

100 Free Press, Chinese Style

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China's economic reforms, in effect since 1978, have not been accompanied by a parallel liberation in political terms. The media enjoys increased freedom, except when it comes to politics.

The author explains how, since the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1948 and until Deng Xiao-Ping's ascent to power in 1978, China had only a hundred or so newspapers and magazines. The hegemony of the ubiquitous "People's Press", China's version of Pravda, was absolute, with a readership reaching 6 million. By late 1992, China had 1,635 registered newspapers, and the "People's Press" had shrunk to three million copies.

The new publications devote most of their space to commenting on the lives of the rich and famous. This breath of fresh air is attributable to the country's new commercial openness.

The Chinese press, however, is still hampered by the "Tiananmen Syndrome". The events leading to the massacre taught the political hierarchy how dangerous it was to loosen the reins and let the media speak out more or less freely. The author explains the iron hand with which the government now controls both the national and foreign media.

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