations have sold entire pages or specific time blocks to a specific business, together with editorial

⁶³Yang Wenzhen, *Press and Publications Journal* (January 24, 1994).

⁶⁴*Wenhui Bao* (February 5, 1993), p. 1.

rights. Some of these reports come from authoritative sources.⁶⁵ For example, *Chinese Journalist* reported a remark made by Zhang Changhai, chief editor of *Guangming Daily*, that a Beijing-based newspaper had sold the editorial rights to two of its pages for a year, one to a Guangdong company, one to a Beijing sporting goods company, at a cost of fifty thousand yuan for each page.⁶⁶

In such a situation, a newspaper or broadcasting station basically "contracts out" a page or a time block to a business. The business takes over the production of news, feature and editorial content and the sale of advertising, as well as the payment of salaries to the staff. Thus, the purchasing company can not only literally buy a segment of the Party's mouthpiece and turn it into its own mouthpiece but can also make a profit out of the operation, if the revenue generated by the newspaper page or broadcasting time block exceeds the contracted amount. The news organization retains final editorial rights over the contracted newspaper page or block of broadcast time. This is to enable the news organization to ensure that no serious political mistake appears in the content.⁶⁷

Government authorities have generally ignored these developments, except in a few extreme cases. In 1994, the State Press and Publications Administration suspended the publication licenses of six newspapers for illegally transferring and selling editorial rights to private businesses. Among these six papers, *Jiangsu Health News* signed a twenty-year "cooperation" contract with a private company in which the newspaper sold the publication rights to some of its pages, including the final editorial rights. The private business, with its newly acquired editorial rights, twice published purely fabricated news reports regarding one of its own products. The false news stories were even accompanied by photos of six individuals falsely claimed to be Ph.Ds returned

⁶⁵These reports usually do not specify the exact names of the news organizations involved, although insiders can easily figure out the names.

⁶⁶"New Times, New Tasks, and New Demands," *Chinese Journalists* (1993:4), p. 10.

⁶⁷This information was obtained from confidential interviews with journalist "F" in Beijing in October 1994.

from studying overseas who were supposedly responsible for the research and development of the product.⁶⁸ In another case, a trade newspaper managed by the Anhui Provincial Light Industry Bureau sold its registration number and advertising permit to the Wuhan-based Changjiang Culture Promotion Centre for ten thousand yuan. The deal was exposed when the purchasing company published an unregistered supplement with sensational crime news stories and caught the attention of the authorities.⁶⁹

Turning Party Organs into Business Consortia

While the news media are now inextricably linked with businesses through advertising, sponsorships, and other market relationships, news media organizations themselves have expanded into non-information and non-entertainment businesses in order to broaden their bases of revenue in a way that is "[a]nalogous to the diversification of investment by media consortia in capitalist societies."⁷⁰ Business expansion of major news media organizations has evolved through several different stages. Initially, news media organizations expanded their operations by increasing broadcasting channels or creating new titles, usually smaller market-oriented outlets focussing on information and entertainment.

As a result, although the government does not allow cross media operations, major national news media organizations have grown into huge media operations with multiple media outlets. Xinhua News Agency has a total of thirty-nine dailies, weeklies and monthly publications.⁷¹ Its important recent subsidiaries have been *China Securities*, a daily newspaper that specializes in economic policies and the stock

⁶⁸*Press and Publications News* (September 5, 1994), p. 1.

⁶⁹Chen Rongshen, "A Reflection on the Suspension of *Light Industry Herald's* License," *Journalist Monthly* (1993:8), pp. 46-47.

⁷⁰Joseph M. Chan, "Commercialization without Independence," p. 25-7.

⁷¹Yi Xudong, Xie Yuan, "The Printing Press in 1994: Makes Me Happy and Makes Me Worried," *Journalist Monthly* (1994:1, pp. 11-14), p. 12.

market, and *Xinhua Daily Telegraph*, a general interest daily that carries the agency's own news dispatches. The Central People's Radio Station runs seven channels of different programming; CCTV was in the process of launching two more specialty pay channels, one movie, one sports in 1995 in addition to its current four channels.

People's Daily runs five subsidiary newspapers. With the exception of its overseas edition, which propagates the Party line among the Chinese-reading public overseas, the other four papers are all market-oriented. *Market* is a tabloid specializing in providing market information and consumer reports. The tabloid *Satire and Humor* appears three times a month and is edited by the paper's Literature and Art Department. It is a more elaborate version of the cartoon page in a Western commercial newspaper. *Global Digest* is a weekly tabloid run by the newspaper's International Department, specializing in feature reports of international hot spots and human interest stories. *China Economic News Bulletin*, launched in 1992, is a joint venture between *People's Daily* Overseas Edition and the American high-tech company, Dela-Global Inc. Unlike the other tabloids, this paper, with its Chinese and English editions and its flexible routes of delivery through fax, express or airmail, is apparently targeting Chinese- and English- speaking business elites both inside and outside China. Its offering of "direct, timely, reliable and accurate, and practical" information is rather different from the daily fare of *People's Daily* itself.⁷² In addition to the five newspapers, *People's Daily* also publishes four magazines: *Journalism Front*, *Earth*, *People's Forum*, and the *Tide of the Times*.⁷³

Today, Party and government organs are no longer simple mouthpieces. They have become business conglomerates. The appearance of the *People's Daily* compound

⁷²*People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (May 14, 1992), p. 8.

⁷³Many provincial Party organs also have a similar lineup of subsidiary newspapers and magazines, although not as many as *People's Daily*. The Guangdong provincial Party organ *Nanfang Daily*, for example, publishes four other papers: *Nanfang Weekend*, *Guangdong Pictorial Reports*, *Guangdong Farmers' News*, and *The World of Birds and Flowers*. Similarly, the Guangzhou municipal Party organ *Guangzhou Daily* has six other outlets: *Guangzhou Digest*, *Football News*, *Lingnan Youth*, *Senior's News*, *Transportation and Travel News*, and *Modern Parenting*.

is perhaps symbolic of this increasing media involvement in other aspects of the economy. If one approaches the huge newspaper complex from its main entrance on the west, one still gets a feeling of impressive status and the political weight of the institution with its armed guards and the sign "*People's Daily*." But at its gate to the south, the scene is rather different. There is also an armed guard and a sign, but above the sign itself across the whole gate is the more impressive, eye-catching sign: Shanghai Volkswagon Designated Maintenance Department. The garage, just inside the gate and sprawling out into the complex itself, with rows of cars and busy working crews, is run by the newspaper's transportation team and is reportedly making a lot of money for the newspaper. To attract business, of course, it is necessary to have a sign, and what can be more impressive than a huge sign over the familiar name *People's Daily*?

Initially, a 1988 provisional regulation jointly issued by the State Press and Publications Administration and the State Administration for Industry and Commerce limited the news media's business operations to information and publicity-related areas, such as advertising, information consulting services, sponsorship in trade fairs, cultural and educational activities, or technically related business operations such as radio and television repairing shops, photo-finishing shops, print shops, and broadcasting, photography or printing equipment supply and service outlets. The regulation prohibited the news media from engaging in industrial and business operations that are unrelated to the operation of the news media.

Such barriers, however, have been broken down since Deng's talks, although there is no official policy that formally revokes the 1988 regulation. The news media have expanded into areas such as tourism, transportation, real estate, manufacturing and trade. *Liberation Daily*, for example, has established in addition to advertising agencies, a number of businesses in other areas, including a real estate company, a computer company, and a taxi service. Similarly, the Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau

has business entities in real estate, tourism, telecommunications, and taxi services.⁷⁴ In prosperous Jiangsu province, local broadcasting administrations have established hundreds of small industrial enterprises. By August 1993, broadcasting administrations in Jiangsu had even established sixteen joint-venture enterprises with overseas business interests, attracting \$ 7,830,000 in investment.⁷⁵

Media Set the Stage, Businesses Sing the Opera

Since the economic reforms in the early 1980s, especially since 1992, the news media in China have undergone a radical process of commercialization. Although news media are still owned by the state or collectives, their economic basis has been shifted from complete reliance on state subsidies to increasing dependence on commercial revenue from advertising, sponsorships and business operations in other areas. At the same time, news media themselves have evolved into business organizations with interests in many aspects of the Chinese economy. In the newspaper sector, many newspaper organizations have achieved complete financial independence and become profitable business enterprises that contribute to the state treasury with profits and taxes. In the broadcasting sector, although most stations still receive government funding, the percentage of government funding in overall expenditure is decreasing. Within the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television's 1.1 billion yuan expenditure for the 1993 fiscal year, for example, government subsidies accounted for only thirty-six million.⁷⁶ In the economically developed areas of Shanghai, Guangdong, Jiangsu and Zhejiang, the ratio of self-generated funding versus government funding is greater. In 1992, the ratio between commercialized financing and government funding for the

⁷⁴Li Xiangyang, "The Trend toward the Conglomeration of Broadcasting Organizations," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1994:1), p. 5.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Speech by Vice Minister He Dongchi, *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting*, (1994:9), p. 8.

Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau, for example, was ten to one.⁷⁷ By 1993, the ratio was estimated to have reached twenty to one.⁷⁸ Some broadcasting authorities actually contribute more to the state treasury in the form of taxes and profits than the subsidy they receive from the government. Indeed, for such broadcasting authorities, the meaning of government funding is more symbolic and political than financial.

The news media's increasing dependence on advertising and sponsorship has greatly altered the Chinese news media landscape. To be sure, Party organs and broadcasting stations are almost guaranteed a stable advertising income by virtue of their monopoly positions and their long established advantages in the market. Moreover, because Party organs rely heavily on institutional subscriptions purchased with public money, the traditional Party organ can still more or less practice Party journalism as usual and at the same time receive a handsome advertising and sponsorship income.

Nevertheless, advertising and sponsorship has been introduced with significant impact on these news media. On existing radio and television stations and in Party organs, less and less emphasis is put on political issues. The newly created broadcasts and expanded newspaper pages mostly carry business information and info-tainment. And as we will see in Chapters Six and Seven, many newly established newspapers and broadcasting channels are almost exclusively devoted to business information and entertainment. Although political news has become more tightly controlled, it has also become less prominent and less pervasive in the news media. In the newspaper sector, newly established business papers have gained a steady readership among the business and professional community. They thus present an effective challenge to Party organs such as *People's Daily*.

⁷⁷Li Xiangyang, "The Business Path to the Development of Radio and Television," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting*, (1993:12), p. 2.

⁷⁸Li Xiangyang (1994), p. 5.

Although the news media industry has not developed an elaborate system of audience and readership surveys, with ratings available for advertisers, many news organizations conduct their own surveys.⁷⁹ CCTV, for example, publishes a weekly report on audience ratings. As advertisers become more selective in their choice of advertising medium, audience ratings and readership statistics are becoming increasingly important to news organizations.

Advertising has also caused a shift of power within the media system itself, as reflected in the relative decline of national and provincial Party organs and the rise of metropolitan Party organs. National and provincial Party organs have more responsibility for propagating Party and government policies. They have to cover a wide range of content concerning political, economic and social issues and have to take into consideration a wide range of audiences, both urban and rural. In contrast, municipal media outlets have fewer political responsibilities and their subject matter is closer to the daily life of the urban population. Although their circulation figures are smaller, their readers are mostly urban dwellers, who are currently the main force of the growing consumer society in China. In addition, advertising rates of municipal newspapers and broadcasting stations are relatively lower than those of national and provincial media outlets. Thus, municipal media outlets become the most ideal advertising vehicles for advertisers of consumer goods and services. Since 1993, the newspaper with the nation's highest advertising revenue has not been *People's Daily*, nor the Guangdong provincial Party organ, *Nanfang Daily*, but *Guangzhou Daily*, the municipal Party organ of Guangzhou city. The paper has the highest rate of private subscriptions (based on individual consumer choice, in contrast to institutional

⁷⁹Audience and readership surveys began in the mid-1980s, mostly initiated by journalism research institutes and news organizations themselves to study media effects. Some of the influential surveys during the 1980s were reported in Chen Congshan and Er Xiuling (eds.), *A Perspective Study of Media Communication Effects in China*, (Shenyang: Shenyang Publishing House, 1989).

subscriptions, which are compulsory in many cases) among all Party newspapers in the country. It sells 200,000 copies to individual readers through street retail alone.⁸⁰

Due to state control over the number of news media outlets, the advertising market in 1994 remained largely a sellers' market overall. Advertisers had to try very hard to get a spot on media outlets such as CCTV and provincial television stations. Thus, for these media, the threat of an advertiser's direct influence on their content has generally not yet been felt. In the competitive local media market and in smaller media outlets, however, the situation is different. Media organizations have to try very hard to solicit advertising, and during the process all kinds of exchanges can occur. A media outlet, for example, may offer the publication of a promotional piece about the advertiser in the form of a news story or a feature story as a bonus for the placement of an advertisement. This kind of voluntary submission to advertisers has become a very common practice, as we will see in the next chapter.

Even if a news outlet does not voluntarily submit to the pressure of an advertiser, advertisers may wield such power nevertheless. Yuan Hui, a radio program editor in Shanghai People's Radio Station, for example, has revealed that the biggest pressure on his programs comes from advertisers. He cited two cases in which advertisers tried to influence the content of the program. After the airing of a critical report on a well-known department store, the store threatened to withdraw its one million yuan annual advertising account with the station. In another case, a company offered 100,000 yuan for advertising in exchange for the cancellation of a critical piece about the company. When editing a critical piece, Yuan had to notify his superiors as to whether the subject of the criticism was one of the station's advertisers and, if so, the amount of advertising.⁸¹ With growing media competition and increasing prices for advertising, which drives away smaller advertisers and leaves only a few large and

⁸⁰Wang Fang, "Revelations from the Growth of Advertising in Guangdong Newspapers," *Fudan University Journalism Quarterly* (Fall 1994, pp. 51-53), p. 53.

⁸¹Jia Yifan, "Cool Thinking on Media Hotlines," *Journalist Monthly* (1994:7), pp. 29-32.

powerful ones in the market, the power of advertisers will be even more strongly felt by the news media.

At the same time, the explosion of opportunities for business involvement in the news media also means that financially resourceful businesses and government departments will have more access to the news media. For example, while a small and rich city in the coastal region is able to get national media exposure and promote its businesses through a sponsorship or a co-production, poor cities in the interior will still have to rely on the good will of the Party and journalists to promote the investment opportunities they have to offer.

So far, the news media are generally uncritically enthusiastic about commercialization with Chinese characteristics. Commercial revenues have enabled them to improve working conditions, expand services, introduce new technologies, and of course, improve the welfare of staff members. The news media have become major business operations. At the same time they have turned themselves into the mouthpieces and instruments of both state-owned and private business enterprises. The news media's use of their influence to promote business interests, including their own, is not only tolerated but celebrated. After all, they have not openly declared that they do not want to be the Party's mouthpiece. On the contrary, they fulfill their role as instruments of economic construction, as prescribed by the Party. The following is a passage taken from an article in the *China Journalism Yearbook*. It summarizes the experience of *Yichang News*, the Party organ of Yichang city in Hubei province, in setting up an enterprise fund as a way of realizing "businesses' participation in the running of newspapers and newspapers' provision of services to businesses." It is revealing of the news media's new role and significant inasmuch as it was published and promoted by the country's most authoritative book on journalism.

Upon the advice of entrepreneurs, we have introduced two columns [one on business strategies and one on successful entrepreneurs]... In news reporting, we reflect the difficulties and demands of business, cheer for

them and appeal on their behalf. We support and protect their reforms on the public opinion front. At the same time, we use our connections to build bridges between enterprises and the society at large. Whenever news organizations all over the country come to Yichang city to have activities [such as meetings of newspaper editors], we provide opportunities for members of the enterprise fund to connect with the news media. In June 1987, forty chief editors came to Yichang city. Some of the main enterprises in the fund received them ... later, these newspapers carried reports of these enterprises. ... In short, our principle is, newspaper sets the stage, businesses sing the opera.⁸²

⁸²Zhang Heling, Wang Xiaotuan, Wei Minghuang, "Yichang News Sets Up a Foundation to Solicit Business Participation in Newspaper Work," *Chinese Journalism Yearbook 1988*, (Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press, 1989), p. 144.

Chapter Five

Corruption: The Journalism of Decadence

Commercialization has undoubtedly brought prosperity to the news media in China. At the same time, however, the news media have experienced a deep sense of confusion over guiding principles and professional values. There is a growing uneasiness within journalism circles about widespread practices that exchange access to readers and audiences for money, whether the exchange is mediated by individual journalists or by editorial units within news media organizations or by news media organizations themselves. While the Party principle is still constantly being reaffirmed by the Party, the market principle has also become an important operational principle. The Party's exercise of power is often crude; but the news media's submission to the power of money is even more crass. The previous chapter discussed forms of commercialization in the well-established Party organs and broadcasting institutions mainly in terms of their financial and organizational structures. This chapter explores the impact of the co-existence of the Party principle and the market principle on the level of journalism practice and news discourse, in particular, corrupt forms of journalism in the well-established Party organs and broadcasting stations that go beyond China's own legal and ethical boundaries.

As in so many other fields in China, corruption has become "not an aberration, but the very way the system works, deeply imbedded in the government itself."¹ The problem of corruption in journalism is not just a matter of a few morally corrupted individuals, as the news media would like people to believe. It is an institutional and occupational phenomenon. It involves the majority of journalists.² It involves the

¹Robert Weil, "China at the Brink -- Part II," *Monthly Review* (46:8, January 1995, pp. 11-43), p. 30.

²This was admitted by media official "H" in a confidential interview, October 1994.

majority of media organizations from the smallest media outlets to the very pinnacle of the Party's propaganda apparatus, *People's Daily*.³

The following example provides perhaps the best footnote to the claim that corruption is not an aberration but the norm. On August 1, 1994, Li Wenhui, a reporter from the provincial radio station in Hebei, became the subject of a feature story in *Press and Publications News*, the official organ of the State Press and Publications Administration. The reason Li had become newsworthy was because it had been noticed that he does not accept money or gifts for his news reporting. The story said that since the 1980s, Li has refused to promote commodities for business and has declined gifts worth two thousand yuan. As a result, although he has been a journalist for more than thirty years, he remains poor.⁴ A journalist makes news in a national newspaper by the simple fact that he remains poor and uncorrupted!

Forms of Corruption in Journalism

Corruption has been part and parcel of the process of media commercialization itself. As a widespread occupational phenomenon, it emerged in the mid-1980s and, like a virus, has spread to every part of the news media system penetrating deeper and

³The Hongkong-based newspaper *Ming Bao* reported in July 1993 that approximately ten individuals from *People's Daily* were detained for investigation that revolved around five charges of corruption in the central Party organ. (1) Individual journalists from the newspaper's economic department and the economic department itself were involved in a gigantic illegal fund-raising scandal with Great Wall Machinery and Electronics Corporation in which they accepted bribes from the company and published promotional material for it. (2) A subsidiary of the newspaper was under investigation for acting as a "snake head" and smuggling illegal immigrants into Japan. They charged 150,000 yuan for a single individual, of which one third of the money went to the company itself, while the rest was used for bribes and travelling expenses. (3) A middle-level official, who had been transferred to the newspaper from the Army during the reorganization after June 4 in 1989, took advantage of his original relationship with the Army to illegally sell cars with army licenses to various localities and take commissions from the deals. (4) The director of the newspaper's advertising department took advantage of his position to set up his own advertising firm and contracted the newspaper's advertising through his own firm to channel funds into his own pockets. (5) *Tide of the Times*, a magazine run by the newspaper's political department, had repeatedly published articles about prostitutes and their clients to boost sales. It had also published an article calling for tolerance of prostitution under the market economy. See *Ming Bao* (July 22, 1993, p. 9), FBIS, July 23, 1993, pp. 13-14. Although Hongkong newspapers are not always accurate in their reporting, with all the details, it is hard not to believe, especially given the context of similar exposures in mainland news media and journalism trade journals.

⁴*Press and Publications News* (August 1, 1994), p. 2.

deeper. There are many forms of such corruption, ranging from unethical practices to criminal activities. Journalists, media officials, editorial departments, and the subsidiary businesses of news media often take advantage of their connections with news organizations to pursue their own financial gains.

All Expenses-Paid News Reporting

The most innocent form of corruption is perhaps the so-called "three-warranty reporting" (sanbao caifang), a practice whereby reported subjects cover the journalists' travel, accommodation and meal expenses during out-of-town reporting assignments. This practice is also called "invitation journalism" (qingjie xinwen) because journalists produce news reports at the invitation of government departments and, more often, business enterprises and other institutions who have publicity needs. Such reporting, of course, is always good news - the grand opening of a major construction project, a tourist attraction, or a business operation; anniversary parties and other public relations events; and achievements of all sorts. Like an expensive holiday tour taken by those who have a lot of money to spend but little interest in adventure, reporters have a worry-free pleasant tour guided by their hosts. They travel by the best and most comfortable means, stay in fancy hotels and are wined and dined. They see what their hosts want them to see, meet those their hosts want them to meet, and, of course, report what their hosts want them to report.

In many such cases, reporters travel in a pack under the sponsorship of one host. They even agree to publish their work on the same day. The group can be organized either by the host or by an intermediary. A host will approach one reporter or a third party first, and this person will organize reporters in other news organizations. For many journalists, "three-warranty reporting" becomes a pleasant vacation out of town. For the sponsors, it is not only a publicity opportunity but also an opportunity to say "thank you" to the journalists who have been supportive in their past

reporting, and, of course, to ensure their continued support in the future. A few lucky journalists (lucky not by chance, but due to past performance) have been sent to travel overseas. Their sponsors are China's newly emerging state-owned multinationals who have subsidiaries in foreign countries.⁵

The phenomenon is a common practice. News organizations and journalists have largely taken it for granted. The business division chief of *Economic Daily* reported in an article in *Journalism Front* that it had become such a common practice that in the newspaper office, whenever a reporter is going on an out-of-town assignment, colleagues will usually ask, "On whose invitation?"⁶ The article lists three different perspectives within journalism circles regarding this phenomenon. The first perspective views it positively because during "three-warranty reporting," reporters do not have to worry about transportation and accommodation and are not subject to the budget constraints of their own news organizations. The writing task is easy to accomplish, and it is beneficial to both parties. The second perspective argues an opposite view, that by participating in "three-warranty reporting," journalists are on their host's leash because they are obligated to report the good and not the bad. Moreover, in the context of working in a group, it is impossible to do any in-depth reporting. The practice is thus bad for journalism. A third perspective tries to find some middle ground and is obviously an attempt by journalists to arrive at some sort of psychological comfort. They say,

You can participate, but the principled thing to do is not to hand your leash to your host. After completing the "required program," you can add some "free style" of your own and you can both satisfy your host and produce a good piece of journalism.⁷

⁵A few journalists reportedly have even enjoyed month-long reporting vacations in Europe. Some reporters not only have their expenses covered but may also receive a handsome allotment of pocket money to spend during their reporting tour.

⁶Lu Zheng, "'Noses' and 'Leashes': A Preliminary Discussion of 'Three-Warranty Reporting'," *Journalism Front* (1992:4, pp. 20-21), p. 20.

⁷*Ibid.*

One wonders, however, how "good" such journalism could be. Perhaps, it depends on whether the reporter wants to get future invitations or how a reporter feels about the host's treatment during the tour. In fact, as one writer has noted, there is often a direct link between how a reporter feels about the treatment and the news report produced out of the occasion. The length, content, timing, and placement are often based on the reporter's evaluation of the treatment.⁸

The Blurring of Advertising and Editorial Functions

For many years, news media organizations directly solicited and contracted advertising. In October 1993, the government introduced the advertising agency system to break the media's monopoly on the production, management and display of advertising and to separate the functions of the media from those of the advertising firms.⁹ To deal with this change, news media organizations simply turned their advertising departments into advertising firms. These firms are supposedly "independent" affiliates of the news media, but for the most part it is business as usual.

Advertising management is often chaotic within many media organizations. Although advertising departments and editorial departments are formally separated, in practice, they are connected and their functions are often blurred. Journalists sometimes solicit advertising for their media organizations while they are gathering news. In some news organizations, not only the advertising department but each programming or editorial department can also place their own advertising in a particular program or on a specific page.

Since sponsorships are usually managed by individual editorial departments, it is even more common for journalists to solicit sponsorships. If they successfully obtain an advertising contract or sponsorship, they can receive a commission. A journalist in a

⁸"On the Adherence to Journalism Ethics and Several Other Policy Issues," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1992:4), p. 2.

⁹"State to Increase Supervision over Advertising," *China Daily* (August 4, 1993), p. 4.

major national news organization revealed that this commission in his news organization is three percent, and that it can be as high as five to ten, even twenty percent in other news outlets. Whatever the percentage, the income is very large in comparison with a journalist's regular salary. One successful advertising and sponsorship deal can bring an individual journalist an income that is many times one's annual salary. One writer reported, "I have a friend working for a major newspaper in Beijing. He solicited 400,000 yuan's worth of sponsorship at once and received 80,000 yuan for himself."¹⁰ This figure is equivalent to at least fifteen years of salary! Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that journalists write favourable news or features for potential advertising clients. Indeed, news and features are sometimes offered as "bonus" for an advertising or sponsorship deal.

While some journalists assume the double task of gathering both news and advertising or sponsorships on their own initiative (of course with the implicit permission of their news organizations, which give them commissions), others obviously are assigned this dual task by their superiors. One radio reporter told the following story. He and a colleague took two tasks on an out-of-town assignment to a city, one was to solicit a sponsorship for a program; the other was to write an analytical piece about problems relating to the implementation of a new personnel management system in a factory. When they met the factory director, they easily solicited a five-digit sponsorship. In return, the two reporters changed their reporting angle and turned an intended analytical piece into a positive piece.¹¹

The blurring of editorial and advertising functions often goes all the way to the top of the news media's management structure. Wang Fang, a Ph.D. candidate from Fudan University's School of Journalism, for example, reported, without any critical

¹⁰Li Zhirong, "The Falling of the Crown from the 'Crownless King,'" *The Nineties* (1993:9), p. 64.

¹¹Tian Fangmu, "On Journalists' Ethical Choices," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1989:5), p. 21.

reflection, that in Guangdong province, there are newspapers in which the editor-in-chief is also the general manager of the newspaper's advertising firm.¹²

At the same time, advertising sales representatives often pose as journalists. The invocation of the authority of the press is apparently more effective in soliciting advertising. As one writer put it, "everybody in the news organization can carry a press card to solicit advertising and sponsorship. A certain television station has more than thirty vehicles, each has the 'news gathering vehicle' sticker on it."¹³

Journalists and Secondary Occupations

Like employees in other sectors, moonlighting, in particular, engaging in business activities in the private sector while at the same time collecting a government employee's salary, is not unusual among journalists, although government regulations prohibit government employees from running their own businesses. One common secondary occupation of journalists is public relations. Journalists not only attend news briefings and conferences, they themselves organize such activities, which have become fashionable public relations exercises among the business community in China since the mid-1980s.¹⁴ They act as "freelance" public relations agents for businesses and social organizations eager to seek publicity for a new enterprise and a new product. Journalists and news organizations, because of their good connections and their access to the news media, are favoured by business as the best public relations experts for hire.¹⁵ They collect handsome fees from their clients, organizing news briefings on the

¹²Wang Fang, "Reflections on the Growth of Advertising in Guangdong Newspapers," *Fudan University Journalism Quarterly* (Fall 1994), p. 52.

¹³Wang Xing, "The Advantages and Disadvantages of the Responsibility System in the News Media," *Chinese Journalists* (1993:10), p. 19

¹⁴In Beijing, for example, news briefings of all kinds are constant. Even places such as the Great Hall of the People and the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse are flooded with news briefings that have nothing to do with politics at all.

¹⁵While there is no official document that permits individual journalists to undertake this kind of business, a 1987 government regulation permitted news organizations to undertake public relation functions. In fact, whatever the government regulations may be, individual journalists and news media organizations appear unconcerned.

clients' behalf, and after all the expenses are deducted, they can still make a good profit.

When journalism and public relations overlap and when both are the subject of abuse, the consequences are often beyond imagination. The following is an astonishing case that shocked the news media and business communities of Beijing and Tianjin in 1993. Ms. Gu, the deputy editor of a magazine, held a news briefing for a number of companies to promote their products. The Tianjin-based Huangqi manufacturing company failed to pay the 8,000 yuan participation fee. As a result, Ms. Gu charged in the news briefing that its product, a fruit drink, had quality problems. As a result of news reports about the quality problem, the factory suffered eighty million yuan in losses due to purchase contract cancellations and the halt of production. More than one thousand workers lost their jobs. Ms Gu insisted on the payment of the fee immediately and said to the factory director afterwards: "As a remedy, I can hold a news conference with the same people attending; I can even bring CCTV reporters to your factory to make a feature report."¹⁶

In addition to public relations functions, it is also common for journalists to hold secondary jobs in other information related areas as reporters and editors of other journals and magazines, especially those published by business organizations, and as consultants and advisers to business firms. In some cases, journalists have to actually work to get a secondary income, but more often their secondary occupations in business firms do not require much work. They can derive a secondary income from their primary job titles simply by publishing positive news and features about their business employers and by providing them with useful business information. In the legal and illegal business deals made by journalists, journalism becomes the sacrifice at the altar of businesses.

¹⁶Wang Qing, "Tainted Sanctity," *Journalism World* (1994:3), p. 33.

Some media personnel and media organizations even establish their own business operations and use their professional titles and links to get preferential business deals. For example, among the five scandals involving *People's Daily* mentioned previously, one involves the director of the newspaper's advertising department who took advantage of his position with the prestigious Party organ to set up his own advertising firm and contracted the newspaper's advertising through his own firm to channel funds into his own pockets.

From Bribery to Extortion

The most talked about form of corruption in journalism, of course, is the practice of so-called "paid journalism," i.e. journalists and/or news media units receiving material benefits from clients for the publication of promotional material in the form of news and features. It is, as one writer suggests, "the biggest news" with the Chinese news media in the 1990s.¹⁷ The payment for "paid journalism" can be cash and negotiable securities; gifts of all kinds; reimbursement of receipts for all kinds of personal expenses; personal favours such as job, housing, day care and educational arrangements for family members and relatives; free travel, house renovations, telephone installation, air-conditioning installation, and other services; money for the mini-treasury of different editorial departments in a news organization,¹⁸ advertising and sponsorship contracts for the news media, ... in short, anything that brings material benefits to an individual journalist and/or a news organization. Payments are legitimated under different names such as "transportation fee," "meal subsidy" (it does not matter whether reporters spend any money on transportation or whether they have already had free meal provided by their hosts) and "trial uses" of various commodities.

¹⁷Gu Tu, "Dealing with the Problem at the Root," *Journalism Front* (1993:10), p. 26.

¹⁸"Mini-treasury" (xiao jinku) to a department in a Chinese institution is similar to pocket money to an individual in a family. This money is not accounted by the unit and a unit usually collectively spends the money for the personal enjoyment of staff members, such as dining and gifts on holidays. Sometimes, this money is simply divided by staff members as extra cash income.

Although "paid journalism" is the standard phrase used both by official and unofficial sources to describe this phenomenon, in essence, it is bribery journalism. As Ding Guangen, the Party's propaganda department chief pointed out, it is "an abuse of power for private gain."¹⁹ Mercenary journalism is perhaps a more appropriate term.

Since the late 1980s, "paid journalism" as a systemic phenomenon has gone through the following pattern of development. First, bribery has grown from small to big and from material gifts to cash and negotiable securities. At the beginning, journalists were known to eat free meals and receive small gifts that related to their work and carried a symbolic meaning, such as a pen, a notebook, a folder, a towel, a tea cup, or other local products. Gradually, the gifts become more and more valuable and further detached from the reporting event and locality such as home electronics and other household goods, jewelry, cosmetics. Eventually it reaches the point at which those who give gifts have exhausted their ideas for novel gifts and journalists have received too many gifts of all types. Also, a gift is perceived as too inconvenient to carry around, especially with the proliferation of news conferences and other publicity events in the early 1990s. The red envelope of cash is becoming the preferred medium of exchange between journalists and their clients. It is so much easier for the giver to prepare, and it is also more convenient for the recipients. With the use of cash as the currency, the trade of news space becomes more efficient and more direct. For example, the delivery of a ready-to-publish news or feature article together with cash in an envelope to the editorial office becomes possible. The amount of cash in the red envelope has increased over the years, perhaps corresponding to inflation and increasing demand for publicity. It began with fifty yuan. In 1992, the regular amount was around two hundred yuan. In late 1994, the "market price" was, according to an insider, three hundred yuan for a news story and five hundred yuan for a feature. For a particularly long feature story of three to four thousand words, the price could be as

¹⁹*People's Daily* (August 5, 1993), p. 1.

high as ten thousand yuan. When stocks and all kinds of negotiable securities became popular in 1992, journalists began to receive bribes in these most fashionable forms. Of course, many journalists continue to eat free meals and receive local specialities.

Second, "paid journalism" has expanded from business clients to government clients. Previously, most of those who gave gifts were business enterprises. Since they have no administrative power they can only rely on the power of money. Gradually, however, social organizations and even government departments have also felt the need to buy publicity. During my research in late 1994 in Beijing, two stories illustrating such cases were circulating in journalism circles. In one case, red envelopes were issued to reporters attending a social event organized by educational authorities in which a Vice-Chairman of the National People's Congress participated. According to insiders, an activity involving an official at this level would usually warrant news reporting on its own merits. Perhaps because the giving of red envelopes has become such a common practice, the people organizing the event felt obligated to do it. Or perhaps, under the current context of "no money, no reporting," the organizer(s) of the event realized that the old convention was no longer adequate and that the red envelopes had become indispensable to ensure coverage of the event. Or perhaps it was given as an insurance or an incentive that would ensure a more elaborated report than the event would otherwise receive. In another case, red envelopes were presented to journalists reporting a ceremony celebrating the publication of a book by a senior Party leader. The name of the leader is unknown, presumably someone other than Deng Xiaoping, although volume III of Deng's collection was indeed published during that time. In the area of feature writing, just as factory directors and business managers can buy reporters' services to promote their businesses and their images, some government

officials have reportedly also paid reporters to write feature stories to boost their images.²⁰

Third, "paid journalism" has developed from individual practices to collective practices. Over the years, journalists have developed mechanisms of cooperation and benefit sharing with colleagues in the same editorial department. When they get a gift or receive a red envelope of money, they will also grab one or two for colleagues at the home front, especially superiors and editors who have editorial rights over their piece. Naturally, some beats and assignments are more "lucrative" than others and editors who stay at the newsroom have less opportunity to receive gifts and cash than reporters who actually go to news conferences and other events. The unevenness of opportunities led to tensions among reporters and between editors and reporters. Editors channel their dissatisfaction by using their editorial power, delaying or even refusing the publication of a story to which a reporter has an obligation because he or she has received favors. Thus, there are instances in which a client has paid but the story remains unpublished.²¹ Such a situation, of course, embarrasses the reporter and affects his or her credibility with his or her clients. Indeed, even the shortening or delaying of a piece can cause considerable distress. For example, a television reporter in Beijing said in an interview that she hated her editor for cutting her pieces because it made her feel embarrassed in front of her client who would naturally complain, "I paid so much to you and you only put on such a short piece!" To compensate, this reporter asked the announcer to slow down her delivery speed so that the piece would appear longer.

Such newsroom politics makes collective corruption a necessity, not to mention the fact that it is also safer. When everybody is involved, there will be a net of mutual protection. In the Great Wall Machinery and Electronics Corporation case, for example, the *People's Daily* reporter divided his 100,000 yuan bribe into three

²⁰While the stories recounted in this paragraph are hearsay, the fact that such stories are circulating in journalism circles is significant in itself regardless of whether the accounts can be verified.

²¹Zhou Yunlong, "Paid' without News," *The Journalists*, (1993:11), p. 31.

portions. The smallest portion, 20,000 went into his own pocket; 50,000 yuan was turned in to his department, and 30,000 was given to his superior, the director of the department.²²

The progression from individual corruption to collective corruption has another dimension. As Wang Shuang writes, "paid journalism" has evolved from "a guerrilla warfare" of individual journalists to a "battle of the whole press corps."²³ Previously, individual products of bribery journalism were inserted into the different pages of a newspaper or a news broadcast. Later, a whole page or time block was sold to a specific client, with the money, in many cases, going to the mini-treasury of the editorial team responsible for the page or time block. These pages are called "special pages" (zhuan ye) and they usually contain favourable reportage about a specific city, county or town, or enterprises.²⁴ Such pages are similar to the paid information columns and programs discussed in Chapter Four, with the content of the page either written by journalists or provided by the client. The difference is that these "special pages" are more specifically designed to meet the advertising and publicity need of a particular client.²⁵

Fourth, "paid journalism" has progressed from "unorganized" to "organized" bribery. As in bribery anywhere and in any context, people usually will not take a bribe from someone they don't know or trust. But the direct giving and taking of bribes between individuals who know one another is too limited for many businesses and

²²*Ming Bao* (July 22, 1993), in *FBIS* (July 23, 1993), p. 14.

²³Wang Shuang, "Overcoming 'Paid Journalism' Involves Systems Engineering," *Journalism Knowledge* (1994:8), p. 18.

²⁴A national media outlet is more likely to have a special page about a city or a county; whereas a local media outlet will more likely deal with the township level.

²⁵The most bizarre case is perhaps the publication of two different editions of *Chinese Human Resources News* on a same day on June 11, 1987: one is the regular version that was distributed nationally, the other contained "special pages" of promotional news about rural enterprises solicited by two reporters from two counties in Beijing. 20,000 copies of this special version were published, most of them were distributed in the two counties. The two counties paid a total of 21,500 yuan to the newspaper to find that these "special pages" and their advertising-as-news were produced for their own consumption only! See, "The Selling of the Journalistic Conscience," *China Youth News* (September 29, 1987), cited in Chang Xinying, *A Hundred Cases of Poor News Writing* (Beijing, Agricultural Readings Press, 1989), pp. 4-5.

individuals who want to have an item of "paid journalism" published. Gradually, a special group of people have emerged to act as intermediaries between news organizations and those who wish to bribe journalists and news organizations. Within journalism circles, such intermediaries are known as "news brokers," comparable in some sense to stock brokers, which is another profession that has emerged with the development of a market economy. The difference, of course, is that being a "news broker" is not a formal profession. These people are not full-time "brokers" in the open marketplace. They work behind the scenes, using their spare time, or more likely, their working hours because these people usually hold dull and easy government jobs that can hardly keep them busy. Some of these people are themselves working in the news media or in related areas.

Articles in journalism trade journals and personal observations provide a profile of this group of people. They are usually very good at socializing and making connections, they have close relationships with the authorities in the news media and know the situation at the grassroots level well. They also have a good understanding of the "news market," knowing what kind of news is in demand and suitable for publication. They make connections between news sources and the news media by organizing news briefings, trade fairs and other publicity opportunities and by organizing "three-warranty reporting" on a client's behalf and asking for favours on journalists' behalf. In the process, of course, they make a considerable income for themselves.²⁶ They thus serve as an important link in the making of "paid journalism."²⁷

²⁶Yi Ren, "Who Is a 'News Broker'?" *Journalism Front* (1992:1), p. 17; see also, Bai Shui, "Watching out for 'News brokers'," *Press and Publications Herald* (1994:1), p. 53.

²⁷The following case, based on information obtained through a confidential interview with "C" in Beijing in October 1994, describes a "news broker" in action. This particular "news broker" has a government job. He knew many reporters and editors because of his job. He also knew many potential "news clients" because of his background and socialization. Thus he could act as a link between the two. One day, he received copies of a ready-to-publish news story about the establishment of a new business and copies of a feature story on the subject. He also received a retainer from his client to cover the necessary spending, including cash for editors. His task was to personally deliver one or the other item to ten major national newspapers in Beijing. He put the news story and the

Finally, rather than passively accepting bribes, some reporters have reportedly engaged in active negotiation for a better deal and even extortion. The following are some of the stories told in trade journals.²⁸

1) At a grand opening banquet for a new business, four tables of journalists showed up. A stunned host had to increase the number of gifts and add dishes.²⁹

2) Four reporters refused to attend a company's news briefing because they knew that in addition to the gift they had received, there were more expensive gifts prepared for the company's directors. They entered the news briefing room only after they each received the more expensive gift. In a similar story, a refrigerator factory invited two reporters from the provincial Party newspaper to the factory to write promotional pieces about its product. "Three-warranty reporting" and gifts produced a series of positive reports in the Party organ. At the farewell banquet, the journalists proposed to visit the factory's customers in the scenic cities of Hangzhou and Suzhou. They received all-expenses-paid vacations in the two cities. The factory director ordered to his sales office in the provincial capital to send a hotel room refrigerator to each reporter for "trial use," and the factory issued ten days of thirty-yuan-per-night receipts for accommodation to each journalists.³⁰ Although the reporters had not spent

feature into separate envelopes. The envelopes with the news story included 300 yuan cash, the feature story envelopes contained 500 yuan. He put the two types of envelopes in separate pockets. Depending on whether an editor had news or feature space available, he would hand in the appropriate piece with the appropriate amount of money. Of course, he does not have personal connections in all the ten newspapers. So he gave part of the retainer to someone with better connections to do the job. After all the items had been delivered, he waited for their publication. When he had collected all the newspapers with the requested coverage, he would receive a handsome sum from his client as compensation for his labour.

²⁸I collected many such examples from confidential interviews. However, due to the sensitivity of the issue, I decided to use the examples reported in the news media and in authoritative journalism trade journals. In the age of "paid journalism," one wonders about the credibility of news stories in the Chinese news media. But when a piece is a critical one, the level of credibility should be higher, because few people want to spend money in getting negative publicity. The same rule also applies to news reports about the news media themselves. The many examples I gathered from interviews lend credibility to these reports.

²⁹Deng Lipin, *Journalism Front* (1994:2), p. 23.

³⁰Wang Qing, p. 34.

a cent, they would be able to be reimbursed the amount either from their own news organization or through other clients.³¹

3) A reporter from *Henan Daily* extorted a well-known personality by threatening to expose his tax evasion. Another reporter threatened to write negative pieces and "internal reference" material to get "publicity fees" from businesses. He asked for a 5,000 yuan "newspaper page fee" from five business enterprises he visited. Three of the five enterprises gave him the amount and were rewarded with positive reports.³²

Reporters are not the only ones who reportedly have engaged in extortion. Editors have their own special targets of extortion. Letter page editors, for example, reportedly have extorted the organizations or individuals criticized in letters by first pointing out the severity of the criticism and then dealing with the letter in accordance with the reaction of the criticized subject. A bribe from the subject of criticism may prevent the publication of a potentially damaging piece in the letters column.³³ Editors who edit pieces submitted by amateur correspondents may also get their share of solicited and unsolicited bribes. They can demand gifts or that correspondents arrange for their unit to underwrite a "sponsorship," otherwise the correspondent's story will not be published. These amateur correspondents, of course, are publicists for their own institutions. Some of them have been allocated public relation fees by their unit that they can use to bribe editors to get their pieces published. Even if they have to take the money from their own pocket, the expense is worthwhile. Their reward from their own unit for successfully getting a piece published is often larger than their expenses.

³¹In fact, journalists and officials are always collecting receipts. During my visit to Beijing in early 1995, I took an individual in a government bureaucracy to dinner. I paid the taxi and restaurant bills and when the receipts were issued, he accepted them and kept them without any hesitation. Like many journalists, my guest could get the receipts reimbursed somewhere. My confidential interview with "S" in October 1994 in Beijing revealed that journalists sometimes hand in up to 500 yuan worth of all kinds of receipts for reimbursement in the name of "transportation fees" during an assignment, even when the report does not require leaving the city!

³²Wang Qing, p. 33.

³³Zhou Yunlong, p. 31.

From Advertising-as-News to News-as-Fabrication

Bribery in journalism not only produces an abundance of advertising-as-news, in some cases, it leads to false reports and deliberate distortion. During the Cultural Revolution, political needs were met with false and fabricated news reports. In current atmosphere of promoting getting rich by any means, the pursuit of money has also turned black into white in the news media. In 1987, the news media exposed the case of Zhao Guangji, a reporter with *Shaanxi Workers News*, who accepted a 10,000 yuan bribe and turned a swindler into a hero in his reporting. In April 1994, the national media were forced by the Party to expose another scandal about themselves. This time it involved not just one reporter from a small non-party organ in a remote province, but many journalists from a number of major national news media organizations in Beijing. It involved not a single swindler, but the illegal fund-raising activity of a big company that affected tens thousands of people. The scope and the details of the case of the Great Wall Machinery and Electronics Corporation (GWMEC) reveal how serious the problem of bribery has become in Chinese news media.

The story begins with an unexpected meeting between Sheng Taifu, the general manager of GWMEC, and Cai Yuanjiang, a reporter from the news centre at the Central People's Radio Station. Cai later assumed a second job as the editor of a magazine published by Sheng's company and received a monthly salary of a few hundred yuan. The two became very close. In June 1992, when Sheng began his illegal fund-raising activity, Cai, at the suggestion of Sheng, invited his college friend, *Science and Technology Daily* reporter Shun Shuxing and two other reporters from two of Beijing's major newspapers to accompany Sheng's fund-raising tour in Hainan province in a typical case of "three-warranty reporting." Sheng gave each reporter two thousand yuan and an expensive suitcase. On June 27, Shun published a long feature story on the tour in *Science and Technology Daily*. It was the leading story of the day

and was highlighted with an editorial note. The story not only did not question the illegality of Sheng's fund-raising activity, it praised him and his venture. The headline reported that Sheng raised "twenty million in twenty days." With this report, Sheng's fund-raising activity attracted more and more people.

In July, Shun phoned Sheng from Guangzhou and provided him with important business information that Shun and Cai were accompanying Li Xiaoshi, Deputy Chairman of the State Science and Technology Commission, on a tour, and Li planned to visit the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone and Hainan province. Upon receiving the information, Sheng flew to Guangzhou and stayed in the same hotel with the journalists and the official. He gave each journalist five thousand yuan for information. At the suggestion of the two journalists, Li paid a visit to Sheng's business branch in Hainan and gave a speech which praised his operations. The speech was widely reported in the news media and further legitimized Sheng's activities.

Promotional reporting and bribes continued between the reporters and Sheng. More and more journalists became involved, more and more articles were published, and more and more bribes were handed out by Sheng. The amount grew from two thousand yuan in the beginning to ten thousand yuan each in the end. Cai, for example, received a total of forty-thousand yuan in bribes from Sheng. With the help of journalists, Sheng and his company made many sensational news headlines. In January 1993, with the publication of another long feature article praising Sheng in *Science and Technology Daily* and more than twenty other newspapers, the propaganda campaign waged on Sheng's behalf reached a peak. The news media set up Sheng and his company as a positive model in economic reform in typical Party journalism tradition. Sheng became a model entrepreneur; his company, a model in the private sector, a pioneer utilizing science and technology to benefit the people and the society. He was a perfect model that fit the Party and government agenda of promoting the private sector and developing advanced technology. By the end, reporter Cai became so closely

identified with Sheng and his cause that he went beyond his propaganda function and bribed Li, the government official from the State Science and Technology Commission, on Sheng's company's behalf.

Sheng and the journalists had gone too far. One of the sensational headlines Sheng and the reporters created was that Sheng's company was going to file a lawsuit against Li Guixian, State Councillor and the Director of the People's Bank of China, who had voiced a negative view of the company's activities. The case was exposed by the government and so were the journalists. In addition to Shun and Cai, many other reporters were arrested and investigated, including some from *People's Daily*. In a short eight-month period, the case of fraud resulted in more than 100,000 cheated and angry investors, who could only get at most thirty percent of their principle. Of the more than one billion yuan raised by Sheng, only half was retrievable.³⁴

Government Regulations, Ethical Codes and Anti-Corruption Campaigns

It is not that there are no rules that regulate news media practices. Since the economic reforms, the Party and government have issued a number of regulations and guidelines that aim to prevent malpractice in journalism. As early as 1982, the "Provisional Regulations for Advertising Management" promulgated by the State Council had already stated that news and advertising should be separated. On October 15, 1982, the State Council's General Office issued a circular on strengthening advertising management. The circular "strictly prohibits journalists from soliciting advertising in the name of news reporting; strictly prohibits the publication of advertising in news formats for a fee."³⁵ The same principle was emphasized again and

³⁴"Under the Lure of Money," *People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (April 14, 1994), p. 3; see also, "Reporters Arrested in Financial Scandal," *Ming Bao* (May 28, 1993), in *FBIS* (June 11, 1993), pp. 25-26. The two sources provided different figures on the number of investors. *People's Daily* reported 10,000, *Ming Bao* reported 20,000.

³⁵State Council General Office, "Circular on Strengthening Advertising Management," October 13, 1982, in Policy and Regulations Bureau, State Press and Publications Administration (ed.), *A Concise and Practical Guide to Laws and Regulations on Press and Publications (1949-1994)* (Beijing: Chinese Books Press, 1994).

again in subsequent government regulations.³⁶ Some regulations contain more specific provisions such as "non-advertising departments in a television stations should not undertake advertising business",³⁷ and "the advertising business of a newspaper should be undertaken by its advertising department and specialized advertising personnel; no other departments and individuals should be involved in advertising."³⁸ The circular "strictly prohibits 'paid journalism'".³⁹ In February 1995, the Advertising Law of the People's Republic of China was enacted. The above regulations on the separation of advertising and news reporting were codified.

There were further regulations that aimed at tightening control in related areas, such as the establishment of news bureaus by news media organizations, the issuance of press cards, and the holding of news briefings. For example, in August 1993, the State Council General Office issued a circular on holding news briefings and stated that "units that hold news briefings should strictly observe the principle of truthful journalism ... No cash gifts or negotiable securities should be given to reporters and press units under any pretext."⁴⁰

Furthermore, after seventy years of journalism under the Party, The Chinese Journalists Association finally established a code of ethics on January 19, 1991. The code stated that journalists

should not publish any forms of "paid journalism," should not put news and editorial spaces up for sale, nor accept nor extort money and gifts nor obtain private gains. Journalism activities and business activities

³⁶See, for example, "Regulations for Advertising Management," issued by the State Council in October 1987; the "Circular on Further Strengthening Advertising Management on Television," jointly issued by the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television and the State Administration for Industry and Commerce in January 1988; "Regulations for the Undertaking of Advertising Business by Newspapers, Periodicals and Publishing Houses," jointly issued by the State Administration of Industry and Commerce and the State Press and Publications Administration in March 1990, and "Provisional Regulations for Newspaper Management" issued by the State Press and Publications Administration in December 1990. See *A Concise and Practical Guide to Laws and Regulations on Press and Publications (1949-1994)*, pp. 264, 271 and pp. 278-279.

³⁷Ibid., p. 271.

³⁸Ibid., p. 279.

³⁹Ibid., p. 279.

⁴⁰"State Issues Supplement on News Briefings," Xinhua Domestic Service (August 13, 1993), in *FBIS* (August 13, 1993), p. 12.

should be strictly separated. Reporters and editors should not engage in advertising and other business activities or obtain private gains."⁴¹

This code was amended in 1994. The above section was expanded to include the statement that journalists "should not accept money or negotiable securities in any form from units and individuals they reported on."⁴²

While it is perhaps an overstatement to say that these regulations and ethical codes have not had any effect at all, there is no question that journalists and the news media have gone ahead with all forms of illegal and unethical practices despite these regulations and ethical codes. "Orders without implementation, prohibitions without stopping" (youling buxing, youjin buzhi) is a common phenomenon in government in China. The saying "policies from the top are countered by strategies from below" (shang you zhengce, xia you duice) is not only very popular but also very accurate in describing the policy implementation process in China. In the words of a well-known Chinese jurist, "[t]he problem we are facing now doesn't lie in the allegation that we have no law to abide, but in the fact that we have not abided by the law."⁴³ The enforcement of government regulations is very weak, not to mention the loopholes in the regulations themselves and the fact that most of the regulations came too late. Ethical codes are not binding at all. In particular, when administrative bodies themselves are corrupt, it is hard for them to effectively enforce administrative orders. If a bribe to officials at the State Press and Publication Administration can lead to the issuance of a newspaper publication license to a unit that does not have the necessary funds and personnel for such a publication, how can one expect such a body to play an effective role in assuring the legality and morality of news media practices?

⁴¹Chinese Journalists Association, "Professional Ethical Principles of Chinese Journalists," January 1991, cited in Yi Xinwen, "Market Economy and 'Paid journalism'," *News Communication* (1993:5), p. 9.; see the April 1994 amended version in *Journalism Front* (1994:7), pp. 18-19.

⁴²Chinese Journalists Association, "Professional Ethical Principles of Chinese Journalists," *Journalism Front*, (1994:7), p. 19.

⁴³"False Advertising Angers Consumers," *Beijing Review* (July 29, 1985), p. 8.

With the exception of a few pieces that expose extreme cases of corruption in the open press and some trade journal articles critical of corruption in journalism, the news media have not played a very active "watchdog" role on themselves. In May 1993, ten senior journalists from the revolutionary era collectively presented a petition to the Party and warned that the Party's journalism enterprise was "sliding into the muddle of money worship."⁴⁴ The petition, however, did not receive much attention from the news media at all.

In 1993, after all these regulations and ethical codes were in place, facing the growing phenomenon of corruption in journalism, the Party finally decided to launch a campaign against "paid journalism." On August 4, 1993, the Propaganda Department of the Party's Central Committee and the State Press and Publication Administration issued a joint circular to prohibit "paid journalism." The circular, entitled "Enhancing professional ethics in journalism and prohibiting 'paid journalism,'" calls for press units and journalists to adhere to the principle of serving the people and socialism, adhere to the Party principle and the principle of truth, abide by the law and professional ethics, be honest in performing their duties and defend the reputation and image of the news media.⁴⁵

On the same day, the Party's Propaganda Department lectured top media officials from major national media organizations in Beijing at a forum to discuss the issue and advocated measures to carry out the campaign. For a short period, the news media in China waged a campaign against "paid journalism." Meetings were called at all levels of government in charge of media organizations. Editorials and public notices were published. More specific ethical codes and disciplines were established by

⁴⁴Han Wenhui, "'Paid Journalism' Must Be Eliminated both from the Inside and from the Outside," *Xinjiang Press Circles* (1993:5), p. 6.

⁴⁵Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party, State Press and Publications Administration, "Circular on Enhancing Professional Ethics in Journalism and Prohibiting 'Paid Journalism'," *People's Daily, Overseas Edition* (August 5, 1993), p. 3, in *FBIS* (August 5, 1993), p. 19.

individual news organizations. Telephone hot lines were set up for the public to report cases of "paid journalism."

While the campaign yielded some results in checking the practice of paid journalism, and some news organizations seemed to take the issue seriously (at least for a short time), overall, like many other anti-corruption campaigns waged by the Party in recent years, it was another case of "loud thunder, small raindrops." In some cases, the practice of "paid journalism" was simply temporarily suspended, with units organizing news briefings saying to attending journalists, "Sorry, the wind is blowing hard at the moment, so we did not bring a gift for you, but next time ..." ⁴⁶ In other cases, the practice of "paid journalism" simply went underground and took more hidden forms. In still other cases, the business of "paid journalism" goes on as usual. When a public relations agent asked journalists about the impact of the campaign, the response was "you hear the noise of somebody coming upstairs, but nobody ever shows up." ⁴⁷ Thus, it is not even a case of "loud thunder, small raindrops", there are no raindrops at all! One of the major national newspapers, *Farmers Daily*, for example, organized a news briefing on behalf of a private company in Beijing during the height of the campaign and gave out 150 yuan to each attending journalists. ⁴⁸ In April 1994, eight months after the issuance of the initial circular, the Party's Propaganda Department issued another circular, urging the news media to continue to strengthen their ethics. ⁴⁹ This circular did not even receive much attention in the news media.

In fact, a circular is hardly enough to eliminate corruption in journalism. Such corruption has roots in the Party's very conception of journalism and in the very structure of the news media system in China today. A campaign for professional ethics is simply not enough. Moreover, as Xia Shangzhou observes, the Party is not at all

⁴⁶Lu Rongxiang, "Reflections upon Receiving 'Notices'," *Journalism Front* (1994:3), p. 23.

⁴⁷Interview with "S," October 1994.

⁴⁸"Paper Pays Journalists to Attend News Conference," AFP in English (October 20, 1993), in *FBIS* (October 20, 1993), p. 16.

⁴⁹*People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (April 26, 1994).

tough on this issue. The 1993 circular, like all the government regulations before it, did not deal with issues such as "three-warranty reporting" nor essay and news reporting competitions sponsored by government units and business organizations. And while the circular prohibits units from giving cash and negotiable securities to journalists, it does not prohibit the giving and taking of material gifts.⁵⁰ Moreover, neither government regulations nor ethical codes nor the Party's circular prohibits journalists from engaging in secondary occupations. Compared with similar regulations and ethical codes for other media systems around world, Chinese requirements are very soft.

Indeed, the Party's campaign against "paid journalism" may have the unexpected effect of spreading the practice. As one radio news producer observed, the Party's campaign against "paid journalism" made many businesses and individuals who had not heard about these practices suddenly realize the need to try them in order to get favourable coverage.⁵¹

Roots of Corruption in Journalism

Corruption in journalism practices is not confined to China alone, but the degree and scope is perhaps China's unique contribution to world journalism. Journalism historian Li Shiyi concluded from his study of Chinese newspapers over the past one hundred years as well as newspapers in Hongkong, Taiwan and developed countries that the particular connection between news and business currently found in the Chinese news media is rare elsewhere.⁵² The extent of the corruption suggests that the problem is systemic. Although some people think that it is only a transitional phenomenon, the problem appears to be worsening. It is a manifestation of the conflict between the continuing dominance of practices and concepts derived from the Party press tradition and commercialization of the news media and values associated with the market. Party

⁵⁰Xia Shangzhou, "From 'Paid Journalism' to Unfair Competition," *News Communication* (1994:2), p. 7.

⁵¹Interview with journalist "N," November, 1994.

⁵²Li Jie, "The Confusion in Journalism Circles," *Chinese Journalists* (1993:7), p. 8.

journalism has not been replaced by commercial journalism in China, as was the case in 19th century America, in which the penny press, a new form of journalism with its own institutional character, challenged the dominance and logic of the partisan press⁵³ and gradually replaced it. In the Chinese context, it is the Party news media system itself that is being commercialized. The news media simultaneously operate with two different logics - the Party logic and the market logic. The conflicts and contradictions between these two different logics provide fertile ground for the proliferation of different forms of "paid journalism."

Old Concepts, New Contexts

Party journalism emphasizes positive reporting, especially the achievements of government departments, businesses and individuals. It creates model enterprises, model government units and model workers in various areas. Under a planned economy, when enterprises have no advertising needs, this type of news reporting is of little immediate economic consequence. But within the context of a market economy, it becomes a form of covert advertising and a public relations exercise for the reported subjects. The reporting of a product winning a prize or a hotel receiving an award for quality service becomes effective advertising. For a medical doctor who runs a private clinic, nothing is more effective than a feature story about how capable he/she is and how selflessly he/she serves his/her patients.

Compare the concepts and effects of "news" in the pre- and post-reform eras. In the earlier period news is openly identified as propaganda for Party/government policy.

⁵³Of course, partisan journalism in American was rather different from Party journalism in China. For one, the American partisan press was a press of competing political parties, rather than a single ruling party; for another, American political parties did not necessarily directly own and control the press, as is the case in China. For a description of the American partisan press, see Frank L. Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 260 Years, 1690-1950* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959); for analyses of the rising of the American penny press, see Micheal Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), and Dan Schiller, *Objectivity and the News: The Public and the Rise of Commercial Journalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

The following are examples of the typical news-writing formula. Factory X correctly follows policy Y with the result that it achieves Z. Company X carries out the open door policy (Y) and establishes a successful joint venture (Z). Government department X follows policy instruction Y and does a good job in Z.

In the reform era Party and government have promoted the concept of news media as instruments of economic construction and encouraged the involvement of news media in the micro-economic stimulation of market demand for products and services. The typical news-writing formula is not significantly different from that of the pre-reform era. Factory X boldly carries out management reform, and as a result, productivity soars, quality improves, or firm Y invests in advanced technology with excellent returns on its investment.

In both the pre-reform and the reform era, "news" writing is a public relations exercise. Rather than transforming the old system, the new system reinforces its essential character. For example, Sheng Taifu and his Great Wall Machinery and Electronics Corporation were portrayed as positive models by the news media. Had they not been exposed, the media's campaign waged on his behalf would have been taken as a good example of reporting on developments in business and promoting economic prosperity.

Because news media reporting brings economic benefits to business, many enterprise managements feel obligated to provide journalists and news organizations with gifts, and advertising contracts and sponsorships in return. Many journalists and news organizations have poorly developed notions of professional ethics. Some even think this mutual assistance and reciprocity is reasonable and justified. The definition of news in the Party journalism tradition provides plenty of opportunities for doing public relations and advertising in this way. Compared with advertisements, news stories, features, and editorial commentary are more credible and therefore more effective. Moreover, the expense to compensate journalists is much less than buying advertising

time or space. Hence, "paid journalism" has become the most cost-effective means of advertising for business or individual entrepreneurs.⁵⁴ This remains true even though some clients have indeed invested a lot in media organizations and journalists.⁵⁵

There are enormous numbers of willing buyers. Journalists and the news media are well-positioned to sell the "news" commodity which these clients wish to buy. The special commodity in this unusual market exchange, however, is defined by the Party and derived from the tradition of Party journalism. The Party may blame business and journalists for this unethical and illegal market exchange, but it is its own construction of what is news that makes such an exchange not only possible but also beneficial to both parties involved.

Economic Realities and Occupational Disorientations

Journalists and news media become willing partners in this exchange for a number of reasons. Declining government subsidies means that the news media have to find their own source of financing. In this drive to create income, some news media organizations inappropriately apply the contract responsibility system to each department turning them into revenue generating units.⁵⁶ In order to fulfil the contracted amount, journalists and editors are given individual financial incentives and fulfil their financial responsibilities by practicing all sorts of "paid" journalism. A television station, for example, signed a financial responsibility contract with its news department, which required it to contribute 100,000 yuan a year to the station. The

⁵⁴A news producer in a provincial capital city conducted the following calculation for me. There are approximately thirty national and local media outlets in the city. Assuming that a business gives one journalist from each media outlet two hundred yuan in a publicity event, the company only spends six thousand yuan. Such an amount can hardly buy much advertising space in a single medium. But such an amount in the form of bribe to journalists may get the company's news across a wide range of news outlets in the whole city.

⁵⁵A company manager reportedly spent 170,000 yuan on twenty newspapers and magazines, which published tens of thousands of words to publicize him. See, Wang Huiquang, "Developing a Commodity Economy and Building a Journalism Team," *Journalism Front* (1992:3), p. 19.

⁵⁶Contract responsibility systems whereby individual workshops in manufacturing plants and shops assume responsibility for their own profits and losses have been introduced in many enterprises throughout China as part of the enterprise management reforms since the early 1980s.

news department further stipulated that an individual could get thirty percent of the income she or he solicited for the station. Whenever there were events such as business grand openings, anniversary celebrations, release of new products, announcement of new patents, or other opportunities, the news staff would solicit a publicity piece for the paid information program and at the same time offer a free promotional piece on the regular news program.⁵⁷

In some news organizations, even individual journalists in editorial departments are assigned a revenue-generating responsibility. Li Jie, a writer from the Beijing People's Radio Station, for example, reported that a news organization in Beijing signed revenue-generating contracts with editorial departments stipulating that a unit would get a bonus if its income surpassed the contracted amount. If they could not meet their targets, directors, reporters, and editors would be penalized financially. The contracted amount for the ten reporters and editors responsible for business reporting was three million yuan a year. Soon after the signing of the contract, a poster went up on the wall of the office building: "Three million a year, 300,000 per person. Everybody must work hard, if not, get out of here!"⁵⁸ Li also reported that many journalists soon found a strategy to get sponsorships. They would write a positive story about a unit first and then approach the unit and ask for a sponsorship.⁵⁹ Journalists, in a way, are "forced" to practice "paid journalism" by their news organizations' inappropriate financing policies.

Indeed, under the drive to generate income and the prevailing glorification of getting rich, journalists have experienced a dramatic occupational dislocation. A popular ditty circulating in journalism circles since 1992 captures the situation.

The first class of journalists run their own businesses;

The second class of journalists trade stocks;

⁵⁷Wang Xing, "The Advantages and Disadvantages of the Responsibility System in the News Media," p. 19.

⁵⁸Li Jie, p. 7.

⁵⁹Ibid.

The third class of journalists solicit advertising;

The fourth class of journalists receive red envelopes;

The fifth class of journalists write for other media outlets;

The last class of journalists write for their own newspaper.

There are different versions of this ditty,⁶⁰ but the underlying message is always that the best and most capable journalists are the ones who make the most money.

There is an intended sarcasm, but the importance of money making as an evaluative standard for journalists is underscored nevertheless. As Li Jie writes:

In news organizations, the standard that evaluates journalists has become multi-dimensional. A journalist should first be able to write and secondly, be able to create income. Those who are unable to solicit money feel inadequate, especially when receiving bonuses derived from income created by others. Conversely, those who are poor in news reporting can still feel good about themselves if they are able to make money... There are dual standards even in the evaluation of media officials... A responsible person from a Beijing media outlet openly declared in a meeting: "A departmental head who is incapable of creating income is not a good one!"⁶¹

Under such circumstances, those journalists who concentrate on their investigative and writing skills find themselves out of fashion, out of place. Journalist Zhang Jianxing expresses the dismay felt by such individuals:

After being a journalist for so many years and after winning so many journalism awards, I woke up one morning and found myself in the last class of journalists. Knowing that I am still writing, a friend praises me for being pure and innocent. Looking at the strange smile on his face, I have no tears in my eyes, but there is bitterness in my heart.⁶²

Peer pressure and the imperative to get along can mean that the practice of "paid journalism" becomes a necessity rather than an ethical choice. When the majority of reporters pick up the red envelopes, the few who do not may cause discomfort among their colleagues as well as upsetting the "host."

The sudden cutting off of subsidies and the imperative to survive and, in some cases, the get rich fast mentality push news organizations to obtain money by any

⁶⁰For example, one version ranks the first class of journalists as those who sell State secrets.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Zhang Jianxing, "Which Class of Journalists to Be?" *Journalism Front* (1993:4), p. 14.

means possible. Smaller, specialized newspapers are particularly aggressive. Many of these newspapers were established during the reform years, and they usually do not get much financial support from their sponsoring units. In some cases, the profit motive is the principle reason for their existence. Specialized newspapers are disadvantaged in the advertising market. Their journalists are usually not properly trained and have little knowledge of the basic journalism standards. These papers usually have only a loose affiliation with their sponsoring institutions, be it a government department or non-profit organization. Thus, unlike major Party organs, their work is not closely supervised. All these factors make them most likely to practice extreme forms of commercialism. In addition to the publication of advertising as news and the selling of newspaper pages, some of these newspapers have more to sell, including the selling of directorships of the newspaper's board, the selling of press cards, even the newspaper itself -- its registration number.

The low income of journalists also contributes to the temptations to sell journalism for money. In a way, to earn extra income through "paid journalism" has become an economic necessity. If you don't earn some extra income, as everybody else is doing, you and your family will be relatively deprived. Under the existing media system, journalists are government employees; their salaries are set by the state in accordance with their professional ranks. There are four professional rankings. In 1993, the base salary for each rank was 180, 140, 113, and 82 yuan respectively. When bonuses and subsidies are added, the monthly income was between 300-400 yuan, which, under the market economy, was just enough to buy a pair of imported running shoes. It was barely enough to survive, and in a context of intensive life-style advertising, few people are happy with just maintaining the minimum standard of living, not to mention journalists, who have seen the lavish consumption of China's *nouveau riche*. Moonlighting, dining at public expense, and accepting gifts and cash bribes is a way of life among most of China's officialdom. Indeed, for some of these

people, the regular salary is almost negligible. Payday does not generate much excitement at all. For most journalists, the temptation of one item of paid news reporting that can bring in a red envelope containing the equivalent of half or a whole month's salary or a television set equivalent to the value of a whole year's salary is just too much to resist. Even a meal that provides all sorts of delicacies rarely found on the family dinner table is very appealing, not to mention an advertising deal that can bring in the equivalent of years of salary.

The Double Burden of Over-Politicization and Political Repression

The old mechanism of control is also at least partly responsible for the growth of unethical journalism practices. Within the tradition of Party journalism, the only standard of discipline is political correctness. Journalists and media officials are evaluated on political standards alone; they are criticized or fired only because they have made a political mistake in their work. Such limited criteria have affected virtually all journalists and media officials, from rank and file reporters all the way to the Party's Central Propaganda Department. The political standard becomes the only standard both of self-discipline and of control from above. Political loyalty takes precedence and even replaces professional integrity. Professionalism and journalism ethics are not stressed. When ethics are promoted at all, it is often highly abstract and politicized, as in the principle of "serving the people." Journalism organizations and media officials are preoccupied with the political management of journalists.⁶³

The first code of journalism ethics was not drafted until 1991. With the exception of a few slogan-like Party instructions, such as serving socialism, serving the people, observing the party principle, and specific instructions about how to produce

⁶³News reporter "G" in Beijing described the mentality of news division chiefs in an interview in this way, "What will make them happy is to see that all the reporters under their supervision are sitting in the news room and not going out to stir up political troubles. They will be most happy if they frequently have bonuses to handout to the reporters."

politically correct reporting, neither the Party nor the news media themselves have concrete guidelines regarding ethical issues in journalism. Thus, when the market economy, and with it, commissions, business opportunities, private companies and business people with red envelopes in their hands suddenly appeared, neither journalists as individuals nor journalism as an institution were prepared to deal with it in an appropriate way.

Although the Party blames money worship and moral corruption on the part of journalists for the rapidly expanding practice of "paid journalism," there are important political causes as well. Journalism in China is a repressive institution, especially since 1989. Journalists' creativity and investigative initiatives are often repressed. Tight political control means that there is little professional autonomy and little prospects for an aspiring journalist to develop professionally, to do enterprising, investigative reporting. Morale among journalists is generally low. The practice of Party journalism as usual, with endless reports of meetings, achievements, and role models makes the craft of journalism dull and unchallenging. As a result, journalists' talents are being diverted into the business sector, either to the newly-established business operations within the news media themselves or to independent enterprises.⁶⁴ Some journalists have quit their jobs and started their own business operations.

In addition to higher income and better benefits, journalists find less restriction and more opportunities to develop themselves and use their creativity in the business sector. Zhang Jianxing, a well-known journalist, describes the situation with the following story. A very capable colleague of his gave up his job as a journalist and took an "untenured" position in a newly established stock firm. On the surface, the reason was that the business firm provided housing, but the underlying reason was that "journalism is dull!"⁶⁵ In Guangdong, the best news bureau chief of *Nanfang Daily*

⁶⁴This trend is true of workers in other cultural industries as well, for example, writers and film makers. See Joseph M. Chan, "Commercialization without Independence," p. 25-7.

⁶⁵Zhang Jianxing, p. 14.

became the manager of the newspaper's advertising firm. The "number one pen" of *Shenzhen Special Economic Zone News* also became the manager of an advertising firm. "It is a creative and stimulating job, it fascinates me", she said.⁶⁶ Few journalists would use the same terms to describe their jobs.

Many journalists have admirable professional and political aspirations but end up practicing "paid journalism" because of the lack of opportunity for the realization of their professional aspirations.⁶⁷ Indeed, it is perhaps not surprising that "paid journalism" became widespread after 1989. There is, in a way, an element of passive political resistance in the practice of "paid journalism."

Commercialization without Independence

The simultaneous operation of the Party logic and the market logic in the news media system is the most important structural reason for the spread of corruption. The 19th century commercial penny press in the West emerged as independent capitalist business operations from the very beginning and did not have formal institutional ties political parties and state institutions. In contrast, news media in China, no matter whether they are completely or partially dependent on commercial revenue, all have institutional affiliations with the Party, the government or quasi-official institutions. Their monopoly status and their existence as functioning parts of Party and government apparatuses means that they do not have the institutional status of independent economic entities, even though most of them are managed financially as independent economic entities. This situation of "media commercialization without independence," as Joseph M. Chan has put it so appropriately, means that the market principle is not completely applicable to the Chinese news media. There is not a media market in which

⁶⁶Wang Fang, p. 52.

⁶⁷This point was suggested to me by "A," a prominent media scholar, and "L," a journalist, in separate interviews in October 1994. They said that since journalists were not allowed to exercise their sense of social responsibility in news reporting, they turned to gain practical material benefits for themselves. Political repression is an important reason for corruption in journalism.

there is competition for survival among media outlets. No media outlet's survival depends entirely on its market success. CCTV, for example, is a state monopoly. Although it depends heavily on advertising revenue, its survival does not depend on its market success. The same is the case with Party organs at various levels. Even if a Party organ fails to attract any advertising, the Party still cannot afford to close it!

Because of the institutional ties between news media and the Party and government apparatus, Party and government bodies are able to use their administrative powers to promote sales of their affiliated newspapers. Compulsory subscription is possible because most of the subscriptions are institutional rather than individual. In fact, subscription to Party newspapers is still a political duty and is still strictly enforced. Party propaganda departments issue orders, organize meetings, and use all kinds of measures to ensure the subscription of Party newspapers. In 1994, such measures included assigning quotas, establishing responsibility contracts, financial policies that allowed the use of basically all kinds of public funds for subscription to Party organs, as well as moral sanctions.⁶⁸

In addition to Party newspapers, government departments all have their own specialized newspapers. They often organize similar mobilization meetings, issue circulars, and assign compulsory subscription quotas to their respective subordinates. In Sichuan province, eighty provincial government departments published 186 newspapers and journals in 1991, all for sale.⁶⁹ A poor county in Hebei province had to subscribe

⁶⁸The following excerpt from news story in *Heilongjiang Daily* (October 14, 1994, p. 1) provides a detailed view of how local Party authorities carry out their subscription drive. "Jixi city held the 1995 newspaper subscription meeting. On behalf of the city Party committee, Jixi city Party propaganda department chief signed Party newspapers and journals subscription responsibility contracts with Party committees from 124 units. The city's Party committee issued compulsory subscription orders to these party committees... The city's Party propaganda department and the city's finance bureau jointly issued a circular on the use of funds for newspaper subscriptions in 1995. The circular stipulated that units can use Party membership dues, youth league membership dues, meeting funds, operational funds, research funds, education funds and other public funds to subscribe to Party newspapers and Party journals... Jixi city also suggested that Party committees at various levels should withdraw the honorary status a unit has previously acquired if it fails to fulfil subscription quotas for its Party newspapers and journals."

⁶⁹"Sichuan Declares War Against Corrupt Practices in Newspaper Subscriptions," *Guangming Daily* (December 23, 1991), p. 3.

to thirty-two newspapers not distributed through the post office.⁷⁰ If national Party and specialized newspapers distributed through the post office are included, the total number is even larger. In order to fulfil newspaper subscription quotas assigned from above, one township government in Sichuan province, after using up all its operating budget, was forced to make up the rest by taking it from the salaries of cadres.⁷¹ In a middle school in a remote mountainous area in a poor county in Zhejiang province, all the grade nine students were forced to subscribe to the county's Party newspaper. Many of these students can hardly afford to attend school, but they have to subscribe to a Party newspaper that does not address their interests at all! Compulsory subscription to newspapers, like many forms of extra legal fines and charges, forced "contributions," and purchases of unneeded goods levied on peasants, has become another means by which authorities extract funds from institutions and individuals under their control.

Administrative measures used to be the only means by which Party newspapers secured compulsory subscriptions during the pre-reform years. Now administrative orders are supplemented with material incentives. Newspapers often award high commissions to units and individuals who help them in subscription drives. Some newspapers even offer free advertising and the publication of favorable news and feature items in exchange for a unit's subscriptions.

In short, although the financing of the news media has been fully or at least partially marketized, media organizations are not yet fully independent economic entities operating in the marketplace, and their survival is not determined by the market. The "sale" of newspapers is also far from being marketized. The papers that are officially subscribed are not necessarily the ones favored by readers. A middle school with a limited budget for newspaper subscriptions, for example, is obligated to subscribe to national, provincial and county Party organs as well as the specialized

⁷⁰*Guangming Daily* (December 10, 1991), p. 3.

⁷¹*Guangming Daily* (December 23, 1991), p. 3.

education papers published by government education authorities at various levels. If they do not fulfil these subscription requirements, they risk compromising their status as a "good" or "model" school, and other possible negative consequences. In a society that is still very centralized and hierarchical, few institutions want to take such a risk. But after all these subscription obligations are fulfilled, there is little money left to subscribe to what the teachers and students actually want to read. A group of young teachers, for example, might like to read *China Youth News* or *China Sports News*, but after fulfilling the compulsory subscriptions, the school usually has no money left for these papers. In the case of students, too, a newspaper such as *China Youth News* would be so much more interesting and meaningful to them. If they had a choice, most of them would not take the dull, poorly edited local Party paper. They would very likely pool their money and subscribe to their favorite newspaper.

The absence of a genuine media market means that Party and government newspapers do not have to be accountable to their readers. Television stations in China are also notorious for not being able to keep up with their publicized schedules, which in a way is a contract of trust between the stations and their audiences. The failure to follow their schedules reflects a lack of commitment toward the audience and the violation of such trust. As Wang Shuang writes:

Newspapers, radio stations, and television stations all hold iron rice bowls. Circulation numbers and audience rates do not affect their survival. So long as they do not commit serious political mistakes, they can continue their operation year after year despite "paid journalism" all over the newspaper and the station. Under the current situation in our country, a news media outlet is often the "single child," the only shop on the block. Nobody competes with it, no matter whether it is good or bad. Even if a newspaper's subscriptions decrease at an annual rate of twenty percent, it will still not close its doors. Such a situation provides a hotbed for the growth of paid journalism.⁷²

Despite increased dependence on commercial revenue and the rhetoric about introducing market mechanisms in the news media by media scholars and even

⁷²Wang Shuang, p. 20.

bureaucrats in government, Party/state apparatuses are not willing to give up their control over the news media and allow them to become autonomous institutions in an independent public sphere. They will not allow the establishment of independent broadcasting stations and newspapers. Nor will they allow institutions to stop subscribing to major Party and government organs. This is media commercialization with "special Chinese characteristics."

Consequences of Corruption in Journalism

An important demand of journalists in the 1989 struggle for press freedom and the debate about press reform was the promotion of the watchdog role of the news media. For a long time, Party control has been the principle reason for the lack of critical reporting in the political sphere. Now journalists' submission to the power of money means that it is even less possible for journalism to fulfil the watchdog function. Being part of the problem themselves, how can one expect the news media to expose official corruption? False advertising, false news reporting, and the abundance of "paid journalism" of all forms means that the news media can hardly keep a critical eye on the business sector. While the Party and the government are struggling to establish the necessary order for the proper functioning of a market economy, the news media, with their mercantile journalism, actually help to promote unfair competition and various forms of illegal economic activity. Indeed, the news media are themselves directly and indirectly involved in fraud, profiteering, and other illegal economic activities.

Critical reporting in the economic sphere is so lacking in the regular news media that a special reporting campaign had to be organized from above in typical propaganda campaign fashion. In 1992, under the initiative of the Chinese Journalism Culture Promotion Committee and *People's Daily's* Economic Department and with the support of the State Council and other government agencies, twenty major national media

launched a news reporting campaign for product quality -- "the ten thousand li journey for product quality in China" (zhongguo zhiliang wanli xing). A special organizing committee was set up to determine reporting topics, assign specific topics to different media organization, and finalize reports.⁷³ The focus of the campaign was on product quality, the ratio between positive reporting and critical reporting was two to one.⁷⁴ The critical pieces exposed nearly twenty examples of quality problems. To ensure the quality of the campaign itself, CCTV even provided a special budget for journalists involved in the campaign to ensure that no "paid journalism" occurred during the reporting.⁷⁵ Perhaps because of the lack of critical scrutiny of product quality in the news media's regular fare and also due to the orchestrated effort of the national media as a whole, the campaign was widely applauded.⁷⁶ Ironically, even this high-profile reporting campaign itself was sabotaged by other journalists or individuals claiming to be journalists. There were seven cases in which journalist groups used the name of the campaign to blackmail business enterprises. One of these groups was able to extort one million yuan from businesses in Tianjin.⁷⁷

With the widespread practice of paid journalism in various forms, many journalists have joined those entrepreneurs and bureaucrats who have become rich first. They are the beneficiaries of economic reform and official corruption. With their newly acquired economic status, it becomes less likely that they will reflect the problems and concerns of ordinary people. With "three-warranty reporting," "invitation journalism," and bribery journalism, few journalists are willing to go to poor areas to conduct investigations. Journalism has become more and more detached from the ordinary

⁷³"Promoting Quality Consciousness Among the Population," *Journalism Front* (1992:4), pp. 6-7.

⁷⁴Ai Feng, "A Look at the Art of Critical Reporting in 'Ten Thousand Li Journey'," *Journalism Front* (1993:1), p. 18.

⁷⁵Lu Ye, *Chinese Television News Amidst Reform*, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Shanghai: Fudan University, 1994), p. 56.

⁷⁶Twenty national media outlets issued the same report on the same day plus a Xinhua release and local media transmission.

⁷⁷Even Ai Feng, *People's Daily's* high profile journalist and chairperson of the "ten thousand li journey" organizing committee, met one such fake reporting team on his tour. See, Wang Qing, p. 34.

people. Instead, the news media are busy reporting the rising stars in the business community and the lifestyles of the rich and famous, while the plight of millions of peasants travelling across the country in search of jobs remains largely unreported. When these people are reported in the news media at all, they often appear in a negative light, as symbolized by the use of the word "mangliu," a massive flow of human beings in an undirected, blind fashion, which implies disorder and a threat to social order.

The following example is illustrative of the current state of journalism. During the Spring Festival holidays in 1993, after a year of hard work in the sweatshops of the coastal cities, many young women factory workers returned to their hometowns in the countryside for a break. The news reported that many of these people returned home by air rather than taking the less expensive trains. The national media claimed that these factory girls had become so rich and enjoyed such a comfortable lifestyle that they took flights home for their holidays! What a great achievement of the economic reforms! In fact, most of these workers were quite unhappy about spending their hard-earned money in this way. They wanted to use their savings to help their poor families. They took the flight only because they were unable to buy the less expensive train tickets. The harsh reality was that train tickets were very difficult to get due to increasing demand and the inadequate investment in railway transportation. Chaotic management and corruption such that railway ticket agents are selling tickets on the black market rather than through normal channels also account for the difficulties ordinary people experience in trying to purchase tickets. On the other hand, with huge investments on airlines, airplane tickets are easy to buy, although they are much more expensive than train tickets. Rather than asking these unfortunate workers their actual reasons for "choosing" to travel by air, not to mention the possibility of exploring the problem of railway ticket shortage and its consequences for ordinary travellers, journalists reported

the news to fit the propaganda needs of the Party and in accordance with their own limited understanding due to ignorance caused by their own insulated, elitist lifestyle.

Under the tradition of Party journalism, reporters are used to taking orders from the party and the government as to what and how to report. Now, in addition to orders from above, journalists have invitations from businesses and others who have money and publicity needs. In both cases, journalists do not have to take initiative and develop investigative skills. Gradually they lose their ability to find news for themselves and to do interpretive and analytical reporting. When the president of a television station asked journalists to come up with their own topics and to go to the grassroots to find news for themselves, the response from the journalists was that without invitation, where were they going to go to find news?⁷⁸ Indeed, because invitation journalism and other unethical practices are becoming the norm rather than the exception, some journalism educators have begun to worry that a whole generation of journalists may have been affected. Journalism professors are still teaching ethics and the techniques for investigative journalism, with the following attitude: "I know they are not practical in the real world of journalism, but at least, I want my students to know what is right and what is not."⁷⁹

The inflated image of economic prosperity and the lack of any critical reporting about the economic reforms seem to serve the Party's purpose of political control very well at least for the short term. Advertising-as-news is politically safe not only for journalists but also for the Party. When journalists are preoccupied with meals, gifts, and chasing after advertising contracts and sponsorships and writing promotional pieces, they have less time for critical reporting that might touch a sensitive political nerve. But there is the other side of the coin. The abundance of news reporting on newly established businesses, on successful entrepreneurs, and on business prosperity in

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Interview with journalism instructor "U," October 1994.

general has fueled news workers' own rising expectations and, with it, frustrations with their jobs and unexciting daily routines. This has been destabilizing.

Most importantly, for journalists as a profession and journalism as an institution, widespread corruption has meant a loss of credibility among the people. A public opinion survey in Beijing in 1988 revealed that journalists were at the top of groups who had a bad image among the public. At the same time, between twenty to thirty-five percent of the people surveyed did not trust the news.⁸⁰ There are no more recent survey figures available on the topic, but it is very likely that the image of journalists in the 1990s has grown even worse and that there is an even large greater percentage of people who do not trust the news. The following are some of the common perceptions I collected during my research in Beijing in late 1994.

Forget about the mouthpiece of the party and the people. The news media are the mouthpieces of whomever gives them money.

Who cares about a laudatory piece in the newspaper? Spend a few bucks and you can buy one.

The stuff on the news media has nothing to do with news at all; it's all about money.

When journalists come, they take the gifts, grab the material that has been prepared for them and go.

Journalists are not only losing credibility among the general public but also among the business community. While the giving and receiving of bribes usually benefits both the giver and the journalists, the very fact that news can be bought does not earn them much respect among the business community. Journalists involved in "three-warranty reporting," for example, have been dubbed by the business community as "high-class beggars." "The value of a journalist is nothing more than a meal and a bottle of beer," commented one factory director after entertaining a journalist with a meal. With the growing appetite of journalists and news organizations and ever more cases of extortion, many businesses, especially smaller ones that cannot afford a huge

⁸⁰Ruan Guanrong, *A Macro-Perspective on Broadcasting* (Beijing: China Broadcasting Press, 1991), pp. 183-184.

advertising and public relations budget and those who have been victimized by the news media, have begun to hate journalists and to avoid the news media. Enterprises are now plagued with demands for payments of fees and taxes from all sorts of officials from various government commercial and business administration offices. Business people complain loudly about incessant demands and harassment.⁸¹ Journalists are now viewed in a similar fashion because when they pay a visit to a business, they often ask for money, and enterprises cannot afford to let them return with an empty hand.⁸²

Finally, the current degradation of journalism is damaging for the struggle to democratize the news media system in China. While this cause is perhaps still kept alive in the hearts of many journalists, corruption in their ranks provides a good pretext for the Party to put journalists on the defensive and to defuse the pressure for news media reform. Moreover, the Party might also use the campaign against corruption as an excuse to punish politically rebellious journalists. During the 1980s, journalists and liberal reformers were able to use such concepts as "factuality" and "objectivity" to convey their critique of Party journalism for twisting news to fit propaganda needs. But now, after being known for twisting news to get money, journalists can no longer make a claim to these conceptual weapons without being perceived as hypocritical. It is the Party who now makes claims to these concepts in its campaign against journalists. As Ding Guangen, the Party's ideological chief has argued, the practice of news writing for illicit payment and describing a bad thing as good in return for bribes is "totally against the principle that news reporting must be based on facts, objectivity and fairness."⁸³ Against such a charge, Chinese journalists currently have no defence.

⁸¹Such complaints are well expressed in popular sayings such as "Watch out for fires, burglars and journalists!" See, Lu Xiaohuang, "Two Kinds of 'Watching Out for Journalists'," *Chinese Journalists* (1993:12), p. 29. See also, Li Jie, p. 7.

⁸²A manager from a Beijing business company provided astonishing statistics. On April 28, 1993, the company received thirty-three visitors and/or visiting teams. Altogether they demanded a total of 500,000 yuan in various forms. The company could not afford to offend any of these uninvited visitors. Among these thirty-three groups, at least one third were news media or media-related organizations. See *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1993:7), p. 9.

⁸³*People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (August 5, 1993), p. 1.

Chapter Six

Broadcasting Reform Amidst Commercialization

Introduction

Although the dominant structures and conceptual frameworks of the news media have remained relatively unchanged under commercialization, new institutions, new formats and new content have emerged *within* the news media system, gradually gaining momentum and expanding their range. More specifically, while the overall situation remains commercialization without independence, commercialization has created some opportunities for relative autonomy at least in some areas where the intertwining of Party control and market-oriented journalism has taken different forms and created a different set of tensions and accommodations. This chapter examines three different sites of relatively autonomous innovation in broadcasting, the Pearl River Economic Radio Station (PRER), the Shanghai East Radio Station, and the CCTV News and Commentary Department, while the next chapter looks at similar developments in the newspaper sector.

The PRER: From "Official" to "Popular" Model

As discussed in Chapter two, broadcasting has for decades been organized on the basis of national and local monopolies, with one radio and one television station under each level of government administration. The broadcasting sector best illustrates the hierarchic and monopolistic structure of the Chinese news media system. The policy of allowing only one radio and one television station at any jurisdictional level means that expansion can only occur in two ways: the establishment of new radio and television stations by government administrations that have not had their own stations, usually governments at the municipal and county levels, or the addition of new

channels to an already existing station, usually in stations run by the national government, provincial governments and municipal governments in large cities.

Thus, by the mid-1980s, it was common for a provincial radio station to have at least two different channels with different programming schedules and content. The traditional "people's radio station" is in fact a multi-channel radio network that provides a wide range of informational, entertainment and educational programming. The main channel usually carries a comprehensive set of news and current affairs, educational and arts programming and reaches the most people in a given administrative region. The secondary channels transmit some of the general interest programming from the main channel at different time blocks and provide some original programming in specialized areas, such as music and business information.

Although piecemeal reform to increase entertainment content and to provide more news about the society at large (in contrast to news about Party and government activities) have made broadcasting more attractive, the essential character of broadcasting by and large remains unchanged. The following description, drawn from broadcasting researcher Luo Hongdao's characterization of the "official model" of broadcasting, serves as a useful recapitulation of the main characteristics of broadcasting under the traditional media system:¹

1) The broadcasting system emphasizes the media's mouthpiece role for the Party and the government and stresses the transmission of policy directives and the education of the public. It neglects the role of broadcasting as simultaneously the mouthpiece of the people and the means by which the people exercise supervision over Party and government. It neglects the direct participation of the public in broadcasting.

2) Programs stress the propagandist, educational, inspirational and guidance functions, and overlook the function of broadcasting as a means of social

¹Lou Hongdao, "From 'Official Model' to 'Popular Model': the Path to Reform at the Pearl River Economic Radio Station," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1988:3), pp. 11-12.

communication. In other words, political and ideological functions are fully exploited, but the personal, social, and psychological dimensions of communication remain unexplored.

3) There is an unequal power relationship between the broadcaster and the audience. One is at the top, the educator, the guide; the other is at the bottom, the one to be educated and to be guided. One is an active agent, the other is a passive object. There is no equal, reciprocal exchange between the two parties. This unequal power relationship is characterized by the authoritative, serious sounding, impersonal, standard Mandarin delivery of the announcer.

4) The organizational structure of the media corresponds to Party and government functional departments, in order to directly coordinate with the work of the Party and the government. Programs cater to the needs of government officials and elite audiences.

5) The reporting and editing process is separated from the broadcasting process. Reporters, editors and announcers have distinct functions; one is not to be mixed with the other. Announcers, for example, do not have anything to do with the preparation of news reports. Their only task is to read the material that has been prepared by journalists and editors and previewed by news directors or somebody even higher in the a station's administrative hierarchy.²

The introduction of new production values and techniques in a piecemeal fashion in the early 1980s did not fundamentally change any of the above characteristics. This "official model" of broadcasting became increasingly unpopular with audiences under the new conditions of economic reform and openness. With the popularization of television by the mid-1980s, radio in particular was having a difficult

²Based on own observation during my interships in two radio stations in 1983 and 1984, it was clear that all broadcasts were pre-recorded and pre-censored. When a recording was being made, an editor was usually sitting outside the recording studio to catch any errors made by the announcer. Only after corrections were made was the tape handed to technicians for transmission.

time attracting audiences and, as a result, advertising. However, any sense of urgency was repressed by fears of uncertainty and the desire to avoid political risks.

The Rise of the Pearl River Economic Radio Station

The Guangdong People's Radio Station, however, was in a different situation. With reform and opening up, listening to outside broadcasting was no longer considered as a counter-revolutionary activity. While listening to foreign broadcasting stations such as the VOA and BBC was mostly confined to the intellectual community, the mass audience in Guangzhou tuned in to commercial radio stations from neighboring Hongkong. By the mid-1980s, with increasing commercial activities linking Hongkong and Guangdong Province, Hongkong commercial radio stations actively sought audiences in the Guangzhou area to increase their advertising sales. They provided programs that were specifically designed to attract audiences in the Guangzhou area.

Guangzhou audiences found the information and light entertainment programming of Hongkong commercial radio broadcasting particularly fresh and appealing when compared with the more sombre political and educational content of the provincial radio network. Thus, the majority of the audience in Guangzhou and surrounding areas began to tune in to Hongkong commercial radio stations. A February 1985 survey by three young Guangdong People's Radio Station journalists found that in the core of Guangzhou city, audience share for Hongkong commercial radio stations was 84.6%. Only 15.4% of the audience listened to their own network. On the streets, almost all the taxi drivers tuned in to Hongkong commercial stations.³

Out of professional pride and the need to lure back the audience from Hongkong stations, Guangdong People's Radio Station undertook more extensive reforms by

³Chen Dahai, "Competition: The Motive Force for Radio Reform," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1988:1), p. 71.

transforming its Cantonese channel into a new station: the Pearl River Economic Radio Station (PRER) on December 15, 1986. The more liberal reform environment of Guangdong and the relative political openness in Beijing at the time made it possible for the station to obtain approval from broadcasting and Party authorities at both provincial and national levels. Moreover, the Guangdong broadcasting authority had a good case. If the Party's news media could not attract audiences in the first place, its propaganda could have no effect. Guangdong People's Radio Station emphasized in its proposal that the reform was a "change in form but not in nature" and framed the logic behind its new programming formats and techniques as upholding "laws" of mass communication that are universally applicable.⁴

With its new operational concepts, new format and content, the PRER was an immediate success. Within three months, the station commanded 54.9% of the audience share in the Guangzhou area. At the same time, the audience share of Hongkong stations dropped to 22%.⁵ During the subsequent five years, the station's audience rate remained above 50% in Guangzhou and nearby areas.⁶

Operational Concepts, Format and Content

The success of PRER can be attributed to its modification of the "official model" of broadcasting by readjusting its lopsided emphases and filling in certain gaps. The imperative to lure back audiences from competing Hongkong commercial stations forced the station to take the preferences of Guangzhou audiences rather than Party and

⁴Guangdong People's Radio Station, "Strive to Establish Broadcasting with Southern Chinese Characteristics," *South China Radio and Television Research* (1988:3), pp. 10-16, cited in Joseph M. Chan, "Media Internationalization in China: Processes and Tensions," *Journal of Communication* (44:3, Summer 1994), p. 76.

⁵Yu Tonghao, "The Birth of the Pearl River Economic Radio Station and Its Practices in the Past Year," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1988:1), p. 10.

⁶In 1990, the two Hongkong commercial radio stations that were very influential in the Guangzhou area changed their language of broadcasting from Cantonese to English and thus basically withdrew from Guangdong territories. The Guangdong People's Radio Station claimed that their withdrawal was the result of the loss of audiences to PRER. See, Guangdong People's Radio Station and Pearl River Economic Radio Station, "Sticking to the Perspective of Both Being Correct and Lively, Strive to Do a Good Job in Running Economic Radio Stations," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1991:6), p. 43.

government propaganda objectives as its primary consideration in programming. Yu Tonghao, vice-president of the station event went so far as to say that, "if there is a single most important line in governing the PRER programming ... [it is] that the audiences are the masters of PRER."⁷

The station has developed a set of principles for its programming. It orients toward ordinary people. It deals with issues at the grassroots level and addresses the concerns of ordinary people. In contrast to the "official model," PRER establishes itself as a "popular, informational, service and entertainment model" of radio.⁸ It defines its audience as the majority of the mass audience with a middle- to low-level of education.⁹ Rather than trying to indoctrinate the audience from the top and design programs around the propagandist intentions of leaders, the station attempts to relate to its audiences so as to "meet their needs, cater to their tastes, communicate with them, solicit their participation, serve them and accept their supervision."¹⁰

This policy orientation is reflected in the content and format of the station's programming. PRER largely "depoliticizes" its content and emphasizes economic and business affairs, light entertainment, and information about daily life. As reflected in its name, economic issues takes are predominant. The backbone of its nineteen-hour-ten minutes-a-day broadcasting is a business information broadcast at each full hour, including a wide range of paid information about specific business operations. Reflecting its a secondary position, news is broadcast at the half hour, with emphasis on business and social issues. In addition, there is a wide range of regular features on business and consumer affairs throughout its programming menu. Business content accounts for approximately one-third of the total broadcasting content. Non-

⁷Yu Tonghao, p. 10; see also, Qian Xinbo, "Revelations from Pearl River Economic Radio Station's Reform," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1988:3), pp. 8-9; and Luo Hongdao, p. 12.

⁸Yu Tonghao, p. 11.

⁹Zhang Jinqing, "Strengthening Subject Consciousness and Establishing Two-Way Communication," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1988:1), p. 28. See also, Luo Hongdao, p. 12.

¹⁰Yu Tonghao, p. 11.

controversial social, sports and personal affairs; light entertainment such as popular music and game shows; and service-oriented information on such topics as food, clothing, traffic and weather comprise the bulk of the station's programming.

Following the broadcasting format and style of presentation of its Hongkong competitors, PRER broadcasts large time-block magazine-type programs. The eight major magazine-type programs each contain news, information, and entertainment contents. Phone-ins, live broadcasts, studio audiences, and naturalistic modes of presentation have also been adopted.

The conventional process of broadcasting has been transformed. Live broadcast have replaced recorded programs. Program hosts with distinct personalities have replaced conventional broadcast announcers. Rather than simply reading from pre-edited and pre-censored material prepared by reporters and editors, these program hosts participate in gathering, editing and finalizing the material used in the programs. They broadcast live based on pre-approved program outlines and material gathered during the preparation process. They are allowed impromptu utterances to elaborate on the prepared material during broadcasting. Such a "personality" may be the main person responsible for a given program production team. They assume more responsibility and enjoy more autonomy in the production of programs than conventional announcers.

The arrangement of programs fits the daily rhythm of the audiences. While Sunday programming is mostly entertainment, the Monday to Saturday schedules accommodate the rhythms of the six-day work week.¹¹ The early morning show is a general interest program for audience listening while getting up, washing, exercising and eating breakfast. It is fast-paced. In the early morning, for example, it offers music to accompany exercises; during the breakfast hour, it provides news and business information to prepare the audience for work and conversation topics to share with

¹¹In May 1995, the work week for a large part of wage workers in China was reduced to five days, Monday to Friday.

colleagues. The 8:30 to 11:30 morning show is aimed at the elderly, housewives, private entrepreneurs doing business on the streets, and taxi drivers. Lunch hour programming provides commentaries on economic and social issues for the working audience and the family during the lunch break. In the afternoon, there are programs for farmers and children after school. Supper time shows and evening prime-time programming is meant to satisfy audience needs for relaxation and entertainment after a day's work. The station affirms audiences' "right to entertainment."

Our society's masters -- the masses have the right to receive legitimate entertainment during their time after work Entertainment is absolutely not just a means, it is at the same time the very content by which broadcasting serves the people. Therefore, PRER breaks with convention by not arranging propagandist and educational programming during the prime time before and after supper. Instead, it offers mainly entertaining content...¹²

To give substance to the newly (re)-discovered role of audiences as "masters" of radio, they are encouraged to participate in phone-in programs. They can phone in to request the broadcast of a particular song as a special gift to someone (of course, they have to pay the station). They can phone in during talk shows to discuss their personal problems and seek advice regarding jobs, personal relationships, home decoration, personal appearance, consumer choice, or similar concerns. They can also voice their complaints about negligence in provision of public services such as under-maintained roads; un-removed garbage, shortages and disrupted supply of water, gas, or electricity. They can phone in to comment on commodity quality and price, housing, or similar issues. PRER also literally brings radio closer to people by organizing live broadcast events from the streets. During its first year of operation, PRER broadcast approximately 3,000 phone-in programs and approximately 300,000 persons participated in its on-site live broadcast events.¹³

¹²Zheng Guangxing, "The Overall Function and Effectiveness of Broadcasting," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1988:1), p. 35.

¹³Lou Hongdao, pp. 14-15.

Radio hosts talk in everyday language, in a personal, intimate, warm, and soft tone, and present themselves as friends of the audience. The traditional dense and serious propaganda content is "diluted" by adding small talks, "nonsense," and music through skillful manipulation of the flexible magazine format.¹⁴

The Structure and the Political Nature of PRER

PRER, however, is not an independent radio station. Although its programming and format borrow heavily from Hongkong commercial radio stations, the station itself is not a copy of a Hongkong commercial station. It presents itself as a new station to the listeners; in reality, it is only one of the six channels operated by the Guangdong People's Radio Station. An editorial department under the People's Station is responsible for most of the magazine programs. PRER's hourly newscasts are provided by the news department of the People's Station. Some of the arts programming is also provided by the arts programming department of the People's Station. PRER, therefore, is in fact a subordinate unit under the People's Station. Its personnel, financing and resources are all under the control of the mother station. The People's Station's president and one of its vice-presidents are at the same time PRER's president and vice-presidents. Such an institutional setup, therefore, does not fundamentally challenge the one government-one radio station principle.

The word "economic" in the title is also an obvious attempt to remain politically correct and play it safe, a choice made "to reduce the risks and any resistance to reform."¹⁵ Its specialization in economic and business affairs fits well with the Party and government's policy priorities and the newly assigned role of the news media as instruments of economic construction. In this sense, the station does seem to live up to

¹⁴Liu Wei, "On the 'Dilution' of Radio Information Programming," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1988:1), p. 68-70.

¹⁵Zhu Yan, "The Current Conditions and Prospects for China's Economic Radio Stations," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1992:2), p. 5.

the name of being an "economic" radio station. But otherwise, the commercials, the station's audience orientation and heavy emphasis on entertainment is similar to programming on Hongkong commercial radio stations. The use of the vague and neutral term "economic" is safer than "commercial," a term the Party and government still reject.¹⁶

Despite its novel formats and contents, PRER does not pose a political threat within the broadcasting system. In fact, PRER performs its ideological function in its own specific way. As Zeng Guangsheng, Director of the PRER Editorial Department explains in an article summarizing the successful experience of the station:

In our program design, we include considerable service-oriented and entertainment content. We try to avoid straightforward and undisguised propaganda as much as possible. We want our audience to be educated in joyful laughter, in lovely music and in the cordial and warm language of our hosts without knowing it. We do not reject positive, straightforward propaganda, as in commentary programs, but more often, we want our programs to melt the party's lines, programmes and policies and correct thoughts into the minds of audiences in a clever (and natural) way, just as spring winds melt rains.¹⁷

Political conformity is strictly observed by the station. PRER makes it a station policy that "hosts and reporters do not articulate views that are inconsistent with those of the Central Party Committee."¹⁸ The station's self-acknowledgment of its role during periods of political unrest is especially telling. During 1987 student demonstrations, PRER claimed that it attracted youth and particularly university students with its programming and, as a result, the majority of them did not listen to the "incorrect propaganda of Hongkong stations" and thereby, as Yu Tonghao, vice-president of the station reported, "effectively stabilized the thoughts of youth and maintained a stable and unified situation."¹⁹ The ideological impact of this diversion

¹⁶The term "economic" (jingji) primarily refers to the station's content orientation. However, it can also carry a connotation related to the operational orientation of the station, i.e. for profit.

¹⁷Zeng Guangsheng, "The Programming Principles of the Pearl River Economic Radio Station," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1988:1), p. 65.

¹⁸Zhu Yan, "Guangdong Radio's Policies and Practices in Establishing Specialized Radio Stations," *Reference for Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1990:2), p. 23.

¹⁹Yu Tonghao, p. 10.

was, as Zeng Guangsheng, a program director of the station, argued, "no less than straightforward and positive propaganda."²⁰

While many traditional Party organs in Beijing became very active in the struggle for press freedom in early 1989 disrupting their regular routines and supporting the students and the movement in their reporting, PRER continued to offer its business and entertainment fare as usual. During that crucial political period, according to Zhu Yan, a policy researcher with the Minister of Radio, Film and Television, the station "did not say anything that was inconsistent with the Central Party Committee. It did not say anything about which it was not sure. Nor did it inject personal feelings into its broadcasting."²¹ Moreover, Zhu Yan continues, the station "followed the directions of the [Guangdong] provincial Party Committee, actively and effectively provided correct guidance to public opinion, and played a good role in suppressing turmoil and unifying the thoughts of people in the whole province...."²² These claims are made in official publications by the station's own leaders and approving researchers. While it is likely that they exaggerate the station's political effectiveness, they are indicative of intentions and possible effects.

Following the suppression of the pro-democracy movement, the political atmosphere was stifling; many people were depressed, and business activity declined due to policy readjustments. The cultural and entertainment industry suffered major setbacks as a result of the campaign against "peaceful evolution" to capitalism. In this context, PRER and the Guangdong branch of the China Trade Promotion Committee co-sponsored a large culture and trade fair in Guangzhou between December 23, 1989 and February 11, 1990, to provide people with a diversion during the New Year and Spring Festival holidays. Through its diverse displays, activities, and upbeat tone, the fair aimed to "create a stable, prosperous, and joyful social atmosphere to greet the

²⁰Zeng Guangsheng, p. 65.

²¹Zhu Yan, p. 23.

²²Ibid.

arrival of the 1990s."²³ In staging the fair, the station shouldered its responsibility as the Party's mouthpiece and shared the concerns of the Party and government for political stability. In short, it was organized "mainly for its political and social effects."²⁴

Thus, by responding to economic, personal and psychological needs of the audience, PRER expands the reach of the Party media from a narrowly defined political and ideological function to the social, personal, and psychological dimensions ignored by the traditional Party organ. In this way, the station performs an important ideological function through diversion. It increases social cohesion by providing an outlet for discussion of and, in some instances, solving individual and personal problems in daily life. While some Party ideologues are wary of the station's approach to reform, its success suggests that the Party's propaganda work is expanding from a narrow and reductionist view of ideology to a broader one. The station is, in a way, an effective instrument of the Party's bread and circus policy. Certainly, at least the public's need for entertainment and popular culture is being acknowledged. Viewed from a historical perspective, this development suggests a gradual move away from the elitism of the traditional Party organ. For the audience, it is perhaps more bearable than the cultural deprivation and "the big talk, empty talk and falsehood" of the Cultural Revolution era.

In addition to its ideological functions, PRER also plays an important economic function in sustaining the traditional Party organ. Because of its popularity and increased productivity due to simplification of production procedures, income from business activities, paid information programs and music request programs, and most importantly, advertising, PRER provides the bulk of the commercial revenue of the provincial radio network as a whole. During the first two years of its operation,

²³Ibid., p. 26.

²⁴Ibid.

PRER's information service alone generated close to one million yuan in net profit.²⁵ With the establishment of PRER, the total advertising income for Guangdong People's Radio Station doubled in the first year, and then doubled again in the second year. In 1990, for example, PRER accounted for seventy percent of the People's Station's total advertising income of 6.38 million yuan.²⁶ Because PRER is not financially independent, it effectively functions as a "cash cow," providing much needed finance for the continuing operation of the other channels of the provincial radio network.

Broadcasting Reform in Shanghai

PRER was the product of its geographic proximity to Hongkong as well as the liberal reform policy of Guangdong and the relative political openness of China in the mid-1980s. The establishment of Shanghai's East Radio Station in October 28, 1992 was related to a combination of similar elements in 1992: the special geographic status of Pudong, where the station is officially registered, as a special economic development district in Shanghai, and the liberal economic policy ushered in by Deng's Spring 1992 talks during his trip to south China. The geographic location is important in this case because Pudong is considered to have the potential to develop into an independent administrative region. By registering the station in that region, the authorities made an exception to the "one government administration, one radio station" policy. That such a case of exception was made possible at all, however, has to be explained by the reform climate created by Deng in early 1992. Thus, as Chen Shenglai, President of East Radio, has said, the station was "a product of the spirit of Comrade Deng Xiaoping's southern tour talks,"²⁷ or as another writer puts it, it is a "major reform measure put forward by the Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau in its effort to implement the spirit of

²⁵Li Xiangyang, "The Path to the Industrialization of Broadcasting," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1993:12), p. 2.

²⁶Guangdong People's Radio Station, Pearl River Economic Radio Station, p. 43.

²⁷Chen Shenglai, "Riding the Wind of Reform and Setting out to Sail," *The Journalists* (1993:1), p. 24.

Deng Xiaoping's southern tour talks."²⁸ The initiative for the establishment of the East Radio and its sister station East Television came from the Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau. Gong Xueping, then head of the bureau, took the proposal to Shanghai's deputy Party secretary, who supported the idea and appointed the chief of Shanghai's Party propaganda department and a deputy Shanghai mayor to join the planning process. The final approval, of course, as was the case with PRER, had to come from Beijing.²⁹

Both Party Organ and Commercial Radio Station at the Same Time

Compared with PRER, East Radio represents a more radical departure in every aspect of its operation.³⁰ First of all, its audience is much larger. Unlike PRER, which broadcasts in a local dialect, Cantonese, East Radio broadcasts in Mandarin. Moreover, although East Radio is officially registered in Shanghai's Pudong District, it aims to be a regional network with much wider reach. This is reflected in the station's ambitious operating slogan: "based in Pudong, serving Shanghai, covering the Yangtze Delta, facing the whole country, and spreading overseas."³¹

Although the station is still officially affiliated with the Shanghai Radio and Television Bureau, it has an unusual degree of institutional and financial autonomy. It is organizationally independent from the pre-existing Shanghai People's Radio Station. It has the same official rank (provincial level) as People's Radio and is an independent legal entity. The station is an independent business entity responsible for its own profits and losses. It receives no state subsidies and is completely dependent on commercial revenue. Its initial start-up fund was borrowed from the Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau.

²⁸Yun Minghuang, "This Group of 'East People'," *The Journalists* (1993:1), p. 29.

²⁹According to media official "M" whom I interviewed in October 1994, East Radio and East Television were specially approved by the central Party authorities (zhongyang tebi).

³⁰East Television shares the same institutional set-up and other characteristics of East Radio. For the sake of brevity, I decided to focus on East Radio alone in the analysis.

³¹"Shanghai East Radio Begins Broadcasting," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1992:6), p. 102.

The station pays its staff according to a merit-based salary scale rather than using the official salary scale set by the State.

Although the personnel of the station are still limited by a recruitment quota (sixty staff members initially) set by the government, the station has exceptional autonomy in personnel selection. Democratic and competitive mechanisms were introduced on a limited scale into the hiring of the station's personnel.³² As a result, a group of young, well-educated, experienced, dedicated and reform-minded journalists were hired. The average age of the news staff was thirty-two. The president of the station was not simply appointed from above, but was selected through a process of open competition in which seven candidates presented their "platforms" to a panel of judges consisting of broadcasting administrators, senior journalists and experts. After their recommendation, the final appointment was made by the Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau. The vice presidents were nominated by the president and approved by the Bureau. They in turned appointed the heads of each of the departments of the station and selected editors and journalists from the editorial staff within the Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau. All the selections were made on a voluntary and consultative basis.³³

From the above institutional arrangements, it is clear that the station is much closer to an independent commercial radio station in the West, although it is still state-owned and still an official propaganda organ.³⁴ Although the word "contracted out" did not appear in any of the descriptions of the station in academic and trade journals, in reality, the station is contracted out to the staff.³⁵ The station has adopted the

³²Selection and competition were limited to personnel within the Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau.

³³The above information is based on an interview with Ruan Guanrong, Director of the Domestic Department, All China Journalists Association, October 26, 1994. See also, Yun Minghuang, p. 29; Hu Jia, "Objective: Connecting to the World Track," *Journalism Front* (1993:8), p. 45. This sort of consultative selection process is quite uncommon in Chinese enterprises, not to mention in political institutions such as the news media.

³⁴While PRER defined its nature in its name by using the word "economic," East Radio cleverly avoids such a term.

³⁵Joseph M. Chan states that the station "is contracted out to a team" in his "Commercialization without Independence," p. 25.10.

programming policy orientations, style and mode of presentation of PRER and escalated them to a new stage. For example, in contrast to PRER, which broadcast only nineteen hours and ten minutes initially, East Radio broadcasts live twenty-four hours a day. Its six-hour mid-night to dawn block *Accompanying You Till Dawn* offers diversion and companionship to the sleepless. The absence of the word "economic" in the station's name reflects accurately that, unlike PRER, it is a general interest station. In fact, as a full capacity radio station, it runs two different channels: a twenty-four general interest AM channel and an FM channel that specializes in music of various kinds. Slogan-like euphemistic phrases used by writers in trade journals and station officials in describing the station, such as "to be connected with the world track,"³⁶ "to operate in accordance with modern management mechanisms," "the first mainland news organization that operates in accordance with international conventions," "the first mainland news organization that has European and American efficiency" all suggest that the station takes the mode of commercial broadcasting as its point of reference in designing its institutional setup and programming.³⁷

East News and the Experiment with Audience Participation

Like PRER, the light entertainment and talk shows, which make up the bulk of the station's programming, serve the important function of diversion. The talk shows, in particular, offer much needed symbolic space where the audience can talk about personal issues and feelings and seek psychological counselling and emotional support. As Wang Wei, the host of the night-time talk show explained, it is a place where the "audience pour out their hearts and feelings and seek psychological harmony."³⁸ The

³⁶"Connecting to the world track" (yu shijie jiegui) is a new political jargon circulating in official political and economic discourse in China since 1992. Using the metaphor of the train track, the phrase is a euphemism for changing China's economic system and bringing it into the world order.

³⁷The first two phrases appeared in a number of writings by the station's academic supporters and management. The last two phrases are used by Yun Minghuang (1993:31), vice-president of the station.

³⁸Wang Wei, "A Brief One-Month Note on *The Night Eagle Hotline*," *The Journalists* (1993:1), p. 34.

station, like PRER serves an important ideological function in providing a safety valve, a buffer zone for the release and diffusion of political, social and personal tensions that have emerged in a period of rapid social change.

Consider the following case as an illustration of this function. On November 16, 1992, less than 20 days after the opening of the station, the program received a letter appealing for help. The letter writer was a young man. He had previously been a contract worker. He was fired by his factory because of his poor personal relationships with factory leaders in 1989. Since then he had been jobless and had attempted many times to seek revenge and then to commit suicide. The letter was treated very seriously. With instructions from departmental and station leaders, the editor and the host decided to try to help the young man. The host read the letter on air, asked all the other callers to the program to hang up their phones and ask the young man to call the hotline. Even though there was no pre-arrangement, the young man was apparently tuned in to the station, as the station had expected. He responded to the call, phoned in, talked about his problems and poured out his frustrations. Afterwards, the rest of the audience phoned in, offering help and support. Some offered to help him to find a job, while others offered psychological and emotional support. The young man was moved and finally "rescued." He was thus prevented from following the example of the Beijing military officer who expressed his personal frustrations with state policies (reportedly the one child policy) by his suicidal shooting of scores of innocent people in Beijing.

The young man who phoned the station was apparently a victim of the economic reforms and the political and economic dislocations in the transformation from a planned economy to a market economy. He was affected by unwarranted firing, the unaccountable power of factory leaders, lack of job security and job protection, unequal employment opportunities, and lack of an unemployment insurance. By means of this radio program, a political and social problem was expressed and solved on the personal level. Although the problem remains for millions of others, as far as the

program and its audience were concerned, something had been done. The program, thereby, plays an important ideological role of defusing political and social tensions generated by the reforms and helping to maintain social order. Indeed, the talk show hosts succeeded where the Party's professional ideological workers in the propaganda department have failed. They have even provided inspiration for the Party's professional ideological workers.³⁹ A Shanghai district Party secretary said that these hosts were more capable of doing ideological work than the professionals.⁴⁰ They were even invited to do ideological work in rectification camps. According to Chen Shenglai, President of the radio station, Shanghai's Ideological Work Research Society praised the East Radio's night-time talk show as "a new creation of ideological work in the new era" and reported it to the Propaganda Department of the Central Party Committee.⁴¹

But there is more to the East Radio. Unlike PRER, which does not even have its own news department, East Radio makes news the "dragon's head" of its overall programming. The six-to-nine morning show is an extended news and current affairs show. At the centre of this show is the one hour morning news, the seven-to-eight AM *East News*. In 1992, it was the longest and most comprehensive broadcasting news show in the country. The longest news program in other stations at that time was thirty minutes. The one-hour news show is comprised of six different segments: a fifteen-minute news flash, a fifteen-minute in-depth report of selected news events prepared by its own staff reporters, five-minutes of phone-in news, a five-minute news digest that introduces the leading news stories and commentaries of major newspapers across the nation, a five-minute news commentary, and five minutes of background information about news personalities. These different segments are relatively independent program units, separated by commercials. But they are complementary to each other in content

³⁹Chen Shenglai, "The Calling of a New Radio Age," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1994:3), p. 49.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*

and sequence. For example, a major news event might be reported first in the news flash during the first fifteen-minute segment, and then pursued in depth during the second fifteen minutes, followed by a commentary, while the persons involved in the news might be introduced in the last segment. Such a frame accommodates both the work of news reporters and the needs of the listeners very well. For the news reporters, the diverse nature of the news format means that their material can find a spot within the entire program and can be flexibly arranged. Their reporting is not constrained by a single rigid news format. On the audience side, those who have only the time to listen to the news brief will not miss the major news of the day, while those who have more time and interest in news can hear background details of an important news event as the program unfolds. This format is also commercially attractive because the listeners are hooked to the whole program as the different aspects of the news stories unfold. In fact, advertising for the one hour news show alone accounts for sixty percent of the station's total advertising revenue.⁴²

Such programming design is referred to as "acting in accordance with the laws" of journalism or communication in the trade journals. What this means is that media practices are based on an appreciation of the technological bias of the medium itself as well as a respect for the internal logics of news production and news reception. It means an understanding of and respect for the relative autonomy of the medium and the production and reception of news. This is something that the tradition of mass line Party journalism, developed mainly in the remote villages in the revolutionary base areas in the absence of modern communication technologies and in relation to a totally different political and social setting, has not been able to offer. In addition to its conceptual limitations and political bankruptcy, the tradition of mass line journalism has failed miserably in the age of modern mass communication. Despite, and perhaps precisely because of the intention and single-minded stubbornness of the Party's

⁴²Yu Chuanshi, "The Shock Wave of East Radio," *Chinese Journalists* (1993:3), p. 17.

ideologues, the Party has failed in its ideological work. Although the Party has persistently rejected "bourgeois liberalization," it has not rejected the learning of media practice from the west within the existing institutional framework of the Party's news organizations. However, institutional changes are necessary for this learning to be possible. As soon as there is some relative institutional autonomy, the young media professionals of the 1990s are eager to import media formats and practices from the west. Moreover, they are willing to experiment with more innovative practices that go beyond conventional western practices. In doing so, of course, they pose a real political challenge to the Party's model of political communication.

Production values advocated by journalism reformers in the early 1980s, such as brevity, speed, diversity, freshness, high information volume have been realized in the program. A survey conducted by journalism students from Fudan University reported that the average number of news items reported during the first thirty minutes of the program is forty-three, while the average length of the items is thirty-five seconds, and sixty-three percent of the news covered events that had happened in the past twenty-four hours. The rate for the news program on Shanghai People's Radio was fifty-one percent.⁴³ The limited news staff within the station's news department (seven reporters, five editors and three hosts initially) means that the station has to have a large news net and a diversity of sources. News for its fifteen-minute *East News Flash*, for example, comes from its own reporters, newspapers, news transmissions from other radio stations, and special transmissions provided by Xinhua, Radio Beijing and Chinese newspaper correspondents overseas.

More substantially, the traditional concept of news, with its focus on achievements, activities of leaders, meetings, and the work of government departments and production units is replaced by a new conception of news that emphasizes breaking events and news that is not initiated by official sources but concerns people's daily life.

⁴³Li Xiang, Yang Yang, Yang Daquan, "We Listen to East Radio," *The Journalists* (1993:1), p. 37.

The standards of news value as practised by journalists in the west have been adopted. The news personality feature, for example, is no longer simply about positive role models but about newsworthy personalities of all kinds such as Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War or U.S. presidential candidates. Changed news values are also reflected in the arrangement of news. In contrast to the common practice of putting international news after domestic news, important international news is occasionally presented as the lead story. Because of its different conception of news and different methods of gathering news, in the early months of its operation, the station reported a number of stories not covered by other media. These included a midnight telephone interview with artists going to perform in Taiwan, a story about a former deputy county magistrate who, went into business after being released from prison, a series on the new phenomenon of tipping, a long distance telephone report about a helicopter crash, an investigation of why the construction of the People's Memorial Monument in Shanghai was so slow to complete, and a report on how an electricity supply department cut electricity without notice and caused losses to a business.⁴⁴

Under the new system, Chen Shenglai, President of the station reported that journalists "have gradually sharpened their eyes for the news. They have gradually said farewell to 'invitation journalism' and 'paid journalism' and pursue the true realization of news values, and at the same time, the true realization of their own values."⁴⁵ Chen relates how a reporter for the station scooped the rest of the Shanghai press corps. A group of reporters accompanied a deputy mayor on his inspection tour of the removal of vendors who had illegally set up stalls at an intersection. While all the other reporters produced routine pieces about the tour itself, the East Radio reporter returned to the site half an hour after the deputy mayor and all the other reporters had left and

⁴⁴Yun Minghuang, p. 31.

⁴⁵Chen Shenglai, p. 27.

found that the vendors had returned to the streets. The reporter did an on-site exclusive report of the post-inspection scene.⁴⁶

The station's young journalists have gone further than merely adopting west news values and practices. Their experiment with audience participation in news reporting and news commentary has radically changed the orientation of news reporting. Rather than simply providing news tips, audience members actually report news or provide commentary. Such public participation, as station President Chen Shenglai argues, is like putting the reader's letters on the front page of the newspaper.⁴⁷ It gives the audience a significant role in reporting the news. Initially, the phone-in segment accepted live reports phoned in by members of the audience, who reported what they defined as news to the station. The station's deputy news director explained how this worked. After receiving a call from a member of the audience, the editor would ask the caller's name, address and the topic. If the editor decided to pursue the topic, the phone would be connected to the live studio. The program host and the caller's conversation would be transmitted live.⁴⁸ At one point, there were more than four thousand attempted calls in each minute during the five minutes of the program.⁴⁹ Most of the callers reported problems with public utilities and product quality or other issues of personal concern.⁵⁰

The significance of the phone-in news is not limited to the five-minute segment itself. The issues and events reported by the listeners sometimes become news clues investigated by reporters and reported in the in-depth segment of the news in

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Chen Shenglai, p. 26.

⁴⁸This information is based on the *Journal of Beijing Broadcasting Institute's* interview with Wang Zhiping. There is no byline to the interview. The *Journal* only used "journal correspondent" as the author of the article, entitled "The Deputy Director of Shanghai East Radio's News Department Talks About Explorations and Improvements in Using Telephone Participation in News Programming." The article consists of excerpts of Wang's statements. See, *Journal of Beijing Broadcasting Institute* (1993:2), pp. 9-11.

⁴⁹Yu Chuanshi, p. 16.

⁵⁰Ibid. These two categories accounted for 80 percent of the 400 calls actually broadcast by the station in the first month.

subsequent broadcasts. They also provide topics for the commentary segment of the program. Due to its live transmission and the potential of a call leading to reporters' investigation, the program exerts effective public opinion pressure on public utility departments and businesses. It becomes an important forum through which the listeners exercise some form of supervision over public utility authorities and businesses. Live broadcast means that the criticisms bypass the protective layers of bureaucracy and thus have a direct impact on the individuals and institutions being criticized. As Chen Shenglai said, the design of the program "provides an essential mechanism that ensures the supervision by public opinion. Here supervision by public opinion through the news media is no longer an ornament that can be added on or removed at will... there had never been such a mechanism in radio before."⁵¹ The program has become very popular. The suspense created around whether a problem reported by a listener will be solved or how an individual or institution criticized by a listener will respond to a criticism draws the listeners back to the news day after day.

Gradually, the issues of concern raised by listeners went beyond personal ones to include issues of common concern such as worn-out national flags, public transportation, wherein listeners, to use the words of Chen Shenglai again, displayed "a sense of citizenship and performed a supervisory function over the state and the society in their role as masters [of the country]." The political challenge posed by the station became apparent. Three months later, the program changed from live broadcast of phone-in reports to broadcast of recorded calls. The station accepts calls twenty-four hours a day. The editors select calls, check with individuals and institutions involved in the calls, then broadcast the recorded call with comments by the program host. According to Wang Zhiping, deputy director of the station's news department, the change was the result of intervention from Party authorities from the city, who instructed that the segment be changed from live to recorded phone calls "due mainly to

⁵¹Chen Shenglai, p. 26.

political considerations."⁵² Wang Zhiping, however, also rationalized the change on practical grounds. He said that due to the short time segment and the number of calls attempted, selectivity was very poor and that the live nature of the broadcast made it impossible for the station to check the validity of the information. In addition, because most of the callers are actually involved in the event or issue reported, it is difficult to ensure the "the objectivity and impartiality" of the information.⁵³ Although Wang acknowledged that the issues raised by callers were mostly valid and there had been no apparent mistakes, he added that he thought that the segment "lacks adequate theoretical preparation."⁵⁴ After being changed to recorded calls, Wang said, the number of reports broadcast has increased from typically two-three calls to five calls during the five-minute segment. Furthermore, "if callers do not express their ideas concisely and properly, the editor might help their to organize their thoughts, ask their to repeat, and make the phone calls concise and clear."⁵⁵

Apparently, political pressure from above is the main reason for the change. However, Wang's rationalization on professional grounds is also noteworthy. Elitist assumptions underlie Wang's explanations. The spontaneity of the live phone call and the authenticity of live conversation have been largely compromised. The fact that editors will check with the individuals or institutions criticized by a caller before broadcasting also re-introduces the possibility of bureaucratic meddling and protection as well as the potential for the kind of corrupt practices discussed in the last chapter. In short, this bureaucratic intervention is an illustration of the containment of reform and the commercial logic. The democratic potential was clear, and so was the commercial potential. However, the critical potential of the segment was contained even before the

⁵²*Journal of Beijing Broadcasting Institute*, interview with Wang Zhiping, p. 10.

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 9-11.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

station was given enough time to experience the potential tensions between democratization and commercialization.

The station's talk show program *Today's News* is also very popular. It invites audience phone-in participation in the discussion of a wide range of issues. During the program's first month, for example, topics included transportation safety, marketing and advertising practices, commissions, the new phenomenon of people keeping pets, extramarital love, the campaign against poor product quality, citizen's moral standards, whether factory directors should get high pay, and the phenomenon of officials and artists moving into the business sector.⁵⁶

With its emphasis on news and informational programming, its novel concepts of news, as well as entertainment programming, East Radio has gained great popularity among its audience. In its first month of operation, the station received an average of 4,000 letters per day from listeners.⁵⁷ An article in the Shanghai journalism trade journal *The Journalist* described the enormous popularity of the station. Shops tune to the station to attract customers. Commuters listen to it on their way to work. A hotel manager was forced to tell his staff "do not listen to East Radio at work!" University students complained that their addiction to the station distracted them from reading books. Attendants at department stores reported that they were very busy with selling portable radio receivers. A warehouse reported that its formerly slow moving stock of portable radio had been eliminated due to the demand created by the popularity of the station.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Xu Wei, "Today's News Answers Four Questions for You," *The Journalists* (1993:1), p. 34.

⁵⁷Yun Minghuang, p. 29.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

Experts from all over the country praise the station for its role in bringing the news closer to the people, for its exercise of the watchdog function, and for its role as a voice of the people.⁵⁹ The station staff, on the other hand, believe that

...what we have done is only to put into practice the standards of journalism put forward by the older generation of broadcasters scores of years ago, such as "brevity, freshness, speed, liveliness, and breadth," as well as the requirement that "the people's radio serves the people." We have only transformed the wishes of our precursors into reality in a very limited and preliminary way.⁶⁰

Thus, ironically, the ideal of the people's radio serving the people has been partially realized through the commercial logic. There are profound contradictions between the notion of "the people" in the tradition of mass line journalism and the notions of "citizen" and "citizenship" that had reportedly emerged among the callers to the news program, and the notion of "news consumers" in the commercial logic. After the initial excitement, the station will be forced to make its daily editorial decisions reflecting the tensions existing among the three different types of journalism: mass line journalism, democratic participatory journalism, and market-driven commercial journalism.

Competition in the Shanghai Broadcasting Market

With the establishment of East Radio in October 1992 and the establishment of the Shanghai East Television Station in January 1993, a television station that shares the same institutional structure and operational principles, broadcasting in Shanghai entered a new age. Competition has been introduced into the broadcasting market in Shanghai. The two new stations compete with Shanghai's pre-existing radio and television stations on an equal footing. The monopoly power of the two old stations is relatively diminished, especially considering the fact that many of their young and

⁵⁹Journal of Beijing Broadcasting Institute, "Theoretical Responses to the 'East Radio Shock'," *Journal of Beijing Broadcasting Institute* (1993:2), pp. 16-19; see also Jia Yifan, "East Radio in the Eyes of News Executives," *The Journalists* (1993:1), p. 39.

⁶⁰Ibid.

experienced personnel have moved to the two new stations. While the two new stations are completely dependent on commercial revenue, the two pre-existing stations also rely heavily on advertising income. Audience ratings, therefore, are important to all the stations.⁶¹

Shanghai People's Radio adopted a number of reform measures as a result of the competitive pressure from East Radio.⁶² As East Radio's news program poses the strongest threat, People's Radio decided to make organizational reform of its news department and the expansion of its early morning news program the core of reform. The news department was radically reorganized. Decisions over personnel selection, use of funds and the allocation of bonuses have been decentralized within the department. The traditional beat system was reorganized to better reflect the change from a planned economy to a market economy. The previous beat system was organized primarily around production sectors (heavy industry, light industry, agriculture, etc.) and government planning departments. Some of the production beats were dropped, while new beats for trade and commerce have been established. At the same time, more reporters have become general reporters, who can report breaking events in all areas, while others are organized around specific programs designed to attract listeners with special interests. Competition has been introduced into news gathering. The general reporters and the ones associated with specific programs can report on topics in any area, any beat, and "invade" the beat reporters' territory with their exclusive stories. At the same time, the organizational structure has been simplified; a middle level in the traditional five-level bureaucracy of news production has been removed. With the reorganization, the entire news department staff were given an opportunity to change jobs. A system of reciprocal selection and democratic

⁶¹This point was confirmed by interviewee "J," who has knowledge of Shanghai's two television stations.

⁶²The following information on news reform in Shanghai People's Radio is based on reports written by Huang Mingxing, Xu Zhiwei, Chen Jiezhong respectively, all of who are from the radio station. See all three articles in *The Journalists* (1993:4), pp. 3-8, and pp. 24-29.

participation was implemented in the re-allocation of job positions. Reporters filled in job selection forms first, then their appropriateness for their preferred positions was evaluated by colleagues who indicated their recommendations by secret ballots. The final decision, made by the management of the news department, was on the basis of the above two sets of data and the consent of the individual. The job tenure of journalists has been removed and their job security reduced to an annual renewable contract.

On February 10, 1993, four months after the establishment of East Radio, People's Radio expanded their thirty-minute 7:00 a.m. news program to one hour with a new format and new content obviously influenced by *East News*. The goal, as set by the station's management, was to "bring the program closer to the listeners, closer to daily life, closer to reality, while at the same time maintaining the authoritative character of the news."⁶³ The new format has a similar structure to *East News*, but it has its own characteristics and strengths as well. The lead-in music is still a revolutionary song but with a faster pace. Its general news segment is twenty minutes, five minutes longer than *East News Flash*. Although People's Radio has a large news gathering staff, like East Radio, the news gathering net has been enlarged. Soon after the approval of the news expansion plan, two editors were sent to Beijing to make arrangements with Xinhua, Radio Beijing and other Beijing news organizations to provide special news dispatches for the program. But the program did not pursue such values as "brief" and fast-paced broadcasting as absolute goals. Its newspaper digest segment not only covers national and local newspapers; it outdoes its competitor by selectively introducing leading news stories from the world's leading newspapers, a breakthrough for China's news media. People's Radio's is able to take advantage of its larger labour force in the competition. The idea of introducing stories from major world newspapers, for example, was put forward by the director of the station's

⁶³Xu Zhiwei, pp. 6-7.

international department, who once studied in Britain. Similarly, in the sports section, People's Radio took advantage of its richer personnel resources by adding an English sports news editor who translates international sports news and thus is able to improve the speed of news transmission. To reflect the growing interest in the financial market, and perhaps also the interests of political and economic elites, a segment on the financial market has been added to the news. It reports stock prices in major international stock markets, RMB market rates, and financial news.

To realize the objective of bringing the news closer to the people, East Radio's main attraction, listener phone-ins, has also been adopted by People's Radio. A twenty-four hour news hotline has been established. Reporters work in shifts to take phone calls from the public around the clock. The news stories provided by the callers are either broadcast or followed up and investigated by reporters. For example, a few days after the program was initiated, a caller exposed a joint-venture business for violating its employees' personal rights by searching their handbags when they left work. The practice received three days of continuous reporting in the station's news and talkshow programs. Law professors and ordinary citizens participated in the discussions. The practice stopped.

In addition to one-hour morning news that competes head to head with East Radio, People's Radio introduced another popular program that competes directly with East Radio. It is a one-hour talkshow, *Citizen and Society*, to "discuss hot topics that concern the general public, and build a bridge of communication and understanding between citizens and mayors, citizens and the government, and citizens and the society."⁶⁴ This program was first broadcast on October 26, 1992, two days before the airing of East Radio, an obvious attempt to keep the audience from tuning in to the new station. Then, on November 4, 1992, nine days after East Radio went on air, *Citizen and Society* began a path-breaking series in which Shanghai's mayor and four deputy

⁶⁴Chen Jiezhong, "Building a Bridge Between Citizens and Mayors," *The Journalists* (1993:4), p. 26.

mayors were broadcast live answering citizen's phone calls and discussing issues of public concern. Similar programs had been tried elsewhere in Tianjin and Beijing. Municipal district leaders had an "office hour" on the radio, mainly to take complaints from the public mostly about public utilities and to solve some problems on the spot. The Shanghai series was the first to invite provincial-level leaders to participate in such a program.

Although such a practice might be a matter of course in broadcasting elsewhere, it was not a small step for a Chinese radio station. It is standard practice for news reports about leaders' speeches and talks to go through several edits before publication. They are checked over by the leader's secretary, officials at the propaganda department and even the leaders themselves. Radio and television interviews with leaders are all pre-recorded. Now these leaders were taking questions from listeners and discussing them live on the radio. Before, the news media were in the passive position of transmitting speeches given by leaders, now the radio station was in the active position of actually initiating the event and inviting the leaders to the station.

Topics were chosen by the program's editors. Telephone calls were screened first. Each city official dealt with one issue of public concern. One issue was the transportation problem during the busy spring season in the city. Did the mayor feel the problem? Yes, when he sometimes saw the unhappy face of his wife after a trying trip home from work on the bus. Then there were discussions about the government's emergency responses and long-term plans as well as citizens' suggestions for solving the problem. The city's policies for encouraging technological and cultural workers to start up their own businesses or to take up jobs in the business sector was another topic. Plans for the development of Pudong district were also discussed, with inputs from citizens over such concerns as transportation, the environment, education, and wage policy. Problems in Shanghai's sponsorship of the Far East Asian Games was the subject of another discussion. The final episode of the series was Mayor Huang Ju's

dialogue with citizens over concrete measures the government was planning to take to improve citizens' life for the coming year.

Each show started with a brief discussion between the host and the guest to establish a topic and then the guest answered phone-calls from listeners. The leaders were trying to solicit understanding from the listeners, while the callers were usually polite, calling in with their proposals and suggestions for their concerned issues. For example, the show about preparation work for the Far East Asian Games was, according to one account, like an "internal working conference" of the government.⁶⁵ In contrast to other media reports about how smoothly the work was proceeding and how Shanghai was ready to sponsor the games, on this program a deputy mayor expressed his concerns and worries about the preparation work in various areas. Candid information sharing, according to this account, increased citizens' understanding of the mayors and the local government, aroused citizen consciousness and sense of responsibility and participation in dealing with problems. The station had worried about getting angry callers complaining about their problems, expressing negative opinions and embarrassing the leaders, but all the shows went smoothly and claimed great success. In addition to mayors, the program has since invited officials from various government departments to discuss issues of common concern and solve some concrete problems during the program.

People's Radio has been highly acclaimed nationwide for this program. Journalists from the Shanghai news media crowded into the studio to do firsthand reports on the program. Major national news organizations in Beijing also carried reports about the program.⁶⁶ Ding Guangen, the Party's propaganda chief, also praised the program and recommended the practice to media officials in Beijing as a path-breaking experiment in news media reform.⁶⁷ Shanghai's mayor Huang Ju expressed

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 27.

⁶⁶Chen Jiezhong, p. 25.

⁶⁷Ibid.

his appreciation for the opportunity to directly appeal to the public through such a forum. He said that a channel of dialogue like this is not only needed by the citizens but also by the city government as well. The journalists in the radio station also expressed exhilaration:

The producers of *Citizen and Society* are very excited. The mayors and citizens are having a direct dialogue, something totally unimaginable before. Yet it is so simple: our government serves the people, our government officials are public servants ... why cannot our media create more opportunities for direct communication between citizens and their servants? ... Once the self-imposed fence is removed, any worries become unnecessary. ... A "bridge" has been established by means of the airwaves. Its construction is not easy, but it has enormous implications. Officials and citizens talk with each other over the "bridge," a bridge covered by the red carpet of socialist democracy.⁶⁸

While socialist democracy certainly means more than a talkshow and one can argue about the extent to which a program like this contributes to democracy, its implications should not be overlooked. During the student movement in 1989, students pleaded on bent knees in front of the stairs of the Great Hall of the People in Beijing and demanded to have a dialogue with government leaders on important political issues such as press freedom. Now, in Shanghai, the People's Radio is providing a regular channel for dialogue between citizens and government officials. The topic might still be limited and non-political, but at least it is structurally different from no discussion at all.

This movement to bring the news media, and through them, government leaders, closer to the public was initiated by East Radio and carried further by People's Radio in their competition for professional esteem, and more importantly, for advertising. Similar competition exists between the Shanghai Television and East Television. Indeed, competition for audience is sometimes fierce.⁶⁹ But since the broadcasting authority has the power to approve programming decisions, competition is regulated. For example, when the competing stations are tangled in a battle, the

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 29.

⁶⁹Interview with "J."

broadcasting authority might act as the final arbitrator. The same is the case with the Shanghai newspaper market where, unlike other cities, three unrelated newspapers compete with each other.⁷⁰ In order to enlarge their respective share of readers, for a while, the morning paper *Wenhui Bao* planned to establish an afternoon edition, which would directly invade the afternoon newspaper territory of *Xinmin Evening News*, who in return, planned to establish a morning edition. The plans, however, were stopped by the city authorities. This process is an example of the idea of a regulated market in which political authorities play a role in "macro adjustment and control" -- economic jargon currently in vogue in China.

Although competition is sometimes unfriendly, there is a "socialist" element of friendly market competition. While the old stations have learnt much from the two new stations, the new stations remain quite modest. For example, ten days after the reorganization of Shanghai Television's channel 14 programming, East Television's officials visited the old station to learn from them.⁷¹ In their article about media competition in Shanghai, Lu Xiaohuang and Wen Lu argue that cooperation, mutual support, and learning from each other is an important aspect:

In Shanghai media circles, studying brother and sister papers and stations has become customary from rank and file reporters and editors to news media executives. When media officials meet with each other at meetings, they will ask each other about their new strategies, new thoughts and new initiatives.... If you have new strategies and methods, I will send people to study and learn; it is even common to take away the complete file and written material for study ... For example, personnel reform measures at *Xinmin Evening News*, the organization of news production at East Radio and East Television were all mutually studied in this fashion.⁷²

So far, competition and learning from each other seem to have forced broadcasting stations to make their programs more attractive to their audiences. But

⁷⁰In other provincial capitals, the only all-interest newspaper is typically the provincial Party organ. The evening paper for the capital city is usually published by the same Party organ. In Shanghai, due to its pre-1949 history as the centre of commercial newspapers in China, in addition to the Party organ, *Liberation Daily*, there are two other major newspapers, *Wenhui Bao*, and *Xinmin Evening News*.

⁷¹Lu Xiaohuang, Wen Lu, "Competition and Cooperation," *Chinese Journalists* (1994:8), p. 5.

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 7.

learning from competitors also implies learning how to attract audiences away from them.

CCTV's News Commentary Department: A "Special Economic Zone"?

Beginning from Guangdong and Shanghai, the wave of broadcasting reform finally reached Beijing, the heart of the news media system in China. On May 1, 1993, CCTV, the most influential broadcasting station in the country, launched a magazine program, *East Time and Space*. Then, almost a year later, on April 1, 1994, CCTV launched another new program, *Focus*. Both programs were products of CCTV's reforms.

East Time and Space is a one-hour morning magazine show. In addition to a regular news segment, the program contains four eight-to-nine-minute segments. *Focus on the Moment* is a single issue in-depth current affairs segment. *Sons of the East* is a personality profile segment featuring interviews with individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the country.⁷³ *Television Music* is an entertainment segment that introduces MTV songs and background information and interviews about the singer and the style as well as tidbits about the making of the music video. *Living Space* features issues or events in the daily life of ordinary people. Unlike other news programming, *Focus on the Moment* and *Sons of the East* do not have a regular host. The journalist who conducted the interviews and drafted the report acts as the host. Originally the program was broadcast at 7:00 a.m. on CCTV-1 and was re-broadcast twice on CCTV-1 and CCTV-2 in the morning and the afternoon. It was launched quietly without much publicity and was CCTV's first experiment in morning hour news and current affairs programming. For most urban Chinese, news consumption consists of listening to radio news at home in the early morning, reading newspapers at work, and watching television news in the evening. The program soon won wide popularity

⁷³Actually, the program does include women. Gender-biased language is still common in the news media in China.

and changed some people's "news consumption habits." In the Chinese media circles some even claimed that the program caused a "silent television revolution in the day time." At the request of viewers, the program or part of it is now rebroadcast six times across CCTV's four channels, including in prime time. The important contents of the program over the previous week are selected and rebroadcast on the weekend.

Focus, a thirteen-minute current affairs program broadcast at prime time (7:38 p.m.), follows the 7:00 o'clock CCTV evening news. It is similar to *Focus on the Moment* in the morning show. It provides single issue in-depth reports and is hosted by a number of different journalist-hosts. Using a range of in-depth reporting techniques widely used on television news in the west, such as on-the-spot reporting, visual documentation, and in-studio interviews, the program provides "follow-up to current affairs, background analysis of news, perspectives on hot social issues, and discussions of topics of common concern."⁷⁴ The program is rebroadcast three times on CCTV-1 the second day. In 1994, it had the second highest national audience rating (23.8 percent) of all CCTV programs, just behind CCTV's 7:00 p.m. evening news, which has a national audience rating of 45.6 percent.⁷⁵

Compared with the reforms in Guangzhou and Shanghai, CCTV's reforms are both timid and bold. They are timid in several senses. First, the reforms are confined to individual programs and departments rather than station-wide. The idea of a second radio and television station, even something like the modest Pearl River Economic Radio, not to mention the more independent East Radio and Television model at the national level, is still unacceptable to the leadership. According to one insider, the Central People's Radio Station once proposed to establish its second channel

⁷⁴These four phrases are the slogans of the program itself.

⁷⁵CCTV audience rating figures during the week of October 9 to October 15, 1994 were published in the department's internal trade journal, *Empty Talk* (No. 18, 1994).

programming as a second station, similar to PRER, but the proposal was rejected by authorities.⁷⁶

The reform is also timid in that CCTV has not touched the core of its news programming, its 7:00 p.m. evening news, which remains conventional Party journalism, packed with reports of leaders in ceremonial functions, meetings, and achievements of all kinds. One insider said that the 7:00 p.m. news touches upon too many people; its influence is too broad. It is not easy to reform. Indeed, there are so many powerful vested interests that any change would have major political implications. For example, although a audience survey revealed the unpopularity of these reports, they continue to dominate.⁷⁷ Therefore, CCTV decided to carry out reforms elsewhere and to start with something that poses less threat to vested interests. This reflects the same mentality of minimizing resistance to reform and risks as was the case with the conservative institutional set-up and focus on the economy of PRER.

There is, however, a bold aspect to CCTV's reform. While the PRER focuses on business information and entertainment and its programs oriented toward a mid-to-low-educational-level audience, CCTV's reform is in the most important area of news and current affairs, and it aims at a mid-to-high-educational-level audience. The central piece of CCTV's reform is the establishment of a News Commentary Department, which produces the two new programs. Just as the two programs stand out as unusual, this department stands out as unusual among CCTV's other program producing departments. As we will describe in some detail in the following section, it is, again, to borrow a term from the economic sphere, a "special economic zone" within the CCTV News Centre.

⁷⁶This information was obtained from a confidential interview with journalist "G" in October 1994.

⁷⁷News Department, CCTV General Editorial Office, "Television Audience Survey Report," in Chen Chongshan, Er Xiuling (eds.) *A Perspective Study of Mass Communication Effects in China* (Shenyang: Shenyang Publishing House, 1988), pp. 402-404.

Organizational Setup

The CCTV News Commentary Department was established in 1993 as a relatively independent programming unit under CCTV's News Center, to specifically produce the two programs.⁷⁸ Yang Weiguang, CCTV chairman and the chief designer of the reform, aimed to strengthen the clout of CCTV by adding the two new programs as part of an overall objective of "building CCTV into a world class television station."⁷⁹

The News Commentary Department replaced the international department of the CCTV News Centre. It also drew personnel from an in-depth reporting team which produced the popular current affairs program *Observation and Thinking* (guancha yu sikou). The system of "contracting out," which has been adopted widely in state-owned industrial and commercial enterprises, was adopted.⁸⁰ Although the word "contracting out" (chengbao) does not appear in public discourse about the department, it is actually contracted out to a team of professionals from original international department and the *Observation and Thinking* production team. CCTV only provided the television time. The department is financially independent; it relies entirely on advertising revenue generated from commercials inserted *into* the two programs (not the revenue from advertising before or after the program, which goes to the station as a whole). CCTV allocates thirteen minutes to the department for the prime-time *Focus*. The department broadcasts ten seconds of advertising after the introduction of the program title itself. The remaining twelve minutes and fifty seconds is the actual reporting itself, without commercial breaks. The morning program *East Time and Space* runs about ten minutes

⁷⁸The CCTV News Centre is a huge bureaucracy that is responsible for news and current affairs programming on CCTV. It has eight departments.

⁷⁹Luo Hongdao, Lu Min, "East Time and Space: What Are You After?" *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1994:3), p. 89.

⁸⁰"Contracting out" (chengbao) means the undertaking of state-owned business enterprises by individuals or a team of individuals under a contractual relationship, in which the contractor enjoys relative autonomy in management but has certain financial obligations such as guaranteeing a set amount of profit or taxes that will be handed over to the government.

of advertising in between the four segments of the programming. In 1994 the ten-second advertisement in *Focus* generated 40,000 yuan a day. Approximately one-fourth of the income went to program production, the other three-fourths went to equipment, salaries and other expenditures. The department borrowed two million yuan from CCTV for start-up capital.⁸¹

Unlike other departments under the CCTV News Centre, the News Commentary Department has autonomy over personnel and is not restricted by government employment quotas. With the exception of the thirty founding staff members, who were originally on the CCTV official employee list, the majority of the workers (160 in total in mid-1994) are contract workers hired by the department itself. These workers are not considered as part of CCTV's formal staff. Their files, for example, are kept in the Beijing Human Resources Exchange Centre rather than at CCTV. They enjoy the same benefits as CCTV formal staff with the exception that they don't have job tenure. Their contracts are renewed on a yearly basis, and they can be fired.⁸² Their salaries are based on a merit system, evaluated by producers on a monthly basis, with a considerable gap between the lowest and the highest salaries.⁸³

Like the two Shanghai East stations, new employment practices such as hiring at large by management through exams as opposed to appointment by officials, the promise of more autonomy and more room to experiment with new ideas and new techniques enable the department to attract a well-educated and ambitious work force. Most of the workers in the department are in their late twenties and early thirties, with university or even graduate degrees, experienced and enterprising. They received their university education during the reform years of the 1980s. They are open-minded, more eager to reform, and have less of the professional and personal burdens of the old generation of journalists. Their previous work in the news media enables them to have

⁸¹This information was obtained from an interview with journalist "E," November 1994.

⁸²Wen Lu and Liu Yanguang, "Interview with *Focus*," *Chinese Journalists*(1994:7), p. 14.

⁸³Interview with journalist "E," November 1994.

a good grasp of the constraints and problems of the old news structure and old news concepts. Sun Yusheng, director of the department, for example, was only thirty-one in 1993 and already a successful star journalist.⁸⁴

The department also has autonomy in the acquisition and use of resources such as editing and recording equipment and means of transportation. Although this is normal in the West, it is exceptional with news organizations in China under the centralized system. For example, a news organization usually has a transportation department, which is external to the news department. If reporters in the news department want to use a car, they have to write a request first and get it approved by heads of program units and/or department. The request is then passed to the transportation team, which then makes the arrangement. Such a system of separation between producers and means of production is, of course, cumbersome and inefficient. Under the new organizational set-up, all the necessary means of production are available in the department, at the immediate disposal of the news production personnel.

The relatively autonomous institutional status of the department is literally manifested by its right to have its own program logo as well as by its physical location outside the main CCTV building.⁸⁵ The department rents a classroom/office floor in a humble old building behind the military museum in a west suburb of Beijing, one block away from the grand, impressive, and modern CCTV tower. The news room is crowded and plain, and the furniture is poor, giving the visitor the impression of a son of a big Chinese family being newly separated from the parents and just starting his own household from scratch. However, the department's main office in the CCTV building itself and the completion of final production in the studios inside the CCTV

⁸⁴See Xiong Rong, "Why Not the Best?" *Chinese Journalists*, 1994:6, pp. 20-21 for a profile of Sun Yusheng as a successful journalist.

⁸⁵The logo features an eye similar to that of CBS's, with blue on the top and green at the bottom. According to "E," it symbolizes integrity, standing firmly on the green ground and up straight against the blue sky. The logo has become a "trade mark" of the program.

building on a huge twelve-square-meter screen symbolizes its ultimate connection with and control by the CCTV as well as its financial and technological strength.⁸⁶

Program production is organized around the producer responsibility system. The producers work under the director of the department. The function of the producer is similar to the producer in the West, and it is a new position within the news media in China. The producers have control over finance, personnel and equipment. In addition to the three units that produce *Sons of the East*, *Television Music*, and *Living Space*, the entire news staff who produce the reports for *Focus on the Moment* and *Focus* (hereafter referred as "the *Focus* programs") is divided into four production units, each headed by a producer, who is accountable to the director of the department. Each unit consists of approximately ten people, including editors, reporters, camera operator and hosts, as well as necessary production equipment. The ten-member unit is further divided into reporting teams of two to three people, working on different topics or different aspects of a topic. There is a broad division of labour between the one unit that specializes in international topics and the three units specializing in domestic affairs. The four units occasionally work together on a major and urgent topic, but most of the time they work independently on different topics and have to compete to have their topics and final program accepted first by the director and then by the station. There is, therefore, competition between the production units, especially among the three domestic affairs units. The result of the competition (the number of programs finally broadcast by a given unit, the quality of the programs) can affect the income and jobs of the whole unit.

In addition to all these organizational reforms, the Department also introduced innovations in television journalism. Like those in news programming in East Radio,

⁸⁶The huge screen reportedly even made Ted Turner feel humble, who reportedly said during his tour of CCTV that he did not have such a big one for his CNN. See, Guo Xiuyuan, "Focus: A New Scene in CCTV's Reform," *Journalism Front* (1994:6), p. 44.

these innovations are also framed as following so-called "laws of communication."⁸⁷ Sun Yusheng, one of the main architects of the programs, explained that one guiding principle during the overall design of *East Time and Space* is that the programs must "employ notions of modern mass communication, explore the functions of television in accord with the laws of television communication."⁸⁸ What such a statement means is that the department wants to move away from the "picture plus narrative" format typical of television journalism in China and instead adopt more sophisticated techniques of television journalism that more fully exploit the potentials of television as a communication medium. Thus, rather than heavy-handed editing whereby the reporter's narratives are added to pre-recorded imagery, the programs use on-spot reporting, street interviews, synchronous sound recording, naturalistic lighting and camera angles, and other techniques of televisual realism that "captures the natural flow of the life process" and "reflects the true state of life."⁸⁹ Rather than overt editorializing, the programs, according to Zhang Haichao, one of the producers, try to "provide the audience with multi-dimensional information and give them space to think [for themselves]. Program hosts and reporters never express conclusive opinions. Instead, they try to let the audience draw their own conclusions."⁹⁰ In short, audiences are called upon to actively fulfil their roles in the process of news communication. In addition, in contrast to typical Party journalism whose archetype is the boring government report, the programs also introduce the more attention-grabbing and more involving news "story" format. Zhang Haichao explained that they tried to learn to tell stories and use a narrative form that has a beginning, a process, and an end. The introduction of these practices have been considered both by news producers and broadcasting researchers as a result of "following the notions of modern

⁸⁷These "laws of communication," as discussed in Chapter Three, are actually mainstream journalism practices and production values in the West.

⁸⁸Luo Hongdao, Lu Min, p. 92.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰In Luo Hongdao, Lu Min, p. 92.

communication."⁹¹ These practice are commonplace in mainstream television journalism in the West, whose "codes" and "conventions" and their ideological implications have been "deconstructed" and analyzed by media scholars.⁹² In China, however, pioneers in broadcasting reform, producers and researchers alike, have only just begun to construct them in television theory and practices.

Topic Selection and Framing

The very nature of the institutional setup of the department determines that its two programs have to be politically correct and commercially viable at the same time. CCTV is one of the most tightly controlled media in the country, and news and current affairs programming is particularly so. The programs have to be the mouthpiece of the Party. At the same time, the programs have to be popular among the people, while the status of CCTV requires that the programs have to be of "high quality, high taste (gao pingwei), and authoritative, matching the status of CCTV as a national-level television station."⁹³ It means that the programs cannot simply attract audiences by relying on sensationalism, or to use Yang Weiguang's word, by producing "side bar" news.⁹⁴ It cannot go too far in "diluting" political and moral messages in programming, as PRER and other local stations are doing.

The objective of trying to please a wide range of audiences is clearly shown in the different components of *East Time and Space* itself. Among the four segments of the program, the first two segments carry heavier political, social, and "high" culture content that caters to the political and cultural elites; the MTV music segment is designed to attract the young and the less politically-oriented; while the *Living Space*

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²See, for example, John Hartley, *Understanding News* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982).

⁹³Ibid. p. 89. The elitist "high culture" and "low culture" or "high taste" and "low taste" distinction is common in Chinese discussions of popular culture.

⁹⁴Yang Weiguang, "Sticking to the Principle of Correct Opinion Guidance Is the Key to Good *Focus* Programs," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1994:9). p. 3.

segment about the life of ordinary people should be of interest to virtually everybody. Within this overall programming set up, each segment tries to accommodate as wide an audience as possible. Thus, while *Sons of the East* features mainly political, economic, and cultural elites and focuses on their achievements and their ideas, it also draws attention to another side of these people as ordinary members of society, focussing on their feelings, their personalities, their families, and their personal lives.

The most challenging part of the program, however, does not lie in attempting to appeal to as large an audience as possible. It lies in the art of trying to please both the leaders and the led at the same time. And this art is perhaps best manifested in the selection of "hot topics" for the *Focus* programs. The question of "what to focus on" becomes crucial. While the choosing of an international topic is relatively easy, the selection of topics with a domestic focus is a very sensitive and demanding task. For the program to be popular, the topics must deal with "hot spots, "confusing issues," and "touchy problems" of wider concern.⁹⁵ A topic must meet three criteria. It must be something that the leadership has paid attention to, that the public is generally concerned about, and that is widespread or has some degree of universality. However, in order to carry out the Party's policy of positive propaganda, positive topics must constitute a certain percentage. In addition, as a current affairs program, the topics must resonate with the Party's current propaganda priorities. The following examples are illustrative of the nature and range of the topics chosen:

Topics for *Focus on the Moment* (August 9-14, 1993):⁹⁶

September 9: Who will do basic research in the sciences? This topic reflects a concern about the tendency of middle-aged and young scientists to drift away from basic research into business and applied research as well as the declining interest in basic research in general.

⁹⁵Interview with "E."

⁹⁶These topics were recorded by Chen Fuqing, in *Television News* (Beijing: China Broadcasting Publishing House, 1994), p. 214.

September 10: A discussion of a recent massive explosion in a Shenzhen factory warehouse. It was a hot topic at the time.

September 11: Perspectives on university students taking summer jobs, a widely discussed recent trend.

September 12: A discussion about the problem of upgrading worn out and dangerous electrical circuits in apartment buildings.

September 13: A discussion of an airplane hijacking (to Taiwan). The incident was also a hot topic of the time. Negative incidents such as the ones in this list are no longer taboo, and the discussions of these incidents contain both elements of exposure and commercial appeal. The hijacking incident is not just reported for its commercial appeal, however. The report contained an important political element, the government's stand on Taiwan's treatment of the incident.

Sept. 14: An in-depth report about farmers in Shandong province paying high salaries to hire technical personnel. This is a current trend and a positive topic from the point view of the government, because use of technology in agriculture is considered an important aspect of modernization.

Topics for *Focus* (January 16-20, 1995)⁹⁷

January 16: China has made remarkable achievements in protecting intellectual property. This is an apparent piece of positive propaganda coordinating the government's propaganda campaign in this area during the crucial days of the difficult talks between U.S. and China on intellectual property.

January 17: After Shanghai consumers named the best and worst shops, a discussion of whether the worst shop should be expelled from a busy street and its manager fired.

⁹⁷These topics were surveyed during the course of fieldwork. The topic sentence is mainly CCTV's, with minor modifications for clarity.

January 18: Let the flag of patriotism fly forever, commemorating the fifth anniversary of the enactment of the national flag law.

January 19: If you cannot finish your food in a restaurant, pack it and bring it home. The discussion addressed the massive waste caused by extravagant eating in restaurants and the bad habit of not taking home leftovers.

January. 20: Let us eat in a more scientific way (continuation of the previous day's topic)

Although the above samples are not large enough to be statistically reliable as indicators, it is perhaps worth noting that the topics for the morning hour show are less propagandistic and have more potential for exposure and critical reporting. The propagandist orientation is more apparent in the five topics for the prime-time show. Two of them, intellectual property and patriotism, are apparently straight political propaganda. The last two topics provide room both for criticism (extravagance in dining at public expense) and for education in the broader sense.

In addition to the selection of the topics, the framing of a topic is also very important, especially with regard to analytical pieces that deal with confusing and controversial issues. Deng Xiaoping has said, "The news media must be the ideological centre for maintaining stability in the whole country." The *Focus* programs, because of the critical edge of some of the pieces and because of the programs' national influence, are therefore particularly careful in this regard. Sun Yusheng, director of the department, had this to say when asked about the key to doing a good job in reporting:

During the process of previewing the programs, I keep thinking about the following questions: Will this report produce negative effects? Will it cause damage to political stability? Will it intensify tensions and be damaging to solving the problem? After all these possibilities are eliminated, I will say that an item is a good one and should be broadcast.⁹⁸

⁹⁸Quoted in Xiao Rong, p. 21.

While detailed discourse analysis of framing and ideological closures in the program is beyond the scope of this research, the following example, provided by *Press and Publications News*,⁹⁹ is suggestive of the exercise of framing and the ideological function of the program in defusing the social tensions resulting from the reforms, or, to speak positively in the language of the official discourse, in providing "correct guidance to public opinion" and "maintaining political stability."

The report concerns the program's treatment of the phenomenon of universities charging students increasingly high tuition fees and other fees. The phenomenon is a recent development and a hot social topic. It is a controversial and difficult issue, and it concerns many people. Therefore, it fits the selection criteria of *Focus* very well, and it is to the credit of the program that it dealt with this topic in an extended report at all. Conventional journalism has largely avoided this issue. Until recently, higher education has been completely subsidized by the state, and university students have not had to pay tuition fees at all. The same developments that have led to increasing commercialization to finance the news media have meant that the state is increasingly unable to provide sufficient funds for education at all levels. Thus students are required to pay more and more for their own education. This development is not a concern for those who have become rich during the reforms, but it is an increasing burden for workers and farmers, who have benefited relatively less from the process of reform. Inequality in access to education, therefore, has become increasingly evident.¹⁰⁰

Inequality in access to education is something hard for many people to swallow, especially after so many years of promoting equality as a fundamental socialist principle. Judging from the *Press and Publications News* report, the televised discussion consciously avoided this issue of inequality, not to mention posing the

⁹⁹Li Zhengyan, "Random Notes on *Focus*," *Press and Publications News*, September 3, 1994, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰For example, while rich parents in urban areas pay tens of thousands of yuan to send their children to private boarding "aristocratic" schools, poor peasants in many parts of the countryside are increasingly unable to send their children to school at all.

serious political questions about commitment to fundamental socialist values in the era of reform:

If the focus were on the question of whether parents can afford to pay [tuition fees], especially on the question of whether a student whose family cannot afford the fees can still go to university, the program would be difficult to handle. Therefore, they adjusted the angle, by focusing on background analysis of the policy for charging tuition fees, describing tuition fees in foreign countries, and explaining our country's difficulties and inability to provide sufficient investment on high education in a short period. At the same time, the program pointed out that one of the solutions to the problem is to encourage students to study hard and win scholarships.¹⁰¹

Thus, rather than directly addressing critical issues about affordability and inequality in access to higher education, the program focused on explanation and rationalization by providing background information and by introducing similar practices in foreign countries. If it is an international "convention," then, it appears, it is a "normal" phenomenon. The appeal to the financial difficulties of the country solicits acceptance of the status quo, perhaps even sacrifice on the part of those who have been victimized. True, the country is still poor, and there is always not enough money for education, but what about the government's policy priorities? What about the Party's claim that it has no other interests but that of the people? What about the estimated ninety billion yuan a year spent by officials dining at public expense?¹⁰² If only half of the money went to education!

Of course, no ideological work will be complete without offering some sort of solution to a problem. The third sentence in the above report suggests one such solution - that students can get scholarships. But the solution is very partial and quite insignificant in comparison with the size of the problem. Government scholarships are few, and private scholarships are even fewer in China.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²This figure was provided by CCTV's *Focus* program on January 20, 1995. According to the program, this figure is the equivalent of the total investment for the Three Gorges Dam project, or half of the budget of the Chinese national government in 1993.

On the other hand, it is important to note that, compared with conventional Party journalism, the *Focus* programs are democratizing in many aspects. That an issue like increased tuition fees in higher education is raised at all in a Focus program is rather extraordinary. In fact, the *Focus* programs have produced many critical pieces. The program often speaks on behalf of the people against official corruption. It exposes the damage done to individuals and to society by bureaucraticism, poor government administration and delinquent government officials, and illegal and unethical business practices. It raises issues concerning the interests of the common people, speaks on behalf of the people at the bottom of the society and seeks social and economic justice for them. It does this by exploring such topics as the prices and quality of consumer products, medical services, the rights and welfare of women and children, even the plight of a peasant working in the city. In order to produce this kind of reporting, reporters have to develop their investigative skills and sometimes find themselves in confrontational and even potentially dangerous situations. They may trace an ongoing event for several months. For example, they drove across several provinces to visit farmers. They went under cover to record the underground world of illegal business and trade.¹⁰³ They even hid behind a bunker during the night to "catch" a bicycle thief stealing a bicycle on camera. There is, indeed, a sea of difference between these practices and "three-warranty reporting" and "invitation journalism."

In addition to the *Focus* programs' attempt to speak on behalf of the people, the democratizing tendency of the programs is also well demonstrated in *Living Space*, which provides a space for the portrayal of the common people and their daily life in what many commentators and media scholars have heralded as a "consciousness of the common people" or populist sentiment (*pingmin yishi*) that contrasts with the elitism of much of conventional Chinese journalism.¹⁰⁴ Here, the program attempts to provide a

¹⁰³Ibid.; see also, Zhou Hongjun, "Tell the Ordinary Folks' Own Stories," *Press and Publications News*, July 2, 1994, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴See for example, Luo Hongdao and Lu Min, pp. 90-91.

space for the common people to speak for themselves, as symbolized by the segment's motto: "tell ordinary folks' own stories." In contrast to the role model approach characteristic of conventional Party journalism, this segment depicts the trivial and the ordinary (fanren shoushi). It publicizes the pleasures of ordinary people, celebrates their values, their dignity, their feelings, and the beauty in their personalities and daily lives. Using the format of naturalistic documentary, the program reported such topics as the daily routines of women textile workers, postal workers, and vendors on the streets, focussing on their hardships, their endurance, and their dedication; the final days in high school students' preparation for the university entrance exams, the tears and laughter at a reunion of university graduates, the sorrow and pain of a pair of parents losing their sons killed by gangsters, and a heart-warming old lady who spends all her savings to buy turtles from sellers who sell them as delicacies so as to return them to nature. Rather than treating people as objects to be managed and shaped, the reporters treat people as protagonists, who speak, laugh, and cry on screen in their everyday environment. Before, when a camera crew went to shoot factory workers at work, they always first notified the factory leaders and workers, who would put on a good show for the camera. Now *Living Space* camera crews may just show up without notice. Even the camera angle, neither looking up in shooting the elites, nor looking down in shooting the lower classes, is arguably more democratic than the conventions of regular Chinese television news.

As a result of the wide use of documentary reporting techniques in the two programs, an interesting reversal of roles has occurred within CCTV News Centre. Although *East Time and Space* and *Focus* are produced by the *News Commentary Department*, compared with regular news, the programs actually have more respect for factuality and provide a broader range of opinions on a given issue. They are more likely to "let facts speak for themselves" and "let the audience draw their own conclusions," and are less likely to do symbolic violence to social life than regular

news programming.¹⁰⁵ The following analogy offered by Chen Mang, producer of *Living Space*, is perhaps too simplistic, but it does suggest a less propagandistic approach in reporting: "This piece of cake [a slice of social life] is very delicious in itself. But you [the journalist] chew it first, and then pass it to the audience. Why not just cut a piece and directly give it to the audience?"¹⁰⁶

Frequent display of telephone numbers to call and messages that solicit news tips reflect the general effort to give the people a role in news production, a commitment initiated by the Shanghai's East Radio. Mandatory topics ordered from above account for approximately one-third of the topics on *Focus*, while the rest are either initiated by the journalists themselves or by members of the audience.¹⁰⁷ There is, indeed, a significant and highly visible difference between these programs and CCTV's 7:00 p.m. news, where an absolute majority of the domestic news is highly propagandist, with topics apparently assigned from above.¹⁰⁸

Dancing with Chains

Notwithstanding the department's relative organizational, financial, and editorial autonomy, which, according to one author, is the "envy of many in journalism circles," the programs are also under the close scrutiny of authorities.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, while journalists have tried a new brand of television journalism, the authorities have also tried to establish a new form of control through the coaching of producers and journalists so that they might internalize the perspectives and standards of the authorities.

¹⁰⁵I am only speaking of a question of degree, of course.

¹⁰⁶Paraphrased by Lou Hongdao and Lu Min, p. 93.

¹⁰⁷Interview with "E," November 1994.

¹⁰⁸*Focus* follows the CCTV's 7:00 p.m. news, separated by eight minutes of commercials. Thus the contrast is quite evident.

¹⁰⁹Xiao Rong, p. 21.

Just a few months after the airing of *Focus*, media officials in the bureaucratic hierarchy of CCTV news production as well as a selected number of producers and reporters from the News Commentary Department were summoned to the Party headquarters to hear praise and comments. Most importantly, they received instructions from top officials of the Party Central Committee's Leadership Group for Propaganda and Ideological Work, the Party's Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television. Ding Guangen, the Party's ideological chief, presided over the meeting and gave instructions. One of the criticisms, according to a broadcasting official, was that the programs had produced too many critical pieces and the department was reminded that "focus" should not necessarily mean exposure and critical topics.¹¹⁰

The instructions from the top of the Party's ideological hierarchy were passed down effectively. In a seminar on the *Focus* programs, CCTV President Yang Weiguang spoke both as a transmitter of instructions from above and as the top official of CCTV. In addition to general requirements that the programs must be consistent with the Party line and must uphold the principle of "correct guidance to public opinion," some of Yang's specific instructions and comments set specific political and ideological boundaries on the programs in terms of topic selection and framing. They were apparently made as a precaution and perhaps, more importantly, as a correction to tendencies that had been perceived as going in the opposite direction:¹¹¹

No matter whether the topic is a positive or negative one, ... the programs broadcast must give people encouragement, confidence, and strength to march forward, rather than a feeling of hopelessness.

... Problems that the government has paid attention to, is trying to solve may be dealt with ... Don't deal with problems that are essentially unsolvable. Don't deal with those problems for which there are definitely no immediate solutions.

¹¹⁰This information was obtained from an interview with media official "M," October 1994.

¹¹¹Yang Weiguang, p. 2.

Exercise caution about controversial issues and personalities ... don't report controversial figures in *Sons of the East*.

The choice of interviewees and sources to quote is very crucial. It is of primary importance to seek the opinions of responsible authorities and to clearly state the position of the government. Such authoritative opinions are what guidance over public opinion means. They take a clear stand on right and wrong. It is not enough to just have the public talk.¹¹²

Don't induce interviewees to express dissatisfaction toward the Party and the government and to talk about the mistakes committed by the Party in the past. For example, a reporter asked the interviewee this question in one program: "Have you ever said something that was against your own will?" Who forced him to speak against his own will? The Communist Party?¹¹³ Now you are all laughing, but the program has been broadcast.

Critical media scholars in the West have gone through laborious content analysis and found that the news media perform their ideological functions through their selection of topics, their avoidance of controversy, and their framing, their use of those in authority as "primary definers" of a given issue.¹¹⁴ Here, these techniques were being explicitly imparted to journalists. The purpose, of course, as Yang said elsewhere in the speech, is to build consensus among "higher level leaders, station leaders, leaders of the News Centre, leaders of the News Commentary Department, producers, reporters, editors, hosts" and to turn overt censorship into self-censorship.

There is a station decision which requires that reporters present their interview topics to the News Centre and a responsible station president for approval before they do the interviews. At the same time, it requires that the preview standard for *Focus on the Moment* and *Focus* be tightened up, i.e. be previewed by a responsible vice-president of the station. But I feel that this is a passive method ... the role of the station and news centre leaders is not to "gun down" a program in the final

¹¹²This comment was obviously made in response to a perceived problem. Elsewhere, Yang Weiguang instructed the whole CCTV staff: "don't ask experts and scholars to discuss the gains and losses of the reforms on television, even less should we let experts predict the problems that may arise out of the reforms." See, Yang Weiguang, "Carrying out the Spirit of the National Meeting on Propaganda Work Completely, Make Our Station into an Important Front for the Construction of Socialist Spirit Civilization," *Television Research* (1994:4), p. 17.

¹¹³Of course, as Yang Weiguang and his audience were clearly aware, many people were forced by the Party to speak against their will in the past, particularly during the anti-rightist campaign in 1957 and the Cultural Revolution between 1966-1976.

¹¹⁴See, for example, Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1980); Stuart Hall, C. Jefferson, J. Clarke, and B. Robert, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Robert A. Hackett provided a summary of the literature on state institutions as "primary definers" of public issues in the west news media, see his *News and Dissent: The Press and the Politics of Peace in Canada* (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1991), pp. 71-73.

stage. The most positive measure is to make every reporter and editor, every producer his [or her] own gatekeeper, i.e. to make the leaders and the reporters, editors and hosts share completely the same perspective, have the same standards of judgment ... ¹¹⁵

Professionals in the department are indeed very careful in their work. While Sun Yusheng, the director of the department stressed making sure that the programs don't cause political instability, producers are also very careful in selecting a topic to report. As one journalism researcher in Beijing puts it in an interview, the people in the department are dancing with chains on.

The pressure from above is certainly constantly felt. However, the programs cannot simply reflect the demand of being the Party's mouthpiece. The competing pressures and instructions that the journalists have to work under and accommodate are perhaps best symbolized by the layout of the trade magazine published by and for the department. On the front pages, the director transmits his own instructions and comments as well as instructions and comments from above. Toward the end, there are letters revealing the audience's appreciation and comments about the programs and, more importantly, their concerns, expectations, and proposals for topics (for example, unjustified school fees). At the very end are the daily audience ratings of the programs, which affect professional self-esteem and, more importantly, are a constant reminder of the bottom line, a very important consideration not only for the very survival of the department but as well for individual income and benefits. In between the directors' instructions and audience comments and ratings are the journalists' own articles reflecting on how they do their jobs.

From available material, these journalists seem quite proud of what they can do in pushing the limits of control. Sun Yusheng's instructions, for example, are framed in negative terms, of not causing instability, which, one could argue, is the minimum requirement of being a Party mouthpiece. At the same time, although there is certainly a grain of truth in a critic's comment that the programs are more about international

¹¹⁵Yang Weiguang, "Sticking to the Principle of Correct Guidance to Public Opinion," p. 1.

"focal issues" than domestic ones,¹¹⁶ the majority of the audience (at least for the moment) seem to be very responsive to the programs and appreciative of the extent to which the programs reflect their concerns and speak for them.

There is one final note on the political and ideological orientation of the program. As mentioned earlier, the motto for *Living Space* is "tell the ordinary folk's (laobaixing) own stories." The choice of the term "laobaixing" here is noteworthy. It is not "renmin" ("the people," as in official Party discourse - "serve the people"), nor "qunzhong" (the masses, as in "the mass line"). Nor is it "gongmin" ("citizens," as in legal and democratic discourse), nor "guanzhong" (audience). The term "laobaixing" is folksy, the opposite of the official and the political. It is a term that was used frequently by the Party in the revolutionary years, when it tried to solicit the support of the public not yet under its political domination and attempted to establish its cultural leadership. The discursive position that the program finally assigned to the ordinary people is perhaps suggestive of the program's ideological ambiguity. The language has moved away from the official political discourse and the discourse of "mass line journalism," in which the Party propagates its ideas among the people or the masses. However, it has not embraced an alternative political discourse stressing the democratic rights and responsibilities of citizens to voice their concerns and actively participate in decision making.

Equally significant, though, after a process of trial and readjustment based on audience ratings and the intuition of staff members,¹¹⁷ the program has moved away from a narrow form of consumerism in which the audience is explicitly addressed as consumers who get their informational services from the program (market-oriented, "at your service" type of information and practical knowledge about daily life) to a broader

¹¹⁶This comment was about the contrast between the important international political and policy issues, the conflicts, the controversies dealt with by the programs and their relatively less political, less controversial domestic topics. The comment was made to me by journalist "G" during an interview in October 1994.

¹¹⁷Lei Weizheng, "Enlightenment from *Living Space*'s Process of Re-Positioning Itself," *Television Research* (1994:4), pp. 30-31.

and more implicit form of consumerism - the audience as "consumers" of media image. Rather than delivering practical information for the consumer in the market, the program appropriates popular idioms and sensibilities and draws upon stories generated from the "living space" of ordinary people. Thus, although the program is completely commercially financed, it actually wins its large audience by rejecting a narrowly defined form of consumerism. *Living Space*, in particular, is praised in trade journals as a rare "untainted island" in the sea of commercialism on television. The News Commentary Department has paid special attention to maintain integrity and credibility. *Sons of the East*, for example, is very careful about offering publicity for entrepreneurs. The Department has also turned down proposals for collaborating with business enterprises in setting up business ventures. The practice of "paid journalism" is rare because of the type of journalism the two programs are promoting. The monopolistic status of CCTV and the programs' popularity also mean that advertisers are unlikely to exert any direct pressure on the programs at this point.¹¹⁸

The Diffusion of the Reforms

As argued in the previous chapters, the media reforms in the early and mid 1980s were mainly on the operational and technical levels. Just as a theoretical ferment was being created to push news media reforms on the conceptual and structural level, the movement suffered a major setback as a result of the suppression of the democratic movement in 1989. It has also been argued that despite rapid commercialization, the overall framework of the news media system remains largely unchanged. Commercialism is simply superimposed on the Party media system. And it is precisely such a development that has led to the phenomenon of massive corruption in journalism.

¹¹⁸Interview with journalist "E," November 1994.

The analysis of the three cases of broadcasting reform in this chapter, however, add some nuances to the broad strokes of the previous chapters. These are cases in which reform and commercialization has brought at least some conceptual and structural change. With these reforms, new stations and programs introduced a new logic of news media operation on a limited scale. News and information have become more attractive to audiences. They are geared more to the interests and concerns of the people, thus putting some truth into ideas such as "serve the people" and "people's radio serves the people" and being the "people's mouthpiece." These new stations and programs do not carry the word "people" in their names, yet they have made themselves closer to the people.

Although the Shanghai East stations and the CCTV News Commentary Department depend completely on commercial revenue, they appear to be less subordinated to business interests than other crass forms of commercialism in established Party organs and traditional broadcasting units. Practices of "paid journalism" have reportedly declined in these stations and program production units. Indeed, an often mentioned consequence of the broadcasting reforms in Shanghai is the gradual moving away from "invitation journalism" and paid journalism. Higher salaries, stricter guidelines and enforcement, increased autonomy for journalists to realize their professional aspirations and, most importantly, the need for credibility and changed concepts of news have all contributed to less corruption in the journalism practised by these pioneers. Despite tight political control by the Party, the commercial need to attract audiences, combined with the enthusiasm for reform of younger professionals recruited through open competition and working under a set of new institutional mechanisms, have all helped to push the limits of the politically permissible in news reporting. The progressive and emancipatory potential of the market have been partially realized. Reporters feel "liberated" and regain a sense of

dignity when they have a place to practice critical reporting and no longer practice "paid journalism."¹¹⁹

Although the analysis is presented as case studies, these reforms, in fact, represent major developments in the course of broadcasting reform since the mid 1980s. From the three cases and their timing, it is clear that the reform has grown from the periphery to the center, and from the technical and operational level to the structural level, although still in a very limited way. Geographically, the reform has spread from the South to the North, and from the local (PRER) to the regional (East Radio and East Television) and finally to the national level (CCTV). In terms of medium, it began with radio and then moved to the more popular and influential medium of television. In terms of content, it commenced with PRER's focus on business and entertainment and expanded with East Radio and Television's overall programming, finally appearing in one of the most influential sites possible, current affairs on CCTV. To be sure, the overall structure of the CCTV News Centre has not been altered, and the centerpiece in the production heartland of CCTV news, the *CCTV Evening News*, is still being produced under the same organizational control and with the same archaic conceptions of news. But a special zone has been created within the CCTV News Centre, with new programs produced under new arrangement with a new style of journalism.

And the significance of the cases are not limited to themselves. The establishment of the PRER and the two East stations, in particular, has triggered two waves of broadcasting reform throughout the country. They sent shock waves through broadcasting circles, and their innovations have been adopted by others in various degrees. Since 1987, PRER's economic station model has spread to many parts of the country. Although the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television was restrictive in approving applications (especially before 1992), by the end of 1992, there were already

¹¹⁹My impression of journalists working under different institutional settings confirm this observation.

thirty economic radio stations and nine economic television stations in the country.¹²⁰ Since the latter half of 1992, the pace has quickened. As of 1994, there were more than one hundred economic radio and television stations. Although the name "economic" continues to be used by these stations, many of them are actually commercial general interest radio and television stations. Some of these stations have a similar institutional set-up to PRER, others have relatively more organizational and editorial autonomy, especially some of the economic radio stations established since 1992. For example, the Shan'xi Economic Radio Station, which officially started broadcasting in October 1992, has a high degree of autonomy from the mother station. All its personnel, including the presidents, are hired on the basis of open competition on a yearly contract basis. Financially, the station is on a responsibility contract system in which after handing in a given amount to the mother station, it is responsible for its own profits and losses.¹²¹ Many of these radio stations have achieved wide popularity with the audiences.

Moreover, the economic stations' formats and presentation styles have slowly spread to conventional stations, although with much reluctance and hesitation at the beginning. Magazine type programs, hosts, phone-ins, and live broadcasts have been adopted by some conventional stations at least in parts of their programming. In March 1993, even the CCTV changed all its news broadcasts, with the exception of *CCTV Evening News*, from recorded to live programs.

In the provinces and municipalities, the diffusion of the PRER model across stations and within stations has led to the break-up of some traditional People's Radio Stations into different specialized stations. This "break-up" usually begins with the separation of an economic station from the mother station, followed by the appearance of an "art and entertainment" station or a music station, and an educational station.

¹²⁰Du Xueliang, "An Overview of the Development of Local Broadcasting in China in 1992," in Journalism Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, (ed.), *Chinese Journalism Yearbook 1993* (Beijing, China Social Sciences Press, 1994), p. 8.

¹²¹Zhang Zhongyi, Wang Yong, "A Successful Experiment with Radio Reform at the Provincial Level," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1993: 1-2), p. 85.

Other specialized stations have focused on such areas as traffic, children's programming, and even the stock market. These subsidiary stations enjoy different degrees of autonomy in financing, personnel, resources and editorial control. It ranges from PRER's relative lack of autonomy in these areas to the complete contracting out of the Beijing Music Station, which grew out of the stereo music department of the Beijing People's Radio Station. In this case, the relationship between the mother station and the specialized station is similar to that of the CCTV News Commentary Department to the CCTV News Centre.

Thus, the overall tendency is decentralization of broadcasting. And although there is no specific survey material available, the general pattern seems to be the less political the contents are, the more autonomy a subsidiary station may enjoy. The politically sensitive news and current affairs programming, for example, is in most cases still run by the traditional people's radio stations under the old institutional set-up with its mechanisms of control. Less political content is taken up by specialized stations with more autonomy. These stations, because of their higher productivity and greater popularity with audiences, usually generate more commercial revenue, part of which goes to the people's station through various allocation schemes to support its news and current affairs programming. In a few cases, such as Guangdong, Tianjin and Beijing, the news and current affairs programming department, like other programming departments, has also grown into a "news station," a sister station of other specialized ones, that takes the major responsibility for political propaganda and plays the greater mouthpiece role. In these cases, the traditional "people's station" no longer directly runs any programs. It becomes an administrative body transmitting policy directives, exercising final editorial and financial control, maintaining broadcasting facilities, and administering other aspects of the broadcasting network as a whole.¹²²

¹²²For a more complete overview of specialization in radio broadcasting, see Liu Yujun, "The Distribution of Specialized Radio Stations and Their Prospects," in Lou Hongdao and Liu Yujun (eds.), *Broadcasting Reform and Development Across the Century* (Beijing: China Broadcasting Publishing House, 1994), pp. 122.

This tendency toward decentralization and specialization, however, is still in the early stage of development, and its diffusion has been very uneven across the country, and between radio and television. However, already, advantages and problems are already apparent. On the positive side, proliferation of economic stations and other specialty channels counterbalances the lopsided political and propagandist orientation of the "official model" and gives fuller play to economic, cultural and entertainment functions of broadcasting. At the same time, a number of problems have emerged. First, there is a lack of overall planning in the distribution of channels. Second, in an effort to attract audiences and fulfil revenue-generating responsibilities, many specialized channels, despite their different names, basically offer a similar programming fare (plenty of human interest stories, and psychological counselling hotlines, for example). Third, the competition for audience has induced many stations to cater to vulgar interests. Fourth, because of the lack of well-trained personnel required for the new jobs, especially program hosts, and the over-stretching of productive capacities, the quality of programming is very poor in many cases.¹²³ There is, therefore, a danger of approaching the other extreme from the Cultural Revolution's "big talk, empty talk and falsehood," that is, "small talk" that is similarly empty.

While the more conservative institutional set-up and more limited content reforms of the PRER has led to parallel developments in broadcasting across the country, so far, the institutional set-up of the two East stations in Shanghai have not led to parallel developments in other provinces. The government has not given up its one level of government, one radio and one television station policy. Because the two Shanghai stations were approved by the central authority as a special case using the special geographic status of Pudong as a justification, other local governments are effectively prevented from copying the model. However, it is very likely that they have

¹²³Liu Yujun, pp. 120-122.

had influence on the institutional set-up of more independent specialized radio stations established since the establishment of East Radio in 1992.

In addition, the two East stations' production values, programming formats, and presentation styles have added energy and scope to the wave of diffusion. Their breakthroughs in news and information programming and the subsequent changes in the same area in the two old Shanghai stations as a result of competition have also had some impact on news and information programming elsewhere. In addition, their news programs, with their large news nets and their relative openness, have led reporters from other stations to send in sensitive stories that cannot get approval in their own stations. For example, when reporters in the Beijing radio station were prohibited from writing the news story about the September 1994 shooting incident in Beijing, they sent their story to Shanghai East Radio, hoping that the news would get out.¹²⁴ At the same time, the East stations are becoming a new source of news for other stations. A radio news director in Hangzhou, for example, said in an interview that his station used East Radio as a regular news source. Finally, due to their regional reach, the Shanghai East stations have not only introduced competition into the Shanghai broadcasting market; but have also exerted some pressure on radio and television stations in neighboring provinces.

The CCTV News Commentary Department model is a more recent development, and it is still too early to see whether other major national media will follow suit. However, already the Beijing media community has felt the pressure of the content orientation of its programming. For example, an article in *Journalism Front*, published under an apparent pen name, has attempted to redefine what is important in news after praising the breakthroughs of the *Focus* programs in addressing the concerns of ordinary people. The article poses several questions. Why do the lead news stories on the front pages of newspapers and in evening television news not even touch the

¹²⁴Interview with "D," October 1994.

"focuses" of the *Focus* programs at all? To be sure, the lead news must emphasize positive propaganda, must publicize the excellent political and economic and social situation, report the achievements of various areas and role models, report important speeches by leaders. But the question is, aren't the important issues that directly affect the lives of ordinary people, the issues that they are generally concerned about, also important news? Shouldn't they be reported on the front pages? At present, the front pages are filled with meeting reports, speeches and long articles. Where is the important news on the important news pages?¹²⁵

At the same time, the introduction of a new style of television journalism and the treatment of ordinary people as protagonists of news in *Living Space* has also caused some in the journalism community to say that "journalism should be done in this way."¹²⁶ Eventually, the programs' new style of television journalism might also have an influence on television news in general.

In short, the reforms analyzed in this chapter represent major steps in the course of broadcasting reform. Their novel institutional set-ups and their new content and formats all in one way or another shape the reforms elsewhere.

¹²⁵Xiu Mu, "Speaking about Important News," *Journalism Front* (1994:11), p. 14.

¹²⁶For example, Lou Hongdao and Lu Min reported that leaders of a major Beijing news organization suggested to their journalists that their news should be written in the same way as *Living Space* does. A media official with the Xinhua News Agency said that the Agency has felt the challenges posed by *Living Space*'s journalism orientation. See Lou Hongdao and Lu Min, p. 89; Lei Weizheng, p. 30.

Chapter Seven

Newspapers for the Market

As can be seen from the previous chapter, broadcasting reform amidst commercialization has been carried out in a more or less orderly, top-down fashion. Reform measures were initiated by broadcasting stations and/or broadcasting administrations and were under the close supervision of the Party and government authorities. The monopolistic status of broadcasting stations means that it is relatively easy for Party and government authorities to exercise control during the course of reform and commercialization.

In the newspaper sector, however, the situation is slightly different. To be sure, the government still exercises tight control on the publication of newspapers. As stipulated by the 1990 Provisional Regulations on Newspaper Management, all applications for the publication of a newspaper must receive final approval of the State Press and Publication Administration.¹ All newspapers must be pre-registered and carry an official registration number. Moreover, with the exception of Party organs, all newspapers must have an area of specialization and must have a "responsible department" (zhuguan bumen, i.e. an official publisher) which exercises leadership and control over the newspaper. For a national newspaper, this department must have the minimum rank of a central government ministry; for a provincial paper, it would need the minimum rank of a provincial bureau; and for a county paper, a county level government entity. This provision effectively prevents the launching of a second general interest newspaper in a given area to compete with the Party organ, unless the Party and government authorities themselves want to set up a second newspaper. With

¹State Press and Publication Administration, "Provisional Regulations on Newspaper Management," issued on December 25, 1990, in Policy and Regulations Bureau, State Press and Publication Administration (ed.), *Chinese Press and Publication Laws and Regulations: A Concise and Practical Handbook* (Beijing: China Books Publishing House, 1994), pp. 135-145.

the exception of Party organs, all the newspapers are either specialized newspapers focussing on a specific subject, such as the economy, the legal system, health, education, or culture, or special interest newspapers targeting specific readers such as intellectuals, workers, women, farmers, or youth. This system effectively prevents the existence of newspapers as independent civil institutions outside the Party state apparatus and the pseudo-version of civil organizations constructed on the basis of the Party's mass organizations.

Nevertheless, the newspaper sector is more pluralistic in its structure than the broadcasting sector. Because of the smaller technological and financial requirements and the availability of commercial printing shops,² it is relatively easy to start a newspaper, with the necessary official connections. The control of official "responsible departments" over these specialized and special interest newspapers is usually loose. Unlike the Party propaganda departments, which exercise directly control over Party organs and broadcasting stations, these "responsible departments" are usually government functional departments that have no direct responsibility for propaganda and ideology. Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter Three, while governments at different levels continue to invest in the broadcasting sector, they have reduced their investments in the newspaper sector significantly. In 1992, about one-third of newspapers were totally dependent on commercial revenue. For the two-thirds that still receive government subsidies, the amounts are usually rather small and are growing smaller. In fact, as Chapters Four and Five have demonstrated, many specialized newspapers have been established not only to carry out the propaganda work within a particular government department but to "create income." Some have even resorted to compulsory subscriptions through administrative measures to achieve financial gains. In short, in comparison with the broadcasting sector, the newspaper sector is structurally

²The print shops of large newspapers undertake contract jobs from smaller newspapers in an effort to increase revenue.

more diverse, the commercial imperative is stronger, and with the exception of Party organs on the different levels, Party and government control is relatively loose.

The situation is further complicated by the fairly widespread use among the print media of the contract system (*chengbao*), which has been introduced only on a limited scale in the broadcasting media. With the exception of Party committees and major government departments, many "responsible departments," or official publishers have contracted out their newspapers to the newspaper's management. The typical arrangement in the contractual system is for the contractor to pay the licence-holding institution a fixed sum on a regular basis for authorization to publish under its name. While the papers so contracted are legally owned by the licence-holding department and officially under its editorial supervision, the operative control rests with the contractor who is responsible for the editing, printing, distribution, taxes and all other expenses.³ In some cases, individuals or groups interested in publishing a newspaper have even taken the initiative to persuade a qualifying unit to become an official publisher and obtain a licence on their behalf. This was how the *World Economic Herald* got its licence to publish from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and the Chinese World Economists Association.⁴

On the distribution side, the reforms in the early and mid-1980s have led to the development of a diverse distribution system and the creation of a newspaper market literally on the streets. With the end of the post office's monopoly in newspaper distribution in the mid-1980s, alternative distribution systems have developed. In addition to office and home delivery, both postal and non-postal distribution systems find their final outlets on newsstands in the cities. Indeed, street newspaper sellers are important components of the city landscape in reform era China.

³Joseph M. Chan, "Commercialization without Independence: Trends and Tensions of Media Development in China," in J. Y. S. Cheng & M. Brosseau (eds.), *China Review 1993* (Hongkong: Chinese University Press), p. 25.9.

⁴Ibid.

The army of newspaper vendors mainly consists of retirees and the jobless, who undertake newspaper retailing as a form of self-employment. Some have a fixed spot in busy commercial and residential areas, while others are mobile, carrying newspapers on bicycles and carts. In 1992, there were approximately 1,200 individual newspaper vendors in metropolitan Beijing alone.⁵ In contrast to institutional subscriptions which provide newspapers for reading in the office, street retail outlets provide the major source of newspaper consumption in private homes. These are the papers that individual readers are actually willing to spend their own money on, out of individual interest rather than institutional imperatives. The pattern of consumption is completely different. In the office, the newspapers are free, and to read a newspaper is often considered legitimate political and professional education at work. It is more or less a part of the job. When you first arrive at your office, when you are tired of your work, when you are in passive protest against your superior, or when you do not have anything else to do, you read a newspaper. No matter how unattractive the newspapers may be, you will flip through them anyway (although few people admit that they read *People's Daily*). Newspapers sold on the streets, however, has to compete not only with other papers but also with other commodities and other forms of popular culture for a reader's leisure time and spare change. A study of these papers, therefore, will reveal much about reform and commercialization in the newspaper sector and the emerging newspaper market in China.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part provides an overall survey of newspapers sold on the streets. The analysis is based on a sample of newspapers gathered on the streets of Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou. The sample was collected from the three different cities on different dates by purchasing all the different issues available at a given retail outlet.⁶ A total of seventy-nine papers, with fifty-four

⁵Wen Lu, "Capital City: 1,200 Newsstands," *Chinese Journalists* (1992:8), pp. 18-20.

⁶The Shanghai sample was collected on September 7, 1994 from a post office-owned newspaper booth contracted out to a male retiree near one of Shanghai's major long-distance bus depots. The Beijing sample was purchased

different titles were collected. The dates and locations were rather arbitrary, and the sample is not exactly a representative or random sample as such. Nevertheless, they provide a good example of the type of newspapers available on the market. Moreover, the analysis is not limited to the sample, which is mostly used for illustrative purposes. It draws from descriptive and analytical material in the trade journals as well as from interviews.

The second part of this chapter is a more specific case study. It examines the reforms carried out by the *Beijing Youth News*, an official Communist Youth League organ that has achieved remarkable market success.

Newspapers on the Streets

Street vendors do not sell major Party organs and the majority of the specialized newspapers published by various government departments. Thus, in Beijing, for example, all the major national Party and government organs, *People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, *Economic Daily*, *Worker's Daily*, *Women's Daily*, etc, are rarely available for sale on the streets because virtually nobody will buy these papers with their own money. These are the "official" papers, subscribed with public money and for consumption in offices, classrooms and factory workshops. *Beijing Daily*, the official Party organ of the Beijing municipal Party committee, is also rarely available on the streets. The situation is the same in other cities.

The most common staples on the streets are the local evening paper and local radio and television weeklies. The radio and television weeklies contain schedules, stories about television series, program reviews, features about radio and television personalities, and other infotainment material. Because of their practical utility and popularity, they sell well. *China Television Journal*, published by CCTV, for example,

from a female retiree on a busy intersection in central Beijing on October 7, 1994. The Hangzhou sample was obtained from a young man selling papers in a market area in the city centre on February 9, 1995.

sells 600,000 copies on the streets in the Beijing area alone. It had an average circulation of 2,380,000 per issue in 1992, second highest of all the newspapers in the country, just after *People's Daily*.⁷ It has the highest private subscription rate of all the newspapers in the country.

The Evening Papers

The other best sellers are the local evening papers. These are general interest dailies, published in the afternoon. In most cases, they are under the direct control of the municipal Party propaganda committee. They are usually the sister papers of the main Party organ and are Party papers meant for the consumption of the family in urban centres. Two of the evening papers, Shanghai's *Xinmin Evening News* and Tianjin's *Tonight's News*, can be traced back to progressive commercial evening papers during the pre-1949 era. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Party, perhaps out of a recognition of the need for newspapers as a form of popular culture for the urban population, created eleven other evening papers, most notably *Yangcheng Evening News* in Guangzhou, and *Beijing Evening News*.⁸ Unlike the morning Party organ, the evening dailies carry more soft news and are more entertainment oriented. Their contents are broader and closer to the everyday life of the urban population. Although they also shoulder the responsibility of propagating the Party's policies and directives, they are less straightforward in their approach.⁹ During the Cultural Revolution, all the thirteen evening papers were forced to close because their human interest stories and entertainment and family orientation were viewed as incompatible with the revolutionary fervor of the time.

⁷Journalism Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, (ed.), *China Journalism Yearbook 1993* (Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press, 1993), p. 413.

⁸Qian Xinbao, (ed.), *A Handbook for News Correspondents* (Dalian: Dalian Publishing House, 1992), p. 92.

⁹Lynn T. White III provides a very useful analysis of the similarities and differences between the main Party organ, *Liberation Daily* and the evening paper *Xinmin Evening News* in Shanghai. See his "All the News: Structure and Politics in Shanghai's Reform Media," in Chun-chuan Lee, (ed.) *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990), pp. 88-110.

Since 1979, not only have all the previous evening papers resumed publication, many new ones have also been established in different cities. By the end of 1992, there were forty-two evening papers in different cities.¹⁰ By the end of 1994, the number had more than tripled, with a total of 128 titles.¹¹ The wave of newspaper expansion following Deng's talks has particularly favored the evening newspapers market. Evening papers have become the fastest growing sector within the newspaper industry. In major cities such as Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Guangzhou, the daily circulation of evening papers are higher than the morning daily Party organs.¹²

In contrast to the main Party organ, street sales account for a larger portion of the evening paper's circulation. *Beijing Evening News*, for example, sold more than 400,000 copies a day on the streets in 1992. This was more than sixty percent of its total daily circulation. Nanjing's *Yangtze Evening News*, a more recent arrival, sold more than ninety percent of the paper's total circulation on the streets of Nanjing in 1992.¹³ This heavy dependence on the market compels these newspapers to cater to the interests of readers and be more responsive to their sensibilities. As the title of an article written by the editorial committee of *Yangtze Evening News* puts it, the newspaper must "Think Highly of Readers, Understand Readers, and Be Close to Readers."¹⁴ The paper carries out large-scale reader surveys on a yearly basis and adjusts its contents accordingly.

In addition to human interest stories and information about family life and entertainment, the evening papers attempt to write political and economic news from a

¹⁰ *Chinese Journalism Yearbook 1993*, p. 413.

¹¹ Wang Zhereng, "Carry Forward the Party Press's Fine Tradition of Closely Connecting to the People," *Journalism Front* (1994:12), p. 3.

¹² In 1992, daily circulation of *Beijing Daily* was 650,000, whereas that of *Beijing Evening News* was 800,000. In Tianjin, daily circulation of *Tianjin Daily* was 412,000; whereas the city's evening paper, *Tonight's News* had a daily circulation of 450,000. In Shanghai, *Liberation Daily's* daily circulation figure was 655,000; whereas that of *Xinmin Evening News* was 1,590,000. Similarly, whereas *Guangzhou Daily* had a circulation of 430,000, that of *Yangcheng Evening News* was 1,130,000. See *Chinese Journalism Yearbook 1993*, pp. 374-375, p. 413.

¹³ Editorial Committee of *Yangtze Evening News*, "Think Highly of Readers, Understand Readers, and be Close to Readers," *Chinese Journalists* (1993:1), p. 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

personal angle and try to soften hard news reports. Indeed, the motto of the most successful evening paper in the country, Shanghai's *Xinmin Evening News*, is "shorter, shorter, even shorter; softer, softer, even softer." (duanxie, duanxie, zai duanxie; ruanxie, ruanxie, zai ruanxie)

The wide popularity of evening newspapers can also be attributed to their attempts to address the common concerns of the city's residents and to give voice to their complaints against government bureaucracies, particularly public utility departments. Like the phone-in broadcast news and talkshows, they exercise some form of public opinion supervision over government and the business sector.

In 1994, the most talked about evening newspaper in journalism circles was *Qianjiang Evening News*, an evening paper published in Hangzhou city. The paper gained popularity among its readers and received high evaluation among media circles for its policy of "encouraging the newspaper to participate in community life and inviting readers to participate in running the newspaper."¹⁵ In the past few years, the paper has become an active organizer of community events in the city. Its activist role in social life and its crusading journalism has added a new twist to the Leninist notion of the newspaper as a collective organizer and propagandist. It sought medical treatments for sick children, organized voluntary service teams to restore public utilities following a major storm in the city. It invited government officials to hold office hours in the newsroom and solve problems for concerned citizens on the spot. It exposed illegal business activities and sought social justice for the powerless. In a practice reminiscent of the best tradition of mass-line journalism, in which journalists are encouraged to learn from the masses by becoming close to them and participating in their activities, the newspaper has sent journalists to report on individuals and institutions at the grassroots, organized them to take temporary jobs in different areas to better understand the experiences, perspectives, and feelings of ordinary people.

¹⁵Wang Zhereng, p. 3.

Rather than upholding mainstream American journalism's notion of detachment, reporters assume the roles of shop attendants, sanitary workers, public utility department employees, neighborhood committee cadres to get an insider's view of these people and their institutions. All these activities, of course, generate news both about these individuals and institutions as well as the newspaper itself and the journalists involved.

At the same time, the paper solicits the participation of readers through the provision of news tips, the writing of news stories through such activities as "being a one-day reporter," and even the planning of reporting activities. Neighborhood committees, for example, reportedly have often phoned the newspaper on how to organize reporting activities and how to better meet the needs of its readers.¹⁶ During all these process of active participation and involvement in community events, the newspaper effectively publicizes itself, stages news events for itself and thus attracts a large readership. In this way, it successfully blends propaganda with commercial success.

The official press circle celebrates the "*Qianjiang Evening News Phenomenon*" as an example of "carrying forward the Party press's fine tradition of closely connecting to the people."¹⁷ It is clear, however, that mass line journalism has been effectively commercialized, or to put it in another way, the commercial potential of mass line journalism has been exploited by the paper. On the other hand, the commercial imperative has been domesticated, contained, and incorporated into mass line journalism. The commercial logic, therefore, provides a mechanism for the (partial) fulfillment of the logic of mass line journalism.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Editorial Committee of *Yangtze Evening News*, p. 17.

Tabloids and Crime Stories

In addition to evening papers and radio television weeklies, many street retailers carry dozens of tabloids. There are two meanings to this word. First, in terms of physical size, most of the papers on the streets are quarto rather than folio papers. Second, in terms of content, they carry the sort of sensational content typical of tabloids in the west.¹⁸ Indeed, the term "small papers on the streets" (jietou xiaobao) is almost a synonym for sensationalism, fabrication and vulgar taste.

The first wave of tabloids appeared on the streets in 1984-85.¹⁹ Because of their concentration on sex, murder and gossip, they came under Party attack during the campaign against "Spiritual Pollution" in 1984-1985. However, since most of these papers did not carry explicit pornographic and "counter-revolutionary" material, they did not violate any laws and regulations. Therefore, the government could not simply ban them. Local Party propaganda departments issued circulars demanding more supervision and editorial control on the part of relevant "responsible departments" and tightened registration procedures.²⁰

However, the tabloid market continued to flourish, particularly after Deng's trip south in spring 1992. In my sample, the three street sellers provided a total of seventy-nine editions of fifty-four different papers. In addition to the three cities where they were sold and nearby locations, they were from faraway places all over the country.²¹ Most of these papers are weeklies. They are published by a diversity of government departments and institutions, including government legal departments, public security

¹⁸Papers published in folio size whose content fits this category will be treated as tabloids in this discussion.

¹⁹For a brief description and analysis of street tabloids in 1984-1985, see Robert Bishop, *Qi Lai: Mobilizing a Billion* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989).

²⁰See, for example, "Guangxi Urges Supervision of Small Newspapers," *Nanning Guangxi Regional Service* (December 18, 1984), in *FBIS* (December 21, 1984), P1; "Sichuan Urges Tighter Control of Newspapers," *Chengdu Sichuan Provincial Service* (December 16, 1984), in *FBIS* (December 18, 1984); "Guangdong Regulates Tabloids Market Management," *Yangcheng Evening News* (April 10, 1985), p. 1, in *FBIS* (April 18, 1985), P1.

²¹For example, Shenyang, Fushun and Jilin in the northeast, Xi'an in the northwest, Baotou in Inner Mongolia, Chengdu and Nanning in the southwest, and Zhuhai, Haikou, and Guangzhou in the south.

bureaus, courts, local People's Political Consultative Conferences, research institutes, and professional associations. Major Party and government newspapers also publish tabloids. Many of their tabloids are in the form of news digests. It is questionable whether tabloids should be considered an alternative at all since they are mostly published by the same news organizations that publish the mainstream newspapers.

The tendency for businesses to become increasingly involved in the media industry is also evident in the samples. For example, while the January 10, 1995 issue of the *Hainan Legal News* listed the Hainan Provincial Legal Bureau as its principle publisher (zhuban), it also lists under its masthead six business enterprises as "co-sponsors" (xieban), with one of them as the "chief co-sponsor". Presumably, these enterprises provided funds for the newspapers, and the "chief co-sponsor" probably provided more money than the rest. Similarly, *Global Digest* (January 22, 1995) listed *People's Daily's* International Department as its main publisher and listed under its masthead two business "co-sponsors." Inside on page 4, the paper listed eleven business enterprises as its "board of directors." It is unusual for a newspaper to have a board of directors in China. And the practice of listing the names of enterprises as its "board of directors" in a newspaper is certainly not an "international convention." The only explanation, of course, is that these enterprises have provided money for the paper, and the paper provided this publicity in return.

Compared with Party organs, these newspapers are generally more expensive (especially when size and content are compared) and carry less advertising. The paper in the sample with the most advertising is *Nanfang Weekend* (*Nanfang zhoumo*), with approximately twenty percent of its space devoted to advertising. Many papers have only about five percent advertising. Because they are mostly weeklies and are distributed across the country rather than in a single city and they mainly cater to the poorer residents of the city and the mobile population, especially the migrant peasant workers, they are not ideal vehicles for "paid journalism" which mainly promotes

businesses and consumer goods and services. Moreover, they do not share the Party organ's responsibility for promoting the economy. Nevertheless, these papers have found their own "market niche" for "paid journalism," for example, as publicity outlets for doctors who are supposedly able to treat difficult to cure diseases, such as cancer or diabetes, or conditions such as infertility. A feature story about a doctor who serves the people with his whole heart, published in *Xi'an Public Security News (Xi'an gong'an bao)*, January 20, 1995), even managed to incorporate the doctor's phone number (with area code), address and the bus route that leads to the doctor's clinic into the story itself! The January 29 issue of the *Weekly Digest (meizhou wenzhai)*, published by *Anhui Daily*, also managed to insert a publicity piece for a local liquor manufacturer, an apparent violation of the editorial principle of the paper itself. Unlike all the other pieces in the paper, this item does not have an original source and is therefore not a news digest. All these examples suggest the pervasiveness of "paid journalism." Like a virus, it has affected not only the mainstream papers that rely most heavily on institutional subscriptions but also the tabloids on the streets.

The majority of the papers in my sample, forty out of seventy-five copies, are "law and order papers" -- papers published by government legal departments and public security bureaus. The front page usually carries news stories about the sponsoring department with headlines such as "Public Security Departments in Xi'an Create a Series of 'Loving the People' Activities" and "Head of High Courts Holds Meeting in Haikou," which reflect typical Party journalism conventions. The commercial appeal of these papers does not lie with such conventional news. It is the sensationalist crime stories on the inside pages that sell the papers. These are long, detailed descriptions of crime and the hunting down of criminals by the police. These stories are the speciality of newspapers published by legal departments and public security bureaus who can provide much privileged information to reporters and editors of their own newspapers. They are well positioned to harvest profit from these stories. Here, gruesome crimes

and distorted human relationships, not reported in the mainstream papers, receive full and extensive treatment. My sample included the following sensational story line: baby-sitters kill the baby's mother; father rapes four daughters; three brothers share one brother's wife and sell their babies; aunt kills niece, chops up body and stores parts in refrigerator; a former prisoner makes money by offering training courses in theft, robbery and rape and his students commit scores of crimes of robbery and rape, including rape of little girls; gangsters armed with automatic weapons wage battle with police in Beijing suburbs; a *Silence of the Lambs* type serial killer; prostitution and the underground market for pornographic material; and robbery, murder, and fraud involving fabrication of State Council documents and the Seal of the State Council. In contrast to crime news in the western news media, these stories are written from an insider's view, with detailed descriptions and narratives, even dialogues between criminals and victims and investigators. The stories are related from the very beginning to the end, often the imposition of the death penalty.

Some of these stories celebrate the bravery and efficiency of law enforcement officers. Others add a moral lesson at the end and thus supposedly provide some kind of legal education to the readers. However, they are clearly primarily written for the purpose of telling a good story and selling newspapers. They expose the dark world of crime, but exposure and social critique are not the main purpose. Moreover, most of these stories are about crimes perpetrated by lower classes.

Weekend Editions

The tabloids, however, do not have a monopoly on crime stories. Many other papers also try to get a share of the profitable market for crime reports and other human interest stories. But a conceptual barrier has to be overcome first. Party dailies, in the best tradition of mass line journalism, are supposed to educate rather than entertain readers. They are supposed to cultivate socialist "spiritual civilization" rather

than cater to vulgar tastes. Other newspapers justify their existence by appealing to special interest groups with specialized contents. To overcome these official role proscriptions and publish more commercially attractive material for a wide readership, the "weekend edition" (zhoumo ban) was created.²²

There has been a flurry of publication of weekend editions since the early 1990s. In the past, since major newspapers were mainly for official consumption in the workplace, few news organizations paid much attention to the reading needs of readers on the weekend. In 1981, *China Youth News*, the official organ of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League, published its first weekend edition in an attempt to increase the appeal and readership of the paper. With more colorful and attractive page layout and, more importantly, with more critical news and features, news about popular culture stars, as well as interesting short essays and poems, the paper was an instant success.

The rapid development of weekend editions, however, did not begin until the early 1990s, with the rise of commercialism. Between 1981-1990, there were less than twenty newspapers in the country that published a weekend edition. By early 1994, however, more than four hundred newspapers were publishing their weekend editions, accounting for approximately one-fifth of the total 2,040 newspapers in China at the time.²³ By the end of 1994, the number had jumped to five hundred, or one-fourth of the total newspapers.²⁴ The years between 1992-1994 were not only a period of newspaper expansion, in which newspapers added more pages to increase information volume and advertising space, a phenomenon we have described in Chapter Four, but also the years of "weekend editions." "Page expansion fever," "weekend edition fever" were the terms frequently used by trade journals to describe the newspaper industry for

²²While dailies typically publish "weekend editions," weeklies publish "end of month editions" (yuemo ban) or "mid-month editions" (yuezhong ban). For the sake of simplicity, all these papers will be referred to as "weekend editions" hereafter, unless specified otherwise.

²³"Over 400 Weekend Editions in the Country," *Press and Publications News* (January 21, 1994), p. 1.

²⁴Bi Yang, "An Analysis of Weekend Editions," *Journalism Front* (1994:12), p. 44.

these years. In early 1992 alone, for example, at least fifty-five provincial and central Party and government organs started to publish weekend editions.²⁵

With the exception of a few weekend editions, such as *Nanfang Daily's Nanfang Weekend*, and *Nanjing Daily's Weekend*, which have separate registration numbers and are therefore independent subsidiary newspapers under the control of the main Party organ, the majority of the weekend editions are not independent papers because of government licensing restrictions. However, the news organizations cultivate the weekend edition as a "special economic zone," often with separate editorial teams and more flexible editorial policies and a "contracting out" arrangement. For the Party papers, it is an area in which the papers do not have to publish compulsory news about speeches, meetings and the activities of leaders. Here the paper has more autonomy in topic selection and content orientation. It is the only paper of the week that is published for readers rather than for leaders. For many specialized newspapers, the weekend edition is where they can go beyond the confines of their special area and cover whatever sells in the market. In short, the "weekend editions" are the "unofficial papers" of the official Party and government organs. And for tabloids, for whom official control is more remote, the weekend edition means even more editorial freedom. Thus, the "weekend editions" of Chinese newspapers are rather different from those of newspapers in the West. For example, Chinese weekend editions have few reports on news or events occurring over the weekend.²⁶

The "weekend edition" is a special space created by the official Party and government newspapers to experiment with journalism for the market. Although the financing of these newspapers has largely been marketized, the bulk of their content during the weekdays is not geared to market expansion. What is in the newspaper is not what the readers are interested in and will spend money to buy. The readers know it,

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

and the newspapers themselves also know it. In Beijing, a journalist from a major national newspaper conducted a random survey of readers' preferences among newspapers by asking them to list ten of their favorite newspapers. The majority of respondents began to mention the major national and provincial newspapers only after they had already listed five or six small papers such as evening papers, and the *Reference News*.²⁷

Nevertheless, tight political control and the official nature of the newspapers as well as long entrenched ways of doing journalism all mean that these newspapers cannot simply change their content to attract readers. Just as CCTV cannot and dare not reform its 7:00 p.m. evening news, nor can major Party and government organs undertake large-scale reforms on their front pages during the weekdays. This is precisely the dilemma of reform and the marketization of the press in China.

On the other hand, although official subscriptions still account for the main portion of newspaper consumption, with increasing newspaper prices and the decreasing operational budgets of many government offices as well as the increasing number of newspaper titles, many newspaper organizations have begun to realize that they will eventually have to reform to make their products more attractive to readers rather than depending on administrative orders for subscriptions. The publication of "weekend editions" is therefore a way to experiment with market-oriented journalism on a limited scale, to avoid straightforward confrontation with the values of Party journalism, and to reduce political risks. As Deng Xinxin puts it, "journalists have long been thinking and exploring ways and methods to improve news reporting in the main newspaper. However, because there are many problems and difficulties in this area, people turn to the weekend editions."²⁸ Thus, for some newspapers, especially major Party and government organs, the purpose of publishing the weekend edition is not

²⁷Si Tong, "Weekend Editions: Exploring the Path for a Long Journey," *Journalism Front* (1994:2), p. 21.

²⁸Deng Xinxin, "An Analysis of the Weekend Editions Phenomenon," *Journalism Front* (1992:50), p. 31.

only to keep readers for the main paper and increase overall subscriptions and revenue but also to set up a "pilot" project of news reform.²⁹

For this reason, many newspapers invest a lot of effort into their weekend editions. The weekend editions of some papers, usually major national papers and provincial Party organs, such as those of *Economic Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, and *Workers Daily*, are usually more readable, more interesting and lively, with more critical and analytical pieces focussing on controversial social issues similar to the ones explored by CCTV's *Focus* programs. They are therefore very popular. Although many are not independent papers at all, street sellers nevertheless sell them separately. *Beijing Daily's* weekend edition, named *Jinghua Weekend*, for example, is only one part of the paper's Saturday edition. Street sellers reportedly simply pull out the pages of the weekend edition, throw away the rest of the paper and sell these pages for the price of the whole paper.³⁰ In short, "weekend edition" has become a synonym for "readability" and market-oriented journalism.

In our sample, there are twenty-nine "weekend editions," accounting for approximately thirty-nine percent of the total sample. This percentage, of course, is much higher than the twenty-five percent of total newspapers that publish weekend editions. A few of the weekend editions are indeed not only highly readable but also contain occasional critical material. The three issues of *Nanfang Weekend*, in particular, contain some thoughtful critical feature stories and political and social commentaries. The October 28, 1994 issue, for example, carried a critical feature story exposing the chaotic and lawless aspects of life on the streets of Nanchang, capital city of Jiangxi province. Reflecting on the lack of fear in the eyes of a criminal upon receiving a death penalty decision, Wang Meng, a well-known writer, commented on the prevalence of violence in the society, the failure of the death penalty to intimidate

²⁹Bi Yang, p. 44.

³⁰Si Tong, p. 22.

potential criminals, and the overemphasis on the sacrifice of human life in the political culture as a whole. The paper, considered one of the best "quality" weekend editions in the country, enjoys a readership in intellectual and cultural circles and has an average circulation of 1.2 million copies, one of the few newspapers in the country that has a circulation figure above one million.³¹

Between the two samples of *Chinese News Clippings* (zhongguo jianbao), a successful newspaper published by a group of young people under the joint sponsorship of the State Council's Information Centre and the Changzhou City Economic Planning Commission, the contents of the end-of-the-month edition (January 28, 1995) are more analytical and better edited than the regular issue. In addition to many interesting pieces on such topics as health and culture, it brings together many thoughtful, informative, and critical stories from the press on political, economic, and social issues, including many well-researched and well-written stories from numerous new non-governmental special interest papers. The four stories on the front page, for example, are all about official corruption and a political and economic system that fosters exchange between money and power, a system that fosters bureaucratism and protects irresponsible bureaucrats, with devastating effects.³² Other revealing statistics and analysis in the issue include massive public spending for private residential telephone bills; the number of police officers killed on the job in 1993 (2,500); the massive number of illegal weapons; analysis of poverty in Chinese urban centres; unemployment; forced retirement; analysis of rural poverty attributable to government policies, unequal distribution of land, and other economic and social reasons; as well as massive tax evasion by many high income individuals.³³

³¹Zuo Fang, "The Nature and Orientations of Weekend Papers," *Journalism Front* (1994:7), p. 15.

³²One story, about fires in 1993, for example, revealed the startling statistics that in 1993 alone, there were 38,094 fires in the country in which 2,467 people were killed and direct economic losses amounted to more than 1.12 billion yuan. The analysis points out that bureaucraticism is the primary cause of loss of human lives and property, and yet implicated bureaucrats remain protected from prosecution.

³³This particular "End-of-the-Month" issue is the most analytical and informative Chinese newspaper I have ever read.

The majority of the weekend editions, however, are rather different from the above examples. Since political control is still tight and few papers are willing to go very far to attract readers by publishing sensitive political discussion or information, many weekend editions opt for commercial success by pursuing entertainment value as the only value of importance in journalism. Their colorful, sensationalist material has been categorized by the Chinese press as "red secrets," "golden temptations," "pink sweets," and "black horror." Red secrets (hongse jiemi) are human interest stories about past Party and government leaders, particularly Mao and Jiang Qing. "Golden temptations" (jinse youhuo) are stories about the pursuit of wealth and the lifestyles of the rich and famous, both domestic and international, especially about China's rising stars in business, entertainment, and sports circles. "Pink sweets" (fengse tianmi) are sentimental love stories. "Black horrors" (heise kongbu) are sensational crime stories, particularly murder cases involving sex and money, similar to what appears in crime tabloids.³⁴ All kinds of human interest stories describing the unusual and the extraordinary, find a place in the weekend editions. For many years, the famous "man bites dog" story line was criticized as the worst manifestation of bourgeois commercial journalism. Now, some newspapers fill their pages with nothing but the "man bites dog" type of stories.

The majority of the weekend editions in my sample are in the above category. The weekend editions of tabloids published by legal departments and public security bureaus don't carry any official news on the front page. They publish nothing but detailed crime stories. Weekend editions published by other papers are more diverse in their content, however, the content has little or nothing to do with the newspaper's area of specialization. There is no clear editorial policy. The governing principle appears to print whatever sells. If the "weekend editions" are experimental sites for journalism

³⁴Shi Tongyu, "The Perplexed and Flustered Social News in China," *Journal of Beijing Broadcasting Institute* (1994:1), p. 15.

reform, then perhaps it is fair to say that while there are some examples of analytical and informative journalism, what has been flourishing is extreme commercialism that is beyond the recognition of any conventional definition of journalism. The following are some examples from my sample.

One is the "end-of-the-month" edition of *Xiangsheng News*, a newspaper published by the Hunan People's Political Consultative Conference. Although as a political institution, it has not much political clout, it *is* nevertheless a prestigious institution that is filled with many of the country's non-partisan political, economic and cultural elites. This paper is quite unconventional. It radically breaks the conventions of what defines a newspaper. Everything, including the very format of the newspaper itself, is organized according to the principle of sensationalism and marketability. The masthead is not in the top center position of the front page. Instead, two huge headlines run across very top of the newspaper: "A Person Who Deciphers Death Codes," and a subtitle: "Unidentified Female Corpse Behind Neon Lights." A skull appears between these two headlines. These two headlines cover almost the entire top half of the front page. "Death codes" and "person" are in very big type, bigger than any other words on the front page. At the top left corner, running vertically, is the "title" of the newspaper: "Revelations of Secret News," white words on a red background. These four words, however, are not the official masthead of the paper itself. The actual name of the newspaper, that is, "Xiangsheng News: End-of-the-Month Edition" appears next to "Revelations of Secret News" in a much smaller black type. The masthead "Xiangsheng Bao: End-of-Month Edition" does appear once again on the front page, in the more attractive red colour and in large type (but still smaller than the words "Death codes" and "person" at the top), with date (only the year 1995, no specific date), serial number, official registration number, and the publisher. However, all these are printed at the bottom right corner of the front page, and with the way the paper is folded, the buyer would not see it on the newsstand.

At the top right corner of the front page is a small square that contains the titles of articles inside: "Pornographic Movies Shake Taiwan Families," "Criminal Records of Young Women Behind Bars," "The Four Death Valleys of the World," and "Qiu Chuji: A Eunuch's Grandfather." Inside the paper, in addition to the articles whose titles have already been advertised on the front page, there are all kinds of "man bites dog" type news stories (some are not new at all) collected from all over the world. One is "a collection of strange pigs," another a collection of other unusual animals: a cat with a human face, a dog that delivers her owner's baby, etc.; a third set contains such stories as a four-year-old boy who only recognizes the family dog as his mother, and a person mistakenly diagnosed as having cancer, who wins a lottery.³⁵

In order to achieve market success, some weekend editions have even asked newspaper vendors to read the final proof. These people, knowing what sells in the market, are able to suggest changes in the content, particularly the pictures and titles, to make the paper more attractive and more marketable.³⁶ Journalism in China exhibits two extremes. On the one hand, Party authorities are requested to preview Party organs to ensure a newspaper's political "correctness" and moral purity - the most extreme manifestation of a politically controlled press. On the other hand, newspapers vendors are requested to preview newspapers to ensure their marketability, although this phenomenon is not yet a widespread practice. For some papers, during the week, the

³⁵This paper, however, is not unique, either in form or content. The weekend edition of *Light Industry Shopping Guide*, a paper whose official publisher is the government authority responsible for light industries, is another case in point. Again, the sensational titles of articles are in bigger type and more attention-grabbing colour than the masthead itself; articles on the inside papers are put at the masthead's position. The contents have nothing to do with either light industries, nor shopping, nor the weekend. The headlines of the front page articles are: "The Lives of the Republic's Generals with Maimed Arms and Legs," "Living Buddha Found in Taiwan," "Kidnapping Case Shakes Zhongnanhai," and "Deng Xiaoping and His Relatives." The inside pages are filled with other sensational stories such as: "A Female Prosecutor and Her Criminal Husband," "The Bizarre Marriage of a Female Ph.D." and other human interest stories about well-known personalities, both past and present, domestic and international, including Michael Jackson's hobbies, the lives of American presidents' daughters in the White House. Pictures of sexy-looking women (often blonde) are superimposed in the pages, often without any relevance to the stories themselves.

³⁶Yang Zicai, "Newspaper Peddlers Previewing Newspapers? Wait a Moment!" *Press and Publications News* (January 15, 1994), p. 1.

right to preview is in the hands of the Party censors; on the weekend, this right is contracted out to newspaper dealers in the market. On May 14, 1993, the official China News Service reported one such example, provided by Liang Heng, Director of the Newspaper Department under the State Press and Publication Administration, at a news briefing. Liang said, *Jiangxi Daily*, organ of the Jiangxi provincial Party Committee, transferred the final preview power of its end-of-the-month edition to a private bookstore and had since published pornographic articles under such headlines as: "A Golden Sex Dream under a Coconut Tree" and "A Whore and Her Thirty-Eight Men."³⁷

Like the economic radio stations, many weekend editions have become the "cash cows" of official Party and government organs. This is particularly the case with organs of government departments. These papers have been in financial difficulties due to inadequate subsidies and advertising. Their lack of readership and their specializations were not attractive to advertisers. In order to increase revenue, some of these newspapers have contracted out part of their publication permit to individual cultural entrepreneurs in the form of weekend editions, with the specific mandate to turn a profit. The Ministry of Culture's official organ, *Chinese Culture News*, for example, was 360,000 yuan in deficit in 1992.³⁸ The paper contracted Zhang Zoumin, an editor, to launch its weekend edition, *Weekend Culture* on January 1, 1993. According to the contract agreement, Zhang Zoumin had to pay the newspaper 200,000 yuan a year for the right to publish *Weekend Culture*. Should the operation fail, he would just have to pay a penalty of 20,000 yuan.³⁹

³⁷Control Over Publications Reportedly Tightened, *China News Service* (May 14, 1993), translated in *FBIS* (May 17, 1993), p. 19.

³⁸Zhaxiduo, "From 'Orioles Sing and Swallows Dart' to 'Flower-Decorated Streets and Willow-Lined Alleys': The Flooding of Popular Tabloids," *The Nineties* (August 1993), pp. 12-13.

³⁹The details of the contracted amount is based on Joseph M. Chan, "Commercialization without Independence," p. 25.9. Chan used an article on page 27 of the January 13, 1993 issue of *Ming Bao* as his source. My own source, Zhaxiduo's above cited article in *The Nineties*, however, reported that the contracted amount was 470,000 a year. Since Chan also included the penalty figure of 20,000 yuan, which is ten percent of the contracted amount, I believe that Chan's figure is more plausible.

In its inaugural issue, the paper featured a front-page special interview by editor Zhang Zoumin himself with superstar actress Liu Xiaoqing on the prospects for nudity and sex in Chinese domestic feature films. The front page also featured a picture of a Western model with her breasts partially exposed, with the Chinese character "naked" superimposed on one side. Inside, the paper carried two more nude pictures, one being a naked black woman. The paper sold very well in Beijing, but it attracted foreign media coverage and shocked Party authorities. The articles and pictures were seen as having tarnished the official image of the Ministry of Culture. As a result, the paper was forced to close down temporarily. Zhang tendered his resignation, but the offer was turned down by his superior. In fact, although Ma Wei'an, the editor-in-chief of *Chinese Culture News*, is well-known in Beijing's cultural circles for being a conservative ideologue, he was protective of the weekend edition, apparently for economic reasons. Ma reportedly threatened to resign from his post if the authorities did not allow his paper to "go to the market." He defended the paper's action in a television interview by saying that the material was meant to suit the taste of readers.⁴⁰

Shifting Boundaries of Party Control

The flourishing of tabloids and weekend editions and their effective distribution through private networks poses a serious challenge to the authority of the political and moral codes of Party journalism. Politically, since many of these papers are published by major Party organs themselves, they become outlets for journalists and writers to express views and report news stories unacceptable for publication in the more tightly controlled main Party organs themselves. *Nanfang Weekend*, for example, has become an outlet for the expression of what one journalism researcher has called "high-class complaints" (gaoji laosao), i.e., well-written and highly implicit political and social

⁴⁰See, "Ministry Closes Newspaper over Nudity Article," *Tokyo KYODO* in English (January 13, 1993), in *FBIS* (January 13, 1993), p. 13.

critiques, such as the piece written by Wang Meng cited early in this Chapter. Articles that cannot be published in Beijing under the watchful eyes of the central Party authorities may find a niche in this paper. The Party authorities in Beijing have reportedly threatened to close down the paper, but due to its popularity and the protection of the more liberal Guangdong provincial Party authorities, it has been able to continue its publication.⁴¹

In the middle of 1993, Wu Hao, deputy director of the Domestic Political Department of *People's Daily*, published two articles in the department's subsidiary magazine *Tide of the Times* (shidai chao), of which he was the chief editor. The first article proposed avoiding the use of the phrase "everyone's thoughts and efforts directed toward one goal" under the market economic system because it was a product of the planned economy. In another article, he openly urged higher authorities to "minimize their interference" and called on "leaders at all levels" to change their mindset and avoid making irresponsible remarks as they were accustomed to doing under the planned economy in the past. The articles were published at the height of the introduction of macro-economic regulations and control measures by the government and were thus considered by Party authorities as having "misled readers" and "incited discontent." Wu was subsequently removed from his posts for "singing a different tune" from that of the Party.⁴²

In addition to serious political writing, the tabloids' appetite for gossip has also caused the Party political embarrassment. As "red secrets" have become one of the staples in these papers, stories about well-known events and personalities in the Party's history have not only provided interesting reading for the readers but also challenged the Party's official interpretation of its own history.⁴³ Stories about personal lives of

⁴¹This information is based on a confidential interview with media scholar "X," October 1994.

⁴²"*Renmin Ribao* Official Removed for 'Improper Remarks'," *Ming Bao* (August 23, 1993), p. 2, in *FBIS* (August 23, 1993), p. 24.

⁴³Shi Tongyu, p. 15.

Mao and other leaders, for example, revealed that rather than sending their sons and daughters to the battlegrounds to fight the Japanese and the Nationalists, Party leaders sent their children to the Soviet Union to receive education during the 1940s. The moral tales of a selfless Party and a selfless Party leadership were thereby compromised.

More often, however, the tabloids and weekend editions challenged the Party's moral code and taboos, as *Weekend Culture* did with its nude pictures. In our sample, for example, there are stories that cover such topics as homosexuality, sexual harassment of women, and the phenomenon of young women becoming concubines of wealthy businessmen, among others.

In short, the tabloids, especially some of the weekend editions, have violated many aspects of Party journalism in their pursuit of market success. Principles of Party journalism such as positive propaganda, "correct" guidance to public opinion, as well as conventional definitions of news in Party journalism have been completely disregarded and subverted. There have been many cases of false reporting and pure fabrications. Even respectable weekend editions such as *Nanfang Weekend* have printed fiction disguised as feature stories. Because editorial staff for tabloids and weekend editions are usually small and competition in the market is fierce, gossip and sensationalist stories are recycled again and again within such papers. Some cultural entrepreneurs reportedly simply buy hundreds of papers from the market, re-organize and re-package the stories by changing names and addresses and playing with the different story lines and then submit them for publication. In fact, even in my small sample, there are several similar stories appearing in different papers, under different titles and with different bylines.

With the exception of extraordinary cases, the Party has exercised little control in this area and has been ineffective in checking the extreme commercialism of a growing newspaper market. Behind these humble tabloids and weekend editions are

powerful government departments and other organizations who are usually more interested in profits than in politics and ideology. In early 1993, the Press and Publication Administration issued a "Circular on Newspapers Observing the Purpose of Running Newspapers and Strictly Following the Rules for Publication," which stipulates that "newspapers should carry articles based on their areas of specialization," and that they "should not use large spaces to report details of criminal cases and play up the horrors of murder."⁴⁴ The circular also forbids the publication of unregistered papers and states that the script, size, and position of masthead should be fixed, and that the names of newspapers' special columns and special editions and article headlines should not be put in the masthead position, and their sizes should not be larger than the masthead. It even says that all violations will be promptly investigated and punished.⁴⁵

In January 1994, the Party's Propaganda Department and the State Press and Publications Office jointly held a national forum on "weekend editions" and attempted to bring the weekend editions under the orbit of Party journalism.⁴⁶ On March 15, 1994, these two departments jointly issued a circular on strengthening the control of weekend editions. Among other restrictions, the circular stated that weekend editions "should not reprint news and articles from foreign media outlets" and that the editor-in-chief of the main newspaper should exercise final editorial control and that editorial rights for weekend editions should not be transferred to newspaper dealers or contracted to individual editors.⁴⁷

From my sample of newspapers in late 1994 and early 1995, it is clear that these regulations have had little impact, particularly on periodicals not published by

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee and The State Press and Publications Administration, "Circular on Strengthening the Management of the Weekend Editions," March 15, 1994, in *Chinese Press and Publications Laws and Regulations*, pp. 152-54.

major Party organs.⁴⁸ Rather than following the guidelines of the Party, these papers continue to "act in accordance with economic laws," a favorite defense often voiced by these papers. Journalism researcher Shi Tongyu charges that rather than uplifting the tastes of readers, many newspapers cater to the vulgar taste of a portion of readers.⁴⁹ In response to the Party's argument that if it does not conquer the ideological field, somebody else will (i.e. liberals and liberal ideology), Ma Wei'an, editor-in-chief of *Chinese Culture News* argues that only after the newspapers have conquered the market can they then talk about guiding the market.

In fact, Party and government authorities have been rather lax. As one media scholar interviewed for this study puts it, the flourishing of tabloids might be both unintentional and intentional. It is unintentional because the Party simply does not have the resources and strategy to exercise control. On the other hand, while it continues to keep a close eye for serious political challenges, it may simply not want to exercise much control over nonpolitical content. It appears that so long as these papers do not make serious political trouble, they can continue to flourish by feeding on sensationalism of all colours. The very different outcomes for the two innovative editors, Wu Hao, and Zhang Zoumin, supports this conclusion.

Beijing Youth News

Despite their market success, the tabloids are presently confined to the periphery of China's journalism. Major national newspapers and provincial Party organs are still caught in a strange dualism, mustering all their energy and creativity to publish a weekend edition, then returning to business as usual with Party journalism during the

⁴⁸Zuo Fang, a writer from *Nanfang Weekend*, refused to put the *Nanfang Weekend* and other weekend editions of major Party organs in the same category as tabloids on the streets. Although these papers are sold on the streets, Zuo emphasizes that they are not the same as other tabloids on the streets. They are, Zuo argues, a small army sent by the Party organs to conquer the newspaper market on the streets. See, Zuo Fang, "The Nature and Orientations of Weekend Editions," p. 14. While it is certainly true that the weekend editions of major Party organs have less pornographic, violent, and fabricated material, they are not devoid of such content.

⁴⁹Shi Tongyu, p. 15.

rest of the week.⁵⁰ Although there is an increasing tendency for "big papers to learn from small papers," and even *People's Daily's* Overseas Edition has established a Societal News Department, overall, journalism is still characterized by two extremes. The main newspapers still closely follow the Party line; the majority of newspapers on the streets, while not opposing the Party line, aggressively pursue the bottom line.

One newspaper, however, seems to have made a successful quantum leap from being a weekly tabloid to a broadsheet daily by expanding market success of its weekend edition to the main paper itself. It has managed to successfully combine market values and the values of Party journalism. It has also managed to achieve a balance between the Party's mouthpiece and being a reader-oriented, popular, and general interest newspaper. It has been successful both in soliciting office subscriptions and street sales, a division few other papers have been able to overcome. The paper is *Beijing Youth News*, one of the most popular and most talked about newspapers in Beijing media circles. Its rise to popularity and fame is known as "the *Beijing Youth News* phenomenon" in news media circles in Beijing.

The Rise of *Beijing Youth News*

Beijing Youth News was launched as an official organ of the Beijing Communist Youth League on March 21, 1949. Its publication was disrupted three times in its history. The most recent resumption of publication was on March 7, 1981. At that time, the paper was a weekly four-page tabloid with a circulation of 29,000 copies, and an official subsidy of 260,000 yuan. The paper's official rank was one of the lowest (division level, or "chuji") in Beijing news media circles. Moreover, its official affiliation with the Youth League, meant that it had less status and political influence

⁵⁰Liu Hongsheng, "Fascinating or Hopeless? Some Cool-Headed Thinking on the Weekend Edition Phenomenon," *Journalism Front* (1992:9), p. 62.

than other newspapers of the same administrative rank.⁵¹ The initial location of the newspaper office, a basement warehouse behind the garage of Beijing's Municipal City Hall was indicative of the official yet humble status of the paper.

However, perhaps precisely because of its obscure status, relative lack of direct control from the central Party and government authorities, and relative lack of vested interests in the Party news media system itself, the paper has been able to ride the tide of reform and make the most of the opportunities created by reform and commercialization. And while its status as a local Youth League official organ disadvantaged it in access to major national news,⁵² it also means that it is run mostly by and for the most energetic and reform-minded sector of the population. While other major official Party and government organs were still talking about reform but were often unable to implement radical reforms due to all kinds of external and internal resistance and pressure, this paper, being small, obscure, newly resumed, and run by a younger than average team on the periphery of the Party media system, was able to experiment with reform measures to a large extent based on self-determination, self-development, self financing, and self-restraint.

The paper has introduced a series of management reforms since the early 1980s. It pioneered a system of recruiting staff through open competition and refused to accept any "back door" placements, a common phenomenon in the journalism profession in China.⁵³ During a recruitment in 1984, for example, 1,700 people competed for eight positions at the paper. The paper eliminated life-time job tenure and introduced open competition for departmental heads. It broke away from the conventional organization of news production and established a series of strict job controls and a qualitative and quantitative job evaluation system, while at the same time strengthening news room

⁵¹In China, the conventional hierarchy of power units at the same jurisdictional level is: the Party, the government, the trade union, the Youth League, and the Women's Federation.

⁵²The paper is unable to get permissions to report important political events, for example.

⁵³Political and cultural elites often get their children and relatives appointed jobs in journalism even though they do not have the necessary qualifications.

democracy and grass-roots participation in the making of important decisions. It also disregarded the official wage system and introduced a complicated internal wage and bonus allocation scheme that combines basic salary, seniority, productivity, and other evaluative standards. It created high salaries and good working conditions for its staff. The salaries of its journalists are among the highest in Beijing media circles. In addition to the regular facilities of newsgathering, such as tape recorders and cameras, each news staff member is provided with a home computer. The newspaper even provides free meals for its employees.⁵⁴

More importantly, as Zhao Xiaofeng observes, the rapid development of the newspaper can also be attributed to the paper's "macro-management perspective." The core of this perspective, according to Zhao, is a clear understanding of the commodity nature of the newspaper, the management of the newspaper as a business enterprise, and an insistence on the primacy of social responsibility while at the same time stressing financial efficiency, the development of subsidiary business operations, and use of other business operations to support the newspaper.⁵⁵ When many official Party and government organs were still unwilling to cut the umbilical cord of government subsidy, *Beijing Youth News* voluntarily cut government subsidies and chose to achieve financial independence. It signed a four-year contract (1991-1994) with the city department that it would not receive any subsidy from the city, while the city would allow the paper to retain all its profits.⁵⁶

Within these four years, the newspaper, with aggressive commercialization and business development strategies, achieved great success. It completed the transformation from a four-page weekly tabloid to a broadsheet published daily with

⁵⁴For a more detailed description of these management reforms at the *Beijing Youth News*, see, Yang Lixin, "Developing Potentials: The 'Dao' of Human Resource Management in the *Beijing Youth News*," in Zheng Xingdong, Chen Renfeng, and Zheng Chaoran, (eds.), *A Journalism Shock Wave: Scanning the Beijing Youth News Phenomenon* (Beijing, People's University Press, 1994), pp. 298-312.

⁵⁵Zhao Xiaofeng, "The Macro-Management Perspective of the *Beijing Youth News*," in *A Journalism Shock Wave*, p. 314.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 319.

eight pages on most days. The growth of advertising income was even more astonishing: 200,000 yuan in 1990, 350,000 in 1991, and 5,070,000 in 1992, 25 times the amount for 1990, fourteen times that of the amount for 1991; and in 1993, the amount was 22,000,000 yuan, more than three times the amount for 1992.⁵⁷ From 1990-1993, the average income of the staff jumped from 3,000 yuan to 10,000 yuan, an increase of 233 percent. Within a decade, the newspaper has grown from a small weekly into a newspaper-based conglomerate that publishes four papers,⁵⁸ and runs twelve business operations in a wide range of areas.⁵⁹ In 1993, the newspaper organization had fixed assets worth 43,650,000 yuan, and it built a fourteen-million-yuan new office building in east Beijing.

The newspaper has an average circulation of 180,000, but based on a readership survey conducted by the Journalism School of Chinese People's University, each issue is read by nearly eight people, with the average reader spending about seventy-two minutes on the paper. This time is much longer than the less than thirty minutes average for other papers.⁶⁰ As an indicator of the market success of *Beijing Youth News*, street sales and private subscriptions account for 63.4 percent of the total newspaper circulation (street sales account for 48.5 percent), while office subscriptions account for 33.7 percent, much lower than other official Party and government organs.⁶¹

⁵⁷Zhan Jiang, "Riding the Tide," in *A Journalism Shock Wave*, p. 5.

⁵⁸In addition to the main newspaper, the news organization also publishes three specialized papers, targeting at school students at different levels.

⁵⁹These businesses include a book store, an arts centre, a high-tech firm, a public relations firm, a grocery store, a medical clinic and a resort, among others.

⁶⁰Yu Guoming, "The *Beijing Youth News* in the Eyes of the 'Gods': A Readership Survey Report of the *Beijing Youth News*," in *A Journalism Shock Wave*, p. 37. For example, 93% percent of the readers of *Beijing Daily* spend thirty minutes or less on that paper. See, The Public Opinion Research Institute of Chinese People's University, "A Survey Report of the *Beijing Daily* Readership," in Chen Chongshan and Er Xiuling (eds.), *A Perspective Study of Mass Communication Effects in China* (Shenyang: Shenyang Publishing House, 1989), p. 431.

⁶¹For example, 81.8 percent of *Beijing Daily's* circulation is official subscription. Private subscriptions account for 7.9 percent of its total subscriptions, while only 2.8 percent of its readership obtain the paper through street sale. See, Yu Guoming, p. 36, and The Public Opinion Research Institute of Chinese People's University, p. 429.

The composition of the paper's readers also says a lot about the paper itself. As a reflection of its special orientation, the majority of the readers, 83.1 percent are people under the age of 35.⁶² Unlike tabloids on the streets, however, the paper's readers are well-educated urban youth; 52.2 percent have post-secondary education. Another 36.7 percent have high school or equivalent education. Thus, 87.9 percent have an education level of high school or above. This is higher even than *People's Daily*, for which the comparable figure was only 72.7 percent in 1993.⁶³ Five major groups, employees of various business enterprises (23.2%), government employees and office workers (20.3%), university students (13.3%), educational, cultural, scientific and health workers (11.4%), and secondary school students (10.4%), account for 78.6 percent of the total readership. This readership composition suggests the "unofficial" nature of the newspaper. In fact, only 1.8 percent of the paper's readers are leading cadres, which can be compared with 13.4 percent of *People's Daily* readers.⁶⁴ However, the paper has drawn the attention of the elite media in Beijing, even *People's Daily* had cited its reports.⁶⁵ It has also drawn the attention of foreign media. A dispatch by Agence France, for example, mentioned that although the paper was not as influential as *People's Daily*, its articles deserve attention.⁶⁶

From Youth Weekend to News Weekly

Like many other newspapers, the most popular part of *Beijing Youth News* is its entertainment-oriented weekend edition, the Friday *Youth Weekend* (qingnian zhoumo), launched in early 1992. Like other weekend editions, *Youth Weekend* sells soft features and entertainment. But while other major newspapers have been unable to transfer the

⁶²Yu Guoming, p. 20.

⁶³Pu Wei, "Understanding the Characteristics of the Readership and Improving the Newspaper: An Analysis of *People's Daily* Readers," *Journalism Front* (1994:3), p. 42.

⁶⁴The *People's Daily* Readership Survey Team, "People's Daily Readership Survey," in *Chinese Journalism Yearbook 1988*, p. 185.

⁶⁵Zhan Jiang, p. 6-7.

⁶⁶Cited in Zhan Jiang, p. 6.

market success of the weekend edition to the weekdays, *Beijing Youth News* put forward the motto: "use news values to push the main paper to the market." As a concept imported from the West, news values imply a different set of standards in news selection from that of Party journalism.⁶⁷ Although "news values" contain many aspects, marketability is certainly an important component, and this is precisely how the term is being applied.

The newspaper set out to accomplish this objective in a piece meal fashion by publishing *News Weekly* (xinwen zhoukan), an eight-page Wednesday edition of the paper in January 1993. "Provide One Thing Only - News" is the paper's logo. *News Weekly* emphasizes non-official news, breaking events and exclusive reports. It not only *sells* news to readers; it *gathers* news from readers. One of the first steps taken by the paper was to establish a news hotline and buy news tips from readers. Any news tip that leads to a published story is awarded with a thirty-yuan "information fee." The paper holds a monthly competition for the best news tips, with prizes ranging between 100 and 1,000 yuan. Telephone numbers and notices soliciting news tips are printed on almost every page of the newspaper. With its wide unofficial news net, the paper has established itself as the primary source for breaking events in Beijing.

In addition to breaking events and exclusive stories, the other specialty of the edition is "repackaging" of major news events and stories from other media outlets. They are rewritten and presented in special columns such as "most important news of the past week" or "leading stories in world newspapers." Given the tight control of major national political news by the Party as well as the paper's low official status, it is not yet in a position to sell firsthand hard political news.

The news is divided into different categories. Each page sells a different type of news. The front page contains attention-grabbing major stories, exclusive features,

⁶⁷See, John Hartley, *Understanding News* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982) for a list and an analysis of news values in western journalism.

court cases, usually with a quarter-page news photo at the top left corner, and a smaller picture of a news personality and a news cartoon on the bottom left corner. Page two carries "in-depth news," focusing on background and analysis of news events and personalities. Page three and four contain "theme news" or "features," focusing on one or a number of special topics of general concern. Page five is usually "visual news," that is, photo reports of a news event. Page six provides "news shorts," with all kinds of salable news items from all over the world classified into different topics. Page seven presents "social news," mainly human interest stories, and page eight reports "opinion polls," which summarizes the results of its quasi-scientific public opinion polls on different, often trivial, topics, and with a motto claiming to "give readers a quantified description of reality." These page arrangements have changed over time, and columns on inside pages are constantly being created and recreated. But the editorial orientation remains the same: market success within the permissible political boundaries, or to use the words of the newspaper's editorial committee, "make the most out of news values within the confines of policies and disciplines."⁶⁸

Large and sensational headlines, huge photos, sharp contrast between black and white colours, clever, stylish, and sometimes humorous language, even in the bylines and the names of columns, and innovative page makeup all contribute to making the paper stand out in the Beijing newspaper scene. The sensationalism is well demonstrated by the front-page headlines of four samples gathered from the market between October 5 and November 2, 1994: "Can One Drive Home a Car With About 10,000 Yuan? How Much on Earth Is the Price Cut to Cars," "The Last Moment of a Nine-Year-Old Girl: A Little Bit of Beauty Before Death," "Birthday Cake for the Republic: Two Hundred Million Yuan!" "Love Inside a Funeral Home." Question marks and exclamation marks were all used to create sensationalist effects.

⁶⁸Cited in Wang Junchao, "The Difficult Transformation to a Daily," in *A Journalism Shock Wave*, pp. 159-160.

Like *Youth Weekend*, *News Weekly* was an instant success on the streets. The paper seized the momentum and reaped success by applying the lessons learnt from the two pilots to the rest of the week. The paper provides a good example of the effort to find a balance between the Party line and the bottom line, between commercial success and political correctness.

Making Party Journalism A Commercial Success

Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to uncover the "news values" of the paper, it is clear from the samples and available material about the paper that it does not pursue a specific political and ideological cause of its own. On the surface, *Beijing Youth News* is full of ideological contradictions, which, in a way, reflect the ideological contradictions of reform era China. For example, it celebrates the increasing tendency of consumerism in one story and praises the simple lifestyle in another; it introduces the "news theme" of "sustainable development," a timely import from the West, and tries to convince readers that they can be part of the solution, while, on the same page it prints advertising for disposable diapers, a less timely import from the West. It expresses a concern for the lower classes in some stories, but sometimes, it is written more for the urban yuppie population and the emerging urban small business class.

The paper has elements of the 19th century American penny press, particularly the popular press of the late 19th century, in its cultivation of readers on the streets, in its breaking away from an elite readership and narrow political news, and its emphasis instead on entertainment and news outside the Party state apparatus, in its sensationalism, its concern for the common people and defense of the interests of the common people against corrupt officials and businesses, in its social critique and its crusading journalism. It also has elements of the consumerist orientation of twentieth-century commercial journalism, exemplified by the headline cited above about car

prices⁶⁹ or another article on page six of the November 2, 1994 issue on the price of leather jackets.⁷⁰ At the same time, the paper's visual appeal is obviously a product of the late-twentieth century *U.S.A Today*-type of newspaper journalism for the television age.

Similar to *Qianjiang Evening News*, the newspaper exploits the commercial potentials of mass line journalism. In August 1994, it organized a large-scale activity of inviting readers to be "reporters for a day" to help to demystify the role of journalists and the journalists' authority. As part of its circulation drive during the 1994-1995 season, it sent postcards to readers and invited them to "just come to visit us in the office or give us a call." In its October 1994 regular issues, it featured a daily picture of a reader and a reporter's interview with the reader about the paper on the front page. In addition to the repeated requests for news tips, in a "Reader-Requested News Reporting" announcement published in the November 2, 1994 issue, the paper provided pager numbers of individual reporters for *News Weekly* so that readers could page a reporter of their own choice and request his or her favorite reporter to report on a story based on his or her tip.

Despite all the innovations, its commercial appeals and its unofficial, reader-oriented nature, the paper serves as an official organ rather well. It cleverly makes Party journalism a commercial success. In this it is comparable to the CCTV's News Commentary Department in achieving a successful synthesis of the bottom line and the Party line. Compared with the programs of CCTV's News Commentary Department, it is more sensationalist, it has a more minor official status and experiences less control from above, but its editorial policy is comparable nevertheless: to make both the

⁶⁹Indeed, ownership of a private car is the biggest dream of the rising urban consumer class, and the paper has frequently pursued this dream. A story in 1993 had carried the headline "With 10,000 Yuan, Drive the Car Home," and the 1994 feature cited above is apparently a reinforcement of the dream.

⁷⁰The leather jacket is part of the dress code of the fashion conscious Beijing yuppies. Prices are ridiculously high.

leaders and readers happy, to strictly observe the Party line on major policy issues, and to be constructive in critical reporting.⁷¹

To be sure, the typical stories of Party journalism, the reports of meetings, activities of Party and government institutions, achievements, or role models, no longer dominate the front page. However, they are still on the front page, although with clever packaging and more innovative treatment. A detailed analysis of news stories and their treatments in different editions from October 1994 is revealing of the paper's orientation and its news values and can be compared with Party journalism as usual.⁷²

On October 15, the lead story was about three security guards at the Capital Iron and Steel Corporation who suffered heavy injuries in a struggle with thieves who were stealing property from this major state enterprise. The incident itself, however, serves as a lead-in to more background and analysis about the widespread phenomenon of theft of state property. It calls for comprehensive measures to protect state property and more protection for those who guard state property. It features a huge picture of the impressive front gate of the factory at the top, with headlines and summaries superimposed on the photo. The main headline: "Shedding Blood in Protecting Factory" is both attention grabbing and event oriented and does not preach. It does, however, play with the traditional Party journalism theme of bravery and sacrifice for the state. However, the summary in the corner of the picture in much smaller type carries a disturbing message that the problem is very serious and the criminals are very aggressive. Based on the style of writing and the information provided in the story, it is obviously not an official news release. It is a story that initiated by a news tip and developed through interviews and research. Throughout its factual report, the news story carries a powerful argument for a policy to deal with the problem illustrated by

⁷¹Yan Guobiao, "Glories and Dreams," in *A Journalism Shock Wave*, p. 98.

⁷²These four examples were purchased from the streets of Beijing. They are not randomly selected samples, but there is some sense of randomness to it: they were purchased by convenience whenever I was close to a newsstand that carried the paper.

the story. The story illustrates the paper's newly appointed editor-in-chief Xiao Pei's approach to news reporting: "There is no such thing as pure objectivity in in-depth reporting. Since such a thing does not exist, it is meaningless to pursue it. Rather it is better to perfect the propaganda art of conveying a point of view without it being perceived as such."⁷³

The second story, on the right side of the front page, is a typical official story: the awarding of role model titles to ten instructors of the Young Pioneers at a ceremony jointly sponsored by the Beijing municipal Communist Youth League, the Beijing Education Bureau and related municipal organizations. As the official organ of the Beijing Communist Youth League, this story would have been printed as the lead story if the paper were practicing Party journalism as usual. Furthermore, rather than printing a picture of the awarding ceremony itself, typically a shot of the stage with leaders handing out awards to the model instructors, with their backs or sides facing the camera, the story features ten small portraits of the model instructors themselves. These photos are arranged in a row running all the way from the top to the bottom in the far right column. In this way, it not only highlights these individuals and thereby gives more weight to these people than to either the leaders or the ceremony itself. Arguably such a treatment is closer to the original ideal of Party journalism, which, after all, claims that the people themselves are the protagonists of history and should be the focal point. At the same time, it also creates a commercially attractive visual effect.

The subject matter and the treatment of the stories on the front page of the October 23, 1994 issue follows a similar pattern. The lead story, again, is a non-official report. It was initiated by a tip provided by a phone call to the newspaper's news hotline. The caller was from a high school in Beijing's Pinggu County. The story reports that authorities asked each student of the graduating class to hand in fifty yuan to enable the school to organize a dinner for the students' parents with the officials in

⁷³Xiao Pei, *Beijing Youth News*, Special Promotion Edition (1994-1995).

charge of university admission for the county. The reporters responded to the call and followed the whole process, with detailed descriptions of how the teachers even wrote the names, addresses of officials and even their relatives on the blackboard for the students (so that they could bribe them?) The teachers cancelled class on the eve of the dinner to enable the students to talk with their parents about the money. Students handed in the money under pressure from the teachers. They reported on a parent's meeting before the dinner, and the dinner itself. The reporters managed to interview all sides of those involved in the event, the students, their parents, school teachers, and administrators. They also obtained a perspective from the Beijing municipal Education Bureau stating that such a practice was definitely inappropriate. The story also went beyond the dinner itself to look at the problem of unwarranted, excessive school fees, a more common phenomenon in the education system throughout China. With vivid descriptions and dialogues, the story is an exclusive and convincing exposure, one more example of widespread corruption and "unhealthy tendencies." It concerns a specific incident, but it addresses a more general tendency. It is a good example of investigative journalism within permissible limits and constructive criticism. It may offend those in the middle -- the teachers, school administrators and the educational officials involved, but it nevertheless pleases both the leaders at the top and the led at the bottom. And of course, it is a story that will sell newspapers. Four other stories on the front page are from official sources, and cover government meetings and reports. However, rather than reporting the meetings themselves from the official perspective, these reports extracted relevant information and reported from the readers' perspective. For example, "Businesses Can Sue Banks" is the headline of a story on the annual working conference of the banks in the city. "Be Careful When Shopping" is the headline of a story on a report released by a state agency responsible for monitoring products quality.

All the issues sampled exhibit a similar pattern of topic selection and editorial treatments. While giving prominence to its own exclusive exposés and analytical

reports, it also gives due coverage to official stories and themes and makes them attractive to readers with skillful manipulation and mobilization of available editorial techniques.

Clearly, the paper has perfected its "art of propaganda" very well, and it sometimes even uses sensationalism to convey typical propaganda messages. The front page of the November 11, 1995 issue of *News Weekly* provides a dramatic illustration. The headline "Love Inside a Funeral Home" is more characteristic of the more autonomous street tabloids. Despite the sensational title, the story reflects the Party line of promoting "socialist spiritual civilization." It reports on an orphan, raised in a State-funded orphanage, who loves his job as an undertaker. As a person who owes his life to the State, he thought that he must do well and contribute to the State in return. He not only dutifully performs his job but also has a warm and selfless heart. He even contributes money to support a poor child to enable him to attend school. He is engaged to a young country girl, who, despite her parents' objection, insists on marrying him. The story carries a huge picture of the man, occupying almost a full quarter of the front page. While both the headline and the picture are uncharacteristic, the content is typical of conventional Party journalism.

In fact, the reporting of role models, a staple of Party journalism, is common in *Beijing Youth News*. Over the years, it has promoted a number of influential young role models.⁷⁴ Chen Ji, former editor-in-chief of the newspaper, has an elaborate theory and rationale for positive propaganda, of which role model reporting is an essential component. The following passages from a talk by Chen Ji at a seminar held by the newspaper on the Party's media policy of "giving primacy to positive propaganda" clearly demonstrates the "official" side of *Beijing Youth News*.

⁷⁴For a more detailed analysis of role model reporting in *Beijing Youth News*, see Feng Yaoxiang, "Writing about the Heroes of the New Times," in *A Journalism Shock Wave*, pp. 217-233.

⁷⁴Cited in Feng Yaoxiang, p. 225.

Positive propaganda means taking a controlling and guiding role on the ideological front. Currently, there is a paradoxical phenomenon in our society. On the one hand, our ideological work promotes hard work and sacrifice; on the other hand, social phenomena are far from these ideals. What is worshipped is money. Thus, we are confused. Isn't our propaganda too far removed from social reality? .. but if our media follow these phenomena and even promote them, then how will society turn out?

We do not understand and appreciate the workers and peasants, who are the pivotal forces of our society. We regard them as backward, out of step with the time. If they are backward, then, where do our food, our houses, our roads come from? We must solve this epistemological problem.

Strengthening positive propaganda at the present time is not only not out of date, but precisely very timely. Otherwise, our dominant ideology will collapse. No rulers of a society will support those who destroy its dominant ideology. This is the class nature of the dominant ideology. In China, we also will not allow the destruction of the dominant ideology, especially not by the media themselves!"⁷⁵

Beijing Youth News directly promotes the dominant ideology by initiating large-scale ideological education campaigns. Such a task appears inconsistent with the "soft" side of the sensationalist news headlines and the light entertainment orientation of *Youth Weekend*, but it is precisely the "hard" side of the paper.⁷⁶ During the early 1990s, when the paper gained its popularity, it organized a large-scale education campaign each year. The themes of these education campaigns were: "I Love My Country" (1990), "the Party in My Heart" (1991), "Socialism Is Good" and "National Defense" (1992), "The Tide of Reform" (1993), and "Traditional Chinese Virtues" (1994).

These education campaigns have been organized around core convictions of the dominant ideology. The political and ideological role of the newspaper was given full play. These annual campaigns started in 1990, soon after the crushing of the 1989 democracy movement which had been spearheaded by Beijing youth. As we have discussed in the previous chapter, the Pearl River Economic Radio Station claimed that its soft entertainment programs distracted the youth in the Guangzhou area and helped to prevent any further student uprisings in that city. The radio station also performed its

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Feng Yaoxiang, "You Have Educated a Whole Generation!," *A Journalism Shock Wave*, p. 200.

ideological function by sponsoring a large trade fair in Guangzhou to provide entertainment and distraction for the people of Guangzhou in the period of political and cultural repression following the June 4 tragedy. Perhaps due to differences in the political culture of Beijing and Guangzhou, *Beijing Youth News* played its ideological role in a more direct way. It provided serious ideological education aimed directly at Beijing youth.

Cui Anqin, publisher of *Beijing Youth News*, believed that in their political enthusiasm, in their worship of liberal political ideals and Western models of government, in their condemnation of the backwardness of their country and their admiration of Western countries, there was a lack of understanding on the part of youth about the historical, political, and social realities of Chinese society. They did not know why China chose socialism. They didn't understand the historical and contemporary conditions for the prosperity of developed capitalist countries.⁷⁷

Thus, in September 1989, the management of the newspaper decided to cooperate with educational departments and use the newspaper to carry out an education campaign on historical, political, and social conditions of the country. This initiative preceded a call by Jiang Zemin, the Party's General Secretary, for strengthened education on patriotism, national conditions, and modern Chinese history among the youth on the eve of the October 1 National Day celebrations. Soon after that, Cui reported to the Beijing Party leadership on the initiative and received the cooperation of the Beijing Education Bureau in the organization of the campaign among youth in the school system. Editor-in-chief Chen Ji organized a writing team, responsible for the preparation of the educational material.⁷⁸

The education campaign was organized around a televised knowledge competition among the readers of the newspaper. School authorities, Youth Leagues in

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 201.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 201-202.

factories and in the military joined the campaign by organizing newspaper reading activities among the youth.⁷⁹ The educational material was highly endorsed by Party and educational authorities. The newspaper went far beyond its regular function and became an organizer of ideological education in the society at large. Editor-in-chief Chen Ji and a reporter turned the material into a school textbook, which became the only textbook of its kind recommended by the State Education Commission to schools throughout China. In four subsequent years, the text was reprinted many times, and more than ten million copies were published -- an unprecedentedly high figure for a text of this nature. At the same time, the newspaper sponsored a seminar of educational officials and scholars around the country to discuss education in national conditions. Like the education campaign itself, the seminar has since become an annual event and a venue for the newspaper to promote its education material among scholars.

If the theme in 1990 was a direct and timely political response to the 1989 student movement, the subsequent campaigns were similarly timely. The 1991 campaign "The Party in My Heart" coincided with the seventieth anniversary of the Party's founding. The 1992 "Socialism Is Good" theme was chosen in response to the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The 1993 "The Tide of Reform" theme capitalized on the new wave of reform brought about by Deng's 1992 talks. The 1994 theme on traditional Chinese values and ethics addressed the conflicts and changes in the value system related to the rapid modernization process.⁸⁰

These campaigns have not only fulfilled the ideological role of the newspaper but also have become successful commercial ventures. The newspaper's skillful manipulation of material, innovative approaches, and attractive writing style make hard ideological propaganda gentler, softer, and much more appealing to readers.⁸¹ The sale

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 205.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹See Feng Yaoxiang (pp. 177-216) for a more detailed analysis of the paper's ideological education campaigns.

of the educational material in textbook form alone brought in a considerable revenue. Indeed, the newspaper has even developed customer loyalty for its products. In 1994, when it comes time to choose school textbooks on traditional Chinese values and ethics, some local education authorities reportedly said that they wanted no version but the one published by *Beijing Youth News*!⁸²

What is significant about these campaigns is that they are the results of the initiatives of the newspaper's management itself, rather than passive implementation of orders from the Party. In comparison with other official organs, this paper has more political freedom because of its relatively low official status; however, it has not become a bastion of ideological liberalization. It used its relative freedom to actively promote the dominant ideology and perhaps play a possibly more effective ideological role than other official Party organs. As Cui Anqing, publisher of the newspaper has said, "marketization and the political orientations of the news are not incompatible. The key lies in the perspectives of news workers."⁸³

Although the newspaper actively promotes the dominant ideology and pursues a policy of not stepping into dangerous political waters, it has often drawn criticism and made trouble for the political authorities, especially in its news reports and opinion pieces. Indeed, in street talk about the "*Beijing Youth News* phenomenon," one common comment is that the paper often "gets into trouble."⁸⁴ While it may be true that there is no overall contradiction between marketization and promoting the dominant ideology, in the actual daily operation of the newspaper, there are contradictions between its attempts to attract readers by broadening the political and geographical boundaries in its news and commentaries and its status as an official local Youth League organ. When it carried an opinion piece critical of another city's handling of a sport event, for example, the other city's authorities took the opinion as

⁸²Feng Yaoxiang, p. 200.

⁸³Cited in Wen Lu, p. 20.

⁸⁴Chen Renfeng, "Behind All the Talk," in *A Journalism Shock Wave*, p. 77.

that of the Beijing city authorities and conveyed official protests to the leaders of Beijing city. The paper has also drawn criticisms when it broke with the convention in Party journalism that local news outlets do not carry independent reports or commentaries on foreign affairs and international issues.⁸⁵ But in order to establish its political influence and the authoritativeness of its news and commentaries, especially now that the newspaper has become a daily, it will have to continue to expand the political boundaries, especially in the area of hard news and commentaries on major political and social issues.

In addition to political boundaries, there are also ethical and moral boundaries, and here again, the paper has put itself at the forefront in exploring what is ethically and morally permissible. Although there has been an increasing interest in news about court cases and reports on the individual lives of the rich and famous, there is a lack of laws, regulations, and ethical codes in this area. How far can the news media go in reporting ongoing court cases without affecting an individual's right to a fair trial? How far can the news media go in reporting the personal life of an individual without violating an individual's right to privacy? What distinguishes legitimate criticism and libel? These are emerging questions for the Chinese news media. And being on the forefront of news media reform, these questions are particularly relevant and urgent for a paper like *Beijing Youth News*.

The paper's pursuit of market success, especially given that street sales account for half of its circulation, also means that it has to constantly struggle against total subordination to the market, and to avoid vulgarism. Indeed, some of its sensational headlines do not match the actual content of articles. Twisting a story line to create a sensational effect has also been a problem.⁸⁶

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 76.

⁸⁶For example, the paper almost drew a formal protest from a national research institute when it published an unfounded story about budget cuts to the social sciences.

Overall, while the newspaper's troubles are big enough to attract readers' attention and increase sales, they are insignificant and inconsistent enough that they will not cause authorities to close it down. Although the paper often receives compliments and praise, it has also often been forced to make apologies and self-criticisms. One aspect of the job of Chen Ji, former editor-in-chief of the newspaper, was to write self-criticisms each time the newspaper got into trouble.⁸⁷ But like his newspaper, which was on the top list of the ten best youth newspapers in the country in 1992, Chen himself carries the title of "Excellent Journalist at the National Level." (quanguo youxiu xinwen gongzuozhe). The following comment, made by Zhang Baifa, deputy Mayor of Beijing city, is worth quoting:

Beijing Youth News has been criticized by me many times. But strangely enough, it becomes better and better? ... I often read this paper. It is very sharp. They make money, while some other newspapers depend on me to solicit sponsorships. Strangely enough, they are not afraid of making mistakes. It continues to publish despite criticisms.⁸⁸

The paper is a unique product, a hybrid of both an official organ and a popular commercial newspaper. It is still an official organ but makes its readers feel it is not.⁸⁹ Many factors, including its position on the periphery of the Party media system and its management reforms that enable it to attract talented people and maximize the potential and creativity of its young and reform-minded staff, all contribute to the success of the newspaper.

⁸⁷Ye Guobiao, p. 100-101.

⁸⁸Quoted in Zhan Jiang, p. 12.

⁸⁹Yu Guoming, p. 41.

Chapter Eight

Toward a Propagandist/Commercial Model of Journalism?

I began this thesis with an analysis of the Chinese Communist Party's mass line journalism and its mode of political communication. I then traced the course of the media reform movement beginning in the early 1980s. In particular, I analyzed the emerging democratic discourse on the news media in the mid-1980s that began to challenge the fundamental assumptions of Party journalism and the dominant mode of political communication. This discourse was suppressed in 1989. The acceleration of economic reforms and the Party's unreserved embrace of a market economy in early 1992 marked another turning point in the course of media development in China. The market logic, which was gradually introduced to the media system in the early 1980s, has had a more significant impact on media development in the 1990s. The intertwining of Party logic and market logic produced new journalism practices and organizational structures and a new scene full of new contradictions and possibilities.

These developments are the results of deliberate policies and unintended spin-offs of the economic reforms. They are the outcome of China's approach to development, that is, economic modernization achieved through the social engineering of a Communist Party that is neither democratically elected by the people nor influenced by much internal democracy. The current news media landscape in China can be explained neither by simply invoking the Party principle nor by market forces alone. To return to the two-fold question posed by the Editor of the Summer 1994 issue of the *Journal of Communication*,¹ it is clear that the practice of journalism and, beyond that, the overall structure of the news media system has undergone significant changes over the past few years. The system has been partially commercialized; market forces have penetrated virtually every corner. Many news organizations have even

¹See the quote at the beginning of Chapter One.

achieved financial independence from the Party state apparatus. Commercialism has been carried to extremes in many instances.

Equally significant, some of the defining characteristics of the Chinese news media system remain unchanged. The Party still maintains overt political control of the news media. Indeed, rapid commercialization of the news media has occurred during a period when the Party's political control has been the tightest. There is still no editorial independence and press freedom. As Xu Yu notes, "the precondition that the power of the Party may not be threatened in the least" remains "unchanged, or even strengthened" in the context of commercialization.² No private ownership of the news media is allowed. The instrumental mentality of the news media persists. The news media have not emerged as an independent public sphere outside the Party/state apparatus proper. If "a Western liberal model of the press" is defined by such characteristics as private news media ownership, legally sanctioned press freedom, and formal institutional independence from the State, then, current developments do not give much promise for the emergence of such a model in China. To date, it seems that for the most part the worst aspects of Party journalism and commercialism have been amplified in mainstream Party organs and the broadcasting media.

The Journalism of an Authoritarian Capitalist Consumer Society?

In an unusual exhibition of post-1989 Chinese avant garde art held in Vancouver in early 1995 (works that could not be exhibited in China), Chinese political pop artists presented striking images such as the superimposition of Chairman Mao's portrait on a huge nintendo game board and the juxtaposition of the icon of the Cultural Revolution (a portrait of a man and a woman in Mao suits with raised fists) with the Coca Cola

²Xu Yu, "Professionalization without Guarantees: Changes of the Chinese Press in Post-1989 Years," *Gazette* (53, 1994), p. 36.

logo.³ The exhibition's narrative interpreted such images as depicting "the subtle fusion of totalitarianism with a consumerist capitalist culture."

The manifestations of such a fusion can also be seen in journalism. More specifically, the current fusion of Party control and market forces has led to a journalism landscape that is characterized by three features: tightly-controlled political news, the dominance of commercial speech, and a growing tendency toward news as entertainment.

Political News in the 1990s

Since the early 1990s, the Party has changed its pre-occupation with ideology to focus instead on "delivering the goods." At the same time, as Alison L. Jernow has noted, journalists in the post-1989 era passively resist being the mouthpieces of the Party by "preferring editorial obscurity to by-lined lies," and they "reject complicity in government propaganda efforts by choosing silence."⁴ According to *People's Daily* journalist Wang Biao, the first reporter since the 1989 democracy movement to step out of line and openly appeal for greater press freedom in China, most journalists are tired of adhering to the Party line. "Except for a few leaders, most reporters want more freedom, but they are scared because they don't know where the limits of the forbidden zone begin."⁵ Most journalists adopt a passive resistance strategy. There is simply not much enthusiasm for conducting Party journalism as usual. Journalists do not openly oppose the Party line; neither do they actively promote it.

Indeed, despite tight control, there have been reports that Party authorities are unhappy with the current quality of propaganda. Jiang Zemin complained that programs

³*New Art in China, 1989-1994*, April 12 - May 28, 1995. Vancouver Art Gallery. The exhibition was organized by the Hanart TZ Gallery in Hongkong and the American Federation of the Arts in New York.

⁴Alison L. Jernow, *Don't Force Us to Lie* (New York: Committee to Protect Journalists, 1993), p. 78.

⁵"Beijing Magazine Calls Official Press 'dull'," Hongkong, AFP in English (January 28, 1993), in *FBIS* (January 28, 1993), p. 2.

and reports about reform and about people's real life are weak.⁶ Ding Guangen, director of the Party's Leadership Group on Ideological and Propaganda Work, said that in addition to the flood of "paid journalism," "the propaganda guidelines and orientations were incorrect and the propaganda work did not positively support the central policy and instructions."⁷

Political news in the current context is characterized by reports on ceremonial activities of Party and government leaders, positive reports of the economic reforms and the absence of any substantial news about the political process itself. People's University journalism professor Gan Xifen's critique of the news media system captures the current state of political communication in the news media very well. In a polemical essay published in early 1993, Gan deplored the current status of information control and the phenomenon of "exports for domestic consumption," -- the fact that Chinese often learn what happens in China through the international news media. Gan argues:

Although China has been opened up for more than ten years and has taken bold steps in economic reforms, the news media remain in the state of the closed door era. ... News about China reaches China through foreign countries. What kind of journalism policy and journalism system is this? Is such a phenomenon what a socialist country should have? ... Some people say that newspapers in China have basically lost the information transmission function. This is not an unjust charge.⁸

Gan notes a second feature of current news reporting, overemphasis on positive propaganda and the suppression of critical reporting. "A Party that serves the people with integrity and selflessness should have nothing to fear. A newspaper that represents the interests of the people should report news with integrity. Yet the functions of our Party newspapers have degenerated in this regard."⁹ Gan notes that the current state of journalism is worse than in some other periods in the history of Party journalism, such

⁶"Media Begins 'Rectification'," *Ming Bao* (August 9, 1993), p. 10, in *FBIS* (August 10, 1993), p. 20.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Gan Xifen, "News Situations Call for Reform in the News Media System," *Journalism Circles* (1993:2), p. 4.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 5.

as the performance of *Liberation Daily* in Yan'an and that of the news media just after 1978. This is not surprising. Those were the periods when the Party leadership, in the spirit of the mass line tradition, was more willing and able to articulate the interests of the majority of the population, when the Party leadership was less detached from the people and less fearful of the people. But since 1989, the Party's leadership has been in great fear of threats both from within and from outside.

A third feature noted by Gan is opinion uniformity. Although many newspapers are not officially Party organs, they are all under the indirect control of the Party, and journalists often voluntarily submit to the propaganda line of the Party, which results in a situation of "a thousand papers with one voice." As Gan puts it,

Newspapers in the West can express different opinions on an issue... they at least play the role of pooling the wisdom among the ruling classes. But we cannot, and only allow one voice which claims to represent all the people. Is this a normal phenomenon in a socialist country during a period of peaceful construction? How long is a policy from the war years going to continue?¹⁰

The Dominance of Commercial Speech

Although China has gone far in replacing its planned economy with a market economy, the Party has persistently fended off substantial reforms in the news media system. As a result, the energy of commercialism has been channeled in peculiar ways in China's news media system. There are more conventional forms of media commercialization such as the rise of advertising as a form of commercial speech, the expansion of media space for advertising and business reporting, the proliferation of business and consumer-oriented news media outlets, and the conglomeration of news media organizations. At the same time, the past few years has also seen the emergence of uniquely Chinese forms of commercial speech.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 5.

The genre of paid business information programming on radio and television, for example, is a direct expression of the function of the news media as instruments of economic construction under the market economy. Here the media's involvement in business communication is more direct and more specific than business reporting in the West. While these programs stay away from ideological indoctrination in the narrow political sense, they have helped to create a favorable symbolic environment for economic development. More importantly, they have helped to cultivate the entrepreneurial spirit that is essential for the development of a market economy. They are, as the news media themselves put it, forms of "economic propaganda." It is precisely for this reason that this type of programming has received praise from the pragmatic Deng, whose endorsement has further encouraged their proliferation.

In a way, this type of programming contributes to the democratization of business information by making it accessible to a wide range of audiences, by addressing them in their role as potential entrepreneurs in the market, rather than simply as consumers, and by the very fact that audiences do not have to pay to have access to business information.

Business sponsorship of specific news items and features and all the other forms of unethical and illegal practices in journalism are some of the other unique forms of commercialization in the Chinese news media. They are not the expression of the commercial logic that regulates the relationship between news media and commercial interests in the West, in which advertisers purchase advertising space in the mostly privately-owned and profit-oriented news media in the open market. Here commercialism takes the more primitive form of mercantile journalism, in which the commercial advertisers and others who have a publicity need directly purchase editorial space. In addition to the bribers who pay less for potentially better advertising and publicity effects, the main beneficiaries of these practices have been the journalists,

who, as delegates of the Party/state apparatus that monopolizes communicative resources on behalf of the people, trade their access for private gain.

The Party still claims that it represents the interests of the people and that the news media are the mouthpieces of the Party and the people at the same time. But increasingly, the news media are the mouthpieces of neither the Party nor the people. One journalism educator claimed in an interview that since there are no fundamental conflicts of interest among the people, the dominance of commercial speech in the news media is not a problematic issue. What is good for business is good for the people. After all, the news media are still state-owned.¹¹ But such a view clearly overlooks growing class divisions among the population.¹² A rising propertied class and a bureaucratic class (including the journalists) control the allocation of key state-owned economic, social, and communication resources of the country. They are unaccountable to the public and trade their administrative power for private gains.

During the pre-reform era, the news media were freed from private ownership and the profit motive but were under the unaccountable authority of the Party. While the power of the Party over the news media has yet to be democratized, and control has even been tightened since 1989, with the increasing penetration of the news media by market forces, Party journalism is now for sale. From newspaper licences to newspaper pages and broadcasting time blocks to individual news items and features, there is literally a price tag for each piece of news. Before, access to the news media system was determined more or less exclusively by those with political power. Now, this access has been partially expanded to include those with economic power, a power the majority of workers and peasants do not possess. As one Chinese journalism researcher said in an interview, journalism in China is currently being sold in two parts. One part

¹¹Confidential interview with journalism educator "L," October 1994.

¹²Of course, China was never a classless society even before the reform era.

is "sold" to the Party's propaganda department; another part is sold to businesses and others who have publicity needs.

The news media are not only increasingly unable to play a "watchdog" role over the Party and the government, they are increasingly unable to be critical of private business interests as well. Attempts initiated by the Party and the news media to protect the interests of consumers have been undermined by corruption and increasingly powerful private interests. The media's annual "ten thousand li journey for product quality in China" campaign, for example, has not only been undermined by corrupt elements within journalism itself but also has been threatened by powerful private interests. A CCTV team reporting for the campaign apparently received threats from an underground "black society" should they explore further into a certain issue.¹³

"A Thousand Papers With One Voice" and "A Thousand Papers With One Star"

The lack of substantial news about the political process and the dominance of commercial content is accompanied by the growing tendency toward the softening of news contents, compelled by the news media's increasing commercial imperative to attract audiences. The tendency is demonstrated not only in the proliferation of entertainment-oriented tabloids and their extreme commercialism and sensationalism but also in the growing trend that has been called "big papers learning from small papers." What this phrase describes is the phenomenon of Party organs imitating the orientations of tabloids in their efforts to boost circulation. This is in contrast to the phenomenon in which "small papers learn from big papers" for editorial direction. This latter phenomenon was carried to extremes during the Cultural Revolution, but it still exists today. Thus, while the iron fist of the Party has led to the situation of "a thousand papers with one voice," the invisible hand of the market has at the same time created what some news media critics in China have called the situation of "a thousand

¹³This information was obtained from a confidential source in Beijing.

papers with one star" - a movie star, or a pop music star, or whoever is hot in popular culture.

Political and economic propaganda plus entertaining soft news and human interest stories -- such are the dominant features of journalism in today's China. Aside from positive news stories about the achievements of the economic reforms, the "socialist" feature of the news media is almost reduced to a news report on the Party's paternalist celebration of the sacrifice and dedication of model workers in a May Day ceremony with the Party General Secretary's speech on the occasion printed verbatim with the opportunistic and hypocritical reaffirmation that the working class is still the Party's class base and "the leading class."¹⁴ Indeed, perhaps as a reflection of the passive resistance strategy of its staff, *People's Daily's* editorial department did not even bother to put up an editorial on May Day in 1995.

At the same time, the "people" are increasingly being transformed into individual consumers in the market place. "The Chinese Gold Purchase Jumped to World's No. 4 Position," announced a headline in the May 29, 1995 issue of *People's Daily*.¹⁵ Many Chinese are indeed much richer than they were a decade ago. And some are so rich that they display it by literally consuming gold. There are widely circulated stories about the so-called "golden banquet" - tiny flakes of gold on a dish. A television station in Guangdong reportedly even interviewed such gold diners. Meanwhile many workers are unemployed and hardly have enough food to feed themselves. Others are heavily exploited in sweat shops and are sometimes on strike against management of foreign and domestic owned enterprises. Peasants' land is increasingly being encroached by industrialization and golf courses, and other playgrounds for the newly rich.¹⁶ While farming is increasingly unprofitable, some peasants cannot even get

¹⁴See *People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (May 1, 1995), p. 1.

¹⁵*People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (May 29, 1995), p. 2.

¹⁶There were fifty-one golf course development projects in Guangdong province alone in June 1995. Among the total 7,246 hectares of land used by the projects, 720 hectares were farming land. Among all these development projects, only twenty-four, or 47.1 percent followed government regulations and were approved by the provincial

payment from the State for the quota grain they are required to sell. Yet the news media have not paid much attention to the unemployed workers and no attention at all to the workers on strike. They portray peasants in search of jobs in the city mostly in a negative light.

But the newly rich are not satisfied. Angry would-be investors in Shenzhen were so upset with the local Party organ *Shenzhen Special Zone News*' reports of the August 1992 stock riot that their dissatisfaction prompted members of the Central Propaganda Department to go to Shenzhen to investigate "media bias."¹⁷ The lack of political information and control over the political process, the very thought that their personal lives and the destiny of the whole country is so closely tied to the life of a dying old man gives everybody a sense of insecurity. A well-to-do beneficiary of the reform era said to me: "Deng is dying, and all the 'big shots' (da kuan, a new phrase for those who are very rich) are transferring their money to foreign banks." Another said, "Everybody is circulating the rumor that Deng may not last till next year. I am really worried about what will happen after Deng. I would rather be poorer if I had a sense of security."

Toward a Propagandist/Commercial Model of the News Media?

In addition to the intertwining of Party journalism as usual with the new phenomenon of mercantile journalism in the mainstream Party organs, the intertwining of Party control and market forces has also been manifested in other ways, which were described in Chapters Six and Seven respectively. Party journalism as usual is increasingly unpopular both among its practitioners and its targets. Mercantile journalism is morbid and parasitical. The kind of journalism that is practised by the Shanghai East stations, by CCTV's News Commentary Department, and by evening

government. However, the provincial government suspended only seven projects. See *People's Daily*, Overseas Edition (June 21, 1995), p. 6.

¹⁷ Alison L. Jernow, p. 85.

papers such as *Qianjiang Evening News* and *Beijing Youth News*, however, signifies the emergence of a different form of journalism. For the sake of simplicity, I will call the emerging media institutions and production units a commercialized popular media sector *within* the Party-controlled news media system. These media organizations and production units are still part of the official Party and government organs, but they have gained more organizational, financial and editorial autonomy either by their special institutional arrangements and the preferential status given by the authorities in an attempt to reform the news media system or by virtue of the fact that they are at the margins of the official media system and have asserted more autonomy. The market logic, in short, functions more or less "normally" (in comparison with mercantile journalism) in this sector. How, then, to evaluate this sector *vis-a-vis* mass line journalism and the ideals of media reform in the mid-1980s? To what extent do they represent a possible alternative?

The "People" as Consumers?

The emergence of this sector helps to materialize some of the media reform ideas put forward in the early and mid 1980s. Production values imported from commercial media in the West and from Hongkong such as brevity, speed, closeness to their readers and audiences and their daily life and being more informative and less didactic have been realized with commercialization and the introduction of production procedures, formats, styles, and news values that have proven successful in commercial media elsewhere.

At the same time, in their attempt to attract audiences, this commercialized sector has to give more consideration to the needs and interests of audiences and readers. The people principle and the idea of supervision by opinion supervision, two important ideas put forward during the theoretical ferment leading to the 1989 democracy movement, do seem to find some realization in the reforms.

But there is a significant difference. Although the idea of the people principle is underdeveloped and vague, it was clearly put forward as an *anti*-thesis to the Party principle. It was a political concept within an emerging democratic discourse, although still colored by the paternalist and elitist elements characteristic of the Party's dominant political discourse. With commercialization, the people principle finds some reflection in a consumerist discourse; and the more generalized, collective political entity, "the people" find their own image in the commercialized media's "audience" approached as individualized consumers.¹⁸ The consumerist conception of the audience is very apparent in the "service" mentality of PRER. Within this discourse, the audience is to be *served* by the radio station with its informational and entertainment programming. Thus, there is the danger of a tendency in which the Party's most important political slogan "to serve the people" finds a convenient and reductionist expression in the service mentality of a commercialized news media system. There is indeed a fit between the Party's paternalism and the consumerist discourse of the commercialized news media.

Meanwhile, in the context of tight political control, the news media's role as mouthpieces of the people and as the means by which the people exercise public opinion supervision over the Party and the government has largely been confined to consumer protection and the supervision of public utility departments. Moreover, this role is limited to the defense of individual rights on a very limited scale, primarily with regard to specific individual cases. There are still no substantial news reports on key decision-making processes inside the Party and the government. There are no open debates on important government policies. There is virtually no critical evaluation of the reforms, for example. Of course, the media are still prohibited from criticizing a Party committee on their same or a higher jurisdictional level and thus are unable to

¹⁸For the purpose of this discussion, "audience" should be read as including readers, listeners and viewers of different news media.

exercise any form of supervision over high-level Party and government officials - the ones who make key political and economic decisions for the country.

I pointed out in Chapter Two that there is no mechanism in the institutional design of mass line journalism whereby the news media would not be detached from the people. Now with commercialization, market logic has become such a mechanism. These media organizations, with their total dependence on advertising in an increasingly competitive media environment, can no longer afford to ignore their readers and audiences.¹⁹ To attract the audience is now an imperative that is independent of either the teaching of the Party or the intention of the journalists. Indeed, in their pursuit of market success, the newly commercialized news media sector has exploited and revived the tradition of mass line journalism to some extent. They have turned their self-promotion and soliciting of audience into a robust rubric of "serving the people." Theories and practices of mass line journalism have been employed to rationalize marketing strategies.

Thus, the political concept of "the people" is increasingly being transformed into "the audience," indeed, fragmented, and individualized audiences in the increasingly specialized radio and television stations. "The people" as the "masters" of the society in the rhetoric of Party journalism is increasingly being fused with the audience as "the God" in an emerging discourse of consumer sovereignty. While these developments are still in their early stage, and it is clear that China's news media have not finally settled for such a transformation, it is very likely that the undistinguished "masses" and "the people" in the Party's mass line journalism may eventually become the advertisers' targeted middle class consumers, a group with whom journalists themselves largely identify.

¹⁹PRER has to compete with Hongkong stations. The two East stations have to compete with Shanghai's two old stations. The newly established specialized stations have to compete with sister stations within the framework of the people's radio station. In the newspaper market, the evening papers have to compete with the dailies, and *Beijing Youth News* is in a competitive market by the very fact that there are so many media outlets available in the capital.

While there is a convenient fit between propaganda and commercialism, and *Beijing Youth News* can even make a profit out of its ideological education campaigns, this media sector is operating with profound contradictions and tensions as well. Any substantial political challenge, and with it greater commercial success, is contained by the Party. CCTV's *Sons of the East* is explicitly prohibited from interviewing controversial figures. East Radio was forced to change its live phone-ins in its news programming to recorded phone-ins. Similarly, *Beijing Youth News* has often run into trouble in its attempt to assert more independence in news and commentaries. Moreover, there is also the tension between mass line journalism's ideal of educating and enlightening the masses and market-driven journalism's tendency to cater to whatever attitudes and preferences are prevalent regardless of how vulgar or problematic.

It is clear that little progress has been made on the most critical issue of the 1989 democratic movement, that is, substantial press freedom. To be sure, the newly emerged commercial sector has more editorial autonomy, but most of these news outlets do not deal with hard news. Party control in the crucial areas of hard political news is as tight with the new stations and new programs as with the old ones. Central Party authorities have kept the CCTV's two Focus programs under close scrutiny and the preview procedures of the two programs are very tight. The two Shanghai East stations are under the tight scrutiny of Central Party authorities as well. Similarly, although recorded news broadcasts have been shifted to live news broadcasts, and broadcasting professionals such as reporters and hosts have gained a little more autonomy, censorship is still tight. Previously, the news was broadcast after being previewed by a responsible station leader (usually the station president or a vice-president responsible for news and current affairs), now the president and vice president usually stands behind the news host and keeps a watchful eye/ear during live broadcasts.

Despite their limitations, journalism practices in the popular commercial sector have made some important theoretical contributions toward the democratization of media communication in China. The operationalization of the people principle was rather vague during the political ferment in the mid 1980s, and despite its democratic thrust, it contains a strong bias toward elitism and professionalism. The assumption was that a group of professional journalists, presumably capable of perceiving the wrong directions the Party is heading, are able to correct it and represent the interests of the people, speak on their behalf, and exercise a watchdog function on their behalf. Now with the popularity of telephone participation, first in entertainment, then with experiments in news and current affairs, the elitism on the part of some media professionals and reformers has been at least partially modified. Chen Shenglai, President of East Radio, for example, has made the following comment:

I personally used to have a one-sided understanding of supervision by public opinion. Public opinion supervision for me seemed to be the supervision of the government by the news media. But in fact, the news media are ultimately communication media. It is the people who exercise supervision over the government. The news media, including radio stations, are merely channels for the expression of such supervision. Therefore, if the news media want to play a true role in opinion supervision, they must invite the participation of the audience in programming.²⁰

Despite problems with Chen's understanding of the news media as "merely channels," the above passage does carry the message of a regained appreciation of the importance of public participation and the dethroning of the self-important, self-appointed news media and media professionals who speak on behalf of the people. I put "regained" here because the tension between professionals' elitism and grassroots participation has been at the heart of policy struggles in the past, including in the area of news media. Mao, for example, often rejected the elitist exercise of power by professionals in favour of mass participation. The Cultural Revolution, for example, despite its disastrous outcomes, was known in the West, particularly in left circles, for

²⁰Chen Shenglai, "Riding the Wind of Reform and Set the Sail," *The Journalists* (1993:1), p. 26.

its critique of elitism and technocracy. One of Mao's important ideas was that newspapers should be run by the whole Party rather than by a few professionals behind closed doors. The amateur correspondents system was a legacy of Mao's policy.

Now, in the new context, public participation has taken a new, and arguably more effective, meaningful and substantial form. Unlike the amateur local correspondents, who have to have some professional qualifications, have to be appointed by the news media, and usually write their news as propagandists of grassroots level Party organizations (and now more often as publicists of businesses), the phone-in audiences do not need the same professional qualifications and institutional recognition. They are simply individuals, act on their own behalf and do not need to get a seal of approval for what they are going to say from their Party propaganda department. Thus, there is some truth in the observation that while PRER brought the first wave of broadcasting reform by making broadcasting closer to the audience, the wide use of telephone participation first in East Radio and later in stations elsewhere created a second wave of broadcasting reform. Now programs are not only designed to attract audiences but for the first time give the audience themselves a place to participate in broadcasting.²¹ Similarly, CCTV's News Commentary Department, *Qianjiang Evening News*, and *Beijing Youth News* have all made efforts in soliciting audience input in news production.

To be sure, such participation is still very limited, both in content and access. To own a telephone in a home is still a luxury even in the urban centres, not to mention in the rural areas, and phone-in programs are almost exclusively designed for the urban population. But the democratizing potential is clear and the political challenge is real. As discussed previously, three months after East Radio's experiment with a live phone-in segment in its news, a sense of citizenship had been aroused among the audience and

²¹See, "The Discovery of the Secret Weapon and the Rise of the Second Wave of Broadcasting Reform," *Journal of Beijing Broadcasting Institute* (1993:2), pp. 1-5.

some of the callers had already moved away from complaints about poor goods and services in the market and public utility problems to more substantial issues and less individualistic concerns.²² Currently, there is virtually no serious phone-in program that deals with important policy issues. The *Mayors and Citizens* series on Shanghai People's Radio's is as far as this format has been permitted to go.

At the same time, the elitism of media professionals is also being challenged by a rising populism (or at least an awareness of the importance and values of the average citizen) in this commercialized sector, particularly in *Living Space*, if discussions in trade journals about the programs and their pressures on the elite Beijing news media community is any indication at all. However, as the fate of East Radio's live phone-in news segment reveals that substantial audience participation is not only politically threatening to the Party but also something professional journalists and editors are not willing to fight for. Public participation will be mediated by media professionals so as to dissipate any potential threat to the Party's hegemony.

Overall, the emergence of a commercialized sector has been democratizing in that these media are closer to ordinary people, address at least some of their concerns and interests, speak in their language, treat them as protagonists of social life, and provide them with some access to participation through phone-ins and news tips.²³ Through these media outlets, the audience's need for popular culture and entertainment is legitimated and affirmed. While the contributions of CCTV's two programs and the two East stations as well as the more respectable evening papers and *Beijing Youth News* are noteworthy, the crime tabloids and weekend editions also have their progressive side. Crime stories, in particular, have exposed the dark side of social relationships, the chaotic social order, the collapse of traditional and socialist value systems in a society in a rapid transition to a market economy. The tabloids and

²²Chen Shenglai, p. 26.

²³It is important to note that there is a strong urban bias in the Chinese news media, and commercialization has in some ways amplified this bias. I will discuss this point in more detail in Chapter Nine.

weekend editions have also broken political and moral taboos. Occasionally, they have even provided a space for the expression of political and social criticism. At the same time, they have also broadened the newspaper readership by catering to the interests of a wide range of people, particularly those who do not generally read the main Party and government organs (the retirees, the homemakers, the urban unemployed, the increasingly large number of mobile peasant workers in the cities, etc.)

On the other hand, the controlled nature of the reforms has thus far prevented the newly emerging commercial sector from posing any fundamental challenge to the dominant model of political communication. The audience's rights to and needs for entertainment, micro-economic and business information and, more generally, their participation in economic and cultural life through the news media is affirmed, celebrated and at least partially fulfilled. However, their rights to and needs for relevant political information, to meaningful participation in political life, in the making of key economic decisions that affect the course of reform and the country's development are still being negated.

Commercialized Media as "Alternative" Media?

One temptation of scholars who are critical of the Party's ideological control is to exaggerate the oppositional nature of the newly emerged commercial sector. Leonard Chu, for example, has grouped local television and radio stations, cable and satellite television, profit-making tabloids, evening papers, weekend editions, and other recent arrivals together with foreign broadcasts such as BBC and VOA and argued that they together "have formed China's alternative media, which the Party has found to be disturbing but impossible to curb."²⁴ Similarly, Pei Minxin has characterized the new financially independent radio and television stations such as Shanghai's East stations as

²⁴Leonard L. Chu, "Continuity and Change in China's Media Reform," *Journal of Communication* (44:3, Summer 1994), p. 9.

fierce rivals of "the government-funded and controlled stations" with broadcast contents that "had been largely kept out of the official electronic media."²⁵

These characterizations, without specific analysis of their actual content orientations as well as clear definitions of what terms such as "alternative" and "official" mean, give the impression that these new stations are not under the control of the government and that they are not part of the "official electronic media." The relationships between the commercialized news outlets and the Party's ideological control are rather more complicated than that.

On the one hand, the commercial imperative of attracting audiences has indeed made these news outlets more attractive, more creative, and more responsive to the needs of the people. Compared with conventional Party organs, they try harder to address popular concerns, to solicit the participation of their audiences, and to speak on behalf of the people. On the other hand, there are several important reasons that prevent them from becoming "China's alternative news media," if alternative means presenting a substantially different political perspective.

First, it is important to note that much of the commercialization happens *within* the existing Party and government media structure. The introduction of new formats and content orientations based on a commercial logic does not generally indicate a commercial revolution from below, outside the existing media structure, but rather an organized reform from within. The adoption of popular commercial broadcasting formats and content orientations by PRER, one of the earliest steps toward commercialization, for example, was not so much a commercial imperative as a political and propagandist maneuver. It was an attempt on the part of the Guangdong People's Radio Station to use commercialized formats and content orientations to improve its own performance and lure back the audiences lost to Hongkong commercial radio stations. It was conceived as a supplementary station to the main channel of the

²⁵Pei Minxin, *From Reform to Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 165.

People's Radio Station. The PRER model took on a life of its own and become a popular model copied first by radio then by television stations across the country. It led to other specialized, financially self-sustaining, and entertainment-oriented broadcasting stations. Nevertheless, these specialized stations are all under the editorial control of either the original People's Radio Station or the government broadcasting bureau.

Similarly, the introduction of commercial logic by the Shanghai East stations and CCTV's News Commentary Department are all deliberate reform initiatives put forward by the Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau and the CCTV administration, with the approval and close supervision of high-level Party and government authorities. These reforms represent attempts on the part of news media reformers inside the news media system to increase the popularity of the news media, to enhance the system's responsiveness to its audiences as well as the effectiveness of its ideological work. These are all top-down reforms conducted within the existing major Party and government-controlled broadcasting establishments.

Second, and closely related to the above point, it is important to note that there are significant differences both in terms of organizational affiliation and content orientations between the different commercialized news media outlets. Many evening dailies are official Party organs. Some profit-seeking tabloids, on the other hand, are only remotely related to the Party's propaganda departments. In the broadcasting sector, there is also a sea of difference between a county-level cable station on the one hand and East Television or the programs of CCTV News Commentary Department on the other, although these are all commercialized news outlets or production units. Although it is true that control is more indirect in some commercialized news outlets, especially the tabloids and local cable stations, in the case of provincial-level economic stations such as PRER and Shanghai's Eastern radio and television stations, editorial controls are as tight as their rival People's stations. Whatever relative editorial freedom

they enjoy is permitted by the Party and the government, and it can be taken away at the will of the Party.

Third, although there are some instances in which commercialized news outlets have challenged the ideological control of the Party, most of these challenges are not fundamental. Moreover, there are far more instances of accommodation. In the current context of tight political control and commercialization without formal institutional independence, the critical capacities of journalists have for the most part been contained. As the case studies in Chapters Six and Seven have demonstrated, commercialized news media outlets survive and flourish not by directly challenging the Party principle and discarding political propaganda. They gain their acceptance by both the Party and the audience by softening the tones of political propaganda, by moving beyond narrow political propaganda, by broadening media contents to include social and personal issues. Their contents are supplementary rather than oppositional to the more conventional Party organs. While the readers of Hangzhou's *Qianjiang Evening News* praised the newspaper for what it did for them, the Mayor of Hangzhou city also praised the newspaper for what it did for the government. While the audiences in Shanghai were excited by their limited opportunity for dialogue with government officials over the airwaves, Ding Guangen, the Party's ideological chief, praised the show and recommended the approach to the Beijing media. Moreover, the new stations' approaches were analyzed by the Party's ideological workers for their contribution to the creation of a new style of more effective ideological work. The media's ideological work involves more than simple political indoctrination. With their reforms, this newly commercialized media sector has shifted their operational notion of the ideological process from a narrow and reductionist one to a broad and expanded one, one that includes the sociological, personal and psychological domains.

To be sure, politically controversial and dissenting material sells. There is profit to be made by selling controversial ideas, particularly ideas that are critical of the

Party. Indeed, as Pei Minxin has observed correctly, commercialization of the book publishing sector has been largely responsible for the publication and distribution of a number of books that otherwise would not have been made available.²⁶ When a book successfully passes through the loopholes of the Party's censorship system and is published and distributed, the Party's criticisms and recall efforts often further publicize the book and raise people's desire to read it. But the news media sector is rather different. Not only is control much tighter in this sector, no single newspaper or broadcasting station can make a huge profit by publishing one critical piece on one day. While the adoption of live radio and television formats and the introduction of call-in programs have certainly made censorship more difficult for the Party, Pei Minxin's assertion that these formats have "rendered government censorship useless" is simply naive and wishful thinking.²⁷ Such an observation totally disregards the issue of self-censorship -- the more routine and more effective mechanism of control in news media systems everywhere. Moreover, when a television station's censors are standing behind the newscaster, how far can a newscaster or a talkshow host go in expressing dissenting views? When everyone knows individuals have lost their jobs for not following the Party line, how many individuals (from programs hosts to producers to station presidents) are willing to endanger themselves? In fact, commercialized news outlets such as PRER, *Beijing Youth News*, and the East radio and television stations are still first and foremost news outlets under the leadership of the Party. The ideological role of these new outlets is demonstrated by the PRER's effort to organize an uplifting trade fair during the dark and depressing holiday season of 1989-1990; by the *Focus*' framing of a discussion about rising tuition fees in education, by East Radio's "rescuing" of a young worker who had been victimized by the system, as well as by

²⁶Ibid., p. 174.

²⁷Ibid., p. 165.

Beijing Youth News' sensationalistic role model stories and its ideological education campaigns.

The less tightly controlled tabloids and some weekend editions are in a slightly different situation. But their relationship with the Party's system ideological hegemony is also contradictory rather than simply oppositional. Their excursion into formally taboo areas such as homosexuality helps to liberalize attitudes and bring social issues into the light of day. But their treatment of these issues is typically superficial, more descriptive than analytical. Their reporting of crime cases is totally different from the muckraking journalism in the Pulitzer and Hearst era in American journalism. The crime stories are almost always reported afterward, after the cases are closed and justice can be illustrated. These stories are not crusading for justice to be done on behalf of victims. They are typically presented as "law and order" stories, exposing law-violating activities perpetrated by criminal elements in the society. Indeed, authoritarianism and sensationalism fuse effectively to increase the market appeal of these stories. The description of the crime itself and the process of crime investigation is often implicitly and explicitly linked with the celebration of the bravery and efficiency of the law enforcement apparatus. And of course, in these newspapers published by law enforcement agencies, there is no report of the repressive side of the State apparatus, no exposure of police brutality, their violation of human rights, and their massive corruption.

Prospects for a Propagandist/Commercial Model of Journalism

The popular evening papers, the East stations, the CCTV News Commentary Department, and *Beijing Youth News* point to the possibility for the emergence of a propagandist/commercial model of journalism. This sector is commercially oriented, imitating the management techniques and production values of commercial news outlets in the West, but it is still under the ideological leadership of the Party. Unlike

traditional Party organs, which depend on government subsidy and operate as government bureaucracies rather than business enterprises and do not have to be popular in order to survive, these news organizations (departments) are financed through commercial revenue and managed as business enterprises. They have to depend on markets (advertising and/or subscriptions) for their survival. Thus, they operate according to a similar commercial logic to the commercial news media in the West.

But unlike the commercial news media in the West, which are first and foremost commercial enterprises, these new media institutions in China are first and foremost political organs. They need to be economically self-sustaining, but they don't have to pursue the profit motive as their primary objective. *Beijing Youth News*, for example, is operated as a business enterprise, but its rapid expansion in the early 1990s was largely due to the fact that it was not treated as a profit-making business by the financial department of the Beijing municipal government. During the formative years of the 1990s, the paper used most of its profits to reinvest in itself. If it had been required to hand its profits to the finance department (as other State enterprises are supposed to do) it might not have had the luxury to invest as much as it did on journalism. If it were a shareholding public company whose primary motive is to obtain high returns on investments, it is doubtful whether the shareholders would have supported non-profitable endeavours such as its specialized papers for school students. With the current structure, although the news organization is a conglomerate, the priority is to use incomes from other business operations to support the newspaper rather than the other way around. There is no evidence of a use the news outlet as a "cash cow" to buy other business interests, a common practice of such media conglomerates as the Canadian-based Thomson group.

With regard to content, while this emergent propagandist/commercial model of journalism has to be responsive to the interests and tastes of readers and audiences, they will first and foremost cater to the propaganda needs of the Party and at the same time

attempt to choose topics and address issues in a way that establishes a common ground between the Party and ordinary people. It is precisely for this reason that compared with Party organs which are only responsive to the propaganda needs of the Party, these commercialized news outlets are more popular among the people. Their degree of success will depend on their ability to put on a good show while "dancing with chains." They have to please both the leaders and the led.

Thus, these newly commercialized news media outlets of the 1990s are of a very different nature from the *World Economic Herald* of the 1980s. Although the *Herald* was financially independent from the State and it was relatively free from formal institutional links with the government, it was, nevertheless, through a set of informal relationships, very close to at least one faction within the political establishment.²⁸ These newly commercialized media outlets, however, do not have such specific political linkages. Despite its folio format, the *Herald* was primarily a political journal. It won its reputation not by its news reporting but by its political commentaries, contributions by prominent intellectuals within the political and intellectual establishment, and interviews with China's political and technological elites. By contrast, the newly commercialized sector's main staple is local news and entertainment. *Beijing Youth News*, for example, consciously set out to become a newspaper.²⁹

While the *Herald's* fight for press freedom was heroic and it became a martyr of the democracy movement, the political orientation of the paper was far from democratic. Indeed, as Li Cheng and Lynn T. White III have argued, the paper had a strong tendency of elitism and was the organ of China's emerging technocratic movement, a movement "inspired by the belief that national progress depends on

²⁸Li Cheng and Lynn T. White III, "China's Technocratic Movement and the *World Economic Herald*," *Modern China* (17:3, July 1991), p. 344.

²⁹Zhao Xiaofeng, "The Macro-Management Perspective of the *Beijing Youth News*," in *A Journalism Shock Wave*, pp. 330.

technological development; thus, experts should rule."³⁰ It showed "obvious biases for the interests of technocratic elites."³¹ "Social welfare, environment, labor, and domestic trade were rare among domestic news items. Women, the elderly, urban housing, and other important issues received little attention."³² By contrast, the newly commercialized news outlets of the 1990s are the champions of the common people. They cater to a mass audience rather than to elites. Rather than concerning themselves with government affairs and offering advice to the government, these news outlets address the concerns of ordinary people in their daily life. Rather than being elitist, they espouse populist sentiments.

In short, the popular commercial sector represents a model of journalism that is different from either the traditional Party organs or the *World Economic Herald* of the 1980s. Within such a model, there is the possibility that the ideological role of the news media will be modified from a narrow and didactic expression of ideology to a more subtle exercise of ideological control in expanded subject areas. Their relationship to the Party's ideological control will be one of accommodation and containment rather than complete compliance. They will constantly make small troubles for the authorities, but they will not fundamentally challenge the existing political and social order. For one thing, when salaries and jobs depend on the continuing existence of the media organization itself, how many people in the management and staff can afford to take the risk of persistently pursuing dissenting views and being forced to close?

For such a new model to be a stable one, however, there must be readjustments, if not a complete redefinition, of the relationship between the Party and the news media. The Party has to have the will to give more autonomy and responsibility to news organizations and journalists. The Party must support the journalists before the journalists can take the initiative to help the Party to win the consent of the people. We

³⁰Ibid., p. 344.

³¹Ibid., p. 365.

³²Ibid., p. 364.

have seen the exercise of journalism's responsibility to the Party in the CCTV News Commentary Department's Director's pre-occupation with political stability,³³ in *Focus*' selection of topics, in *Beijing Youth News*' initiatives and efforts in running ideological education campaigns. From the side of media management, the intention and effort to transform overt censorship into greater reliance on self-censorship is seen in CCTV President Yang Weiguang's coaching of journalists and in his attempt to establish consensus about news selection criteria among Party leaders and rank and file news workers.

As part and parcel of the same process in which the Party has to recognize the relative autonomy of journalists and the news media, the Party also has to recognize the relative autonomy of the news discourse and not to conflate news with propaganda. Indeed, much of the journalism reform arguments in the mid-1980s for "separating news from propaganda," for learning "international conventions" of news production, and for respecting "laws of journalism and communication" has to do with the issue of the relative autonomy of journalism. Here again, journalists in East Radio and CCTV's News Commentary Department have achieved some success in this regard.

I have already noted in Chapter Seven how, commenting on the success of his paper, Cui Anqing, publisher of *Beijing Youth News*, argued that commercialization of the news media is not incompatible with the news media's political orientations. Similarly, Gong Xueping, former Director of Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau, who played a crucial role in the establishment of East Radio and East Television and the initiation of other broadcasting reforms in Shanghai, argued that there is no necessary contradiction between political and commercial goals in broadcasting. According to

³³It is worthwhile to note that, Sun Yusheng, Director of the CCTV News Commentary Department, won a title as one of "China's Ten Most Distinguished Youth" in 1995. (*People's Daily*, Overseas Edition, September 19, 1995, p. 1). This prestigious annual competition is sponsored by the All-China Federation of Youth, China Youth and Juvenile Development Fund and ten major national news media organizations. It honors young role models who have made an outstanding contribution to the country and whose achievements are widely recognized by society. Sun is the first journalist to win such a title. It indicates that Sun has indeed successfully put up a good television show while "dancing with chains."

him, "to effectively run the broadcasting media as an industry will not only not undermine their propaganda functions, it will even positively promote their role as mouthpieces of the Party and the people."³⁴ It is worth noting that Gong Xueping, one of the deputy mayors of Shanghai, was promoted obviously for his success in transforming Shanghai's broadcasting establishment into an expanding industry while maintaining its ideological function. Others within the news media establishment have similarly written many articles in trade journals to argue the same point. The initial success and popularity of commercialized news outlets seems to substantiate these arguments.

But in order to secure their success and perpetuate themselves as a stable model, they must continue to enjoy the relative autonomy that the Party has permitted and be able to be critical on concrete political and social issues, to at least partially address the concerns of ordinary people, and to provide the audiences with some form of access. The success of the current popular press in many ways hinges on its ability to be a voice of the people as much as they can within the politically permissible. Being critical on small matters and being supportive on major issues (*xiaoma da bangma*) is a phrase that has often been used in official Party media theory to describe the relationship between the commercial media and government in the west as well as the relationship between independent commercial newspapers in the pre-1949 era and the Nationalist government in China. Although these commercialized news outlets still lack the political and institutional independence of commercial newspapers in the west, they seem to increasingly play such a role and pursue such an editorial orientation.

Currently, this newly commercialized sector faces many problems. There is the danger that their initial moves toward greater autonomy will go no further and they will eventually surrender to the pressures of an overall news media system that remains the

³⁴Qin Nin, "Gong Xueping on Broadcasting Reform: Both Mouthpieces and Business Operations," *The Journalists* (1993:1), p. 5.

same. Shanghai's East Television, for example, reportedly has suffered from station leaders' efforts to boost their image in front of their government boss -- the Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau -- by handing in too much profit and thus putting the station in a difficult financial situation.³⁵ The continuing existence of all forms of "paid journalism" in other media outlets means that it is very hard for a few journalists in these news organizations to stand above the sea of corruption and remain untainted. And even if they want to explore some sensitive social issues within the boundaries permitted by Party authorities, they might not be able to get the necessary cooperation from government officials. For example, *Live from East Television*, East Television's flagship current affairs talkshow was supposed to explore the problem of forced early retirement of women workers on International Women's day in 1995. Officials from the city government and the Women's Federation were supposed to appear on live television to talk about the issue. But these officials retreated at the last minute for fear of making political mistakes on television. A programming consultant for the program ended up taking the role of a "guest speaker" herself! What was interesting about the program, however, was that precisely because of the absence of officials, the discussion was more lively, and the episode ended up receiving praise from the city's Party authorities!³⁶

Indeed, the fate of this program is perhaps symbolic of the dynamics of being both a Party organ and a market-oriented television station at the same time. The program was originally very popular. Seeing the propaganda potential of the program, Shanghai city propaganda authorities began to assign mandatory topics such as "spiritual civilization" to the program. These mandatory topics, however, drove the audience away. The fierce competition from the Shanghai television station added to program's demise. As a result, the frequency of the program's airing has been reduced,

³⁵Interview with television producer "J."

³⁶Interview with television producer "J."

and there is the possibility that the program might eventually be moved to a less important time block. However, given that the station was an important revenue generator, the producers can also use the commercial imperative to bargain with propaganda officials over programming.

There is an often noted tradition of a distinguishing between "quality papers" and "popular papers" in Britain, and to a lesser extent, in U.S. and Canada. "Quality papers" specialize in hard political and business news and cater to the information needs of elites. They operate with a notion of news as information. "Popular papers," on the other hand, cater to a mass audience with soft news and human interest stories and operate with a notion of news as entertainment.³⁷ China's rising evening papers and weekend editions and *Beijing Youth News* seem to have established themselves as China's popular commercial news media catering to a mass audience with a focus on entertainment.

Will the principal Party organs establish themselves as "quality papers" in the newspaper market? Although some articles in the trade journals have pointed in such a direction, and there is indeed a market for serious news, there are many obstacles for the transformation of major Party organs into the "quality papers" of an emerging news media market. Tight political control and the need for positive economic propaganda mean that these newspapers will continue to sell themselves in two parts, one to the Party, the other to businesses. Unable to produce hard political news that is attractive to their readers, these papers have chosen to soften their content and move away from political content in a trend of "big papers learning from small papers." Yet what distinguishes a "quality paper" is precisely hard political news, news about concrete political and social developments in the country with at least a certain degree of

³⁷Micheal Schudson provides an excellent analysis of the differences between "news as information" and "news as entertainment" in American journalism. See his *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspaper* (New York: Basic Books), 1978.

objectivity, and opinion columns that at least provide some sort of forum for debates among the elites. But this is precisely what is lacking in the main Party organs.

If the Party organs want to "go to the market" by attempting to be the "quality papers" in China's newspaper market, the Party itself must first be democratized. It must allow news reporting of decision-making, allow some critical reporting, and allow news reporting about policy debates and differences within the Party. After all, it is this kind of news that will make political news interesting and attractive to readers.

Challenges and Responses

The emerging commercialized sector is the result of the news media's accommodations to internal and external challenges. The PRER was a direct response to the challenge of Hongkong commercial radio stations, while CCTV's News Commentary Department was a response to the increasing challenges posed by local television stations, particularly as satellite and cable and local commercial interests challenge the CCTV's monopoly in the national broadcasting market and diminish its power, as we will see in the next section. The Shanghai East stations were created by the Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau to challenge the monopoly of the existing stations and introduce competition to the broadcasting system. In addition, according to insiders, the two Shanghai East stations were also the results of accommodation between national and local interests. The Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau was allowed to establish the two East stations as regional radio and television networks as a trade off for not pursuing the idea of sending Shanghai Television Station's program to satellite, because the resulting national distribution of Shanghai television programming would pose a strong threat to the national monopoly of CCTV.

So far, all these developments have been accomplished without substantial changes either in the system of control in the news media or in the system of political decision making. Indeed, many of these developments occurred after 1989, when

political reform came to a virtual standstill. The viability of the emergent propagandist/commercial model depends on the ability of the current media system to continue to respond to the challenges outlined below, most importantly, on how much longer the Party can continue to promote economic reforms and "deliver the goods" to the satisfaction of the majority of the population without substantial political reform, and in journalism, continue to suppress the desire for more autonomy while keeping journalists preoccupied with making money.

The Resurgence of the Press Freedom Issue

As discussed in Chapter Three, since the 1989 crackdown, the course of press reform has taken a sharp turn to commercialization both in theory and in practice. But the struggle for reform on the political realm has not been abandoned. Whenever there is an opportunity, press reform resurfaces as a political discourse. For example, in July 1992, the Shanghai press seized the opportunity of a lawsuit involving journalists' right to report to raise calls for the "speedy formulation of a press law."³⁸ Shanghai's *Liberation Daily* published an opinion piece in which Qian Bocheng, a publisher and National People's Congress deputy wrote:

...If we really want to become an open China in the eyes of the world, we must first have an open press or must open up the press. Journalists have the right to interview, the media have the right to report, and the public has the right to know.³⁹

In theoretical writings, two recent publications on news media reform stand out as unusual. Rather than arguing for the commercialization of the news media, they discuss journalism reform as a political project, a continuation of the main thrusts of the press reform discourse just before 1989. They again raise the question of press freedom as a political issue.

³⁸See more detailed description of the case in Alison L. Jernow, pp. 90-91

³⁹Qian Bocheng, "All Should Concern Themselves with This Lawsuit," *Liberation Daily* (September 9, 1992), p. 2, cited in Jernow, p. 91.

One is Gan Xifen's three-page polemic published in February 1993.⁴⁰ As noted earlier in this chapter, Gan criticized the continuing dominance of leftist policy in journalism, information control, the lack of the exercise of watchdog function by the news media, and the monolithic nature of news reporting. All these problems, Gan argued, are problems with the news media system and journalism policy, which are beyond the capacity of the average journalist to change. Many journalists have the aspirations to reform, but they fear being charged with "liberalization" and thus only experiment with minor reforms such as publishing weekend editions. Gan observes that journalists are waiting for something to happen, working under stress. The only hope, Gan argued, lies in the determination of the Party Central Committee.

Gan appealed to the Party to make a clear declaration of its intention to carry out press reform. He urged the Party to mobilize journalism circles to participate in a discussion leading to the selection of the best reform scheme suitable for the concrete situation. He argued that such a scheme should not only be conducive to the development of socialist democracy, but should also prevent blindly copying from Western models. "We must explore our own unique road."⁴¹ At the same time, Gan asked the Party to make a clear distinction between Party newspapers and non-Party newspapers and allow non-Party newspapers to publish independent news and commentaries on major domestic and international affairs.

Rather than responding to Gan's calls, the Party responded by criticizing Gan for publishing this article at all. Indeed, the story surrounding the publication of the article itself said a lot about the current situation of political repression and press reform.⁴² Gan said that although these ideas had been in his mind for three years, he finally decided to say what he had wanted to say in light of the new economic openness

⁴⁰Gan Xifen, "New Situations Call for Reform in the News Media System, *Journalism Circles* (1993:2), pp. 4-6.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴²The article was first published in a current affairs magazine published by China News Service (*Viewpoint*, 1993:2, pp. 25-27). At the request of Gan himself, it was reprinted in *Journalism Circles*, a journalism trade journal in Sichuan Province, Gan's place of origin. Both journals have small circulations.

created by Deng's spring 1992 talks and Deng's call for combating leftist extremism. He presented his ideas for "judgment by perceptive individuals in journalism circles" with the intention of opening discussion of press reform as a political issue. Although Gan said that these ideas are shared by many people in journalism circles, nobody dared to respond to him. Rather than receiving any comments from media circles, he received the unsolicited criticism of the Party's Propaganda Department. Obviously Gan had wrongly estimated the political climate. Although there has been economic openness after Deng's talks, there is no political openness. On the other hand, the Party did not make its criticisms in public, and it was careful not to inflict any other punishment on Gan.

Despite much repression, intellectual circles have not been completely silenced by the Party. In 1994, the call for press reform as a political reform resurfaced in a more elaborated form. This was no short three-page essay but rather a book by yet another prominent media scholar. *New Theories of Journalism* is a collection of essays by Sun Xupei, the then director of the Journalism Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Among other criticisms of the media system and proposals for reform, Sun elaborates a notion of "socialist press freedom" and proposes "a multi-structured, multi-tiered socialist media system," including independent newspapers. Similar to Gan, Sun also suggests that only the Party organs need to propagate the Party's policies, while other newspapers should be allowed to report and comment independently within the boundaries of the law. Like Gan, Sun was also criticized by the Party for the ideas expressed in this book.

Technological Developments, Commercial Imperatives and Local Interests

Although the Party might still be able to silence the majority of intellectuals and journalists who challenge its control of the news media, the structure of the news media has been diversified and grown much more complicated. After a decade of

liberalization and decentralization, the commercial imperative and local interests are much stronger. The introduction of new communications technologies in the context of commercialization and decentralization means that the Party is increasingly unable to control the new media for the purpose of centralized propaganda. With the geographic size of the country, enforcement of central policies on the local levels has become a very difficult task. Thus, although the principle of Party control of the news media has not been challenged, the monopoly of national media like CCTV is being challenged. Single-minded ideological control of such an enormous population in a context of commercialization and internationalization is becoming increasingly difficult.

Already, the Party has adopted a policy of differentiation in the exercise of ideological control. While it still maintains tight control over hard political news, as discussed in Chapter Seven, control is rather loose for soft news and non-political topics. Indeed, so long as there is no overt political challenge, it seems anything goes. For example, the Guangdong Cable Television Station transmits the entire Hongkong cable television package, including news, by simply blocking out individual reports that are deemed to be politically harmful, for example, news stories about Deng's health and the power struggle in the Party. The method of censorship is very blunt. Previously, the station simply left a blank screen for the duration of a censored item. Later, a censored segment is replaced with something else during a newscast.

While such control seems to be effective in the short run, it also means that the major Party organs, especially the newspapers, are monotonous, dull, and increasingly detached from the people. Indeed, a growing number of people do not even bother to open the pages of the major Party organs. "Editors of major newspapers, why are your headlines so dull? ... You spend your time in meetings or rehashing official documents and languishing in the corridors of power. How can you produce papers which please

the masses?" Even the official *Outlook* news magazine has begun to ask these questions.⁴³

The circulation figures of major Party organs have dropped significantly, despite mandatory subscriptions from business and administrative offices. *Guangming Daily*, for example, has seen its circulation fall from 1.5 million in 1987 to 800,000 in 1993. In order to survive, the paper, like many other Party organs, has decided to "use fewer political articles and more cultural and scientific news."⁴⁴ The result, of course, is less straightforward political propaganda and a diminished ideological role for major Party organs.

The differentiation policy also has another repercussion. That is, even non-political topics are not necessarily always politically safe. The personal is political, as feminists have known for some time and the Chinese authorities are discovering. In Beijing, a popular late night phone-in talkshow on the Beijing Radio Station was ordered to shut down less than forty days after its inauguration by the Party's Propaganda Department. According to *South China Sunday Morning Post*, among other reasons, the content upset the Party because the show

revealed the ugly side of life in Beijing and exposed the city's social and psychological problems. Wives phoned in saying they hated their husbands; husbands called up in a dilemma over whether or not to leave their wife for their mistress; and a lot of soldiers complained about their low social status and the brutality of officers.⁴⁵

In addition to the different degrees of control over hard news and soft news, there is also a significant difference of control between the top and the bottom. With the proliferation of media outlets at all levels, the monitoring of the news media by Party authorities becomes increasingly difficult. Central Party and government authorities maintain tight control of key Party organs - the major Party and government

⁴³"Beijing Magazine Calls Official Press 'Dull'," in *FBIS* (January 28, 1993), p. 8.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵"Authorities Cancel Radio 'Phone-in Show'," *South China Sunday Morning Post* (August 8, 1993), p. 1., in *FBIS* (August 10, 1993), p. 21.

newspapers, and the national radio and television networks. In turn, provincial Party and government authorities maintain control of the news organs under their direct supervision (perhaps not as tightly as at the central level). But at the municipal and county levels, as well as news media outlets not directly under the control of national and provincial Party committees, control is much looser. Thus, CCTV programming has been compared by audiences with "distilled water," television programming by provincial stations is "boiled water," while municipal and county level stations provide "Coca Cola," mostly Hongkong and Taiwan productions involving story lines packed with action and violence and sentimental love stories.

Indeed, the rapid development of local television stations and cable networks has greatly reduced audiences for centralized propaganda, particularly for CCTV. Before, county-level stations were merely relay stations. But thanks to a 1983 policy, county-level stations have been allowed to broadcast their own programs. With the introduction of cable in the mid-1980s, many municipalities and counties as well as large government and business units with their own employee's residential areas established local cable networks. Because cable stations rely on initial set-up fees and monthly fees for their operation, they do not need government investment. As a result, they have developed very quickly and have become a highly decentralized media sector. As of the first half of 1993, there were more than two thousand cable television networks in the country; with different levels of technological sophistication. Among these networks, approximately eight hundred are cable television stations that broadcast videos or self-produced programming. Two hundred of these are run by large-scale state-owned business enterprises. Twenty million households had already hooked up to cable.⁴⁶ The Shanghai cable television station, covering 700,000 households, claims to be one of the largest in the world.

⁴⁶Liu Youli, "A Study of Cable Regulations in the Mainland," *Journalism and Communication* (1994:1), p. 70. This article provides a detailed description of the development of cable television in China and relevant government regulations.

Local television programming has threatened the reach and reception of CCTV. CCTV President Yang Weiguang reported in 1991 that, despite the rapid development of the television industry in the past decade, the audience for CCTV had actually declined, while the reach of local stations had increased.⁴⁷ Before, when provincial stations did not have enough programs, they transmitted more CCTV programs. But now with more provincial programming, provincial stations use their powerful transmitters for the transmission of their own programming, while using less powerful transmitters to carry CCTV programming. The complete transmission of CCTV programming is often limited to provincial capitals. Microwave transmitting lines in the countryside are mainly used to transmit provincial television programming.

Although CCTV programs are now carried by satellite, in areas where there are no satellite receiving stations, most of CCTV programming cannot reach local audiences. The establishment of municipal and county-level television stations further cut the reach of CCTV programming. *CCTV Evening News* is often the only program available. The channels assigned to county-level television stations are usually at a higher spectrum and are thus more difficult for the audience to access. In order to improve reception of local programming, county-level stations simply use the CCTV channel to broadcast their own programming. A resident in a county complained: "For a long time, our county's television relay station has disregarded repeated orders from authorities and the wishes of the vast majority of viewers and replaced the majority of CCTV programming with the display of Hongkong and Taiwan video tapes for private gains."⁴⁸ Another viewer complained in a letter to the CCTV that the county station replaced CCTV programming with its own advertising and video show and even asked each unit to send the station a 100-500 yuan "video fee."⁴⁹

⁴⁷"CCTV Vice President Yang Weiguang on Television Propaganda," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1991:2), p. 17.

⁴⁸*Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1992:2), p. 46.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 45.

Even in places where there is satellite relay and cable distribution, a technological combination that is capable of distributing the entire CCTV package, the Party can no longer control what the people are exposed to. Indeed, given the choices, the majority of the audience prefer the "Coca Cola" offered by local stations to the "distilled water" of CCTV. The more localized the station, the higher the audience rating. Thus, as Yang Weiguang complained:

... due to the lack of management, the rich resources of cable have not been used to promote positive propaganda, instead, it provided convenience for those who choose to watch low quality programming, ... as a result, the influence of CCTV on the national audience is undermined. Consequently, the role of CCTV in using the Party's thoughts to unify the thinking of the people in the whole nation is weakened.⁵⁰

The lack of production capacity at the local level (even national and provincial stations have to rely on imported shows to fill in the schedule) means that "local programming" basically means "imported programming," particularly Taiwan and Hongkong entertainment shows. According to a 1994 survey of more than ten municipal cable channels, more than ninety percent of the programs were foreign imports, which are considered by the Party as of low taste and the ideological instruments of "peaceful evolution" to capitalism.⁵¹ The Party has intended to use the mass media to resist "peaceful evolution" and promote "socialist spiritual civilization." In 1993, a top leader at the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television warned: "We can't spend money to buy peaceful evolution!"⁵²

Thus, the rapid expansion of television in the countryside has neither helped to spread the Party line nor promoted local culture and local expression. Indeed, in some instances, it has helped to destroy local and folk culture. For example, peasants now prefer to watch their favorite traditional drama on the television screen than actually

⁵⁰"CCTV Vice President Yang Weiguang on Television Propaganda," pp. 17-18.

⁵¹Huang Handong, "A Preliminary Analysis on the Development of Cable Television Programming in Coastal Cities," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1994:2), p. 57.

⁵²Cited in Guo Runtian, "The Cable Television Fever and the Search for Programming," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1993:2), p. 67.

attending village theater performances. They prefer the comfort of home viewing, with better visual and better sound effects, not to mention better performances by professionals. And on local cable television screens, with the exception of the local news - a propaganda outlet of the local government, the primary form of local expression has been the lucrative business of on-request popular songs. Send a certain amount of money to the local cable station and it will broadcast a song at your request for anyone you name to celebrate a birthday or wedding. The song is usually accompanied by on-screen display of the names of both the individuals sending and receiving the gift and greetings. Because profit is the only consideration of the stations, cable stations usually do not exercise much control at all in terms of the requests. The few songs that are broadcast repeatedly are mostly from Hongkong and Taiwan or domestic pop songs. There are many incidents in which the song and the on screen message are used by individuals to publicly humiliate another individual.⁵³ There have also been cases in which local radio and cable stations broadcast elegies at the request of individuals who mourned the loss of a family member.⁵⁴

Indeed, CCTV President Yang Weiguang even blamed the current situation on the Party's policy of differentiated control. He argued that in order for Party control to be effective, it cannot simply put a tight lid on CCTV alone, while letting local stations do as they please. The Party may have the intention, but it simply does not have the clout to control such media. The country is too large; the policies have to pass through several administrative levels; technological developments are too fast for the Party and government regulators to respond to; and, most importantly, local, especially county-level government officials, are simply not very interested in ideological issues at all.

⁵³The following are two stories I collected during my fieldwork: a group of factory workers requested a love song for their boss with the message saying that the boss was spending a good time with his lover in an extramarital affair; a county girl's ex-lover requested a song for her with the message implying that she aborted his child -- still an ultimate public humiliation for an unmarried young woman in the countryside.

⁵⁴Zhongran reported a similar incident on a local radio station in Hai'an County, Jiangsu Province. See Zhong Ran, "A Warning about Television On-Call Songs," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1994:5), p. 75.

Administrative orders and regulations are simply ignored or at best loosely enforced. For example, according to government policies, the foremost duty of the county-level stations is to transmit CCTV Channel 2 in its entirety, and they are not allowed to carry advertising and their own entertainment programming. They are supposed to provide only local news and features on local topics, but few stations observe these policies. Moreover, there are many loopholes in existing policies as well as problems for which there is not yet any policy.

While both CCTV and provincial television stations are facing challenges from municipal and county-level stations, CCTV also faces competition from provincial stations. In addition to CCTV's four channels, the stations of Sichuan, Yunnan/Guizhou, Xinjiang, and Tibet, all relay their television signals to the satellites and thus reach a national audience. More influential provincial stations in coastal provinces also want to reach a national audience through satellite. As of late 1994, Shandong Television and Zhejiang Television had each sent one channel to the national audiences through satellites. With the help of local cable networks, many cities and even rural areas can receive more than a dozen television channels. Shandong Television, which broadcasts twenty-four hours a day, has caused quite a stir. With newly installed cable television, peasants in the rural areas, particularly illiterate old men and women, tune in Shandong Station during the wee hours to watch their favorite television drama!

Challenges from the Outside

While centralized propaganda is increasingly undermined by decentralization and pursuit of local interests, external challenges to the news media system have never been so strong, with reinforced foreign radio broadcasting and now satellite television broadcasting. The PRER was the result of a direct response to Hongkong radio stations in the mid-1980s. As 1997 approaches, the influence of Hongkong news media on the

mainland is getting stronger. But external influences go far beyond the Hongkong media.

Since reform and opening up, foreign shortwave radio broadcasting has become an important alternative source of news and information particularly for intellectuals and university students. In a 1990 survey, 10.6 percent of the Beijing population responded that they frequently listened to a foreign radio station.⁵⁵ According to 1991 statistics, there were twenty-seven outside broadcasters (including five from Taiwan), providing Chinese language broadcasting, using a total of 185 channels.⁵⁶ Influential foreign short wave radio stations such as the VOA and the BBC have played a critical role in challenging the Party's monopoly of information, especially with their news reports about events in China during periods of political upheaval. Indeed, the Party blamed the VOA for stirring up the students during the 1989 democracy movement and for the great damage it did to its information control. In Beijing, audiences listened to nearly twenty foreign broadcasting stations. Fifteen of these stations had an audience rating of above one percent, with the VOA having the highest audience rating of 10.6% -- meaning that the VOA had at least 1.3 million listeners in Beijing alone.⁵⁷ The national average audience rate for foreign stations is between 0.5 to 3 percent lower than that in Beijing.⁵⁸ But most of these audiences are the politically active part of the audience, and they in many ways are the opinion leaders.

International radio broadcasting has always been an instrument of foreign policy, and the Chinese Party and government authorities are certainly right in their argument that the main purpose of Western stations such as the VOA is ideological penetration and the promotion of western values. For a long time, the focus of Western

⁵⁵Jin Wenxiong, "A Comparison of the Influences of Foreign Radio and Foreign Television on China," *References to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1993:10), p. 17.

⁵⁶Zhao Shuifu, "Several Issues on Foreign Broadcasting," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1993:10), p. 10.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

stations had been on the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Now with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, Western shortwave radio stations have begun to concentrate on communist regimes in Asia. Thus, in the past few years, Western governments have all readjusted their foreign broadcasting policies and enforced radio broadcasting in Asia. Territories of the former Soviet Union, previously targets of Western international broadcasting, have become new bases from which Western countries broadcast their programs to China, their most important next target. If China was partially under siege from Western shortwave radio signals mainly coming from Southeast Asia previously, now with new Western broadcasting bases in Russia and the central Asian republics, China has been encircled by Western radio broadcasting signals.⁵⁹

Since the early 1990s, the United States, for example, has closed the offices of "Radio Liberty" and "Radio Free Europe" in many West European capitals and drastically cut the operational budgets for these two stations.⁶⁰ At the same time, the broadcasting time of VOA has been increased from eight hours a day to twelve hours a day since 1989, more than \$300 million has been spent on expanding and upgrading broadcasting facilities in Asia.⁶¹ The VOA now uses twenty-four channels to broadcast more than ten hours of daily programming into China.⁶²

For the Chinese Party and government authorities, the most threatening instrument of foreign radio broadcasting, however, has yet to come. The United States has decided to copy the success of "Radio Free Europe" and establish "Radio Free

⁵⁹Zhao Shuifu, "Challenges from Foreign Radio and Television Broadcasting and the Directions of Our Own Radio and Television Broadcasting," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1994:3), p. 20.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹Hu Yaoting, p. 24

⁶²The BBC increased its daily broadcasting to China from two hours and forty-five minutes to three and a half hours in 1990; in 1992, it began to rent three Russian broadcasting facilities in central and far east Asia and provided 9.5 hours of daily programming into China and India in five languages; since 1993, its broadcasting has increased to fifteen hours. Germany also began leasing three radio transmission stations in central Asia to provide a daily broadcast of 19.5 hours to Asia, mainly to China. See Jin Gaochu, "Situations, Analysis, and Strategies," *References to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1993:9), p. 6.

Asia," targeting China.⁶³ The station plans to broadcast twenty-four hours a day into China, recruit its personnel from Chinese broadcasters and journalists in the United States, and broadcast from facilities around China -- from Taiwan in the East to the Philippines in the Southeast to Thailand in the South and Russia in the Northwest.⁶⁴ Despite protests from China and some other Asian countries, the US has decided to go ahead with the station. In early 1994, the US Congress approved a thirty million dollar budget for the establishment of the station.⁶⁵ Already, the station has caused a lot of fear and pressure among Chinese broadcasting authorities. If the Party already feels threatened by the VOA, it will certainly have to face a more direct threat from this new station, with its a more flexible policy, greater coverage of Chinese domestic affairs, and more straightforward propaganda goals.

In addition to reinforced Western radio broadcasting, direct satellite television broadcasting also poses a new threat to China's news media system. With direct satellite broadcasting the next frontier of international broadcasters, especially powerful networks in the West, availability of foreign television programs has increased rapidly over the past few years. In addition to CNN and BBC international services, there are more than twenty outside television channels broadcasting by satellite over China, including the three major American commercial networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) and other government-sponsored or commercial television stations from Hongkong, Australia, Japan, France, Germany, Russia, and other countries.⁶⁶

Although the Party and government, because of fear of ideological influence from the West, generally forbids the reception of all external television, due to a number of factors, including initial relaxation in broadcasting policy, pursuit of commercial interests by local stations, and ineffectuality of policy enforcement, foreign

⁶³Guang Fu, "Why Does the United States Want to Set up Radio Free Asia," *Chinese Journalists* (1994, 3), p. 57.

⁶⁴Hu Yaoting, "From Radio Free Europe to Radio Free Asia," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1994:5), p. 24.

⁶⁵Hu Yaoting, p. 24.

⁶⁶Li Ze, "Reforms and Developments at the CCTV in 1994," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1994:3), p. 24.

satellite television has gained considerable influence in China. As a reflection of relaxation of control, a 1990 government regulation stated that with government approval and proper licence, education, science, news media, financial and trade institutions, and hotels and apartments for foreign guests could install satellite dishes to receive direct satellite television programs for their business needs. The regulation, however, left a loophole by failing to explicitly specify whether individual households can install satellite dishes, although the regulation seemed to imply applications from individual households were out of question. With a price the equivalent of a television set, the number of household satellite dishes expanded rapidly in the early 1990s. The expansion has been facilitated by commercial interests who realize that there is a lot of money to be made by manufacturing and selling satellite dishes. Even the news media themselves had played a role in publicizing satellite reception dishes both in their advertising and regular news reporting.⁶⁷ By late 1993, more than eleven million Chinese households had been hooked up with satellite dishes.⁶⁸

China began to lease international satellites to transmit domestic radio and television programming in 1985. By 1993, China had opened eleven satellite television transmission channels, which carry twelve television programs and thirty sets of radio programs. It had also built 54,084 satellite ground reception stations.⁶⁹ Like shortwave radio, China's original purpose in developing satellite broadcasting was to improve signal reception and expand the reach of domestic stations, particularly the national reach of CCTV's four channels and the reach of provincial stations in provinces and regions such as Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Xinjiang, where rugged terrain and vast territory make microwave transmission difficult. Once satellite reception dishes are

⁶⁷"Don't Publicize Private Satellite Receiving Facilities," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1992:2), p. 45.

⁶⁸Zhao Shuifu, "Several Issues on Foreign Radio and Television Broadcasting," p. 10.

⁶⁹Liu Xiliang, "New Demands on Program Hosts Posed by Developments in Broadcasting in the 1990s," *Chinese Journal of Broadcasting* (1994:5), p. 9.

installed, however, they can receive all the other programs carried by the same satellite.

The most wide-reaching outside threat, however, comes from Star TV based in Hongkong. In 1992, China sent the signals of a satellite station shared by the provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou on AsiaSat I, the same satellite that also carries Star TV's programming. Among the eleven million Chinese households that owned satellite dishes, forty-five percent, ie. 4.8 million are capable of receiving Star TV. Star TV, the first commercial pan-Asia television service, was established in 1990 in Hongkong. By leasing twelve transponders from AsiaSat 1, its programs reach thirty-eight countries with a potential audience of 2.7 billion. Star TV offers a total of five channels, including MTV, sports, news from BBC World Service Television (partially translated into Mandarin), family entertainment, and a channel of broadcasts in Mandarin, all running on a twenty-four hour basis. With the exception of the Chinese channel, which broadcasts programs made in Hongkong, Japan, Taiwan and China, the other four channels carry mainly Western programs obtained through contractual suppliers or the international market.⁷⁰

Star TV's Chinese language news program provided by BBC World Services Television, in particular, poses a major threat to the Party's tight control over information. To use the words of Liu Xiliang, Deputy Minister of Radio, Film and Television, the news program "contains a lot of distorted reports about China, and it frequently attacks China's domestic and foreign policies."⁷¹

The potential threat of outside television broadcasts is much larger than foreign radio broadcasts. Unlike foreign radio broadcasts, the reception of which remains on an individual basis and often of poor quality, satellite television programs have been transmitted and collectively amplified by local cable networks and common antenna

⁷⁰For more detailed information on Star TV and its influence on Asia, see Joseph M. Chan, "National Responses and Accessibility of STAR TV in Asia," *Journal of Communication* (44:3, Summer 1994), pp. 112-131.

⁷¹Liu Xiliang, p. 10.

systems. In late 1993, STAR TV programs registered a total penetration of more than thirty million households.⁷²

Star TV was originally controlled by the Hongkong tycoon Li Ka-shing, who has a lot of business interests in China and has close ties with China's top leadership. Initially, China took its protest to Star TV and just when the two sides were "in dispute," Li suddenly sold sixty-four percent of the Star TV share to Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. in July 1993. This change of ownership from a friendly Hongkong businessman to an international media baron, of course, further diminished the possibility of cutting the source from the sky.

Seeing the increasing popularity of Hongkong and foreign television broadcasts and realizing the impossibility of exerting any pressure on Star TV itself, the State Council in October 1993 tightened its satellite TV regulations by issuing an order that banned unauthorized production, sale, and installation of satellite dishes.⁷³ Star TV programs, particularly its Chinese news program, were prohibited from being received and transmitted. Owners of all those satellite dishes that had been already been installed were required to report to the government and get the proper license.

Although this order has definitely put a temporary halt to the rapid expansion of outside television programs, as Lincoln Kaye has noted, central Party and government authorities may find the ban difficult to enforce.⁷⁴ In addition to the massive bureaucratic work that would be required to process licence applications for the millions of dishes already installed and the police strength required to remove the satellite dishes on rooftops, pursuit of local interests may further hinder the effectiveness of the ban and thus the propaganda departments' aspirations for ideological control.

⁷²Joseph M. Chan, pp. 117-118.

⁷³The State Council, "Regulations on the Management of Satellite Television Ground Reception Facilities," October 5, 1993, printed in *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1993:11), pp. 1-2.

⁷⁴Lincoln Kaye, "Shooting Star," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (October 21, 1993), p. 73-74.

For example, a report carried in the July 1994 issue of the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television's internal publication *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* disclosed that despite the State Council ban almost a year ago, "a number of local cable networks and common antenna systems continue to receive and transmit foreign television programs, including Star TV."⁷⁵ In fact, even in Beijing, under the very nose of the central Party and government authorities, the Beijing Cable Television Station continued to relay sports programs broadcast by ESPN in the U.S. on a daily basis (noon to three a.m. next morning) until well into February 1994. The channel was forced to close down only because CCTV, which viewed it as a competitor for its own sports programming, used the ban on unauthorized satellite transmission as an excuse and pressured the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television to hand down the order.⁷⁶

In addition to these illegal transmissions, many local television authorities are setting up subscription television, which, as Joseph M. Chan notes, "may provide a long-term redistribution network for STAR TV."⁷⁷ As an example, Chan cited a cable network in Wuhan that already offers all but the news channels of STAR TV.⁷⁸ Moreover, Chan also noted that there are policy differences over satellite television regulations. While ideological departments prefer tight control on foreign satellite television broadcasting, technical departments that manufacture the dishes advocate a more liberal policy.⁷⁹

Most important of all, the simple technological factor that some of the domestic television programs are also carried by the same satellites that carry foreign programs makes control very difficult. Thus, central ideological authorities are facing a

⁷⁵*Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1994:7), p. 44.

⁷⁶"State Suspends Beijing Cable TV Sports Channel," *Hongkong Lianhe Bao* (February 8, 1994), p. 10, in *FBIS* (February 10, 1994), p. 23.

⁷⁷Joseph M. Chan, p. 118.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

formidable challenge from an increasingly influential technological configuration: the foreign satellite television broadcasting/local cable network transmission combination, linking international and local interests.

In addition to conventional news media, telephone and fax lines also pose a threat to the Party's information control. Moreover, the Internet now reaches China. And here again, the Party's Propaganda Department is falling behind government departments that have technological and commercial interests in promoting it. The State Education Commission has set up the Internet in ten universities, and the State Science and Technology Commission is currently promoting the service generally. With the increasing popularity of telephones and home computers, many institutions and households in urban areas might soon hook up with the Internet, and it can be predicted with certainty that the Propaganda Department is lagging behind. Before they find out - as was the case with Star TV - many people will already have hooked up with the Internet, and unlike satellite television from the sky, in which the physical presence of a receiving dish is easier for the government to see, the Propaganda Department cannot simply ban computer and telephone use without crippling the economy.

Reactive Party Policies

Does the Party have a policy at all with regard to a reformed news media system or does it simply respond to challenges from below and outside and maintain control as much as possible? To be sure, there are officially-sponsored research projects on news media policies. "The News Media and Modernization" research project, for example, was one of the major social science research projects during the Seventh Five-Year Plan (1986-1990). The report, entitled *News Media and Modernization in China*, published in 1992, contains many policy proposals in specific areas, but in the

important area of media policy, it simply reiterates the Party line.⁸⁰ The official research project for the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1991-1995), "News Media Reform in China," is currently under way, and according to the project's chief organizer, Xu Zhankun, a journalist-turned professor with the Chinese Journalism College, the project is supposed to provide an overall scheme for news media reform in China and strategies for its implementation.⁸¹ Viewed from its outline, this project, like the first one, is not likely to present any major breakthroughs in media policy.

Indeed, given the current context of Deng's poor health and uncertainty about leadership after his death, the Party's policies toward the news media can only be even more reactive. Short-term policy responses rather than long-term policy and planning will prevail. And the suppression of not only press freedom but also theoretical debate and academic freedom will certainly not contribute to the development of a viable and coherent news media policy.⁸² For example, despite rapid commercialization in the news media, the Party still refuses to recognize commercialization as an explicit policy objective. It simply passively reacts to the pressures of commercialization and demands for more independence and autonomy from below.

To be sure, there are policies in specific areas such as satellite and cable policies. But enforcement is not effective at all, as we have seen. In addition to resistance from vested local interests, official corruption further diminishes administrative authority and efficiency at all levels of government.

In late 1994, the central Party Propaganda Department's six "Nos" were circulated in top journalism and news media research circles.⁸³ These six "No"s are: no

⁸⁰The News Media and Modernization Research Team (ed.), *News Media and Modernization in China* (Beijing: Xinhua Press, 1992).

⁸¹Xu Zhankun, "An Overall Perspective on News Media Reform," *Journalism Circles* (1993:1), p. 4.

⁸²Some academic writers still have to use pen names to publish their articles on news media reform. For example, a scholar gave me an article under a pen name and asked me not to disclose the author's actual name in China.

⁸³No written document about the six "Nos" was available. But the order was widely circulated in journalism circles in Beijing. This information was obtained through confidential interviews with several authoritative sources in Beijing during October and November 1994.

private media ownership, no shareholding of news media organizations, no joint-ventures with foreign companies in the news media sector, no discussion of the commodity nature of the news, no discussion of a press law, no openness in the sky. These six "No"s are a good illustration of the reactive nature of the Party in the area of news media policy. Authorities simply want to suppress theoretical discussion and practical developments in these directions. As we have discussed in Chapters Three and Four, there have been many discussions of the commodity nature of the news in academic circles. Although preparation work for the drafting of a press law was halted in 1989, many people still pursue the idea. The first shareholding newspaper enterprise had been established in Sichuan and received wide publicity in the news media. There are many proposals for privately-owned media operations and joint-ventures in news media, especially from media interests in Hongkong and Taiwan -- indeed, there are already some joint-venture enterprises in business information and entertainment.⁸⁴

Without a coherent policy and a clear direction, the enormous energy for news media reform will find outlets one way or another. The results may not be what the Party would like to see. Extreme information control in the domestic news media, for example, will inevitably create a willing audience for foreign news channels such as the VOA. Once vested interests are established, it would be hard to change. Although the Party prohibits business interests from owning and operating news media outlets (general interest mass media, rather than internal publications) businesses have entered and will continue to enter the news media sector through the back door and result in Chinese forms of business control of the news media that are more blunt than those in the West.

⁸⁴See, Joseph M. Chan, "Media Commercialization without Independence," in J. Y. S. Cheng and M. Brosseau (eds.) *China Review 1993* (Hongkong: Chinese University Press of Hong Kong, 1993), p. 25.10.

Chapter Nine

Media Reform Beyond Commercialization

Since the late 1970s news media reform in China has been carried out on two different fronts: the struggle for press freedom and the commercialization of the news media. The two processes often overlap, but it is important not to equate reform with commercialization or to reduce reform to commercialization. In fact, this conflation is precisely what is going on in the current process. As a result of the Party's tight political control and its refusal to initiate political reforms, much of the energy for reform in the news media has been channeled toward commercialization with distinct Chinese characteristics. In this concluding chapter, I want to return to some theoretical issues and discuss the possibilities for media reform beyond commercialization in China.

Full Scale Commercialization?

In the West, liberal and critical media scholars and alternative media practitioners alike criticize the limitations of the news media's dependence on advertising and the commercial media's inadequacy as democratic forums of communication. In addition to the well-entrenched public broadcasting model as represented by such institutions as the BBC and CBC, democratic media reformers argue for the "maximum feasible de-commodification and 'reembedding' of communications media in the social life of civil society as a vital condition of freedom from state and market censorship."¹ In China, those media outlets that actually function on the commercial logic of selling audiences to advertisers are considered by media reformers as the most promising parts of the news media system. When the news media are under the tight control of the Party and are plagued with more blunt and

¹John Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (Cambridge: Policy Press, 1991), p. 153.

problematic forms of commercialism, it is not surprising that many media reformers see the establishment of "genuine" media market logic as the objective of reform. Progressive media reformers are currently pushing for the commodification of news. They have even cited Marx to support their arguments.

Compared with arguments for press freedom, calls for the commercialization of the news media are safer and more convenient. After all, such an argument can find political legitimacy from Deng's 1992 speech, if only indirectly.² But the theoretical discourse on the commercialization of the news media is a multifaceted one. Some reformers have argued that the Party principle and the market are not incompatible. Others have criticized commercialization along lines similar to the mass culture/mass society critique in the West, blaming commercialization for the debasement of culture and the proliferation of news as entertainment.³

Underlying the theoretical discourse on media commercialization, however, is an implicit critique of Party control. Thus it presents a potential political challenge to the Party. Although few have argued that editorial freedom is necessary for a successful audience-building strategy and market success, many have begun to argue that if the news media are to be run as businesses, then they should have relative autonomy in editorial policy. When the commercial logic is carried to its logical conclusion, as some have done, it means that just as factory managers have autonomy in determining what to produce, editors should also have the right to determine what to report; and just as factory products are produced to meet the needs of consumers, news as a commodity should also be produced to meet the needs of readers and audiences, not just the propaganda needs of the Party. Moreover, if the market is to play a major role in the

²Ironically, those who argue against the commodification of news find support from Deng's speeches of the early 1980s in which he warned against the commodification of cultural products.

³See, for example, Shi Tongyu, "The Perplexed and Flustered Social News in China," *Journal of Beijing Broadcasting Institute* (1994:1), pp. 15-17. The Frankfurt School's critique of the culture industry is a good example of the mass culture/mass society critique in the west. See especially T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott (eds.) *Mass Communication and Society* (Beverly Hills, London: Sage Publications, 1979), pp. 349-383.

allocation of productive resources, then the broadcasting spectrum should also be commercialized and be distributed through the market rather than monopolized by the government. But there is evidence of reification of the market in much of the literature advocating commercialization of the news media.

Market Mechanisms as Magic Keys?

To be sure, the penetration of market forces has led to the development of an elaborated media infrastructure and has made some parts of the news media system more responsive to the needs and concerns of readers and audiences. It has also modified the elitism of media professionals and given rise to populist sensibilities. As John Keane has put it, it is unlikely that

market mechanisms structured by anonymous monetary exchanges could ever be eliminated from the heart of a complex, pluralistic civil society. Market transactions can function as useful accessories of social life, enhancing its productiveness, flexibility and efficiency. Market-influenced media can also function as important countervailing forces in the process of producing and circulating opinions; they are not only economic phenomena but sites of signification that often run counter to opinion-making monopolies operated by churches and states.⁴

It is precisely for this reason that the introduction of market mechanisms into the Chinese economy, including the current spin-off to the news media sector, has its progressive aspects. However, democratic socialists should not lose sight of the inherent limitations and structural biases of the market. It is important to understand that the market is not simply a value neutral mechanism, as Deng Xiaoping wants many people to believe.

The Influence of Advertising

Currently, the news media are still celebrating the liberating effects of advertising - liberation from dependence on government subsidies or on "paid

⁴John Keane, p. 152-153.

journalism." Indeed, earning money by getting advertising based on the popularity of media contents is much more dignified than receiving a bribe. Currently, the main problem is still the blurring of advertising and news. However, even if the market logic is fully established and functions "normally" with clear separation of news and advertising, as I have discussed in Chapter One, market-driven journalism has its limitations. Serving the market is not the same as serving the public. Moreover, the effect of advertising is also structural. James Curran characterizes market forces as a "control system" and advertising as a licensing authority that systematically discourages radical working class newspapers.⁵

Indeed, full-scale commercialization and application of the market logic may lead to destruction of some of the gains of news media reform in the past decade. For example, the reform has seen the growth of special interest newspapers run by China's pseudoverion of civil organizations and other institutions. These newspapers are not organized in accord with the principle of market segmentation. They address their readers not as consumers but as political, and social, and cultural constituents. Most of these papers were created in the 1980s. Although the current lack of autonomy of their affiliated organizations prevents these papers from becoming fully expressive of the interests of their readerships, once political control is loosened, these newspapers can become potential forums for different political, economic and social groups. Despite their limitations under the current context, they are one of the positive aspects of a "socialist" news media system.

There is a question as to whether specialized newspapers such as workers' and women's newspapers can be attractive enough to advertisers and become commercially viable operations. Indeed, a full-scale commercialization will almost certainly lead to the destruction of the current pluralistic structure. Some of these papers will have to be

⁵James Curran, "Capitalism and Control of the Press, 1800-1975," In *Mass Communication and Society*, pp. 195-230.

closed down, while others will have to turn themselves into general interest papers so as to maximize audience and survive the pressures of the market. Such a tendency is apparent both in the expanded pages of specialized newspapers and their weekend editions. For those who continue to survive as special interest newspapers, heavy dependence on advertising will certainly change their editorial orientation. Rather than defending the interest of workers, for example, a worker's newspaper will end up protecting the interests of businesses. Rather than advocating women's rights and resisting the commodification and objectification of women, a women's newspaper may end up promoting such a process.

Already, commercialization has led to the decline of newspapers for peasants. Compared with other types of special interest papers, peasant newspapers were relatively underdeveloped to start with. Such a situation is a reflection of the lack of political and cultural capital of the peasants in China, despite the fact that more than eighty percent of the population are peasants. There was a small boom of peasant papers in the 1980s as a result of initial economic reforms in the countryside. By 1989, there were twenty-six national and local peasant papers, published either by government agricultural departments or as the rural editions of the main provincial Party organs. But peasant newspapers have suffered a drastic decline, both in terms of the number of titles and circulation, with the rapid commercialization of the newspaper sector since the early 1990s. In 1993, the circulation of peasant papers dropped more than twenty percent. *Liaoning Peasant News*, for example, which once set a national circulation record of 1,300,000, has recently dropped to 100,000. Peasant papers are usually not commercially profitable ventures due to overall financial difficulties in the rural areas, difficulties in distribution, the rise of production costs, inability to attract advertising, and inability to engage in other income-generating business activities.⁶ As

⁶Advertising income for peasant newspapers is generally very low. In 1992, for example, for *Changchun Rural News* it was only 40,000 yuan, for *Harbin Rural News* 80,000 yuan, for *Guizhou Peasant News* 60,000 yuan, for others even less. Most peasant newspapers were run on deficit. *Chongqing Rural News* had an advertising income

a result, with more emphasis on commercial success, many news organizations simply stop publishing peasant papers or redirect the orientation of the paper toward the urban population and cater to the more profitable urban market.⁷ Shanghai's *Liberation Daily*, for example, has stopped publishing its rural edition. *Jilin Peasant News* was changed to *Jilin Business News* in 1992. *Anhui Daily* has changed its rural edition to an entertainment-oriented evening paper catering to the urban population. As a result, this huge agricultural province is left without even one special newspaper for the peasants.

While the news media's long-standing bias favouring the urban population is certainly to be blamed, commercialization has further perpetuated this bias.⁸ On the distribution side, for example, while the commercial imperative has broken the post office's monopoly in newspaper distribution and improved distribution services and the financial situations of newspapers in densely populated cities, it also "reduces the post office's profits, making cross-subsidies to rural distribution less viable."⁹ Thus, "the end of the post office's monopoly in distribution may ultimately deprive the remote rural areas of ready access to city publications, further widening the rural-urban disparity."¹⁰

Market Mechanisms and Journalists' Autonomy

In addition to commercialized financing through advertising, many of the reforms in the micro-management of the news media have focused on the introduction of market mechanisms in the newsroom, including such measures as connecting the journalist's news output with material incentives, increasing income differentials among

of 150,000 yuan in 1992, but still ran a deficit of 10,000 yuan, and the amount of deficit for 1993 was estimated at 200,000 yuan in 1993. See, Xiong Qingyuan, "Peasant newspapers under the market economy," *Chinese Journalists* (1993:6), p. 33.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Wang Minsheng, "Peasant Papers Should not be Chopped," *Chinese Journalists* (1993:1), p. 52.

⁹Paul Siu-nam Lee, "Mass Communication and National Development in China: Media Roles Reconsidered," *Journal of Communication* (44:3, Summer 1994), pp. 22-37, p. 24.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 25.

journalists, and replacing the journalists' job tenure with short-term (usually one year) contracts. Such measures are supposed to increase the productivity of journalists and are widely promoted in the news media. However, these measures also introduce new forms of control. The lack of job security, for example, may lead to self-censorship on the part of journalists.

Indeed, under the dominance of the market logic and the tightening up of editorial control by the Party, the lack of autonomy and the lack of democratic control in the news production process by journalists and, consequently, poor quality of news production and the low morale of journalists may be easily attributed to equality of payment, job tenure, or for that matter, lack of competition among journalists. Problems of political control and the lack of democratization in news production thus mistakenly find solutions with the introduction of market mechanisms, which have their own constraints. The result is dual repression of journalists -- political control and market control.

For example, the lack of productivity and creativity on the part of journalists may have less to do with job security and material incentives than with the lack of autonomy and lack of a sense of responsibility that comes with freedom and autonomy. If the topics are assigned from above anyway, why bother to be diligent or to pursue investigative journalism, which might cause political trouble? Already, management and personnel reforms in Shanghai People's Radio Station has rendered some support to this argument:

Before, when we tried to mobilize the enthusiasm of intellectuals [journalists] for work, we often solely emphasized material incentives. Such a measure is necessary, but the results were not very ideal. but now, with reforms in the internal management systems and operation mechanisms [that increase journalists' autonomy and reduce levels of bureaucratic control], people have changed their mindset. They put self-esteem, success in their job, and their self-realization as their primary needs and attach more weight to these values than to money. ... now with the arrival of a genuine Spring for news reporting the journalists have a sense of duty. When their work is valued by the public [with more critical reporting and news reports that are closer to the people],

they also achieve a sense of self-realization. Such a realization is precisely where "motivating force" lies.¹¹

My impressions of journalists working under different institutional settings confirm this argument. The journalists who have relatively more autonomy and are able to practice some form of investigative journalism have a better sense of achievement and job satisfaction. They are more dedicated and they derive more social meaning from their work. On the other hand, although some journalists actually have a higher income due to "paid journalism," their lack of autonomy and their inability to engage in critical reporting make them take the attitude that "journalism is just a means of earning an income."

Another case in point is competition. One argument put forward by those in favor of commercialization is that the current news media system lacks a mechanism of competition and the introduction of the market mechanism will lead to competition. But competition in what at what level? Without press freedom, competition often means competition in format and style of presentation on safe subjects. Competition within the Party news media itself might not necessarily be beneficial for the audience. Only when there are different media sectors and different opinion orientations will competition be more meaningful. Similarly, in the broadcasting sector, different specialized radio and television channels basically compete by offering the same fare of light entertainment. Thus, while Party control has created a monotonous media system, unrestrained market competition also has a homogenizing impact on news media content and creates "rivalry in conformity."¹²

¹¹Huang Mingxing, "Reform Brings Change," *The Journalists* (1993:4), p. 5.

¹²Maxwell E. McCombs, "Concentration, Monopoly, and Content," in Robert Picard, James Winter, and Maxwell McCombs (eds.), *Press Concentration and Monopoly: New Perspectives on Newspaper Ownership and Operation* (N.J.: Ablex, 1988), p. 133.

The Issue of Private News Media Ownership

In Eastern Europe, as Slavko Splichal has observed, after decades of a non-market economy and state-controlled economy, "It is largely believed that freedom of ownership and particularly private ownership are the guarantors of democracy and a free press. Privatization is seen as the only instrument that can reduce and possibly abolish state intervention in the media."¹³ In China, the issue of private ownership of media of communication has largely been suppressed. It emerged briefly during the theoretical ferment that led to the 1989 democracy movement when an argument was made that the right of individual citizens to publish newspapers is inherent to the constitutional guarantee of press freedom.¹⁴ While some reformers have explicitly argued for private newspaper ownership, others use the more broad and vague term of independent newspapers (minban). Since the 1990s, many entrepreneurs have expressed the desire to establish private news media operations.

Certainly, the establishment of independent media outlets is one of the important steps toward the realization of press freedom. But there is a question as to exactly what ownership structure and financing scheme independent media outlets should take. It is important to note that although privately owned, advertising-supported, and profit-oriented news media have traditionally been associated with press freedom in the West and although there is a common assumption that property rights are the foundation for press freedom, there is also a growing literature in critical media scholarship which challenges this assumption. As Denis McQuail points out, "[t]he case for equating press freedom with property rights is far from conclusive."¹⁵ Even in the United States,

¹³Slavko Splichal, *Media Beyond Socialism: Theory and Practice in East-Central Europe* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1994). pp. 135-136.

¹⁴Journalism Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Survey Group of the Capital Journalism Society, "People's Calls, People's Expectations," in Chen Chongshan, Er Xiuling (eds.) *A Perspective Study of Media Communication Effects in China* (Shenyang: Shenyang Publishing House, 1989), p. 85.

¹⁵Denis McQuail, *Media Performance: Mass Communication and The Public Interest* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), p. 103.

McQuail notes, "[a]uthoritative accounts of the theory of the American First Amendment do not always support the equation of economic freedom with press freedom nor the argument for private ownership as a necessary condition."¹⁶ It is important, therefore, not to equate independent news media with privately-owned and profit-seeking media.

Toward a Framework for a Democratic News Media System in China

The current intertwining of Party control and market forces is undemocratic. Nor will complete commercialization and the replacement of Party control by market control lead to a pluralistic system of media communication. But the news media's growing financial independence, the emergence of a semi-pluralistic news media infrastructure, and the development of printing facilities and distribution systems, have laid some of the material foundations for the development of a pluralistic news media system.¹⁷

Such a situation, therefore, is quite different from situations in the former Soviet Union and the East European countries. While governments still control the broadcasting media in one form or another in these post-socialist societies, the print media, newly freed through progressive legislation that abolishes formal censorship, are facing strong economic pressures and are in danger of falling under the control of domestic and international capital.¹⁸ The print media in Russia, for example, after the "golden age" of press freedom during the *perestroika* years in the late 1980s, have faced severe economic pressures and the problem of becoming increasingly dependent

¹⁶Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁷Pei Minxin, *From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 178.

¹⁸See Slavko Splichal, *Media Beyond Socialism* for an excellent analysis of media theory and practice in post-socialist societies in East-Central Europe. See also articles on "Media in Eastern Europe" in the Winter 1995 issue of the *Canadian Journal of Communication*. Pei Minxin provides an analysis of the transformation of the Soviet mass media in his *From Reform to Revolution*, chapter 6, pp. 179-204.

on government subsidies.¹⁹ Lacking the material foundation for the exercise of press freedom, the press "is becoming a kind of product that not many people care to produce, sell, or buy,"²⁰ while the government "was quick to learn that economic pressure provides as effective a tool for control over editorial policies as did the ideological and political dictate exercised by the communists."²¹

In China, the Party still rejects complete commercialization of the news media as a matter of principle and of administrative policy. Although market forces have partially taken over the news media through the back door and the contractual system has served as a surrogate for private media ownership in some cases, the Party still rejects private ownership of the news media and the investment of foreign capital. While Deng Xiaoping has closed the debate on whether a specific reform measure is socialist or capitalist, he has not rejected socialism in rhetoric, nor has the Party. It is important, and perhaps still possible, to critically examine the implications of the current wave of commercialization, to insist on the specificity of the news media industry, and not to allow the commercial logic to take over completely. Since the Party is still rhetorically committed to socialist values, it is important for democratic forces to appropriate the Party's language and to struggle for a different articulation of this language (including key terms such as "socialism with Chinese characteristics," "reform" and a "socialist market economy") for a different type of socialism rather than jumping from anti-capitalism to anti-socialism or taking the more convenient path of simply trying to imitate the West by simply pushing for privatization and complete commercialization of the news media.

In her study of rural economic reform in the early 1980s, Pat Howard warned:

There is a very real danger that overcoming utopianism will mean reversion to a pragmatism more or less devoid of social ideals. There is

¹⁹Andrei G. Richter, "The Russian Press after *Perestroika*," *Canadian Journal of Communication* (20:1, Winter 1995), pp. 7-23.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 21.

²¹*Ibid.*

a danger that the rejection of the moralizing of the Cultural Revolution will involve a rejection of ethics altogether. There is also the danger that rejection of large-scale class struggle will involve elimination of struggle over questions of equity and justice. All of this would add up to a triumph of pragmatism over practical reason.²²

This is precisely what is happening in China in the 1990s. There is plenty of room to get rich and get corrupt. But there is little space for political imagination. The Party has sunk into a state of ideological and moral bankruptcy. Its objective of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" hasn't much credibility. Some of the Chinese dissidents, especially those overseas, are still fighting over the question of whether the 1989 democracy movement should be critically assessed.²³ Binary thinking prevails. Extreme politicization of criticism has made any critical thinking difficult, if not impossible. Inside China, for example, if you mention concepts such as "cultural invasion," you are likely to be "accused of harbouring leftist sentiments" that "should be buried along with the Cultural Revolution."²⁴ You are necessarily identified with conservative Party ideologues.²⁵

Among the Chinese dissident circles outside China, any critical reflection on the 1989 democracy movement can be viewed with suspicion and runs the danger of being perceived as "standing in line with" the Party.²⁶ Being refugees in foreign countries has made it very difficult to articulate anything outside the dominant ideological framework that defines democracy in liberal terms, anything beyond what Robert Hackett has called the "Capitalism Triumphant: No Third Way" mode of thinking.²⁷ In the current

²²Pat Howard, *Breaking the Iron Rice Bowl: Prospects For Socialism in China's Countryside*, (Armond, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1988) p. 191.

²³Liu Binyan, for example, noted in June 1995 that the hundreds of Chinese dissidents overseas have not seriously reflected upon the 1989 democracy movement and drawn lessons from it during the past six years. See "Controversies over Chai Ling are not over," *Ming Bao* (June 18, 1995), p. C16.

²⁴Marie Cambon relates such a case in her fieldwork in China on Chinese responses to foreign media imports. See Marie Cambon, *The Dream Palace of Shanghai: American Films in China's Largest Metropolis 1920-1950*, unpublished M.A. thesis (Department of Communication, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C. Canada), 1993, pp. 261-262.

²⁵As Marie Cambon puts it, "it is difficult take a critical stance without being aligned with conservative or 'leftist' thinking" in China, see Marie Cambon, p. 261.

²⁶"Controversies over Chai Ling Are not Over," p. C16.

²⁷Robert A. Hackett, *News and Dissent: The Press and the Politics of Peace in Canada* (Norwood, N.J.:Ablex, 1991), p. 286.

context, any critical evaluation of liberalism and liberal democracy runs the danger of being perceived as aligning oneself with the Party's cause of opposing "bourgeois liberalization."

But the goal of socialism has not been totally abandoned. Inside China, media scholars such as Gan Xifen and Sun Xupei are still arguing for some form of socialist press freedom and socialist pluralism in the news media. Outside China, Ruan Ming, one of China's dissidents, has spoken out about the "ideological bankruptcy" of the 1989 democracy movement and argued that democracy movement leaders, Party reformers and journalists "should keep in mind that the goal of socialism is not modernization through authoritarianism, but human emancipation."²⁸

Capitalism can and does co-exist with authoritarian regimes. And China is heading in that direction. The Chinese people suffered when the political imagination of one man - Mao Zedong - was imposed as articles of faith for the whole population. The lack of fundamental change to the process of political communication means that again, there is a danger that the whole nation may suffer from the domination of political imagination by another old man - Deng Xiaoping. While the Cultural Revolution is remembered for its "Great Criticisms," currently, Deng's closure of any substantial debate on the future direction of the country and the ethical and political implications of the reforms is no less problematic. Either situation is undemocratic.

While there are those who tend to believe that China's capitalist revolution will lead to a democratic political system,²⁹ there is no necessary relationship between capitalism and political democracy. Capitalism is not the only possible future for humanity. Nor does liberal democracy have an exclusive claim to democracy.³⁰ To be sure, just as the market has an important role to play in the organization of human

²⁸Ruan Ming, "Press Freedom and Neo-authoritarianism," in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed.), *Voices of China*, p. 131.

²⁹See, for example, Pei Minxin, p. 210.

³⁰Political theorist C.B. Macpherson, for example, has made a strong point that a range of political movements, ideologies and systems could lay claim to the mantle of democracy. See his *The Real World of Democracy*, (Canada: The CBC, 1966).

society, liberal democracy contains important principles that constitute significant achievements of human civilization. Such principles include the rule of law, equality before the law, respect for individual human dignity and rights, representative democracy as the accountability of the government to the governed, and the right to participate in choosing those who rule. Unfortunately, in China, these ideas have either only been paid lip service or dismissed as "bourgeois."

On the other hand, the brutality and bankruptcy of Stalinism and Maoism does not invalidate critiques of the fundamental flaws and blindspots of liberalism, capitalism, and liberal democracy. The following are just a few of the problems.³¹

First, liberalism virtually equates freedom with ownership of property. Based on the notion of acquisitive, possessive individualism, capitalism has produced massive poverty as the counterpart of extreme concentration of wealth.

Second, liberalism assumes the nation-state as the repository of political virtue and the guarantor of political rights. But the nation-state faces dissolution from above by the process of "globalization" and the associated growth and power of unaccountable, hierarchical supra-national organizations and arrangements that represent elite interests (IMF, NAFTA, the proverbial Trilateral Commission, etc.) and disintegration from below by the growing anarchy in many Third World countries, by the growing millions of effectively stateless refugees and "guest" workers, and by the upsurge of racism, ethnic violence, and micro-nationalism in many countries, including Europe and North America. Citizenship based on nation-states is not enough.

Third, from an ecological perspective, liberalism has no notion of the limits of growth. Its assumption of the limitless expansion of human wants leads to a continuing crisis of overconsumption and destruction of resources and local ecologies.

³¹For a more elaborate discussion of these ideas, see, Robert A. Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao, *Regime in Crisis: Democracy and "Objectivity" in the News* (Toronto: Garamond Press, forthcoming).

Fourth, the homogenizing impact of market relations has undermined more traditional values of kinship, community, place, ethics and mutual obligation and has contributed to the backlashes of racism, fundamentalist religion and micro-nationalism in many parts of the world.

Fifth, from a feminist perspective, neither liberalism's notion of elected, representative institutions as the embodiment of the public sphere nor its definitions of individual rights in the private sphere addresses the political economy of the domestic household and the exploitation of women's labour.

Finally, despite its achievements, liberal-democracy is insufficiently democratic -- partly because of the discrepancy, oft noted by socialists, between formal legal and political equality on the one hand, and substantive inequalities of social class, which lead to inequalities in communicative and political power on the other. A related critique argues that the political institutions of contemporary liberal-democracies (parties, elections, parliaments) sharply curtail the opportunities for genuine political participation. They have become simply mechanisms by which citizens can at best select candidates and parties from a narrow range of alternatives. Once in power, those parties are in turn so strongly influenced by the society's most powerful unelected elites and systemic problems (e.g. the debt crisis of the capitalist state) that they can no longer function as popular representatives. North America's recent populist revolts, symbolized by Ross Perot and the Reform Party, are partly products of a political malaise, of a perceived gap between the system's democratic legitimation and its actual performance.

While democracy has often been defined in a narrow sense as "meaning simply a system of choosing and authorizing governments,"³² as C. B. Macpherson has effectively argued, there is a broad definition of democracy that "has always contained an idea of human equality, not just equality of opportunity to climb a class ladder, but

³²C. B. Macpherson, p. 20.

such an equality as could only be fully realized in a society where no class was able to dominate or live at the expense of others."³³ Thus, democracy not only has a political dimension, as a system of government which provides "to the people (all members of a collectivity) a certain degree of political equality and the fullest possible involvement in procedures for arriving at collective decisions about public affairs,"³⁴ but also a social dimension. It also means a kind of society.

According to Macpherson, although a vanguard state might have a legitimate claim to democracy in the broad sense, communist states have done much damage to their own credibility by claiming to be democratic in both the narrow and broader sense. While communist states in the East bloc have mostly been transformed and democracy in the narrow sense has been established in one form or another, in China, the communist state has managed to remain intact with the help of tanks and with much damage to the society. According to Macpherson, the only remedy is for communist states to "make good their claim to be democratic in the narrow sense."³⁵ In his view, a vanguard state "can in principle merge into a democratic state in the narrow sense."³⁶ He further argues that this transition does not necessarily require that a system of competing parties be set up. Even a one party state can in principle be democratic in the narrow sense, provided

(1) that there is full intra-party democracy, (2) that party membership is open, and (3) that the price of participation in the party is not a greater degree of activity than the average person can reasonably be expected to contribute.³⁷

Such a remedy is perhaps the only hope for the Chinese communist state to rescue itself both from within and without. In the West, where democracy in the narrow sense has been achieved, democratic forces are struggling for a broadened

³³Ibid., p. 22.

³⁴Slavko Splichal, p. 1.

³⁵C. B. Macpherson, p. 22.

³⁶Ibid., p. 20.

³⁷Ibid., p. 21.

definition of sustainable democracy with a focus on equality, while at the same time guarding against losing the advantages of liberal democracy. In China, democratic forces should struggle to achieve democracy in the narrow sense while at the same time guarding against losing the progressive gains of the socialist revolution and whatever has been achieved in the name of a broad definition of democracy. There were discussions of 'convergence' between capitalism and socialism (qu tong lun) in China during the pre-1989 theoretical and political ferment. This convergence, of course, should mean the evolution of the two systems toward a qualitatively different stage of for both. In the nineties, however, this theory of convergence is being replaced by contention over "peaceful evolution" to capitalism.

Thus, China is at a crossroads. One road would combine an undemocratic vanguard state with capitalism untempered by the liberal democratic state, a direction China is currently heading. An alternative option is to democratize all aspects of the Chinese society, including political, economic, social, and communication and cultural spheres.

Such an option would necessarily involve the reconceptualization and restructuring of the complex relations between the media, state and civil society. The state could still be a one-party democratic state as long as it followed Macpherson's suggestions to meet the three essential conditions. The Party's pseudoverion of civil organizations would need to become truly independent through substantial reforms, and new independent civil organizations would have to be encouraged. Third, the dominant ideology of Marxism, Leninism and Mao-Zedong Thought, together with Deng Xiaoping's pragmatism, would have to be critically re-examined, discarded, expanded, or amended to allow ideological diversity within the broad framework of socialist pluralism, including the incorporation of recent critiques of the blindspots of liberalism in the west, some of which are also shared by Marxism. A reinvigorated democratic state that has popular support, a vigorous civil society guaranteed by democratic state

institutions, and reconstructed news media able to function as a public sphere are all urgently needed to check the structural biases of the market forces unleashed in China.

A broad definition of democratization means that it is not only necessary to struggle for freedom but also for equality and a sense of community. While freedom and rights of communication defined in the traditional liberal sense of negative liberty is a necessary base, as Slavko Splichal has argued, "the question of democratization ultimately rests with a *material base* that does (or does not) provide for the realization of the political and social rights declared in a society."³⁸ Democratization should dismantle such barriers to communication as class privilege, gender preference, racial discrimination, exclusion on the basis of age, regional disparities, and a division of labour that awards authority to a relative few and mandates compliance to a large majority. Writing in the context of post-socialist societies in Eastern Europe, Splichal argues that a process of societal democratization implies a transition from "political democracy" in the strict sense to a "social democracy" infiltrating various spheres of civil society. Democratization implies and should mean more than the overthrow of a government that was not elected democratically and the turn to a market economy. It should also involve a concern over the "the management and control of information *within and between groups*."³⁹ This observation is also highly relevant to the Chinese context. The democratization of media communication should mean much more than a press law that protects journalists from the heavy hand of the Party and allows the publication of private newspapers.

As Raymond Williams puts it, the "basic choice is between control and freedom, but in actual terms it is more often a choice between a measure of control and a measure of freedom, and the substantial argument is about how these can be combined."⁴⁰ Denis McQuail has grouped the basic values of public communication in

³⁸Slavko Splichal, p. 3, emphasis in the original.

³⁹Ibid., emphasis in the original.

⁴⁰Raymond Williams, *Communications*, p. 124.

terms of three fundamental principles, freedom, equality, and order/cohesion.⁴¹ Each value is further divided into a number of subsets, including independent status; access; diversity of supply, access, and content; objectivity of content; control and solidarity in the social domain; and quality and authenticity/identity in the cultural domain. These values, of course, are both complementary and contradictory, and none is absolute. The struggle for a democratic communication system requires finding the best ways of achieving a maximum balance in the realization of these values. In China, for example, freedom has been compromised to its extreme in the name of achieving equality and order, but the result has been neither equality nor order. Similarly, the Party has persistently invoked the relativity of freedom to suppress freedom. While there is no absolute freedom and autonomy, there is a substantial difference between the existence of legalized sanctioned freedom and relative autonomy and the lack of them. At the same time, while expanding media freedom, including the freedom to use the news media to make a profit, it is also important to safeguard and expand equality, including media services and access for such groups as children, women, peasants, soldiers, seniors, and ethnic minorities, particularly in light of the current wave of commercialization.

If anything, the experience of capitalist news media and the news media system under state socialism points out that the domination of one mechanism of control - either the market or the state - is not satisfactory for a democratic system of communication. While the ultimate objective of communications freedom should be the liberation of the communications media from subordination either to private capital or to the state,⁴² at the present, the idea of a multi-sector, multi-tiered, pluralistic news media system organized around different principles and logics within a democratically

⁴¹Denis McQuail, *Media Performance*, pp. 65-80. See also Denis McQuail, "Mass media in the Public Interest: Toward a Framework of Norms for Media Performance," in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds.), *Mass Media and Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1991), pp. 68-81.

⁴²Sun Xupei, *New Theories of Journalism*, p. 109.

constructed legal framework is perhaps the best alternative. The struggle for such a system of communication will simultaneously be the struggle for the democratization of Chinese society.

A Democratic Media System for China: A Modest Proposal

While proposals for alternatives appear unrealistic, as Ben Badgikian has put it, "What is logical and good ought to be expressed even if it appears unachievable at the moment."⁴³ My proposals are based on current Chinese media realities, including existing technological, organizational and financial capabilities, proposals for democratic communication developed by media scholars in the West, critical analysis of the experience of media democratization in post-socialist societies in East Europe, as well as media reform proposals put forward by Chinese scholars.

Strikingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, there is convergence (or at least, elements of similarity) between proposals for democratic media systems developed by democratic forces in East and West. In the conclusion to the November 1988 survey report on press reform, perhaps the most eloquent and best-formulated statement produced by the Chinese media reform movement so far, two high-profile institutional co-authors, the Journalism Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Capital Journalism Society, summarizing the opinions of NPC and CPPCC delegates, wrote:

Ideological pluralism means ending the monopoly structure of the Party press. It means that government press, partisan press, public service press (*gonggong xinwen shiye*) and civic press (*minying xinwen shiye*) develop and compete on an equal basis within a constitutional and legal framework. It means a multi-dimensional structure with different tiers, different levels and different forms of ownership.⁴⁴

⁴³Cited in Douglas Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1990), p. 179.

⁴⁴Journalism Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Survey Group of the Capital Journalism Society, p. 99.

Elsewhere, ideas such as "many voices, one direction [socialism]," originally proposed by People's University professor Gan Xifen, and "a multi-tiered, multi-structured socialist press system with the Party press at the centre" originally proposed by Sun Xupei, have also been expressed. But these ideas remained underdeveloped and without much concrete detail, perhaps due primarily to the lack of academic freedom.

Despite differences, there are similarities between these ideas and James Curran's "model of a democratic media system," which "draws upon and composes features derived from the practice of different European countries."⁴⁵ In this model, a core sector is surrounded by media organizations which are organized on different principles. The core sector is composed of general interest TV channels which "reach a mass audience and provides a common forum of societal debate... and a common symbolic environment which reinforces ties of mutuality."⁴⁶ The peripheral sectors are composed of "media reaching more differentiated audiences, and are organized in a way that is designed to produce a vigorous plurality of competing voices," including a private enterprise sector, a social market sector, a professional sector, and a civil sector.⁴⁷

While James Curran's model reflects the centrality of television, the proposals of Chinese scholars have been heavily biased toward the press, primarily due to the fact that most of the leading scholars were press scholars to begin with and because the press had been at the centre of both Party journalism and journalism theory in China. But such a bias is no longer justified. In my view, some aspects of James Curran's model can be adapted to the Chinese context and enlighten the Chinese search for democratic alternatives. While the concrete details of such a structure should be worked out in practice, the following are some possible arrangements.

⁴⁵James Curran, "Mass Media and Democracy," in *Mass Media and Society*, p. 105.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

In the newspaper sector, the current structure is already fairly pluralist, although ideological diversity has been prohibited by the ideological domination of the Party. Therefore the current system is pluralist only in name. In a reformed system, there could still be a party/state sector. It would consist of existing Party organs at a much reduced scale, subsidized by Party membership dues. The current trend toward the commercialization of Party organs in all its forms, including the contracting out of editorial pages should be reconsidered and stopped. Party journalism has its good sides and there is a place for less mediated political communication. With the development of intra-party democracy, Party organs would become more interesting, more informative and a forum for the open discussion of Party policies.

In addition to Party newspapers, there is already an elaborated government and state newspaper sector consisting of newspapers run by governments and government departments and other apparatuses of the state. The reform years have seen the establishment of government organs. At the central level, there is *Economic Daily* under the State Council. At the local levels, the cities of Shenzhen and Xiamen both publish government organs in addition to local Party organs. Like the Party organs, this section has been a major site of journalism corruption and compulsory subscriptions. In a reformed newspaper system, this sector should be greatly reduced. While government advertising could be permitted, commercial advertising should not be allowed. The profit motive should be eliminated. Many of the newspapers, especially those established by government departments, should be transformed into internal newsletters with free distribution within the department. In the past few years, some local People's Congresses and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conferences have also established their own newspapers. The National People's Congress, whose request to publish its own newspapers was reportedly turned down by the Party,⁴⁸ should also

⁴⁸This information was obtained from an interview with media official "M," October 1994.

establish its own newspaper. But like government newspapers, newspapers established by these political institutions should be freed from advertising and the profit motive.

The Xinhua News Agency should be free from the Party's intervention and operate at arm's length from the government. Its intelligence function should be eliminated. The journalists' responsibility for writing "internal reference" news for leaders should be abolished.

A civil sector in the print media can be (re)established through transformation of existing newspapers run by women's federations, trade unions, and other social groups as part of the process of reconstituting an independent civil society. While under the direction of their affiliated organizations, these newspapers should enjoy complete editorial autonomy from the Party/state apparatus. They should be financed by their affiliated organizations and readership subscriptions rather than depending on commercial financing. These newspapers will serve both as channels of communication among members of a group and as the collective voice of a special group in discussion of public issues.

A commercial sector can be established on the basis of general interest evening papers and other special interest papers catering to specific market segments. These papers should cut their institutional ties with Party and government apparatuses and other institutions and become independent commercial entities through such ownership structures as shareholding. However, a structural arrangement should be made to ensure that no single business enterprise or private individual can control a newspaper. Nor should cross-media ownership be allowed in the news media sector. The principle should be to maximize the benefits of commercial media, such as its responsiveness to readers and audiences, efficiency, and watchdog role over government on the one hand and minimize structural bias and self-paralyzing effects of the market, such as the

tendency of competition to lead to monopoly.⁴⁹ State revenues from this sector should be redistributed through a democratically-worked out scheme to subsidize newspapers in other sectors, especially newspapers run by civil groups whose readerships are not profitable in market terms.

In addition to the above sectors, there is a special need for the voice of a professional sector "which is a bedrock of independence and which can be relied upon to maintain a critical surveillance of all power centres in society, and expose them to the play of public opinion."⁵⁰ Indeed, the idea of newspapers run by professionals without external political and commercial control (tongren banbao) has always been an important dream of Chinese journalists under different political regimes. As Sun Xupei argues, compared with Party organs, which exercise press freedom on behalf of the people, professional-run newspapers are citizens' expression of press freedom in the direct, unmediated form, based on voluntary association of citizens.⁵¹ This sector can take the form of non-profit journalists co-operatives democratically managed and operated in a non-hierarchical structure so as to ensure a maximum of freedom and a minimum of organizational constraint. Such newspapers should not be engaged in other political and economic activities. While readership subscription fees should be the main source of revenue, a percent of state revenues from the commercial sector can be distributed to this sector. The first step toward the establishment of such newspapers could begin with the transformation of *Guangming Daily* in Beijing and *Wenhui Bao* in Shanghai, through the cutting of their ties with the Party externally and internal re-organization that turns them into worker-owned cooperatives. Both newspapers have some tradition of non-partisanship and professionalism, especially before 1957. Their

⁴⁹Ben Bagdikian provides an excellent analysis of how the advertising logic leads to newspaper monopoly in the United States. See his *The Media Monopoly*, 4th edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), chapters 6-9.

⁵⁰James Curran, "Mass Media and Democracy," p. 110.

⁵¹Sun Xupei, p. 94.

material foundations and national influence would ensure that the professional sector could have a solid start.

Finally, there should be a community sector consisting of small-scale newspapers and newsletters established by various institutions such as universities, factories, neighborhood committees and township councils. In universities and factories, for example, in addition to the existing newspaper that is typically under the control of Party committees, there should be an alternative newsletter, established by student unions and trade unions. Alternatively, given the lack of resources, the existing institutional paper should become independent of the Party committee and through re-organization become democratically managed and operated so as to provide a forum for the discussion of community issues.

In broadcasting, a similar pattern can be established by the democratization of existing broadcasting monopolies on the national and local levels. Rather than subjecting broadcasting stations to the direct control of government broadcasting ministries and bureaus, broadcasting stations should have relative autonomy and operate independent of Party and government. The current Ministry of Radio, Film and Television and its local counterparts should change their dual roles as both government department and propaganda organ to become regulatory agencies at an arm's length from the government, something similar to the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission. Given that television has become the most important medium, especially for rural residents who have skipped the age of the popular press and jumped into the age of satellite and cable television, television should be at the centre in the reconstruction of the news media system.

Rather than organizing the current structure around different content orientations, such as economic stations, news stations, music/art stations, with different stations operating on a spectrum of different degrees of control in the intertwining of the Party logic and the commercial logic and ending up offering similar fare, as is

currently the case, a first step is to democratize the current structure. CCTV, for example, can be re-organized in accord with the public service model with different channels meeting different needs, with a board representing governmental and non-governmental economic, professional and cultural interests with the authority to decide the allocation of channels and resources and the cross-subsidizing of different channels.

The current general interest channel can be preserved and enhanced with increased journalism autonomy and de-commercialization. One channel can be provided for direct, unmediated Party and government information services and propaganda, such as the transmission of speeches, government reports, live transmission of open Party meetings and NPC sessions. An access channel should be established to provide access for civil organizations. A professional channel in the national radio and television networks should also be established. Raymond Williams' suggestion for "the creation of genuinely independent programme companies, which will be leased all necessary production and transmission facilities by an independent public authority" is highly relevant here.⁵² Such an arrangement already exists in some embryonic form in the contracting out system in broadcasting. The CCTV News Commentary Department represents an institutional innovation with some of these characteristics.

A commercial national network (one radio, one television) could be established. It would provide the main venue for advertising and journalism and entertainment that is profitable. Like the newspaper sector, no single business, state or private, in a single economic sector should control such a network. A license can be awarded to a consortium of businesses through an open and competitive process. The promises of performance should have binding power. The license should be subject to periodic renewals. A licence fee paid annually by the commercial network could be used to subsidize the civic and professional channels. Unregulated, over-the air radio and

⁵²Raymond Williams, p. 157.

television channels should not be allowed to exist. As James Curran argues, such an arrangement

would undermine the pluralism of the rest of the broadcasting system. It would scoop advertising revenue needed to sustain alternatives. It would also generate pressure on its rivals to converge towards the middle market at the expense of minority provision and minority perspectives."⁵³

The same pattern can be copied on the local levels. Rather than concealing commercialized broadcasting in the vague name of "economic stations," whose quasi-commercial and quasi-independent status often run into conflict with the existing broadcasting administrative structure, a regulated commercial sector should be recognized and treated as such in regulations concerning ownership structure, finance and content. The experience of broadcasting reform in Shanghai provides useful points of reference. But unlike Shanghai, commercialized radio and television stations should have be completely independent of government.

In addition to different forms of broadcasting at the national, provincial and municipal levels, there should be a community sector controlled by the county and neighborhood levels. There is already an elaborate infrastructure for a community sector in various existing independent local cable networks. The current drive for technological standardization and convergence of various unconnected cable networks into one big network in metropolitan areas should not be permitted to eliminate the relative independence of the constituent local networks. Local cable as a communication resource should not simply be contracted out to institutions and individuals for profit making through the transmission of legally or illegally imported Hongkong and Taiwan soaps. Local expression should go beyond the current form of "on call" popular songs to include the discussion of community issues and the promotion of local and folk cultures. Cooperative radio stations could also be established at the local levels.

⁵³James Curran, "Mass Media and Democracy," p. 110.

Equality and access at the receiving end is equally important. With the exception of the newspaper sector, media consumption has largely been privatized in China. But access to news media has been very unequal. In broadcasting, while the majority of the urban population enjoy multiple channels of radio and television programming; a large portion of the population in the countryside still cannot receive any radio and television signal at all.⁵⁴ Government policy and investment have systematically favored the urban population. Market forces are not likely to even bring radio and television to the poorest twenty percent of the Chinese population. Indeed, regional disparity in terms of access to mass media has increased since the introduction of the market mechanisms. Wired-radio networks, which had been peasants' main source of information, for example, have experienced a significant decline due to lack of finance and administration in many rural areas.⁵⁵ This development means that households without television have been further deprived of their access to communication, not to mention the fact that wired-radio can provide more localized and specific information for specific needs in such areas as agriculture. Government investment, therefore, should focus on improving access for the most deprived twenty percent of the population.

In newspaper consumption, the gap between the urban and rural population is even greater. Even with regard to the urban population, while current arguments for cutting office subscriptions and letting the market regulate newspaper consumption have some merits, the idea of subsidized public consumption of newspapers should not be rejected completely. When real wages do not rise and the individual is expected to

⁵⁴In 1990, population coverage was 74.7 percent for radio and 79.3 percent for television. (*Mass Media and Chinese Modernization*, p. 4). The rate of growth has been very slow in the past few years. During 1993, for example, the rates grew 0.8 percent for television and 0.7 percent for radio. See Ai Zhisheng, "Speech at National Broadcasting Working Conference," January 27, 1994, published in *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1994:1-2), p. 13.

⁵⁵See, for example, Hunan Provincial Government Joint Survey Team, "The Role of Rural Wired-Radio Networks under the New Conditions and Their Current Problems," *Reference to Decision Making in Broadcasting* (1994:1-2), pp. 71-74.

assume more and more of the burden for his or her own welfare, including medical care, daycare, and education, and when newspaper prices double and triple within a few years, the average household simply cannot afford to subscribe to any major daily newspaper.⁵⁶ The sudden cutting off of official subscriptions would mean the loss of newspaper reading opportunities for ordinary workers. A more sensible measure is perhaps to introduce the market mechanism to office subscriptions. That is, there will still be an amount of money for newspapers but office workers can collectively choose their favorite titles.

There is no single agent of change. Reformers within the Party, journalists, and democratic forces throughout the society must act together to bring about change. The Spring of 1989 was a moment of hope; but Party reformers and democratic forces failed to forge a successful alliance and win the battle for democracy. However, the objectives of reform articulated by democratic reformers during the theoretical ferment that led to the democracy movement in 1989 should not be forgotten, especially in light of the current intermingling of Party logic and market logic.

The overall objective of journalism reform is the democratization of every aspect of news communication and the establishment of a Chinese socialist news media system that has a high level of democracy, a comprehensive legal framework, unimpeded communication channels, a fair structure, and maximum vitality.⁵⁷

In short, the key issue in reforming both the economic system and the political system is democracy. The crucial point to economic reform is the democratization of the economic sphere so that producers obtain economic rights and financial benefits and assume responsibilities as masters of the society. Vitality and efficiency are the results of voluntary participation on the basis of democracy. Herein lies the true meaning of journalism reform as well.⁵⁸

⁵⁶For example, many readers buy *Beijing Youth News* on the newsstand because they cannot afford to pay the subscription fee on a regular basis. See, Yu Guoming, "Beijing Youth News in the Eyes of Its 'Gods'," in *A Journalism Shock Wave*, p. 65.

⁵⁷This point was made by two prestigious institutional co-authors, the Journalism Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Survey Group of the Capital Journalism Society, in "People's Calls, People's Expectations," p. 113.

⁵⁸This point was made by a National People's Congress delegate. Cited in "People's Calls, People's Expectations," p. 113.

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