

MEDIA TRANSPARENCY IN CHINA:  
A CRITIQUE OF THE PARTY-STATE RHETORIC  
AND MARKET DISCOURSES

Submitted by

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**SUB CRUCE LUMEN**

**THE LIGHT UNDER THE CROSS**

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## Glossary of Terms

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Chinese Title</b>
ACJA	All-China Journalists Association	中华全国新闻工作者协会
APP	Administration of Press and Publication	新闻出版署
AUD	Australian Dollar	澳元
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation	英国广播公司
CHRD	China Human Rights Defenders	维权网
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System Broadcasting Inc.	美国哥伦比亚广播公司
CBV	China Business View	华商报
CCP	Chinese Communist Party	中国共产党
CNN	Cable News Network	美国有线新闻网
CNNIC	China Internet Network Information Center	中国互联网信息中心
CNY	Chinese Yuan	人民币
CPD	Central Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee	中共中央宣传部
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference	全国人民政治协商会议
CSRC	China Securities Regulatory Commission	中国证券监督管理委员会
CWA	China Writers Association	中国作家协会
GAPP	General Administration of Press and Publication	新闻出版总署
GMD	Guomindang	国民党

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Chinese Title</b>
GOCCPCC	General Office of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee	中共中央办公厅
HMD	Huaxi Metropolis Daily	华西都市报
IPO	Initial Public Offerings	初次公开发行股票
KMT	Kuomintang	国民党
LL	People's Republic of China Legislation Law	中华人民共和国立法法
MANJCS	<i>Measures for the Administration of Newspaper and Journal Correspondent Stations</i>	报刊杂志记者站管理办法
MAPC	<i>Measures for the Administration of Press Cards</i>	记者证管理办法
MIIT	Ministry of Industry and Information Technology	中国工业和信息化部
MNS	Ministry of National Security	国家安全部
MOFTEC	Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation <sup>1</sup>	外经贸部
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture	农业部
MOC	Ministry of Commerce	商务部
MOFC	Ministry of Construction <sup>2</sup>	建设部
MPA	Ministry of Personnel Administration	人事部 <sup>3</sup>
MPG	Minor Parties and Groups	民主党派
MPS	Ministry of Public Security	公安部

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<sup>1</sup> The MOFTEC was reorganized into the Ministry of Commerce in March 2003.

<sup>2</sup> The MOFC was reorganized into the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD) in March 2008.

<sup>3</sup> The MPA was reorganized into the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) in March 2008.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Chinese Title</b>
MPT	Ministry of Post and Telecommunication <sup>4</sup>	邮电部
MRFT	Ministry of Radio, Film and Television	广播电影电视部 <sup>5</sup>
NBSC	National Bureau of Statistics of China	中国国家统计局
NPC	National People's Congress	全国人民代表大会
NPCSC	National People's Congress Standing Committee	全国人民代表大会常务委员会
OCED	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development	经济合作与发展组织
PRC	People's Republic of China	中华人民共和国
SAIC	State Administration of Industry and Commerce	国家工商总局
SAP	State Administration of Publication	国家出版局 <sup>6</sup>
SARFT	State Administration of Radio, Film and Television	国家广播电影电视总局
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome	非典型性肺炎
SC	State Council	国务院
SCB	State Copyright Bureau	国家版权局
SCIO	Information Office of the State Council	国务院新闻办公室
SEC	State Education Commission <sup>7</sup>	国家教委
SDPG	Sichuan Daily Press Group	四川日报报业集团
SMD	Southern Metropolis Daily	南方都市报
SPB	State Post Bureau	国家邮政局
SSA	State Secrecy Administration	国家保密局

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<sup>4</sup> The MPT was reorganized into the Ministry of Information Industry (MII) in March 1998, and then into the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) in March 2008.

<sup>5</sup> The MRFT was reorganized into the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) in March 2008.

<sup>6</sup> The SAP was reorganized into the Administration of Press and Publication in January 1987, then into the General Administration of Press and Publication in 2001.

<sup>7</sup> The SEC was reorganized into the Ministry of Education in March 1998.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Chinese Title</b>
TLEP	Three Learning and Education Programs	三项学习教育活动
TMT	Three Major Transformations	三大改造运动
TRC	Thought Reform Campaign	思想改造运动
UFW	United Front Work	统一战线
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization	联合国教科文组织
VOA	Voice of America	美国之音

## Abstract

The arguments and analysis of this thesis surround the issue of the illusion of media transparency in China. It argues that the gap between the official transparency rhetoric and the censorship reality has demonstrated the discrepancy between what the Party is and what it claims itself to be. Media transparency, which is proclaimed to be something that should be aimed at by the Chinese government and the media, and which includes but goes beyond the issue of press freedom, is defined as a multi-faceted concept, but has been undermined by the consensus reached between the Party-state and the media on political and market control. Subsequently, the subjectivity of the disenfranchised groups has been diminished in the public sphere, their image distorted, and their voices muzzled. The thesis aims to show that the logic of political control and market has been suppressing the voices of the broad masses of people in China. This thesis argues this suppression is rooted in the disjuncture of political representation of both the party-state and the media. Hence, this thesis proposes that explanation for the transparency illusion can be drawn from Wang Hui's *daibiaoxing duanlie* [disjuncture of representation] argument, showing how this disjuncture has resulted in the irrelevance of the reform and boom of the media to the expansion of public sphere. To substantiate this point, this thesis explores the problems of media transparency in four aspects. Firstly, censorship's justification problem is analysed to reveal the contradictory Party principle of journalism. Secondly, exploitative management, ethical confusion and denial of the professionals' rights are examined to identify the causal connection between media malpractice and the consensus of political and market control. Thirdly, the trajectory of marketization and conglomeration is discussed to demythologize the prediction of press freedom on market forces. Fourthly, media activism is examined to show how transparency illusion posits its market discourses on misinterpretation of the past and the present. This thesis concludes that the disjuncture of the Party-state and the media

from their political representation of the public has resulted in the media transparency illusion.

## Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to XIE Baohui and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Some chapters have been presented at various academic conferences. Chapter Four „Media Malpractice in China: Grassroots Professionals in Three Dilemmas“ was presented at the 2011 Conference of "Developing Sustainable Societies: Challenges and Perspectives" co-hosted by the Flinders University and China Academy of Social Sciences in Adelaide on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2011. Chapter Three „From Censorship to Meta-Censorship Rationale“ was presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> CSAA Biennial Conference hosted by the National University of Australia in Canberra on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2011. Chapter Five „Business management, Corporatization and Conglomeration: A Media Transparency Myth?“ was presented at the 2011 Melbourne Conference on China hosted by the University of Melbourne on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2011. An abridged version of Chapter Two was presented at the „2012 Emerging Leaders“ Dialogue“ co-hosted by the Asia Institute at the Griffith University and Peking University in collaboration with the Queensland Government on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2012.

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Xie Baohui

25th June 2012



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## Conventions

In this thesis, Chinese name order, by which surname is followed by given name, is used when referring to Chinese figures. Therefore, the name of President of the People's Republic of China is addressed as Hu Jintao.

A partial exception to this rule applies to Western citizens with Chinese origin, whose names follow the given name – family name order. For example, the author of the book *The Battle for China's Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution* is referred to as Mobo Gao.

The spelling of the Chinese names in this thesis follows the *Pinyin* convention in Mainland China, which adopts a spelling system different from those in other Chinese speaking regions such as Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Singapore, and in some Western literature. For example, the name of Jiang Jieshi instead of Chiang Kai-shek is used herein to refer to the former President of the Republic of China.

Chinese characters, i.e. the name of an official document or regulation, are substituted with its *pinyin* equivalence to avoid these characters being garbled when read on computers that are not installed with Chinese fonts. Translation of these Chinese characters is provided either in form of bracketed in-text notes or footnotes. A list of *Pinyin* – Chinese characters is also provided in Appendix 10 for bilingual reference.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Introductory Background

Never before have the Chinese people been able to get access to as much information as they can today.<sup>8</sup> A media boom has gained momentum since the start of the reform era in the late 1970s. China has also become the world's biggest nation of netizens with an Internet population of 5.13 hundred million at the end of 2011.<sup>9</sup> The media industry has grown into a multi-billion dollar business with 1,937 newspapers, 251 radio stations and 272 television stations by the end of 2009.<sup>10</sup> Media's overall turnover reached 422.08 billion yuan in 2008.<sup>11</sup> The news media in particular is playing an increasingly important role, not only as a platform for information, but to some extent, also for expression. More importantly, the editorial content is no longer uniform.

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Fig. 1.1 Number of newspapers, radio stations and TV stations from 1978-2009<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Discussion is limited to the situation in the Mainland China only.

<sup>9</sup> CNNIC, "Di 29ci Zhongguo Hulian Wangluo Fazhan Tongji Baogao [29th Statistical Report on the Development of China's Internet]," [http://www.cnnic.cn/dtygg/dtgg/201201/t20120116\\_23667.html](http://www.cnnic.cn/dtygg/dtgg/201201/t20120116_23667.html).

<sup>10</sup> Baoguo Cui, ed. *2009: Report on the Development of China's Media Industry* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2009). 4

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

At the rate of 1:6.5, the amount of 422.08 billion yuan is equivalent to 64.94 billion Australian dollars.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 41

Yuming Zhao, *2010 China Radio and Television Year Book* (Beijing: Zhongguo Guangbo Dianshi Nianjian She, 2010).

One of the media's roles is as a watchdog acclaimed by the Chinese government in official documents and speeches, particularly after the Hu Jintao – Wen Jiabao Administration's proposal of „Construction of a harmonious society“ in 2005. This proclaimed a shift of priorities from economic growth to resolving the problems resulting from increasingly prominent social tensions.<sup>13</sup> The media is crucial to this call because it is hard to imagine social harmony without adequate mass communication and relatively open public discussion. To achieve these aims, the Chinese government has added „openness“ to the political parlance as part of its efforts to improve government-citizen relations, and ultimately its legitimacy. In the *Report of the Work of the Government (2009)* presented in the annual session of the National People's Congress<sup>14</sup> on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Premier Wen Jiabao, on behalf of the State Council, stated that:

We will promote transparency of administrative affairs, improve regulations for transparent governance and administrative review, create conditions for the people to criticize and oversee the government, let the news media fully play their oversight role, and exercise power openly.<sup>15</sup>

Many new regulations have been stipulated to promote an ostensibly journalism-friendly environment. *Measures for the Administration of Press Cards* (MAPC), for example, which was issued by the Chinese General Administration of Press and Publication in 2004 and revised in 2009. This administrative regulation stresses in *article 5* the protection of journalists and their professional activities by law and requires the departments and staff members of the government at all levels to provide necessary facilities and protection. It states that, „Any organization or individual shall not interfere in or obstruct the lawful activities of the press

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According to the 2010 Year Book, the 2010 statistics on the number of radio and TV stations has been adjusted due to the internal statistical policy of the SARFT, and therefore different from the 2009 and previous year books. The 2010 statistics is adopted here because the 2011 and onward statistics released by the SARFT will follow the 2010 protocol.

<sup>13</sup> Tony Saich, "China in 2005: Hu's in Charge," *Asian Survey* 46, no. 1 (2006). 37

<sup>14</sup> NPC is the legislative branch of Chinese state power.

<sup>15</sup> Jiabao Wen, "Jianshe Fuwuxing Zhengfu: Chuangzao Tiaojian Rang Renmin Piping Jiandu Zhengfu [Constructing a Government of Service Type: Creating Conditions for the People to Criticize and Oversee the Government]," [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2010-03/05/content\\_13102646.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2010-03/05/content_13102646.htm); Stanley Crossick, "Corruption Threatens Chinese Communist Party Rule," <http://crossick.blogactiv.eu/2010/03/12/corruption-threatens-chinese-communist-party-rule/>.

institutions and journalists".<sup>16</sup> Restraints on activities of foreign journalists were also reduced in 2008 as a signal to the international community that China is becoming more open and tolerant.<sup>17</sup> To demonstrate the government's welcome of supervision by public opinion [*yulun jiandu*],<sup>18</sup> the idea of *transparency* was for the first time included in the Twelfth Five-Year Plan in March 2011.<sup>19</sup>

These official pledges and actions might be taken as increasing transparency. However, there is an obvious gap between the official transparency rhetoric and information control reality. On the one hand, increased transparency of government through supervision by public opinion is positively affirmed in official discourse, whilst on the other, the public sphere is from time to time stifled.<sup>20</sup> It is not uncommon that open discussion of sensitive issues is banned, outspoken journalists suspended, fired or even jailed. Censorship and self-censorship mechanisms are employed to filter sensitive key words, ban public discussion of sensitive issues, and block access to foreign databases such as wikipedia.org and social networks such facebook.com.<sup>21</sup> The government has sponsored a number of firewall projects such as the Great Firewall, the Green Dam Project and the Golden Shield Project to monitor and control online content and activities.<sup>22</sup> Also, some China-based websites such as tudou.com and youku.com have classified part of their content to make it unavailable for viewers outside China's borders.

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<sup>16</sup> GAPP, "Jizhe Zheng Guanli Banfa [*Measures for the Administration of the Press Cards*]," <http://www.gapp.gov.cn/cms/html/21/397/200908/465942.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Olesen, *Power and Transnational Activism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011). 121

<sup>18</sup> There are various terms to describe the watchdog role of the media in China. Most commonly used versions include *yulun jiandu*, *meiti jiandu*, supervision by the media and supervision by public opinion.

This thesis adopts 'supervision by public opinion' because the media is not necessarily representative of the public and public opinion.

Christopher H. Sterling, *Encyclopedia of Journalism*, vol. I (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009). 290

<sup>19</sup> The Twelfth Five-Year Plan is released in March 2011.

Xinhua, "Guomin Jingji He Shehui Fazhan Di Shi'er Ge Wunian Guihua Gangyao (Quanwen) [the Twelfth Five-Year Plan of National Economy and Social Progress (Full Text)]," [http://www.gov.cn/2011lh/content\\_1825838.htm](http://www.gov.cn/2011lh/content_1825838.htm).

<sup>20</sup> Mobo Gao, "Media Ownership: One Case Studies and Two Perspectives," *The International Journal of Humanities* 2, no. 3 (2004). 2110

<sup>21</sup> Helen Wang, *The Chinese Dream: The Rise of the World's Largest Middle Class and What It Means to You* (Brande: Bestseller Press, 2010). 40

<sup>22</sup> Ronald Deibert et al., eds., *Access Contested: Security, Identity, and Resistance in Asian Cyberspace* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011).

The official transparency parlance is defined here as rhetoric because the Party-state has hardly specified, despite its ongoing promotion of this concept, what transparency is and to what extent transparency can be realized through supervision by public opinion. At best, while implying it is an unmitigated good word in and of itself, the official concept of transparency is no different from the better known concept of openness. This explains why the adoption of e-government and promulgation of *Decree of Government Information Openness*<sup>23</sup> are described officially as symbolic moving towards transparency.<sup>24</sup> At worst, transparency is no more than a figure of speech and a meaningless subject of cynicism. Yet, as hollow as it is, this concept can nevertheless be manipulated by the elites to resist any attempt towards substantive transparency.

The difficulty in substantiating the concept of transparency and transparency through journalism is rooted in the Party-state's fear for and consequent limit of both transparency and journalism. At a symposium on journalism organized by the Central Publicity Department (CPD) on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1989, Jiang Zemin in his capacity as General Secretary of the CCP, defined press freedom and transparency as well as their connection as follows:

Under the socialist system, journalism is no longer the business of private owners, but that of the Party and the people. It is to maintain the fundamental interest of the people that no freedom will be given to any illegal journalistic activities that attempt to change the socialist system, and these activities must be punished according to law. Press freedom is an important method of „peaceful evolution“ for the international hostile forces and bourgeois liberalization advocates.

I would also like to address the popular question of *transparency*... Some things should be and must be transparent; some other things cannot be transparent immediately and can only become transparent when the right time comes; some things are not meant to be transparent at all... Some people are either naive and ignorant or conspiratorial to request transparency by all means and think this is democracy and freedom. What can be transparent, what cannot be transparent, what can be more transparent than it is, are

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<sup>23</sup> *Zhengfu Xinxi Gongkai Tiaoli* was promulgated on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2007. It came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2008. According to this Decree, governments at various levels are required to release information that 'affects the immediate interests of individuals and groups' or which 'ought to be widely known and demands public participation'.

State Council, "Zhonghu Renmin Gongheguo Zhengfu Xinxi Gongkai Tiaoli [Prc Decree of Government Information Openness]," [http://www.gov.cn/zwgk/2007-04/24/content\\_592937.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zwgk/2007-04/24/content_592937.htm).

<sup>24</sup> Weifeng Liu, "Transparency Key to Public Faith," *China Daily*, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-07/16/content\\_5435353.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-07/16/content_5435353.htm).

by all means determined by the interests of the Party, interest of the nation and interest of the people and whether such transparency is conducive to the stability of the society, political order, economy and public opinion.<sup>25</sup>

Jiang's talk is a telling demonstration of the Party logic of journalism, by which „the CCP insists that the media are its mouthpiece“.<sup>26</sup> Firstly, according to Jiang, both press freedom and transparency are not something laudable unless they serve the interests of the Party because they can also be used against the Party-state and the political system. Secondly, the Party logic rejects any causal connection between press freedom and transparency because freedom and transparency beyond the Party's definition are considered to be no more than fantasies for „naïve and ignorant“ people or „conspirators“. Thirdly and most importantly, the definition of press freedom and transparency is determined at the discretion of the Party because the scope of the *nation* and the *people* is too vague while the Party is the only definite entity that holds the power and has the ability to define the concept. Therefore, any interpretation or specification of the concepts of transparency and press freedom beyond the interest of the Party-state is not officially legitimate, and consequently unwanted.

The substance of transparency has not been a concern of outsider observers. Central to most concerns about press freedom in existing discussions has been censorship and the information control reality. This reality exists despite the increasing marketization and prosperity of the media industry. It is this which seems to have attracted attention from many liberal observers in the West. According to liberalism, which is grounded largely on the belief in liberty and equality of individuals,<sup>27</sup> censorship is a vehicle of authoritarian state power which not only suppresses

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<sup>25</sup> Zemin Jiang, *Jiang Zemin Lun Shehui Zhuyi Jingshen Wenming Jianshe [Jiang Zemin's Talks on Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization]* (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1999). 258

Translation by author.

<sup>26</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998). 2

<sup>27</sup> Robert Song, *Christianity and Liberal Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 45; Shaun Young, *Beyond Rawls: An Analysis of the Concept of Political Liberalism* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002). 39

dissident voices but also threatens „the ideal of transparency“.<sup>28</sup> The resistance to censorship that Vernon mentioned is also manifested in the condemnation of the Chinese censorship system because the rights of individuals to free expression and access to information are strangled.<sup>29</sup> Criticism of censorship in China can easily be found in opinions in Western media such as the British Broadcasting Corporation<sup>30</sup>, the Voice of America and the Cable News Network, reports by non-government organizations such as Reporters Without Borders and China Human Rights Defenders, and articles and books by Diaspora Chinese dissidents such as Cao Changqing, and media such as Epochtimes, to name just a few.<sup>31</sup> But this discussion often leads to bitterness and an increasing sense of hopelessness because there seems to be an endless list of clampdowns by Chinese authorities, and the state power seems to be too strong and dynamic to be overthrown in the immediate future. More often than not, liberal discussions of the censorship reality subscribe to free market and privatization.<sup>32</sup> The market discourses of press freedom usually start with a censorship problem and conclude with a proposed prediction on free market and privatization.

## 1.2 It is not all about Censorship

As shown in the introductory background, the gulf between the concept and the reality of transparency involves two aspects: 1) lack of substance in official transparency rhetoric and the promise of supervision by public opinion; 2) the

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<sup>28</sup> Richard Vernon, "Beyond the Harm Principle: Mill and Censorship," in *Mill and the Moral Character of Liberalism*, ed. Eldon J. Eisenach (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998). 115

<sup>29</sup> Amnesty International, "Undermining Freedom of Expression in China: The Role of Yahoo!, Microsoft and Google," (London 2006).

<sup>30</sup> BBC, "China Protest Closes Toxic Chemical Plant in Dalian," <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-14520438>.

<sup>31</sup> Changqing Cao and James D. Seymour, eds., *Tibet through Dissident Chinese Eyes: Essays on Self-Determination* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Xueqin Zhu, "1998: Ziyou Zhuyi Xueli De Yanshuo [1998: Discourse on Theory of Liberalism]," *Nanfang Zhoumo [Southern Weekend]*, 25th December 1998.  
———, *Shuzhai Li De Geming [Revolution in the Study]* (Kunming: Yunnan People's Press, 2006).  
Peng Hwa Ang and Guozhen Wang, "The Principal-Agent Problem in Chinese State-Owned Media," *China Media Research* 6, no. 1 (2010).



censorship reality. This thesis takes the former as the fundamental cause of the problems without any intention to make light of or defend the latter. The following discussion addresses why censorship is not necessarily the centre of the media transparency problem, and proceeds to the research problems of this thesis.

In *China Human Rights Year Book 2009*, the Chinese Human Rights Defenders condemns the Chinese government for abusing and punishing disobedient journalists, exercising power over the media, and demands the Chinese government and the CCP keep the constitutional promise of press freedom, cease using legal power against journalists, abolish the journalist accreditation system, apply international standards of civil and political rights, and above all, terminate mechanisms of information control and censorship.<sup>33</sup> They also state that the „occasional opportunities“ for greater press freedom come from „the rise of the internet“, marketization of the press, interaction with international media, and increasing evasion of local government censorship. This condemnation of censorship is intensified and focused on how information control keeps tightening up and pins its hope on further marketization.

By listing the stories of censorship and its chilling effect, focus is fixed on the censorship apparatus to such an extent that this „harping on about censorship“ considers censorship as the centre subject of all problems. This constant refrain leads many to the belief that eliminating censorship and embarking on Western liberal democracy and free market will be the solution. Unfortunately, this perspective neglects other facets of the complexity that constitute transparency.

In a 2010 CNN online report, for example, a number of Hong Kong university students from the Mainland were interviewed to give their comments on Chinese information control.<sup>34</sup> They attributed the increase in Chinese students studying abroad and the success of universities in Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan over their counterparts in the Mainland to the help of its censorship system. „I love my

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<sup>33</sup> CHRD, "“Follow the Principles of the Party“: State Control of the Media & What the Media Is Doing to Fight Back," in *China Human Rights Yearbook 2009*, ed. CHRD (Not Known: Chinese Human Rights Defenders, 2010). 21-22

<sup>34</sup> Fanny Facsar, "China's Censorship Could Lead to a Brain Drain," <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/TECH/web/06/03/hong.kong.students.google/index.html>.

country, but I don't want to give up on my right to access information", said one to explain his not returning to the Mainland.<sup>35</sup> By delivering concerns over the fractured freedom of information in China, the article creates the impression that it is the censorship system alone that is responsible if a patriotic Chinese student chooses to leave home and stay overseas.

But one's motives to seek a personal future overseas can hardly be a simple equation of liking or dislike of censorship. China became the world's biggest exporter of international students in 2006, with 14% share of the internationally mobile students worldwide.<sup>36</sup> To most of those who have left the Mainland to study or work in places like Hong Kong and other Western countries, seeking better opportunities for education, employment, business, living conditions, and academic and professional development is the overwhelming motivation. As stated in an IDP Education report, there is „a clear positive relationship between education attainment and future wage earnings“. <sup>37</sup> Wealthier destinations such as the United States, The United Kingdom and Australia are on top of the choice list followed by Japan, Canada and New Zealand.<sup>38</sup> Domestic economic growth, expectations of parents, better proof of competence with a foreign degree, positive attitudes of the Chinese government towards studying abroad, or the inadequacies in Chinese higher education, and the physical and cultural attraction of Western societies constitute a „push and pull effect“ for those students.<sup>39</sup> The study of Li and Bray also shows that students from the mainland in Hong Kong are attracted mainly by

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> According to the UNESCO report of *Global Education Digest 2006*, the term 'internationally mobile students' refers to 'those who study in foreign countries where they are not permanent residents'.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Global Education Digest 2006: Comparing Education Statistics across the World," (Montreal 2006). 38

<sup>37</sup> IDP Education Pty Ltd (IDP) is an international institution based in Sydney that offers 'student placement and English language testing services'. Viewed on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 from [http://www.idp.com/about\\_idp/about\\_us/welcome\\_to\\_idp.aspx](http://www.idp.com/about_idp/about_us/welcome_to_idp.aspx)

Geoff Maslen, "Chinese Students to Dominate World Market " <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20071101150549773>.

<sup>38</sup> Also see Line Verbik and Veronica Lasanowski, "International Student Mobility: Patterns and Trends," (London: The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, 2007). 4

<sup>39</sup> Molly Yang, "What Attracts Mainland Chinese Students to Australian Higher Education," *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development* 4, no. 2 (2007). 3-4

the better education quality there.<sup>40</sup> The relatively free access to information is part of the agreeable environment, which understandably, is preferable. However, there is little research evidence to support the claims that it is the censorship system *per se* that has driven these promising youth to go and stay overseas or that it should take the blame for a „brain drain“.

The focus-on-censorship perspective takes censorship as the kernel of the problem of freedom of information. This is a minimized and over simplified conflict between the censorship apparatus or state power and „the media“. Journalism is also simply divided into two opposite sides, with one having „abandoned professional ethics and participated actively in the all-out promotion of the Party“s interests“ and the other having „risked being fired or jailed in the process“ to win the increase of press freedom.<sup>41</sup> Any fault found with press freedom is therefore redirected to the „original sin“ of censorship as a whole.

Such a perspective, however, usually fails to address the fact that censorship is not something exclusive to China. It tends to stress the CCP clampdown and futility of the media under political pressure, implying that there cannot be press freedom in a communist regime. This „all or nothing“ approach increases resentment of the government“s role, particularly that of a communist regime. Yet, it fails to explain the far greater information accessibility, availability and diversity today despite the presence of this censorship regime. This approach has not produced an ideal pattern of what transparency through journalism might become in the future; nor can it provide a valid solution to the existing problem in that it is very unlikely that censorship or centralized state power is ready to give in within the short run.

Such censorship-focused perspective avoids discussion of censorship as a controversial issue that involves arguable facts.<sup>42</sup> One of the facts is that censorship still exists in highly developed democracies such as the United Kingdom, the

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<sup>40</sup> M Li and M Bray, "Cross-Border Flows of Students for Higher Education: Push-Pull Factors and Motivations of Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong and Macau," *Higher Education* 53(2007).  
N.V. Varghese, "Globalization of Higher Education and Cross-Border Student Mobility," (Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning, 2008). 23

<sup>41</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Sixty Years of News Media and Censorship," [http://en.rsf.org/spip.php?page=article&id\\_article=34630](http://en.rsf.org/spip.php?page=article&id_article=34630).

<sup>42</sup> Vernon, "Beyond the Harm Principle: Mill and Censorship." 116

United States,<sup>43</sup> Australia,<sup>44</sup> Canada and Germany.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, over-concentration on censorship *per sé* significantly lacks consensus on how changes should be made. Some dissidents such as Cao Changqing advocate overthrowing the Communist regime with violence,<sup>46</sup> and many others hold belief in „expansion of incrementalism“ in social reform.<sup>47</sup> These approaches are rooted in the approval of Western liberal democratic system and are more often than not based on „privatization of the state-owned media'.<sup>48</sup>

The over-concentration on censorship is based upon the narrow perspective that the free flow of information and transparency is hampered by the censorship apparatus and communism. The understanding of press freedom and transparency is simplified as journalism-without-censorship in a Western style democratic system and free market. It is considered to be a limited perspective because it deals with only part of the problem of Chinese media, an issue no more than the „operational component“ of „process transparency“, or the „nominal“ aspect of the „transparency illusion“, which David Heald describes as a matter of „application of rules,

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<sup>43</sup> For example, under the rule of Alien Registration Act (ARA) of 1940, any attempt to ‘knowingly or wilfully advocate, abet, advise or teach the duty, necessity, desirability or propriety of overthrowing the Government of the United States or any State by force or violence...’ is defined as a crime, which provided legal support for McCarthyism against Communists in the United States in the 1940s to 1950s. While ARA was rolled out in 2008, the Federal Communications Commission takes the role in broadcast censorship and the Child Online Protection Act was passed by the Congress in 1998 to target internet pornography and other information defined unhealthy. Media outlets also play a censorial role to some extent. Voice of America stopped broadcasting an interview of M.M. Omar, former Afghanistan’s Taleban leader after receiving a decision from the Federal government not grant ‘a platform to terrorists’. Viewed on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2010 from <http://www.serendipity.li/cda.html>

<sup>44</sup> The Australian Office of Film & Literature Classification censors publications according to ‘the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults’ in the *Publications Guidelines* of the Office without giving clear and specific definition of ‘standards generally accepted by reasonable adults’, which may result in banning of certain publications without having the public reasonably informed.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Zittrain and John Palfrey, *Introduction*, ed. Ronald Deibert, et al., *Access Denied: The Practice and Policy of Global Internet Filtering* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007). 2

<sup>46</sup> Changqing Cao, "Dangjin Zhongguo You "Baoli Geming" Ma? [Is There Violent Revolution in China Today?]," [http://caochangqing.com/big5/newsdisp.php?News\\_ID=2120](http://caochangqing.com/big5/newsdisp.php?News_ID=2120); ———, "Yong Geming Jieshu Zhonggong Baozheng [to Terminate Chinese Dictatorial Regime by Revolution]," <http://www.observechina.net/info/artshow.asp?ID=66795>.

<sup>47</sup> Zhu, "1998: Ziyou Zhuyi Xueli De Yanshuo [1998: Discourse on Theory of Liberalism]."

<sup>48</sup> Ang and Wang, "The Principal-Agent Problem in Chinese State-Owned Media."

regulations and measures to a particular case".<sup>49</sup> This thesis, nevertheless, is by no means defending censorship or to trivialize censorship with relativism. While it is largely true that censorship exists and government clampdowns stand in the way of free flow of information, the issue of media transparency is a matter that should be observed from a more panoramic view.

### 1.3 Research Problem

Free press is regarded as an indispensable part of democracy from liberal perspectives.<sup>50</sup> However, it is critical „to clarify what press freedom and whose press freedom we are talking about“,<sup>51</sup> and in what way this freedom is possible. The following discussion explains why liberal perspectives of press freedom are problematic in discussing the Chinese media and why media transparency instead is essential so as to prepare the ground work to develop the narrative.

#### 1.3.1 Press Freedom

The liberal concept of press freedom dates back to John Milton's argument of unlicensed publication in the seventeenth century.<sup>52</sup> Press freedom implies freed communication and expression through the media. According to article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* adopted by the United Nations in 1948,

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<sup>49</sup> David Heald, "Varieties of Transparency," in *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?*, ed. Christopher Hood and David Heald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 32

<sup>50</sup> Western democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Australia boast press freedom as institutionalized human rights embedded in electoral politics and free market. Stephen M. Feldman, *Free Expression and Democracy in America: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

<sup>51</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, "'Qieting Men' Yu Ziyou Zhuyi Xinwen Tizhi De Weiji ['Hacking-Gate' and the Crisis of the Liberal Journalism]," *Beijing Cultural Review*, no. 5 (2011). 122  
Hanno Hardt, "Karl Marx on Press Freedom and Censorship," *The Public* 7, no. 4 (2000). 93

<sup>52</sup> John Milton published his long celebrated article *Areopagitica* in 1644 in condemnation of the English pre-publication censorship. This article is still cited widely by liberal discussion of press freedom as relevant to the *First Amendment to the United States Constitution*.

Van Belle Douglas A., *Press Freedom and Global Politics* (Westport: Praeger Publishers 2000). 1  
Vincent Blasi, "Milton's *Areopagitica* and the Modern First Amendment," *Ideas* 4, no. 2 (1996).

everyone has the rights to freedom of opinion and expression: this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of any frontiers.<sup>53</sup>

To preserve these rights, constitutional and legal provisions are usually adopted by liberal states to assert minimum interference from coercive state power. Among the best known are the 1689 English *Bill of Rights* and 1791 *First Amendment to the United States Constitution*.<sup>54</sup> The liberal perspective of press freedom is celebrated in established Western democracies to such an extent that M. Rodwan Abouharb and David L. Cingranelli claim that „Only a liberal democracy with a bill of rights and an independent judiciary to uphold it can prevent the tyranny of the majority“ in protection of „certain liberties such as freedom of speech, association and press“.<sup>55</sup> Other liberals, John Whale and Zhu Xueqin for instance, have argued for a free market because they believe market forces enable the press to write *whatever* they like freely.<sup>56</sup>

However, as Kaarle Nordenstreng opines, the concept of „freedom of the press“ is „misleading“ because it stresses and stretches the libertarian rights of the media and ignores those of the people expressing their voices *through* the media.<sup>57</sup> Hence, uncritical use of the notion of press freedom can also be misleading without specifying the potential problems that cannot be adequately solved within the liberal press freedom framework.

Firstly, political influence on the free media is inevitable even in liberal democracies, let alone in an authoritarian context. In a liberal democracy like the United States where there exist „independent media ownership, legally sanctioned

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<sup>53</sup> Jonathon Green and Nicholas J. Karolides, "Encyclopedia of Censorship," (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2005; reprint, 1990). 87

<sup>54</sup> The *First Amendment to the United States Constitution* is part of the *Ten Amendments to the United States Constitution*, which are commonly referred to collectively as the *United States Bill of Rights*.

Mark Pearson and Mark Polden, *The Journalist's Guide to Media Law* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2011). 28

<sup>55</sup> M. Rodwan Abouharb and David L. Cingranelli, *Human Rights and Structural Adjustment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 212

<sup>56</sup> John Whale, *The Politics of the Media* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977). 154  
Zhu, "1998: Ziyou Zhuyi Xueli De Yanshuo [1998: Discourse on Theory of Liberalism]."  
———, *Shuzhai Li De Geming [Revolution in the Study]*.

<sup>57</sup> Kaarle Nordenstreng, "Free Flow Doctrine in Global Media Policy," in *The Handbook of Global Media and Communication Policy*, ed. Robin Mansell and Marc Raboy (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011). 85

press freedom, and formal institutional independence from the state”,<sup>58</sup> the media can be highly associated with the government’s political agenda. Any liberal government can play a strong role in setting the press agenda.<sup>59</sup> As a result, neither the idealized nor the institutionalized press freedom has been able to prevent the U.S. mass media from becoming a loyal messenger of the government and capital, as tellingly demonstrated in the media’s rampant promotion of the 2003 Iraqi War and their curious absence of supervision over the Wall Street before the 2008 Financial Crisis hit.<sup>60</sup> Other examples include how the free and privately owned [New York] *Time* has been consistently silencing reporters and stories which may cause the government discomfort,<sup>61</sup> and that Dan Rather, CBS’s former anchor for *Evening News*, openly uttered his unswerving loyalty in 2003 to then President George Bush.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, the impossibility of press freedom in avoiding political influence can be seen in how Western liberal governments and courts, including those of the

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<sup>58</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 152

<sup>59</sup> W. Lance Bennett, "Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States," *Journal of Communication* 40, no. 2 (1990).

Also see Pippa Norris, Montague Kern, and Marion R. Just, "Framing Terrorism," in *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government, and the Public*, ed. Pippa Norris, Montague Kern, and Marion R. Just (New York: Routledge, 2003). 23

<sup>60</sup> Zhao, "'Qieting Men" Yu Ziyou Zhuyi Xinwen Tizhi De Weiji ['Hacking-Gate' and the Crisis of the Liberal Journalism]." 122

<sup>61</sup> Gao, "Media Ownership: One Case Studies and Two Perspectives." 2016

Also see the discussion of ‘ the Silenced Majority’ in Amy Goodman and David Goodman, *The Exception to the Rulers: Exposing America's War Profiteers, the Media That Love Them and the Crackdown on Our Rights* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2003). 8

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the *Time* also practices objectivity and from time to time produces investigative reports that reveal the dark side of the politics and corporate businesses. However, this professionalism is far from consistent and persistent because, as Yuezhi Zhao and Zhifeng Hu have pointed out, this professionalism is rooted in the post-World War II consensus and value system that engenders the discourse myth and hegemony sustained by capitalism. Also, as opined by Hackett and Zhao, journalists themselves have important stakes in the ethos of objectivity, dismissing rigid correlation between the capitalist economic context and any particular mode of journalism. The professionalism appears on and off in the U.S. media does not justify the validity of liberal democracy in generating and safeguarding objectivity.

Yuezhi Zhao and Zhifeng Hu, "Jiazhi Chonggou: Zhongguo Chuanbo Zhutixing Tanxun [Reconstructing Values: Seeking Subjectivity in Chinese Communication]," *Xiandai Chuanbo*, no. 2 (2011). 14

Robert Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao, *Sustaining Democracy?: Journalism and the Politics of Objectivity* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1998). 71

<sup>62</sup> Gao, "Media Ownership: One Case Studies and Two Perspectives." 2107

Also see Goodman and Goodman, *The Exception to the Rulers: Exposing America's War Profiteers, the Media That Love Them and the Crackdown on Our Rights*. 150

United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and Canada to name just a few, have been trying to exert impact on cyberspace content. According to Google's 2012 *Transparency Report*, the U.S. based international search engine continues to be „disheartened“ by removal requests from the United States, which, during the period from January to June 2011, increased by 70% comparing to the period between July and December 2010 during which Google deleted 1,100 search results according to six U.S. court orders.<sup>63</sup> China also lodged three requests regarding 121 search results, during the period between January and June 2011, apparently less from those from the United States. Moreover, removal requests from the United States increased by 103% between July and December 2011.<sup>64</sup> The U.S. law enforcement departments and courts requested Google to remove search results regarding at least one blog, 1,400 videos on youtube.com, and 218 websites. In contrast, Google does not reveal any removal requests from China during this period.<sup>65</sup> In terms of political influence over the media, the Google report shows that the liberal United States, where press freedom is highly developed and celebrated as one of its core value of libertarian human rights, is doing no better than China.

Secondly, a literally independent press is not necessarily free of collusion with market forces and politics.<sup>66</sup> As James Curran and Jean Seaton have critiqued, liberal theorists tend to argue that the freedom to publish in a free market guarantees pluralism and democracy and would deny the pitfalls of the market when expression of *certain* viewpoints is „missing“.<sup>67</sup> In a liberal context, the triangle relationship among commercialism, politics and privately owned media may be established upon as much consensus on political influence and profits as possible in an authoritarian country. Amy Goodman and David Goodman have illustrated such a triangle relationship in their 2006 book, which reveals in detail

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<sup>63</sup> Rick Burgess, "Google Transparency Report Reveals Global Political Censorship Trend," <http://www.techspot.com/news/49029-google-transparency-report-reveals-global-political-censorship-trend.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Google, "Transparency Report," <http://www.google.com/transparencyreport/removals/government/>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Zhao, ""Qieting Men" Yu Ziyou Zhuyi Xinwen Tizhi De Weiji ['Hacking-Gate' and the Crisis of the Liberal Journalism]." 120

<sup>67</sup> James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power without Responsibility: The Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010). 346



how the government deception, corporate profiteers, and media hypocrisy have become rampant in such a liberal state as the United States.<sup>68</sup> This reality is contrary to John Whale's claim of reader's influence and reader-oriented content in a free marketplace.<sup>69</sup> In an authoritarian context, the market is not adequate for realizing democracy and supervision by public opinion. As Chin-Chuan Lee has commented, „The market may betray the ideals of democracy and Habermas's „public sphere“, but from the pluralistic perspective it is also a necessary yet insufficient condition for checking on authoritarian state power“.<sup>70</sup>

Thirdly, a free media is not necessarily a transparent one, nor does it necessarily aim for transparency. Susan D. Moeller and her research team investigated twenty-five major news outlets, among which twenty-four are in liberal democracies including the United States and the United Kingdom, to examine these outlets' degree of transparency.<sup>71</sup> The investigation concludes that these outlets are keen to call for transparency but reluctant to practice transparency on themselves. According to Moeller's study, what these outlets manage best is „grudgingly“ admitting to who owns them, and where they really do poorly is disclosing their guidelines for writing and editing stories.<sup>72</sup> Lack of transparency in both practice and intention among the free media in liberal democracies has demonstrated that the liberal notion of press freedom is inadequate to realize the freedom of communication and expression, and more importantly, inadequate to substantiate transparency.

The reform of Chinese media has borrowed the liberal market discourses in commercialization of the media and in effect reinforced dominance by the state, capital and powerful interest groups. In result, whilst the media spare no efforts in

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<sup>68</sup> Amy Goodman and David Goodman, *Static: Government Liars, Media Cheerleaders, and the People Who Fight Back* (New York: Hyperion, 2006).

<sup>69</sup> Whale, *The Politics of the Media*. 85

<sup>70</sup> Chin-Chuan Lee, "Chinese Communication: Prisms, Trajectories, and Modes of Understanding," in *Power, Money, and Media: Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China*, ed. Chin-Chuan Lee (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000). 35

<sup>71</sup> The only outlet in non-liberal country is Al Jazeera English located in theocratic Saudi Arabia. However, Al Jazeera English, according to Moeller's research, is by no means the least transparent outlet. It ranks 14th among the 25 outlets on Moeller's transparency list.

Susan D. Moeller et al., "Openness & Accountability: A Study of Transparency in Global Media Outlets," (College Park: International Centre for Media and Public Agenda, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

trumpeting the tone set by the Party-state,<sup>73</sup> their content becomes increasingly irrelevant to everyday struggles of the disenfranchised groups,<sup>74</sup> which include not only the vast rural population, but also low income, urban, working-class families and migrant workers.<sup>75</sup> The liberal market logic, as Lü Xinyu and Yuezhi Zhao have observed, often attributes the problems of the media to „incomplete marketization“ and subsequently proposes further depoliticization and privatization.<sup>76</sup> As a result, the media have increasingly subscribed to the class containment dimension and displaced class antagonism, and in turn, become in itself a „power of the market on behalf of the dominant political, economic, and cultural forces“ that shape the normative expectations and moral foundations paralleled with the thriving capitalist economy.<sup>77</sup>

Lü and Zhao also suggest that liberal theories of journalism are inadequate to explain why the politically submissive and market-oriented media, both the Party outlets and non-Party ones, have „significantly marginalized the subjectivity of the workers and peasantry“ in Post-Mao journalism.<sup>78</sup> Such marginalization is seen, at least in part, in the urbanization and middle-class orientation of the media content imposed on the rural community, which has in effect dismantled the social base for the rural subjectivity.<sup>79</sup> Endorsed by the WTO membership as a backdrop for depoliticization, naturalization and normalization of the neo-liberal market agenda,<sup>80</sup> editorial attention has been dedicated to the affluent urban elites and middle-class consumers as they are advertisers“ marketing target groups.<sup>81</sup> Given

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<sup>73</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008). 93

<sup>74</sup> Wanning Sun, "Sexuality, Domesticity, and Citizenship in the Chinese Media: Man's Needs, Maid's Rights," *Information* 22, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>75</sup> Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 93

<sup>76</sup> Xinyu Lv and Yuezhi Zhao, "Zhongguo De Xiandaixing, Dazhong Chuanmei Yu Gonggongxing De Chonggou [Reconstruction of China's Modernity, Public Media and Their Public Nature]," *Chuanbo Yu Shehui Xuekan*, no. 12 (2010). 8

<sup>77</sup> Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 124

<sup>78</sup> Lv and Zhao, "Zhongguo De Xiandaixing, Dazhong Chuanmei Yu Gonggongxing De Chonggou [Reconstruction of China's Modernity, Public Media and Their Public Nature]." 6

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 6

<sup>80</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, "Enter the World!: Neo-Liberalism, the Dream for a Strong Nation, and Chinese Press Discourse on the WTO," ed. Chin-Chuan Lee (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003). 36

<sup>81</sup> ———, "Who Wants Democracy and Does It Deliver Food? Communication and Power in a Globally Integrated China," in *Democratizing Global Media: One World, Many Struggles*, ed. Robert A. Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005). 70

that the media plays a special role in forming subjectivity, Wanning Sun also points out that the arrival of television broadcasting in rural China, which carries commercialized programs full of vicarious life in foreign and unknown places, marks the beginning of formation and transformation of a transnational imagination among rural residents who have not, will not and cannot leave their rural premises for the overseas destination of that imagination.<sup>82</sup> The irrelevance of the programmed content to the rural life and concerns has demonstrated the marginalization of the subjectivity of the poor and disenfranchised in commercialized content production, and led to a deep gulf between the urban and rural realities as well as the commercialized media and the marginalized subjectivities.

### 1.3.2 More Freedom Today?

Nevertheless, it is obvious that there is more freedom in the Western liberal democracies than in China, but also that there seems to be more freedom in China now than before. There is also much more flexibility in the new media, particularly social media such as *weibo* microblogs, than in the traditional media like newspapers, radio and television broadcasting services.

However, the talks on liberal press freedom are usually framed in terms of Western liberal democratic system, which is absent in China. This absence has made the idea of liberal press freedom even more irrelevant because this idea does not find a relevant social political environment to grow in, as metaphorized by Hu Zhifeng, a plant cannot grow properly without a right soil and environment.<sup>83</sup> At best, the liberal talks call for copying the Western political and market systems and inevitably lead the Chinese media to the same problems in the West. At worst, these talks ignore the political and capital control in both Western democracies and capitalized autocracies, and justify and reinforce such control by promoting the bandwagon of elite conceptual rhetoric and market discourses.

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<sup>82</sup> Wanning Sun, *Leaving China: Media, Migration, and Transnational Imagination* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002). 33

<sup>83</sup> Zhao and Hu, "Jiazhi Chonggou: Zhongguo Chuanbo Zhutixing Tanxun [Reconstructing Values: Seeking Subjectivity in Chinese Communication]." 14

Furthermore, despite the new openness demonstrated by the Party-state, tolerance of topics once considered taboo and increase of public choices of media outlets and content, journalism is still experiencing what McNally has called „a period of significant contraction“.<sup>84</sup> The increased freedom and flexibility result from adaptation rather than any significant changes of the Party-state’s media administration regime. The increase of diversity is mostly seen in the non-political areas such as entertainment, sports and finance that are not considered as a threat to social stability and the political status quo. However, as Chin-Chuan Lee argues, content diversity as the result of marketization is vulnerable to the distorting and restricting market forces in both liberal democracies and illiberal China.<sup>85</sup>

Such distorting and restricting potential is demonstrated in how symbolic and cultural boundaries are constantly being created and negotiated.<sup>86</sup> The image of the workers and peasants from less educated, financially worse-off and geographically discriminated backgrounds is shaped and stereotyped to be low human quality [*suzhi*] people and the urban middle-class as high *suzhi* people.<sup>87</sup> Wanning Sun cites and analyses in her 2009 book the media coverage of murder stories including one that took place in April 2005 in Changzhi, Shanxi Province where a sexually abused *baomu* killed a couple who had employed her.<sup>88</sup> The murder stories are manifestations of every politics and practicalities, because the way in which these stories are narrated epitomizes the way in which the image of the vast poor and weak is created in politics and the media.<sup>89</sup> Sun highlights „the fact that the media’s predilection for stories about transgressive maids does scant justice to the complexity and breadth of the *baomu*’s quotidian behaviour and experience“.<sup>90</sup> She critiques that the media’s *suzhi* discourse and image-shaping have inscribed the

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<sup>84</sup> Christopher A. McNally, *China's Emergent Political Economy: Capitalism in the Dragon's Lair* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008). 132

<sup>85</sup> Lee, "Chinese Communication: Prisms, Trajectories, and Modes of Understanding." 9

<sup>86</sup> Wanning Sun, *Maid in China: Media, Morality, and the Culture Politics of Boundaries* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>87</sup> ———, "Suzhi on the Move: Body, Place and Power," *Positions* 17, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>88</sup> Sun, *Maid in China: Media, Morality, and the Culture Politics of Boundaries*. 127

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* 128

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* 128

discourse of danger and risks onto the *baomu* and hence justified panoptic scrutiny of the *baomu*'s political activities by the state, the industry and their employers.<sup>91</sup> The distorting and restricting potential of the profit-driven media, as suggested in Sun's ethnographic study, lies in the media's „fertile imagination and voracious appetite for spectacle“ that amplifies violence and stereotypes to define the low *suzhi* people to be sources of danger and social instability rather than the oppressed and victimized „whose actions are intended, however unrealistically, to improve their lives and working conditions“.<sup>92</sup> The publishers care more about marketability than the everyday struggle of the weak and poor,<sup>93</sup> and discussion of the life and concerns of „the poor“ virtually does not exist in the trend of tabloidization of the media.<sup>94</sup> Media stories related to these disenfranchised groups are more often than not mixed up with sex, crime and other spectacles,<sup>95</sup> if one wants to call this content diversity and increased freedom of the press. This kind of media narration fits well into the Party-state agenda of political control because the more dangerous and unstable the poor and victimized are pictured to be, the more the control is legitimized.

Moreover, the flexibility in the new media is more a result of active mass participation than the benevolence of the Party-state and the social media. When one way is blocked, it is the users who always manage to find circumvention. The cat-and-mouse-game is played largely between the media users on one side, and the cohort of Party-state and the media on the other. A recent example took place in April 2012 when Sina *weibo*, a Chinese microblog platform home to 324 million registered users, suspended commenting for three days in response to the Party-state's request to quiet down online discussion of the Bo Xilai incident.<sup>96</sup> As many

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 128

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 129

<sup>93</sup> ———, "Sexuality, Domesticity, and Citizenship in the Chinese Media: Man's Needs, Maid's Rights."

<sup>94</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, "The Rich, the Laid-Off, the Criminal in Tabloid Tales: Read All About It!," in *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalising Society*, ed. Perry Link, Richard Madsen, and Paul Pickowicz (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002). 113

<sup>95</sup> Sun, "Sexuality, Domesticity, and Citizenship in the Chinese Media: Man's Needs, Maid's Rights."

<sup>96</sup> Bo Xilai, former member of the Politburo and Head of CCP Chongqing Committee was removed from his offices in late March 2012 for alleged involvement in unconfirmed charges of 'breaching of Party rules'.

would admit, Sina *weibo* is too big and too influential for the government to blatantly shut down. Yet, the biggest concern of this cyberspace giant (in terms of the size of its users and consequent implications for profit-making opportunities) remains that „its failure to police the site itself will provoke the authorities to close it“ whilst its least concern is the users“ complaint about the limits imposed upon their activity.<sup>97</sup> For these varied concerns, Sina *weibo* started to recruit „monitoring editors“ to strengthen its „rumour control team“ in May 2012.<sup>98</sup> Sina“s *weibo* practice shows that the new media are just as politically sensitive and profit-driven as any other traditional media. The limited increase of content diversity and flexibility does not change the fact that the new media remain under both political and market control no different from any traditional media. Hence, the liberal notion of press freedom is not adopted in this study, nor is it considered as the centre topic here as much as in liberal discussions of censorship and press freedom. Predictions of systematic changes on liberal democracy and free market are just unwarranted speculation. Banging on about Western liberal press freedom and increases in content diversity and flexibility is not relevant to framing and solving the problems of political and market control of the media in the Post-Mao China. Nevertheless, this thesis is not rejecting the idea of press freedom *per se*, but merely a realistic assumption that the predication of press freedom on a liberal political system and free markets is problematic when discussing Chinese media. Should the phrase *press freedom* appear in the following chapters, it carries connotations of freedom as an „absolute good“ that combines „harmony, unity, stability and lack of contradiction“,<sup>99</sup> a value against unrestrained capitalism,<sup>100</sup> and

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Jacob Weisberg, "Hairy Eyeball: China's New Censorship Model,"  
[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/the\\_big\\_idea/2012/05/sina\\_weibo\\_han\\_han\\_and\\_chinese\\_censorship\\_beijing\\_s\\_new\\_ideas\\_for\\_cracking\\_down\\_on\\_debate\\_and\\_dissent\\_.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/the_big_idea/2012/05/sina_weibo_han_han_and_chinese_censorship_beijing_s_new_ideas_for_cracking_down_on_debate_and_dissent_.html).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Phil Muncaster, "Chinese Social Network to Recruit in-House Censor: Job Ad for 'Monitoring Editor' Points to Web Crackdown,"  
[http://www.theregister.co.uk/2012/05/22/sina\\_censor\\_job\\_ad/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2012/05/22/sina_censor_job_ad/).

<sup>99</sup> Michael Curtis, *Marxism: The Inner Dialogues*, 2 ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997). 121

<sup>100</sup> Peter Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). 89

a weapon in the service of an emancipatory struggle for the disenfranchised workers and peasantry.<sup>101</sup>

### 1.3.3 Research Problem

In light of the inadequacy of Western liberal democracy and press freedom for framing the problems of the media in China, this thesis turns to the idea of media transparency. Targeting political and market control, media transparency aims to hold both politics and the media accountable to the public sphere. It becomes a research problem because the concepts of transparency and supervision by public opinion are increasingly popular and offering a potential alternative to liberal democracy and free market models whilst the substantiation of these concepts has been hindered by the Party-state's political and market control.

This work specifies what media transparency is and identifies the causes of the problems undermining it. Hence, media transparency is considered here to be the centre of discussion. It is a multi-faceted prism that reflects the policy environment, the roles of the market, management and professional activities. Media transparency consists of two aspects in terms of policy environment: the rules for transparency must themselves be transparent; and the practices should offer an unobtrusive and penetrating lens through which truth can be presented to the users, also in a transparent manner. Moreover, media transparency is closely related to business and professional activities that are not only affected by government policies and rules, but also by management and corporate governance. Meanwhile, the discussion demythologizes the market discourses given that it is paradoxical that the marketized media outlets and their senior management, which have benefited both financially and politically, would yet rise up against the system in which their benefits are rooted.

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<sup>101</sup> Hardt, "Karl Marx on Press Freedom and Censorship." 37  
Xupei Sun and Elizabeth C. Michel, *An Orchestra of Voices: Making the Argument for Greater Speech and Press* (West Port: Praeger Publishers, 2001). 11

The question of media transparency is almost as broad as the complexity it has to get through:

- What is media transparency?
- How and why censorship is rampant yet denied?
- What has resulted in media malpractices that hamper media transparency?
- Why has media boom failed to lead to adequate media transparency?
- Why has media activism failed in pushing media transparency forward?

Answering these questions, I will argue that China's media transparency illusion, or the gulf between official transparency rhetoric and censorship reality, should not be simply understood as the conflict between state power and the media, or only a matter of censorship. Instead, it demonstrates the discrepancy between what CCP is and what it claims itself to be. The discrepancy has led to the Party-state's refusal to substantiate the concept of transparency and supervision by public opinion. The Party-state and the media have largely reached a consensus on political control and pursuit of profits, and the media system is reformed to suit this consensus. This discrepancy and consensus have led to various problems that have hampered media transparency. Finally, I will put the question of media transparency in its socio-political context to bring out the notion that the transparency illusion results from the disjuncture of political representation of both the Party-state and the media. The very first step towards media transparency is substantial debate over its substance and causal connection with political representation, which is the main concern of this study.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Framework and Significance**

This thesis uses David Heald's account of „transparency illusion“,<sup>102</sup> to identify the gulf between transparency rhetoric and reality, and adopts a neo-leftist perspective in discussing the Party-state's political and market control of the media. Wang

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<sup>102</sup> Heald, "Varieties of Transparency." 34



Hui's „disjuncture of representation“ argument is drawn on to analyse the cause of the undermining problems.<sup>103</sup> Starting from the description of the transparency illusion, this paper develops its discussion of media transparency in Chapters Two to Six by observing the policy rationale, corporate activities, problematic management and rising media activism. Further, the disjuncture of political representation is addressed to explain why the market success of the media has failed to lead to pluralism and empowerment of underrepresented voices. Such a representation problem has beset the macro environment in which policy making, business management, and professional activities are involved.

#### 1.4.1 David Heald's 'Transparency Illusion'

David Heald defines the discrepancy between nominal transparency and substantive transparency as „transparency illusion“,<sup>104</sup> a term that helps us understand the gap between the official transparency rhetoric and information control reality. It suggests that rules and the fairness of transparency rhetoric cannot determine the outcome of substantive transparency while media practice can also impact on the transparency effect, not necessarily in a positive way. Heald maintains that:

There can be a divergence between the path of nominal transparency and that of effective transparency, the gap being described as the „transparency illusion“. The intuition behind the transparency illusion is that, even when transparency appears to be increasing, as measured by some index, the reality may be quite different.<sup>105</sup>

In terms of policy environment and rationale, the questioning of the nominal fairness of transparency versus effective transparency in recent decades also suggests that rules and rhetoric, the aforementioned article five of the MAPC for instance, should not be regarded as a sufficient factor of transparency because it does not specify the public nature of journalism and obligations of the Party-state and the market, and therefore, is unable to hold the latter two accountable.

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<sup>103</sup> Hui Wang, "Shangshengqi De Maodun, Tixixing Weiji Yu Biange Fangxiang [Contradictions, Systematic Crisis and Direction of Reform in the Rise Period]," *Guowai Lilun Dongtai*, no. 12 (2011). 85

<sup>104</sup> Heald, "Varieties of Transparency." 34

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*:34

Similar situations happen in Western democracies such as the United States as well. There can be numerous rules and notions in place granting press freedom and advocating transparency, but, as Chomsky shows, the procedural and political correctness of these rules does not prevent the U.S. mass media from becoming the propaganda tool and „bought priesthood“ for the national terrorism of the U.S. government and blacking the American people out.<sup>106</sup>

Heald's transparency illusion argument brings forth the importance of substantiating the concept of media transparency. It shows that transparency is not an abstract concept or ideal that is manufactured with any taken-for-granted Holy Grail. It should not be used as a shield for elite politics or corporations that try to use this ideal to glorify or gloss over their interest or power-driven behaviours. Instead, transparency involves process, procedures and activities that aim at generating substantive openness, credibility, accountability and relevance in the interests of the public, particularly the disenfranchised groups.

Theoretically, there has been a shift from deification of transparency as a sacred notion,<sup>107</sup> to futility,<sup>108</sup> jeopardy,<sup>109</sup> to a perversity argument,<sup>110</sup> and then to an

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<sup>106</sup> Noam Chomsky, *On Democracy and Education* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003). 30

<sup>107</sup> Jeremy Bentham, "Writings on the Poor Laws," ed. Michael Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon, [1790s] 2001).

R. Hazell, "Balancing Privacy and Freedom of Information: Policy Options in the United Kingdom," in *Open Government, Freedom of Information and Privacy*, ed. A. McDonald and G. Terrill (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

S Lambell, "Freedom of Information, a Finnish Clergyman's Gift to Democracy," *Freedom of Information Review* 97(2002). 8

Kirstin Shrader-Frechette, *Risk and Rationality: Philosophical Foundations for Populist Reforms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>108</sup> David Stasavage, "Does Transparency Make a Difference? The Example of the European Council of Ministers," in *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?*, ed. Christopher Hood and David Heald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 177

<sup>109</sup> Onora O'Neill, "Transparency and the Ethics of Communication," in *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?*, ed. Christopher Hood and David Heald (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). 89

Michael Power, *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>110</sup> Andrew McDonald, "What Hope for Freedom of Information in the UK?," in *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?*, ed. Christopher Hood and David Heald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 134

instrumental view of transparency.<sup>111</sup> The functional perspective, in particular, regards procedural fairness no more than a means to other primary goals. Even when laws, regulation, rules, and policies in favour of transparency are, to some extent, in place, the rhetoric fairness is inadequate to conceptualize the profound changes in the social context to produce a more substantive certainty of media transparency. In an authoritarian context, rule makers are as powerful as the rules themselves<sup>112</sup>. In terms of facilitating editorial autonomy for transparency, rhetoric concept without substance does not necessarily lead to substantive outcome when the public sphere is plagued by political and market control. Therefore, it is of critical significance that politics and the media are held responsible to public interests through substantiated media transparency.

On the other hand, media transparency will be at stake when rules in the name of openness are meant to draw a line to confine rather than allow exploration in media practices. As Christopher Hood argues:

Policy measures such as transparency laws can achieve the very opposite of their intended goals and not merely null effects or undesired side-effects. ... Citizens would end up knowing less rather than more as a result of the introduction of transparency provisions.<sup>113</sup>

Proclamation of transparency and its rhetoric in-and-of themselves do not guarantee substantive transparency. Without substance, the notion of transparency will remain an abstract and hollow ideal and only leave the public frustrated, a result likely to culminate in a crisis of public trust.

Even when checked by ethical morality, media practices may still militate against transparency. When the interests of a particular media or a professional in relation to their clients (i.e. organizations, government agencies and individuals) is left unclear, media corruption such as bribery for news coverage is very likely to occur

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<sup>111</sup> David Heald, "Transparency as an Instrumental Value," in *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?*, ed. Christopher Hood and David Heald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 71

<sup>112</sup> Hilary NG'Weno, "All Freedom Is at Stake," in *The Third World and Press Freedom*, ed. Philip C. Horton (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978). 131

<sup>113</sup> Christopher Hood, "Beyond Exchanging First Principles?," in *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?*, ed. Christopher Hood and David Heald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 219

even when there exists an unspoken agreement against corruption.<sup>114</sup> Transparency in media operations is of crucial significance because media corruption, like that in other industries, thrives on cultures of secrecy.<sup>115</sup> Media ethics consist of not only professional integrity, objectivity, impartiality, honesty and disclosures of conflicts of interests,<sup>116</sup> but more importantly its commitment to public sphere. All of these aspects can be affected by various pressures and pursuits. Faked news, paid news and bribed news are no longer sins crouching at the door, but already inside the Chinese media house. Withholding of news reports under pressure from the government and commercial interests also hinders media from upholding their ethical standards. Over the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, pervasive media malpractice has diminished public trust in journalism to new low with „a poor image with the public“.<sup>117</sup> What’s the point then of media exposures of corruption when the media themselves are corrupt?

David Heald’s account of the transparency illusion has explanatory power when used to describe the gap between transparency rhetoric and censorship reality because it focuses on the easily neglected rhetorical nature of *transparency* as political parlance. Without substance, any political ideal can be conveniently manipulated by elite politics and changed into a mere conceptual mechanism to resist the substantive obligation of such an ideal. On the other hand, transparency is rich with meanings entailing openness, credibility, accountability and relevance in general. Each of these aspects is associated with many positive connotations. For example, openness is positively related to candour, transparency, freedom, flexibility, expansiveness, engagement, and access.<sup>118</sup> Media transparency involves policy rationale, professional activities, media operations, the market and all other

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<sup>114</sup> Katerina Tsetsura, "The Development of Public Relations in Russia: A Geopolitical Approach," in *The Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research and Practice (Revised Edition)*, ed. Krishnamurthy Sriramesh and Dejan Vercic (New York: Routledge, 2009). 665

<sup>115</sup> Peter Eigen, "Measuring and Combating Corruption," *Journal of Policy Reform* 5, no. 4 (2002). 188

<sup>116</sup> Lawrence Soley and Sarah Bonewits Feldner, "Transparency in Communication an Examination of Communication Journals' Conflicts-of-Interest Policies," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2006). 228

<sup>117</sup> Andrew Belsey, "Journalism and Ethics: Can They Co-Exist?," in *Media Ethics*, ed. Matthew Kieran (New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>118</sup> Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams, *Macrowikinomics* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010). 9

participatory elements in journalism that influence transparency. These factors are far too complex to be simplified into the idea of „journalism without censorship in a liberal democracy“. Therefore, without substantiating the idea of media transparency, transparency rhetoric will remain just that even when overt information control is alleviated.

#### 1.4.2 A Neo-leftist Perspective

Karl Marx opposed censorship. What makes him different from the liberals is his historical materialist approach that takes a practical insight into the internal factors of a contradiction in the „real conditions of the social, economic and political environment rather than elaborating the formative part of it.<sup>119</sup> The development of modern sociological theory owes relevance to the „ghost of Karl Marx“<sup>120</sup>. Modern critical theory can also find its roots in Marxist philosophy<sup>121</sup>. The influence of historical materialism is so immense today that, as Jennifer Kretchmar propounds, „it is to Karl Marx and his work that we now turn“<sup>122</sup>. In addressing the contradictions embedded in the modernity, Wang Hui maintains that „Marxism is a modernist project that critiques modernity – it too is established upon the logic of historical teleology“.<sup>123</sup> Not only does Marxism remain the best way to understand the world, but also the only theory that can empower human liberation.<sup>124</sup> In the trend of pervasive depoliticization since the 1980s,<sup>125</sup> as important contributions and correctives have been made to the Marxism as Yuezhi Zhao has argued, „it is premature to write off Marxian perspective entirely“.<sup>126</sup> The social struggles and the media’s absence in addressing these struggles are political and ideological issues,

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<sup>119</sup> Hardt, "Karl Marx on Press Freedom and Censorship." 87

<sup>120</sup> J Farganis, *Readings in Social Theory: The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000).

<sup>121</sup> George Ritzer, *Sociological Theory* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008).

<sup>122</sup> Jennifer Kretchmar, "Conflict Theory," in *EBSCO Research Starter* (EBSCO Publishing Inc, 2009).

<sup>123</sup> Hui Wang, *The End of Revolution* (London: Verso, 2009). 74

<sup>124</sup> Colin Sparks and Anna Reading, *Communism, Capitalism, and the Mass Media* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1998). xii

<sup>125</sup> Wang, *The End of Revolution*. 6

<sup>126</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, "The "End of Ideology" Again? The Concept of Ideology in the Era of Post-Modern Theory," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 18, no. 1 (1993). 71

and therefore, cannot be explained and mitigated by depoliticized rhetoric and market discourses. In this regard, neo-leftism offers a valid perspective for critique and analysis.

The press (news media in broader sense today) was regarded by Marx as „a determinant of political process“ which „produces and reinforces specific ideological positions“. <sup>127</sup> The media plays its role as „an extension of public sphere“, as Marx defined the purpose of freedom of speech to be „in the spirit of the people“. <sup>128</sup> The press is seen as a collectivized social instrument for social cooperation and community building. <sup>129</sup> The freedom of the press, therefore, is considered by Marx as the fundamental basis for all other freedoms instead of in the interests of the press itself. <sup>130</sup> He denounced censorship not only because it suppressed the rights to challenge orthodox, but more importantly it jeopardized the ideal of freedom for all. According to Marx“s comments on the Prussian censorship law, „the press law is a right and the censorship law is a wrong“. <sup>131</sup>

Marx rejected the belief that people were born imperfect and therefore in need of guidance and education. <sup>132</sup> From his point of view, there is no justification for censorship that is applied in the name of producing good results. As he wrote:

The censored press is bad even if it brings forth good products, for these products are good only in so far as they represent the free press within the censored press, and in so far as it is not part of their character to be products of the censored press. The free press

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<sup>127</sup> Hardt, "Karl Marx on Press Freedom and Censorship." 94

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 95

<sup>129</sup> John Calhoun Merrill, Peter J. Gade, and Frederick R. Blevens, *Twilight of Press Freedom: The Rise of People's Journalism* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2008). 83

<sup>130</sup> Karl Marx, *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, trans. Loyd David Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, 1997 ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1967).

This book collects several articles that reflect Marx's perception of press freedom and his denouncement of censorship. These articles include "Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction", "The Leading Article in No. 79 of the Kolnische Zeitung: Religion, Free Press and Philosophy", and "From Defence of the Moselle Correspondent: Economic Distress and Freedom of the Press".

Also see Sun and Michel, *An Orchestra of Voices: Making the Argument for Greater Speech and Press*. 11

<sup>131</sup> See Curtis, *Marxism: The Inner Dialogues*. 121

<sup>132</sup> Eugène Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962). 26

is good even if it brings forth bad products, for these products are apostates from the character of the free press.<sup>133</sup>

For Marx, there is no such a thing as censorship in the interest of the public whatsoever. Censorship is no more than a mechanism of confinement that limits the press within the boundaries drawn by the censors. While press freedom embraces respect, tolerance and mutual accommodation, censorship is engendered by disrespect, intolerance, and suppression.

However, Marx was not just talking about censorship. He saw the self-contradictory nature of censorship and the possibility that it could be applied in the name of good and against the good in essence. He was well aware that censorship had significant difficulty in seeking justification. In discussion of press freedom and censorship, He wrote:

From the standpoint of the Idea (of freedom), it is self-evident that freedom of the press has a justification quite different from that of censorship, in so far as it is itself a form of Idea, of freedom, a positive good, whereas censorship is a form of bondage, the polemic of a *Weltanschauung* of appearance against the *Weltanschauung* of the essence. It is something merely negative in character.<sup>134</sup>

This negative nature is usually glossed over by the censors, and censorship discourse will more often than not lead the public opinion to the belief that too much freedom is dangerous and unhealthy. Unlike the Roman censors who targeted individuals, as Margarete A. Rose maintains, the censorship system since the industrialization era aims to stifle the public spirit of society.<sup>135</sup> Such a system suppresses the voices of the oppressed. Hence, a censorship system that posits its justification on „guiding public opinion correctly“ is against the public opinion in essence.

Censorship is bad in a civil society because it distorts the government-public-media relationship. It hinders the public access to certain information and prevents the media from facilitating public access to that information. The balance within this

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 27

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 27

The bracketed phrase ‘of freedom’ is added by author.

*Weltanschauung* is a German word, meaning a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world especially from a specific standpoint.

<sup>135</sup> Margaret A. Rose, *Reading the Young Marx and Engels: Poetry, Parody, and the Censor* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978). 20

trilateral relationship, if considered in terms of substantive transparency, can be attained only when the weaker party has adequately accommodated access to policies, decision-making process and relevant information, has their voices heard and their demand properly realized. David Heald also suggests that effective transparency cannot be achieved before the public can process, digest, and use the information.<sup>136</sup>

In China, the censorship reality reflects the distorted relationship between the Party-state, the media and the public. As being constantly proclaimed, the Party-state itself represents the public that is the source of state power. The Three Represents rhetoric is an example of such proclamation.<sup>137</sup> According to this rhetoric, the Party-led public media, as part of the superstructure, at least nominally, represents the voice of the public. The market takes up an interactive role between the media and the public in connecting what the public need and what the media offer in response. The role of the market is relatively external because it is not supposed to exert direct impact on the representational relationship between the public media and the public. Nor is the market expected to affect the representational relationship between the public and the Party-state because the market is not supposed to be the source of state power.

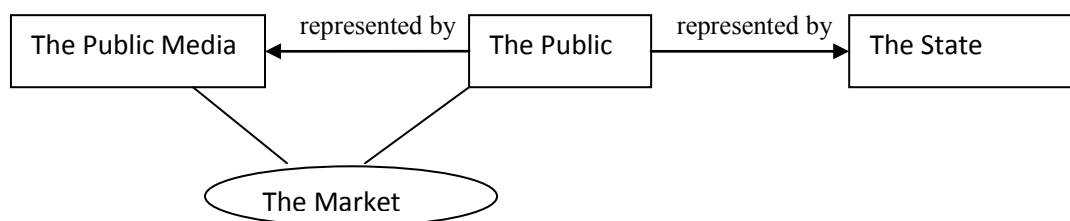


Figure. 1.2 Public-centred representational relationship between the public media, the public and the state

<sup>136</sup> Heald, "Varieties of Transparency." 38

<sup>137</sup> The Three Represents is a theory of representation produced by Jiang Zemin Administration on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2000 during his visit to Guangdong Province. This theory proclaims that the CCP has always represented the development trend of advanced productive forces, the orientation of advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China.

Zemin Jiang, *Lun "Sange Daibiao" [on the 'Three Represents']* (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2001). 71



However, such a public-centred relationship, as shown in figure 1.2, exists and functions only when there is at least an ideological consensus on, and preferably an existence of, the representation of the public by the Party-state and the public media. The higher the level of the consensus, the less contentious the trilateral relationship will be. Unfortunately, this consensus has diminished in the Post-Mao era.

Instead, the public media is managed and operated under both the official „throat and tongue for the Party and the people“ parlance and market discourse. In reality, the relationship between the three is Party-state-centred at the cost of the representation of the public, a *de facto* commitment from which the state and the media are disjunct.

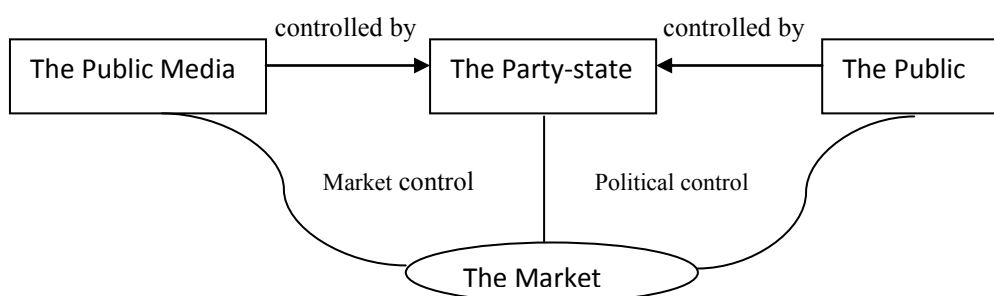


Fig.1.3 Party-state-centred relationship between the public media, the Party-state and the public in the Reform Era

Figure 1.3 shows that the proclaimed representation relationship between the Party-state and the public and between the state-owned media and the public virtually does not exist. The public media and the public are segregated by the Party-state's political and market control.

Thus, journalism is controlled in many ways. The state-owned media are mandated to assume the role of constructing the Party's ideological positions without allowing the public to question, discuss and contribute to these positions. The media must follow the government decrees and documents because these rules are made legal by the *PRC Legislation Law* and the *PRC Administrative Approval Law*. In terms of market diversity, journalism has no place for non-state capital.<sup>138</sup> The

<sup>138</sup> Jieyun Xu, "Wangyi Shiyu Youxi Nianhui, Banshu Jiama Wangyou Jianguan Lidu [Netease Absent at the Cgiac, Gapp Tighens up Supervision over Online Games]," <http://game.people.com.cn/GB/48644/48662/10815231.html>.

marketized media outlets, particularly those financially successful and editorially influential, are restructured into media groups, each of which is without exception headed by a Party mouthpiece. Senior management are ultimately appointed by Party authorities. Censorship is intensified to clampdown media activities that are considered a threat to social stability and the political status quo. Moreover, the public is controlled as attempts to facilitate the voices of the disenfranchised groups lead inevitably to warnings, harassment, arbitrary detention and even jail sentences. The public media and the public are relatively remotely connected via the market, which again, is subject to government intervention at any time. Profit-driven and politically obedient media management usually loathe risking their positions and interests in pushing boundaries beyond the Party-state's envelop. In result, there is no such thing as a representational relationship between the Party-state, the public media and the public as proclaimed in or inferred from either the „Three Represents“ rhetoric or „Throat and Tongue“ parlance.

At the media operational level, the substance of journalistic values of truth and objectivity are implanted with a mixture of what Yuezhi Zhao has called „Party logic“ and „market logic“. <sup>139</sup> Party logic defines journalism as part of the Party cause notwithstanding the ongoing growth of non-political content diversity. The market logic places profit-seeking on top of the editorial priority list. Between the Party line and bottom line, <sup>140</sup> there are „ambiguities and contradictions“, <sup>141</sup> which generate room for political and market forces against openness and accountability. Thus, the media reform has turned media outlets into profit-seeking businesses that tend to prioritize market performance over the media's public nature. The increased freedom and flexibility has been invested heavily in profit-generating content, such as sex and crime, rather than the „everyday struggle“ of the weak and poor. <sup>142</sup> Should any struggle be covered, it is more often than not the downside of this

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<sup>139</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Chin-Chuan Lee, " Ambiguities and Contradictions: Issues in China's Changing Political Communication," in *China's Media, Media's China*, ed. Chin-Chuan Lee (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

<sup>142</sup> Sun, "Sexuality, Domesticity, and Citizenship in the Chinese Media: Man's Needs, Maid's Rights." 23

struggle, treated as a spectacle for ratings and profits.<sup>143</sup> Consequently, the political significance of the life and concerns of the public is largely ignored, and the transparency of politics and media operations is hindered. As J.M Balkin argues, „mass media can hinder political transparency as well as help it“.<sup>144</sup>

The problematic representation relationship between the Party-state, the public and the media is an ample example of Wang Hui’s „disjuncture of representation“ argument. According to Wang, the problems of modern politics are rooted in the „disjuncture of representation [*daibiaoxing duanlie*]“, the disconnection of political system from social reality, an unprecedented crisis that threatens the political system *per sé*.<sup>145</sup> With regard to the difficulties in democratizing China, Wang Hui defines „disjuncture of representation“ as follows:

I believe that „disjuncture of representation“ is the best way to generalize the crisis of the practice of democracy at this stage ... The social base of the disjuncture of representation lies in the disconnection of the political elites, economic elites, cultural elites and their interests with the public. This disconnection is directly demonstrated in the fact that political parties, the media and legal system (whatever universally acclaimed names they may use) cannot represent correspondently the social interests and public opinions. This disjuncture of representation are shown in three crises, namely that of the party politics (as demonstrated in party statification), that of the public sphere (as demonstrated in the expansion of the media irrelevant to the space of public sphere), and that of the legal system (as demonstrated in procedural fairness manipulated by interests).<sup>146</sup>

To further explain the legitimacy crisis of China’s Party-state, Wang Hui argues that „the legitimacy crisis originates from the disjuncture of representation of the political system, that is, the disconnection of the political system and social reality.“<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> ———, *Leaving China: Media, Migration, and Transnational Imagination*. 105

<sup>144</sup> J. M. Balkin, "How Mass Media Simulate Political Transparency," *Cultural Values* 3, no. 4 (1999). 1

<sup>145</sup> Wang, "Shangshengqi De Maodun, Tixixing Weiji Yu Biange Fangxiang [Contradictions, Systematic Crisis and Direction of Reform in the Rise Period]."

<sup>146</sup> Hui Wang, "Zaiwen "Shenme De Pingdeng"? Lun Dangdai Zhengzhi Xingshi Yu Shehui Xingshi De Tuojie [Revisiting "Equality of What"?-- on the Disjuncture of Contemporary Political Forms and Social Forms]," *Beijing Cultural Review*, no. 5 (2011). 69

Literally, Party statification [*zhengdang guojiahua*] means that the Party becomes consubstantial with state power. It refers to the process that the Party transforms itself from a political organization into a mere mechanism of state power.

Translation by author.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* 70

The disjuncture of representation argument pinpoints the representation problems shown in the Figure 1.3. Wang's disjuncture argument explains the difficulties rooted in the discrepancy between what the Party is and what it claims itself to be. The Post-Mao Party-state posits its legitimacy largely on capital-driven economic growth rather than the fundamental interests of the people, the weak majority of whom remain the workers and the peasantry. Unfortunately, most of the societal imbalance and social stability issues are generated between the powerful capital and political elites and the weakest strata of the society.<sup>148</sup> These societal problems are caused by and reflect the disjuncture of representation and subsequently culminate in a legitimacy crisis. Public discussion of these problems may lead to collective protests and movements, which are perceived as a direct threat to the social stability and more significantly, the political status quo. Consequently, as Xiao Qiang argues, the most important aim of censorship becomes preventing large-scale distribution of information that may lead to collective action, especially offline actions such as mass demonstrations or signature campaigns.<sup>149</sup> As a result, public expression of and access to certain information, particularly that which is related to incidents in which the workers and peasants are victimized, is considerably hindered.

Given the obvious tendency for state power and ruling party to control the media,<sup>150</sup> the nature of the representation of Party-state has evident impact on its relationship with the media. In the Post-Mao China, both political dominance and economic success are powered by a capitalist economy, which has inevitably led to revision of the ideological system.<sup>151</sup> The media, maintained as part of the superstructure, is also subject to the same political or ideological commitment and market incentives as the Party-state. The media's representation problem is the result. In reality, the media businesses peg their success to political patronage and profit-seeking incentives and disconnect from their public nature. This disjuncture problem has

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Translation by author.

<sup>148</sup> Mobo Gao, "A Boom Financed by Taxes on the Poor," *New Statesman*, no. 1 (2005).

<sup>149</sup> Qiang Xiao, "The Rise of Online Public Opinion and Its Political Impact," in *Changing Media, Changing China*, ed. Susan L. Shirk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). 209

<sup>150</sup> Hui Wang and Yan Xu, "'Qu Zhengzhi Hua De Zhengzhi' Yu Dazhong Chuanmei De Gonggongxing ["Depoliticized Politics and the Public Nature of Public Media]," *Gansu Social Sciences*, no. 4 (2006). 236

<sup>151</sup> Joseph Fewsmith, "The Dengist Reform in Historical Perspective," in *Contemporary Chinese Politics in Historical Perspective*, ed. Brantly Womack (1991). 36

inevitably resulted in rampant pursuit of profits and abuse of media power such as bribery, blackmailing and sensationalism. Reciprocally, media malpractice incurs an endemic loss of professional integrity and accountability which justifies as well as invites interference by state power and constitutes the social base for state control.<sup>152</sup>

Post-Mao China is full of contradictions because the Party-state finds it difficult to justify capitalism with an ideology labelled communism. Marxism has to be significantly revised in the name of domestication.<sup>153</sup> Maoism and Maoist social systems are totally abandoned.<sup>154</sup> Although the Party-state holds a dominant position in the government-citizen-media relationship, it fails to „protect the life-world from erosion and confinement by the market and the bureaucratic system“.<sup>155</sup> This disjuncture has given rise to the necessity for the Party-state to control and use journalism to conceal and gloss over this disjuncture, which has led to the Party-state“s reluctance to substantiate transparency. As Joseph Fewsmith maintains, „On an ideological level, openness undermines the antagonistic relationship presumed to exist between socialism and capitalism“.<sup>156</sup> The control of the media, borrowing from Lenin“s idea of newspaper as a collective tool,<sup>157</sup> has in turn inevitably led to the media“s disjuncture from journalistic values and representation of the public, regardless of the latter“s ownership status in the public ownership system.

Therefore, media transparency has a significant role to play in addressing political and market control and aims to hold both politics and the media transparent and accountable to their commitment to the public in the public sphere.

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<sup>152</sup> Wang and Xu, ""Qu Zhengzhi Hua De Zhengzhi" Yu Dazhong Chuanmei De Gonggongxing ["Depoliticized Politics and the Public Nature of Public Media]." 248

<sup>153</sup> Joseph Fewsmith, *Elite Politics in Contemporary China* (Armonk: M.E.Sharpe Inc., 2001). 18

<sup>154</sup> Mobo C. F. Gao, *Gao Village: A Portrait of Rural Life in Modern China* (London: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1999). 91

<sup>155</sup> Wang, *The End of Revolution*. 73

<sup>156</sup> Fewsmith, *Elite Politics in Contemporary China*. 18

<sup>157</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Lenin's Fight against Economism*, vol. I (Chippendale: Resistance Books, 2005). 12

Lenin defined newspaper as not only a means of disseminating information, but also a collective propagandist, collective agitator, and collective organizer. However, there are differences between a collective tool and an authoritarian tool. The differences, nevertheless, are not the focus of this study.

### 1.4.3 Significance

The significance of this study lies in three areas. Firstly, demythologizing the liberal press freedom and over-emphasis on censorship, this study regards media transparency as central to the discussion of the Chinese media. Secondly, this thesis sheds light on the media transparency illusion in the reform era from multiple perspectives which not only describe but also explain the gap between the official transparency rhetoric and reality. Thirdly and finally, the discussion of media transparency reveals the disjuncture of political representation of both the Party-state and the media. The findings may provide a viable basis for discussing other current social political issues in China.

### 1.5 Methodology

This study adopts a multi-thematic approach, and the thesis develops a number of sub-themes from Chapters Two to Six to support the main argument. A combination of conceptual analysis and historical comparative case study is adopted to support this approach. The concept of media transparency is examined to reveal its multi-faceted implications. This approach regards „concept as a system of interrelated concepts“, a methodology that is more popularly used in the study of linguistics.<sup>158</sup> As Diane Pecher and Rolf A. Zwaan maintain, „A concept can only be understood if an entire system of interrelated concepts are acquired“.<sup>159</sup> As „the content of each concept is wholly determined by implicational relations to other concepts of the system, the task of conceptual analysis, according to C.I. Lewis, is to „map out these relations“.<sup>160</sup> Such a process of „explication“ as „the first business

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<sup>158</sup> Robert L. Goldstone, Ying Feng, and Brian J. Rogosky, "Grounding Cognition: The Role of Perception and Action in Memory, Language and Thinking," (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). 287

<sup>159</sup> Diane Pecher and Rolf A. Zwaan, *Grounding Cognition: The Role of Perception and Action in Memory, Language, and Thinking* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). 287

<sup>160</sup> Harold I. Brown, *Conceptual Systems* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007). 131

of conceptual analysis“ sees the breaking up of a multi-faceted concept or terminology into a number of thematic concepts that provide explicit explanation to the top concept in return.<sup>161</sup>

This study identifies the gulf between official transparency rhetoric and censorship reality to be a problem of lack of substance. It tests a hypothesis that this lack of substance does not necessarily result from the conflict between state power and the media, but should be considered more panoramically by looking at the political and market control and its causal connection with the political representation of the Party-state and the media. For this purpose, various sub-themes are discussed regarding censorship of censorship, media malpractice, business management and conglomeration, and media activism. Each chapter carries a sub-theme or sub-argument. Various perspectives are adopted individually or combined according to analytical need.

Various perspectives are adopted to allow a qualitative exploration into the concepts that are developed in these chapters. This thesis develops a number of terminologies including „media transparency“ in Chapter Two, a number of discursive strategies of denial of censorship in Chapter Three, and „media malpractice“ in Chapter Four. Therefore, these terms need to be defined in order to set up an interrelated conceptual constituency for further analytical purposes.

Furthermore, a historical comparative case study is adopted in analysing media phenomena that have a comparative significance. Case study is an empirical approach to verify a theory in the real world.<sup>162</sup> As Robert K. Yin argues, case study is the generally preferred strategy for answering „how“ and „why“ questions, particularly when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life and historical context.<sup>163</sup> Comparative case study can be used to compare a case

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<sup>161</sup> Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed. *The Philosophy of C. I. Lewis* (Chicago: Open Court, 1968). 29

<sup>162</sup> Damon P.S. Andrew, Paul M. Pederson, and Chad D. McEvoy, *Research Methods and Design in Sport Management* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2011). 132

<sup>163</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2003). 1

procured by conventional means with another similar case.<sup>164</sup> Historical comparative case study aims to identify causal patterns that are associated with distinct historical occurrence which bears historical resemblance.<sup>165</sup> This method allows for selecting cases for comparing phenomena in different historical contexts so as to avoid misinterpretation of the present and identify manipulated interpretation of the past.

This methodology is useful particularly when history is involved in interpreting the present, or „the focus on contemporary as opposed to historical phenomena“.<sup>166</sup> As Peter C. Rollins suggests, misinterpretation of the present is largely attributable to inaccurate understanding of the past when one relies on the past to understand the present.<sup>167</sup> The deepening effect on investigation by comparative case study, as Charles C. Ragin suggests, is the explanatory effect of the variables on various cases that share common features.<sup>168</sup> Given that cases in different historical stages may share such common features, overconcentration of these features may lead to exaggeration of similarity, ignorance of key variables and hence misinterpretation. To avoid this misinterpretation and engage in historical comparative case study, identifying cases and comparability are essential. According to Kaarbo and Beasley, selection of cases is „to establish the relationship between two or more variables“, and „comparability depends on the theoretical basis of the study“.<sup>169</sup> Therefore, comparing variables between these cases can reveal their different implications for a certain investigation.

For example, Chapter Six uses a historical comparative case study to select and analyse media activism in different historical stages. The chapter gives a historical account of the pre-1949 media activism and analyses various blank spaces left on

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<sup>164</sup> Nigel Dubben and Brendan Williams, *Partnerships in Urban Property Development* (West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 2009). 88

<sup>165</sup> Samuel Achinonu Onyegam, "Historical Comparative Case Study of Emerging Hegemonic Behavior: Perspectives on the People's Republic of China" (University of Arkansas, 2006). 11

<sup>166</sup> Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 1

<sup>167</sup> Peter C. Rollins, *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film: How the Movies Have Portrayed the American Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). xiv

<sup>168</sup> Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). 77

<sup>169</sup> Juliet Caarbo and Ryan K. Beasley, "A Practical Guide to the Comparative Case Study Method in Political Psychology," *Political Psychology* 20, no. 2 (1999). 379-380



publications, dubbed as skylight windows, in the reform era. These blank spaces are often interpreted as protest against censorship and paralleled with the media activism before 1949. The analysis with comparative perspective distinguishes the skylight windows of the reform era from the pre-1949 activism so as to demythologize the transparency illusion borne on misinterpretation of the key variables of the media activisms in the past and present. These key variables are participatory elements and ideological consensus. The relationship between the variables of the activisms in the two periods is established upon the similarity in their historical backdrops, namely one-party rule political system and heavy censorship. The comparability of these variables lies in their implications for press freedom and democracy. The study will show that misinterpretation of the pre-1949 media activism is attributed to the ignorance of the broad participation and the ideological consensus on press freedom and democracy among the participants. Such broad participation and consensus is tellingly absent in the media activism in the reform era, which determines the latter's major weaknesses.

Data for both conceptual analysis and case study will be based on published materials such as academic publications, promulgated rules, official documents, and media products. There are two types of data for this research, namely printed publications and digital text. Printed publications are mainly retrieved from local libraries including the Barr Smith Library of the University of Adelaide, the State Library of South Australia and interstate libraries such as Australian National University Library. On-line resources are also extremely important. Most visited ones are the e-journal systems and the online databases of the University library system. Not only does this system provide abundant academic journal articles in English language, it also provides access to full-text academic articles and newspaper reports in Chinese language through the CNKI database in China. International search engines such as google.com are also used to hunt for text in web pages. All the data used in this thesis are legally and openly available. There is no requirement for special permit or ethical clearance to access these data.

## 1.6 Organization

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Following this introductory Chapter One, Chapter Two outlines the theoretical framework in which the definition of media transparency is discussed in order to set up the targets and realm of the study. Drawing on the general principles of transparency, this chapter develops the concept of media transparency and identifies the impact of the current rules, the degrees of transparency and various constraining elements.

Chapter Three analyses how and why censorship is applied yet denied by various discursive strategies. This chapter argues that censorship is censored because the Party-state and the media are unable to justify the censorship regime. The justification problem is rooted in the incompatibility of communist ideology and the capitalist economic base. As a result, the Party becomes increasingly disjunct from its communist values and the media from its public nature, breeding the current censorship apparatus geared around secrecy and uncertainty.

Chapter Four discusses the current phenomena of professional malpractice including fabricated and misleading news, a rampant problem that not only renders the prolonged official „*Sanxiang Xuexi Jiaoyu Huodong*“ [Three Learning and Education Programs] void and futile, but also hampers the further development of media transparency.<sup>170</sup> Instead of looking at the professional malpractice as a problem of individual and ideological weakness that official discussion intends us to believe, the chapter shows that the problem is rooted in the market, and the ethical and the identity dilemmas for the grassroots professionals. These dilemmas result from political control and market forces, and further demonstrate the disjuncture of political representation of the Party-state and the media.

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<sup>170</sup> The TLEP was launched in October 2003 by the CPD, aiming at massive education of socialist journalistic values and ethics among the media professionals. It is an ongoing program for all journalists and editorial staffers who are requested to participate in the program in form of on-site and off-site training courses. The CPD, GAPP and SARFT also organize officials and specialists for lecturing tour nationwide.

Chapter Five discusses media marketization and conglomeration. It asks why business management and conglomeration have failed to lead the media from financial prosperity and autonomy to expanding the public sphere. Instead of being marginalized, Party leadership has been duly reinforced and consolidated *through* conglomeration corporate governance. This chapter demythologizes the prediction of press freedom on market forces, arguing that the consensus on political control and pursuit of profits, which is reached between the Party-state and the media, leads to nowhere but rhetoric and illusion.

Chapter Six explores media activism such as leaving blank spaces on newsprints. Using historical comparative case study, this chapter argues that the media activism today is drastically different from that in the past in terms of participatory elements and ideological consensus. These differences have determined the major weaknesses of the media activism in the Post-Mao era. As a result, the Party-state remains coercive; profit-driven outlets loathe challenging the censorship apparatus; activist professionals are vulnerable to both political and market control. This analysis demythologizes the misinterpretation of the present and the past, and further revealed the disjuncture of political presentation of the commercialized media.

Finally, Chapter Seven is conclusive. This thesis argues that the transparency illusion revealed between Chapters Two derives from the lack of substance of the concepts of transparency and supervision by public opinion. This lack of substance is determined by the Party-state and the media's disjuncture of political representation. The disjuncture of representation is entrenched in official rhetoric and market discourses. Therefore, discussion of the Chinese media cannot afford to bypass the question of media transparency and the problem of political representation.

## Chapter Two: Media Transparency

### 2.1 Introduction

Despite its heavy hand of censorship, the Party-state could not really object to the idea that transparency is good. In fact, the idea of *touming*, the Chinese term closest in meaning to „transparency“, has been increasingly promoted over the reform era. At the same time, supervision by public opinion, particularly for anti-corruption purposes, is encouraged in various official documents and talks. Such promotion in recent memory is the inclusion of the concept of transparency in the Twelfth Five-Year Plan in March 2011.

However, there is an apparent gap between transparency rhetoric and information control reality. The performance of the Chinese news media has been dubbed as „dancing while wearing fetters“. <sup>171</sup> Critical sentiments and cynicism are common such as the word „harmony“ being used by many as a derogative term to describe how unwanted voices are silenced by censorship. <sup>172</sup>

Apart from the censorship reality, a significant cause of the aforesaid gap lies in the fact that the concept of transparency and transparency through journalism has been kept as rhetoric with sound connotations but empty substance. The Party-state holds on to the sole authority of defining press freedom and transparency, as emphasized from time to time by the CPD and Party leaders. <sup>173</sup> Yet, Party-state officials loathe specifying what transparency is and what the key elements of supervision by public opinion are. As a result, the boundary for journalism between what is forbidden and what is allowed has been uncertain for media professionals. <sup>174</sup> Meanwhile, official discussions on press freedom, those in Jiang Zemin’s 1999 talk and Wang Shoucheng’s 2008 book for example, more often than not try to massage public

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<sup>171</sup> Hanqi Fang and Changfeng Chen, eds., *Zhengzai Fasheng De Lishi: Zhongguo Dangdai Xinwen Shiye [History That Is Happening: Chinese Contemporary Journalism]*, vol. 2 (Fuzhou: Fujian People’s Press, 2002). 560

<sup>172</sup> Todd Joseph Miles Holden and Timothy J. Scrase, *Medi@Sia: Global Media/Tion in and out of Context* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006). 100

<sup>173</sup> Jiang, *Jiang Zemin Lun Shehui Zhuyi Jingshen Wenming Jianshe [Jiang Zemin’s Talks on Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization]*. 258

<sup>174</sup> McNally, *China’s Emergent Political Economy: Capitalism in the Dragon’s Lair*. 129

opinion to the belief that an unchecked flood of information may give too much room for confusion, rumour and instigation, and thus jeopardise social stability.<sup>175</sup>

This chapter discusses „media transparency“ in an effort to substantiate the concept because journalism, as an extension of the public sphere, offers a multi-lateral communicative window for government and citizens, both domestic and overseas, for professionals and non-professionals, the insiders and the outsiders, to observe and be observed, to inform and be informed, to voice their views and to have their voices heard. Addressing the problem of transparency rhetoric is important because concepts without substance do not lead to substantive results. Instead of simply taking „transparency“ as a figure of speech meaning openness or „media transparency“ as journalism without censorship, this chapter tries to identify answers to the question: What is media transparency?

The discussion commences with a brief account of the general principles of transparency and develops into defining media transparency. This account will also lead us to the discussion of related phenomena in the following chapters.

## 2.2 General Principles of Transparency

Both as a term and doctrine of modern governance, transparency consists of various expressions of meaning.<sup>176</sup> The concept of transparency today puts together the pre-twentieth century ideas of rule-governed administration, candid and open social communication and methods of making organizations and society knowable.<sup>177</sup> Its origin dates back to the eighteenth century English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in

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<sup>175</sup> Jiang, *Jiang Zemin Lun Shehui Zhuyi Jingshen Wenming Jianshe [Jiang Zemin's Talks on Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization]*.

Shoucheng Wang, *Baokan Shendu [Review Reading of Newspapers and Publications]* (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 2008).

<sup>176</sup> Christopher Hood, "Transparency in Historical Perspective," in *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?*, ed. Christopher Hood and David Heald (Oxford: Oxford University Press Inc., 2006). 1

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* 5

his belief in good governance by rule of law against secrecy and conspiracy.<sup>178</sup> The popularity of the transparency terminology today is rooted in efforts to reduce government and business corruption.<sup>179</sup> These ideas involve the general principles of rule of law for generating certainty and predictability, press freedom as a watchdog over government and politics, and development of means that enable supervision by the public. The implementation of these ideas is usually concerned with openness, credibility, accountability and relevance of the governance behaviours.

Openness involves both attitude and actions. An open attitude will exhibit willingness to adopt interactivity between the government and the public. Open actions lead to adequate participation and disclosure. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development defines openness as governments listening to its citizens and businesses and taking their suggestions into account when designing and implementing public policies.<sup>180</sup> The interactivity is based on adequate access to information and expression. Information made available to the public is a means towards transparency and the effect of information disclosure leads to participation.<sup>181</sup> The citizens, therefore, are able to participate in political decisions.<sup>182</sup> In similar vein, Richard Oliver's *active disclosure* argues that „the old transparency (being open and forthright, should anyone happen to ask) has given way to new transparency, more active in calling attention to deeds, both intentional and unintentional“.<sup>183</sup>

With the demand of open attitudes and action by the public comes the obligation of the government to fulfil its pledge of openness. This is why the notion of transparency is more-often-than-not accompanied by that of accountability.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 9

<sup>179</sup> Carolyn Ball, "What Is Transparency?," *Public Integrity* 11, no. 4 (2009). 295

<sup>180</sup> Seiichi Kondo, "Fostering Dialogue to Strengthen Good Governance," in *Public Sector Transparency and Accountability: Make It Happen* (Paris: OECD, 2002). 7

<sup>181</sup> Noella Edelmann, Johan Hochtli, and Michael Sachs, "Collaboration for Open Innovation Processes in Public Administrations," in *Empowering Open and Collaborative Governance: Technologies and Methods for Online Citizen Engagement in Public Policy Making*, ed. Yannis Charalabidis and Sotirios Koussouris (Heidelberg Springer, 2012). 34

<sup>182</sup> R Cotterrell, "Transparency, Mass Media, Ideology and Community," *Cultural Values* 3, no. 4 (1999). 414

<sup>183</sup> Richard W. Oliver, *What Is Transparency?* (Columbus: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2004). 4

Although almost everyone tends to prefer confidentiality to accountability, it is the rulers and overseers who have the power and resources to claim „a cloak of privacy“. <sup>184</sup> The disequilibrium between the government and the public in possessing and using power and resources accentuates the importance of making accountability an explicit responsibility. In addition, governments assume responsibility because the process of government is carried out by people in charge and these people must be held responsible. <sup>185</sup>

To enable this responsibility, accountability has at least the features of *external* supervision over the *rights of authority* through electoral retribution, legislative scrutiny and public seeking redress from government and its officials. <sup>186</sup> Accordingly, those held accountable must respond to the wishes and needs of their citizens and facilitate public discussion in this regard. <sup>187</sup>

In an authoritarian context, however, the absence of effective electoral retribution and legislative scrutiny raises both the difficulty and the significance of holding the government officials accountable by effective public discussion. This is where journalism committed to transparency comes into play, to substantiate the concept of accountability through facilitating the expression of public opinions in a less democratized country like China.

In addition, accountability cannot be substantiated without adequate credibility. Credibility often refers to accuracy and reliability of disseminated information, an ability to make or generate belief, particularly among one's counterpart. <sup>188</sup> Positive government credibility reduces political uncertainty and meets expectations of its future behaviour. Government credibility, as maintained by Ben Ross Schneider and Sylvia Maxfield, most likely generates positive consequences with the help of

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<sup>184</sup> Hood, "Transparency in Historical Perspective." 6

<sup>185</sup> C. A. Dykstra, "The Quest for Responsibility," *American Political Science Review* 33, no. 1 (1939).

<sup>186</sup> R. Mulgan, "'Accountability': An Ever-Expanding Concept?," *Public Administration* 78, no. 3 (2000). 555

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* 556

<sup>188</sup> James C. Freund, *Smart Negotiating: How to Make Good Deals in the Real World* (Cammeray: Simon & Schuster, 1992). 77

sound policies.<sup>189</sup> Also, building credibility through the media is of high priority in the eyes of government officials because of the media's „third-party endorsement effect“.<sup>190</sup> Government credibility, therefore, is intertwined with the media criteria of usefulness, the capacity to produce information that is reliable, interesting, and timely and in a form that can be used.<sup>191</sup> In practice, the credibility of the news media is often used by governments to test the public response to a certain policy and maintain public faith at moments of crisis management.<sup>192</sup> As a result, the credibility of the media is unavoidably affected by its relationship with the governance.

The usage of *transparency* and other related terms, in describing governance at least, frequently extends into areas that previously subscribed to different terminologies. This extension, as Richard Mulgan recognizes, is not necessarily unhealthy, but also helps add significantly to the understanding of public institutions.<sup>193</sup>

This thesis shifts the discussion of press freedom from liberal individual freedom to a discussion in the substance of and constraints on transparency and supervision by *public* opinion, which is largely ignored both in official discourse and by liberal perspectives. The central importance of transparency does not lie in its taken-for-granted positive connotations, but in the power of its substance and how it is substantiated. The original core of accountability, for example, signifies external scrutiny, justification, sanction and control.<sup>194</sup> This signification does not carry substantive significance unless it enables fair participation of the disenfranchised groups in the public sphere to have their voice heard without being harassed by political and market control.

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<sup>189</sup> Ben Ross Schneider and Sylvia Maxfield, "Business, the State and Economic Performance in Developing Countries," in *Business and the State in Developing Countries*, ed. Sylvia Maxfield and Ben Ross Schneider (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). 11

<sup>190</sup> Kirk Hallahan, "Product Publicity: An Orphan of Marketing Research," in *Integrated Communication: Synergy of Persuasive Voices*, ed. Esther Thorson and Jeri Moore (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1996). 322

<sup>191</sup> Jerry Palmer, *Spinning into Control: News Values and Source Strategies* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000). 50

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.* 50

<sup>193</sup> Mulgan, "'Accountability': An Ever-Expanding Concept? ." 556

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.* 557



To sum up, the idea of transparency embraces the following substance and principles:

*Openness*, meaning proactive attitude and actions towards transparency of the authority that listens to its people and involves the public in decision-making process.

*Accountability*, meaning that the authority takes responsibility, is answerable and liable for its action, policy and governance, subjects itself to public supervision and suffers punishment in the case of eventual misconduct.

*Credibility*, meaning the authority is trustworthy, reliable, and responsive to public requests.

*Relevance*, meaning the information is available in a direct, precise, complete and timely manner.

### 2.3 Three Aspects of Media Transparency

Based on the above understandings, this chapter incorporates the principles of transparency into the discussion of journalism. Openness, credibility, accountability and relevance are also the qualities that are to be substantiated in the concept of *media transparency*, which consists of the following three aspects:

- *Transparency for the media*, meaning that the policy environment should be transparent when the media is regulated by a rule-governed administration. The media rules, including laws, regulations, policies and guidelines with binding effect should be in place, accessible, accountable and relevant. The policy environment covers public accessibility to and discussion of the intention, formulation and implementation process of the rules. For example, the intention of a law is not to be considered transparent when it is stated, promoted and proclaimed to be granting and ensuring more rights, while it is used to

restrict the rights of the media institutions, participants and their activities.

- *Transparency of the media*, meaning that the media should be open, accountable and credible in terms of its ethical integrity, operating policy, business structure and corporate responsibility.<sup>195</sup> A media is not considered transparent unless it adopts a welcoming attitude and actions towards pluralism and objective reporting, discloses conflicts of interest and the policies that govern its activities and business structure, upholds its publicized journalistic values and maintains a readiness to recognize and rectify mistakes without shaking off its responsibilities.
- *Transparency by the media*, meaning the extent of transparency to which the media is capable of delivering information to its users in a timely, relevant and objective manner, and of facilitating the understanding between the government, citizens and other parties involved in media activities.

Each of the three aspects of media transparency entails the basic principles of transparency mentioned above: the first one related to the rules and policy environment; the second to the media practice; and the third to transparency effect. Any lagging behind of any part of these essential aspects will result in a transparency reality distant to its ideal and hence to an uncertain future. These three aspects are interrelated and interactive, all involved with reciprocal connections between rules and media practice.

### 2.3.1 Transparency for the Media

Policy environment has direct impact on media transparency because rules prescribe the scope and limit of media activities. Chinese media policies are mainly composed of government rules and regulations that enshrine the popular official slogan of *rule of law*. Since Jiang Zemin urged to „govern the country according to

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<sup>195</sup> Moeller et al., "Openness & Accountability: A Study of Transparency in Global Media Outlets."

law“ in his February 1996 speech, China has embarked on the „bandwagon“ of rule of law.<sup>196</sup> The rhetoric effect of the official rule of law parlance is boosted by Premier Wen Jiabao’s pledge of „creating conditions for the people to criticize and supervise the government“ in March 2010.<sup>197</sup> The phrase „according to law [yifa]“ is mandatory to precede every official decision, whether the „law“ refers to a statutory Act or government document. In the presence of the increasing number of government rules, there arises an argument that statutory laws (particularly those for the press) are not necessarily decisive to ensure media freedom.<sup>198</sup>

However, the concept of rule of law invoked in Jiang’s speech and Wen’s vow is by no means what is commonly understood as „a means to restrain government and to secure the rights of the citizens“ that „aims to minimize any discretionary power“.<sup>199</sup> According to Jiang Zemin, all government works must be legal-systematized [fazhihua] and standardized [guifanhua] in order to protect the nation’s long term peace and stability.<sup>200</sup> This proposal attaches more emphasis on creating a legal framework for government work than the need to clarify the relationship between the Party-state and law.<sup>201</sup> This notion of rule of law in China does not aim at a civil society with a high degree of rule of law in which the government has little discretion. Rather, the Party-state’s lack of intention to limit government power engenders confusion between *rule of law* and *rule by law*. This confusion has exerted considerable impact on transparency for the media.

Rule by law refers to a form of instrumentalism where law is merely a tool for the state to control others without imposing meaningful restraints on the state itself.<sup>202</sup> It aims at strengthening government control of the media so that the media can be

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<sup>196</sup> Stanley B. Lubman, *Bird in a Cage: Legal Reform in China after Mao* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). 128

<sup>197</sup> Yuesheng, "Ruhe "Rang Quanli Zai Yangguang Xia Yunxing" [ How to Let Power Be Executed in the Sun]," [http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/trad/china/2010/03/100308\\_china\\_media\\_liu.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/trad/china/2010/03/100308_china_media_liu.shtml).

<sup>198</sup> Ze Zhou, "Baoshang Ziyou Buzai Fa [It Is Not up to the Law to Ensure Freedom]," (2008).

<sup>199</sup> James Bovard, *Lost Rights: The Destruction of American Liberty* (New York: Palgrave, 2000). 51

<sup>200</sup> Lubman, *Bird in a Cage: Legal Reform in China after Mao*. 128

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.* 129

<sup>202</sup> Randall P. Peerenboom, *China’s Long March toward Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). 64

used by political elites both at central and local levels for contests for power.<sup>203</sup> As Brian Z. Tamanaha quotes Li Shuguang,

Chinese leaders want rule by law, not rule of law...The difference...is that, under the rule of law, the law is preeminent and can serve as a check against the abuse of power. Under rule by law, the law is a mere tool for a government that suppresses in a legalistic fashion.<sup>204</sup>

The connotations of rule of law, therefore, are confused to such an extent that promotion of rule of law results in facilitating expansion of state power.

The media policy environment is plagued by this confusion as it is dominated by government rules including decrees, rules, normative documents and consequent ambiguity of the boundary between rule of law and rule by the Party-state. Although the draft of *Press Law* has been shelved for over twenty years since its first proposal to the National People's Congress in the mid-1980s, China is not short of government rules and regulations related to media administration.

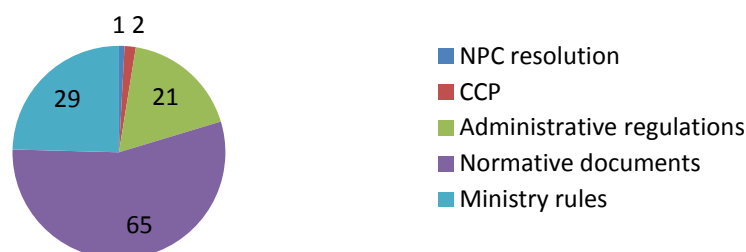


Fig. 2.1 Types of rules and regulations for journalism in China<sup>205</sup>

According to the information disclosed by the SC, GAPP, SARFT and MIIT, there are 118 rules and regulations in effect related to journalism as of December 2011. Fifty-four rules are directly concerned with newspapers, twenty-six with radio and

<sup>203</sup> Joseph Y.S. Cheng, "Introduction," in *China in the Post-Deng Era*, ed. Yushuo Zheng (1998). 13

<sup>204</sup> Brian Z. Tamanaha, *On the Rule of Law: History, Politics, Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 3

Also see John Remington Graham and Laura Tesh, *Free, Sovereign, and Independent States: The Intended Meaning of the American Constitution* (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 2009). 30

<sup>205</sup> Source: GAPP, SC, SARFT and MIIT

Please refer to Appendix 1-4 for details including document titles, issuing authorities and issuing dates.

television broadcast services, seventeen with online and digital media, and twenty-one with all media. These rules are classified hierarchically as follows:

- Statutory laws passed by the NPC and NPCSC;
- Administrative Regulations [*xingzheng fagui*] passed by the State Council and ministries in form of decrees [*zhengfuling*];
- Ministry rules [*bumen guizhang*];
- Normative documents [*guifanxing wenjian*] including all legislation passed by governments other than mentioned above.<sup>206</sup>

Apart from only one NPC resolution and two CCP notifications, the rest of the rules and documents are produced by the government or jointly by the government and the Party. Twenty-one administrative regulations, sixty-five normative documents and twenty-nine ministerial regulations take up the most provisions. In the obvious absence of statutory laws, the rule by law refers to the governance of the rules, regulations, documents and orders issued by the State Council, ministries and local governments.<sup>207</sup> When referring to rule-governed administration, it is more like *rule by government rules* than rule of law.

The confusion has advanced since the *PRC Legislation Law* (LL) and *PRC Administrative Approval Law* came into effect in July 2000 and July 2004 respectively. The former endowed government decrees and normative documents with the status of administrative law. The latter proclaimed to clarify the boundary of government regulations and prevent the abuse of government power and protect human rights. The State Council and Ministries are empowered to enact administrative regulations to implement basic laws as well as normative rules regarding matters within their administrative power.<sup>208</sup> The making and revision of these rules is subject to the discretion of the issuing authorities without having to

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<sup>206</sup> Chinese legislative hierarchy is classified into Constitution, statutory laws, administrative regulations, local laws, rules and normative documents.

See Peerenboom, *China's Long March toward Rule of Law*. 271

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. 138

<sup>208</sup> Vai lo Lo and Xiaowen Tian, *Law for Foreign Business and Investment in China* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009). 11

obtain prior approval from the NPC. The public hearing prior to promulgation, an important community consultation procedure, is basically nominal and lacking substantive significance, recognized Cao Kangtai, Director of the Legal Office of the State Council at the National Conference of Directors of Legal Offices and Departments on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2009<sup>209</sup>.

The confusion over rule of law is largely the result of the popularised legalism in Post-Mao China which, according to John Gray, assumes that the executive and legislative branches of state power will be determined by constitutional and legal boundaries.<sup>210</sup> It is also notable that the inadequacy of legislative law and dominance of government rules have enabled the Party-state and political elites“ „self-interest seeking within the boundary of law“.<sup>211</sup> The procedural fairness embedded in such legalism leads to the Party-state“s indifference towards the result that the media are futile in carrying out their role of supervision by public opinion.<sup>212</sup>

This confusion has exerted considerable impact on transparency for the media because it entails difficulties in making the intention of the government rules and regulations transparent, particularly when these rules aim to strengthen government power. For example, the following analysis on the *Measures for the Administration of Press Cards* (hereinafter referred to as the MAPC) illustrates how government control over the media professionals is strengthened and this intention is concealed in the name of protecting journalists and their professional activities.

The press card is a professional identity granted by the GAPP to journalists and editors to lawfully carry out journalistic jobs including collecting and editing news and interviews. The intention of the MAPC, as Zhu Weifeng, Deputy Director of the Department of Journalism, Newspapers and Periodicals of the GAPP stated in

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<sup>209</sup> Li Li, "Woguo Jiang Jianli Zhengfu Lifa Tingzheng Zhidu, Baozheng Tingqu Minyi Changtaihua [Our Country Is to Establish Hearing System for Government Legislation to Ensure Adoption of Public Opinions]," <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/10502318.html>.

<sup>210</sup> John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London Routledge, 1996). 76

<sup>211</sup> George B. Graen and Joni A. Graen, *Predator's Game-Changing Designs: Research-Based Tools* (Charlotte: JHU Press, 1992). 200

<sup>212</sup> Adam Tomkins, "In Defense of the Constitution," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 22, no. 1 (2002). 162

an interview with the China Press and Publication Newspaper, is to „facilitate and protect the journalists“ rights to collect news and report, which to some extent represents the people“s constitutional rights to know, to express, to participate and to supervise“.<sup>213</sup> Therefore, the MAPC is supposed to facilitate and ensure these rights. However, the promise does no more than gloss over the prescribed restrictions.

One restriction lies in the eligibility for applying for the press card. Portals and smaller websites, except those attached to traditional state-owned media, that carry news, are not categorized as „news media“ by the MAPC and are not allowed to collect news according to the *Administrative Regulations on the Internet News Information Services* jointly promulgated by the Information Office of the State Council and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology in 2005. Many of these media, such as the NASDAQ listed sohu.com, netease.com and Hong Kong listed tencent.com, have hundreds of millions in their audience. Editorial employees from these online media are not eligible for press cards. One of the reasons, according to Zhu, is that „most countries including the United States do not define websites as independent media“ and „None of the Olympic Games or World Expos has issued formal journalist permit to any website“.<sup>214</sup>

To justify its refusal to grant journalism license to non-state-owned websites by referencing the United States is ironic to say the least. What Mr. Zhu did not or chose not to mention is that the Chinese, Japanese, United States and Australian branches of yahoo.com, a detached Internet-based global media, „were proudly issued dozens of journalist permits for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games“.<sup>215</sup> Also, tencent.com, a Chinese Internet service provider based in Shenzhen, staged a special news column featuring a 3D version live transmission titled „2010 Shanghai Expo Online“ after establishing a high profile strategic partnership with the

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<sup>213</sup> Genan Zeng, "Weihs Jizhe Quanyi, Baozhang Jizhe Liyi [Protect the Journalists' Rights and Safeguard the Journalists' Interests]," *China Press and Publication Newspaper*, 6th November 2009.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Fang Huang, "Zhongguo Yahu Xiangyou Aoyun Caifangzheng, Fabu 2008 Aoyun Zhanlue [Yahoo China Enjoys Journalist Permits for the Olympic Games, Releasing 2008 Olympic Strategies]," <http://news.sohu.com/20080318/n255771508.shtml>.

Shanghai Expo authority.<sup>216</sup> Moreover, netease.com has secured exclusive rights to collect news and report both in text and video for the 16<sup>th</sup> Asian Games in Guangzhou in 2010. And, by introducing baidu.com, it was the first time that a Chinese Internet search engine has been involved in the official report of the Asian Games.<sup>217</sup>

Despite disqualification of reporters from detached Internet service providers to apply for accreditation, the MAPC has been unable to stop the online media from rapidly extensive news products, especially on significant and profit-generating media events. In effect, the excluded reporters and editors from online media undertake responsibilities no different from those with traditional outlets who are eligible. The MAPC's restriction on press card eligibility has demonstrated the obvious intent of the government and its policies to control journalist professionals by limiting their eligibility for journalistic activities. This restriction sheds doubts on the MAPC's vowed purpose „to safeguard journalists' normal professional activities and ensure legal rights of journalists and social public".<sup>218</sup> Without the press card, the news making activities by online media and its professionals are defined as „illegal" and consequently dangerous. Punishment of these illegal activities is, therefore, subject to the discretion of the administrative power of the authority. Reciprocally, this discretion increases the coercive effect of the government rules.

Furthermore, public accessibility to decision or policy making process also has implications for transparency of the policy environment. Policies and rules such as the MAPC are drafted and promulgated by the government including the State Council, GAPP, SARFT, MIIT and Party publicity authorities. There are few opportunities for the vast majority of grassroots professionals to engage themselves in the policy-making process. Either there has been no specific channel for

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<sup>216</sup> Shibowang, "Tengxun Shibo Zhanluo Jiexiao, Jiang Dazao Quanqiu Zuida Shibo Wangluo Shequ [Tencent-Expo Strategic Ties Will Create the Biggest Online Expo Community in the World]," <http://www.expo2010.cn/a/20091030/000035.htm>.

<sup>217</sup> Dayangwang, "Wangyi Youdao Zhuwei 2010 Guangzhou Yayunhui [2010 Guangzhou Asian Games Assisted by Netease.Com's Search Engine Youdao]," [http://news.dayoo.com/sports/201008/25/54235\\_13694697.htm](http://news.dayoo.com/sports/201008/25/54235_13694697.htm).

<sup>218</sup> See Article One of the MAPC.

GAPP, "Jizhe Zheng Guanli Banfa [Measures for the Administration of the Press Cards]."



professionals to express their concerns regarding these rules or the lack of adequate participation in the policy-making process has, at least in part, resulted in difficulties in making the policy intention transparent. The difficulties explain to some extent why fewer than 220,000 journalists and editors are eligible to apply for press cards when there are around four million professionals sustaining the booming news industry.<sup>219</sup>

Building up a favourable policy environment for news media professionals gives rise to the need for transparency as it is not a spontaneous result of any rhetoric or of top-down decisions made behind closed doors, but the outcome of a much wider community engagement. Adequate interactivity between the governing and the governed on an informed basis is the first step towards transparency and to release control is a pathway, similar to promoting corporate governance in the spirit of transparency.<sup>220</sup> Not only should adequate rules be in place, the whole process including intention, proposal, drafting, discussion, ratification, execution and revision must be an accessible, accountable and relevant to, at least, the vast majority of professional practitioners.

### 2.3.2 Transparency of the Media

Transparency of the media, at its most simple, is about transparency in corporate governance within the media, regarding the process of editorial decision-making and management policies. Moeller and her research team established five categories coded for Corrections, Ownership, Staff Policies, Reporting Policies and Interactivity respectively in order to examine how transparent a media outlet can be<sup>221</sup>. These categories are designed to evaluate the outlet's willingness to openly

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<sup>219</sup> The figures come from the speech of Mr. Li Dongdong, Deputy Director of the GAPP, dedicated to the female workers in the news industry during the Lianghui period in March 2011. Viewed on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2011 from <http://www.baoye.net/News.aspx?id=312945>.

<sup>220</sup> Shel Holtz, John C. Havens, and Lynne D. Johnson, *Tactical Transparency: How Leaders Can Leverage Social Media to Maximize Value and Build Their Brand*, 2 ed. (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2009). 7; Laura Fitton, Michael Gruen, and Leslie Poston, *Twitter for Dummies* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2010). 213

<sup>221</sup> Moeller et al., "Openness & Accountability: A Study of Transparency in Global Media Outlets."

correct mistakes and give information about their corporate owners, the outlet's candour about its internal staff policies and its internal reporting and editing policies, as well as the outlet's openness to reader comments and criticism.

Moeller concludes that of twenty-five major news outlets in the United States, the United Kingdom and the Middle East that have been studied, „most news outlets are unwilling to let the public see how their editorial process works“ while „what most news sites manage best ... is admitting to who owns them“.<sup>222</sup> Although Moeller's research did not involve the news media in China, the understanding of transparency of media is common: „It is not only important to demand accountability of the subjects of news coverage, it is also important to demand accountability from those who do the coverage“.<sup>223</sup> Therefore, her five categories are drawn on here in discussion of the transparency of Chinese media.

Moeller's first category is about correction policy. The purpose of examining an outlet's correction policy is to see whether it learns to use its past errors for future cordon under public supervision.<sup>224</sup> News outlets tend to loathe recognizing their mistakes and subjecting themselves to public supervision. Reluctance to make an apology open and available exhibits an outlet's unwelcoming attitude to transparency of the media management in that they believe that public knowledge and memory of their misdoings will not only affect the ratings but more importantly their positions and career future.

Standardization of corrections in the West started in the early 1970s, before which corrections could be found scattered in different places in different papers, and often under different headlines in the same publication.<sup>225</sup> Modern correction standards were created by Abraham Michael Rosenthal, former senior editor with *Times*, in 1972, which gave corrections a place, a title and a format.<sup>226</sup> Rosenthal's standard was soon accepted by most newspapers in the United States. Almost every

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Nick Russell, *Morals and the Media: Ethics in Canadian Journalism* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006). 137

<sup>225</sup> Craig Silverman and Jeff Jarvis, *Regret the Error: How Media Mistakes Pollute the Press and Imperil Free Speech* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 2009). 228

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. 229

North American city daily today, for example, carries corrections, if any, at the bottom corner of page two.<sup>227</sup> Chinese newspapers, also, are no strangers to corrections. For example, *New Hunan Daily* was one of the newspapers in the early 1950s that regularly published corrections. Its editors made open apologies on the paper when they were found responsible for errors.<sup>228</sup>

However, online technology today has altered the landscape of journalism. Many Chinese newspapers now have established websites and made their reports available online. News contents are disseminated at electronic speed, reprinted and reposted by other media and users. Publication of corrections is obviously outrun by the spread of the original messages that carry the mistakes. Some newspapers in the United States have established specific corrections tally or resorted to external news database such as Nexis to gather the corrections.<sup>229</sup> But these methods are rarely used for error-prevention purposes.<sup>230</sup> Therefore, it is of crucial importance that the media, particularly those provide online services simultaneously, have a correction policy that ensures its corrections reach the readers as quickly and broadly as the original messages. Such a policy must be open, explicit and able to hold the media accountable.

Few Chinese media today have made their correction policies open and available to the public, if they do indeed have such policies. Different media may adopt different attitudes toward their mistakes. For example, Xinhuanet.com, the portal of Xinhua News Agency, apologized for publishing an article that reported stories about China's first spacewalk on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008, two days before the walk

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid. 229

<sup>228</sup> Hunansheng Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui, *Hunan Shengzhi Baoye [Annals of Hunan Province, Newspapers]* (Changsha: Hunan Chubanshe, 1993). 231

<sup>229</sup> Silverman and Jarvis, *Regret the Error: How Media Mistakes Pollute the Press and Imperil Free Speech*. 232

Nexis.com is an online database that makes available content from more than 20,000 global news sources, company & industry intelligence providers, biographical and reference sources, intellectual property records, public records, legislative and regulatory filings and legal materials.

Viewed on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2012 from <http://w3.nexis.com/new/>

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. 232

actually took place.<sup>231</sup> As of 30<sup>th</sup> May 2012, the apology letter, which was posted on 26<sup>th</sup> September, remains retrievable on xinhuanet as of December 2011.<sup>232</sup> Another example is an apology missive issued by *Huaxi Metropolis Daily* (HMD) in 2010 for its admitted inaccurate report of China Writers Association (CWA) Annual Presidium Conference. In the report, the HMD accused the CWA of extravagance including using presidential suites and luxury cars for the conference participants. The HMD was ordered by the GAPP to openly apologize to the CWA. The apology was made in the form of an official missive addressed to the CWA so that it was treated only as a bilateral dispute between the HMD and the CWA rather than sensationalism that has misinformed the readership. However, this missive is not available to the public from any HMD sources.<sup>233</sup>

Secondly, disclosure of information about ownership is included in the discussion of transparency in that it indicates the possible influence of the owners over editorial practice, which imposes implication on the editorial independence of a news outlet. The Council of Europe urged its member countries in September 1993 to pass policies to mandate disclosure of media ownership in order to improve knowledge of level of media concentration.<sup>234</sup>

In China, journalism remains exclusively state-owned. However, it does not mean that disclosure of ownership and corporate structure of the market-oriented outlets becomes superfluous. While market discourses keep hinting at more credibility generated by market-driven content production, the possibility that the market will eventually drive the media away from their political obligations is largely overestimated.<sup>235</sup> Media outlets are willing to boast their non-official status and market-oriented editorial style. In particular, introduction of non-state capital to the

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<sup>231</sup> The Telegraph, "China Fakes Reports from Space," <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/3082804/China-fakes-reports-from-space.html>.

<sup>232</sup> Xinhuanet, "Xinhuawang Xiang Wangyou De Zhixianxin [Apology Letter from Xinhuanet to Netizens]," [http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-09/26/content\\_10117833.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-09/26/content_10117833.htm).

<sup>233</sup> Please refer to Appendix 5 for the full text of the apology missive. An electronic version is available at the Phoenix Network [*Fenghuang wang*], [http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/201004/0406\\_17\\_1597127.shtml#](http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/201004/0406_17_1597127.shtml#).

<sup>234</sup> Karol Jakubowicz, *Media Revolution in Europe: Ahead of the Curve* (Paris: Council of Europe, 2011). 316

<sup>235</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 158

profit-making sector such as logistics, distribution and advertising is usually claimed to endorse a non-official background. The oppositional nature of commercialized media is more often than not exaggerated.<sup>236</sup> The reality, however, is that not only the commercialized media trumpet the tone set by the Party-state,<sup>237</sup> they have also targeted the urban elites and new rich, a fraction of the population, as their key market.<sup>238</sup>

Despite the tide of commercialization and organizational restructuring, journalism remains off the reform agenda. Media conglomerates, without exception, are each headed by a Party media. Each outlet is governed by its parent official media. In conglomerated outlets, it almost goes without saying that the newsroom is under the direct leadership and guidance of the senior management. Senior management positions are appointed by the Party, and answerable to both the Party and the market.<sup>239</sup> Disclosure of ownership, particularly participation of non-state stakeholders, should not be used to endorse the market discourses of the profit-seeking editorial style, but to reveal the impact of the ownership on editorial content. Declaration of ownership does not carry substantive significance if such declaration does not hold the owners and their influence transparent and accountable.

Thirdly, internal staff policies specify responsibilities of employees and management and the implications of these responsibilities for editorial processes. These policies usually include employment conditions, training programs, incentive and discipline policies, and other policies related to staff management. Likely are these policies considered as internal affairs, and consequently are not necessarily released to the public.

However, what many are not aware of is that these policies are closely related to who is making the news, and therefore significant to the resulting news production.

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid. 158

<sup>237</sup> ———, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 93

<sup>238</sup> Xiaoming Wang, "A Manifesto for Cultural Studies," in *One China, Many Paths*, ed. Chaohua Wang (London: Verso, 2003). 276

<sup>239</sup> Edward Lawrence Davis, ed. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005). 780

The recruitment criteria impact on the professional quality of the editorial employees. In addition, training programs should also be in place to keep the employees updated to the latest standards. Incentive and discipline policies motivate the professionals and the management, impose critical impact on management policies and bring journalistic behaviours under the jurisdiction of professional ethics.

These policies have strong implication particularly when there is a choice to be made between money and journalistic values. Who is most likely to get the journalist or editor's job? Is it someone with satisfactory expertise, professional convictions and experience, or others capable of securing advertising sales contracts? Is the salary and welfare system fair enough for grassroots professionals? Are the training programs designed to improve reporting and editing skills or will they reinforce ideological brainwash? Can reporters accept gratuity or seek sponsorship during an interview or news collection? What are the discipline measures in place to ensure ethical standards? What is the authority and discretionary power when judging professional misconduct? To what extent can the professional be supported by their organizations when there is a conflict or legal case incurred from a report? These questions are just a few of many in the complex media environment in which the professionals and their news products may be involved.

Fourthly, reporting policies or standards with regard to the process of news production have direct impact on the news products. It is generally understood that a news article or report is either assigned as a top-down task or initiated by a reporter based on his or her own resources. The finished article or report will then have to go through bottom-up procedures and be approved by the chief editors before getting published. Reporting policies, however, are more than procedures that can be inferred from a topological graph or similar. These policies specify what to report and how to report, what not to be reported and why, „how many sources it

takes to confirm a story”,<sup>240</sup> with an independent supervisory system or equivalent to be alert to possible corruption and misconduct.

The purpose of explicit and open policies or rules governing news production process is to tackle ambiguity and discretion that may give rise to secret sub-rules [*qiangui*] prone to generate media malpractice and hinder transparency. Only when the rules and policies are open can the news outlets, and their management in particular, be held accountable. One of the sub-rules that helps the management reduce personnel cost and shed editorial responsibility is to outsource news collection so that the outlets do not have to consider salaries and welfare cost. Casually employed news providers, usually „special reporters [*teyue jizhe*] or „special editors [*teyue bianji*]“ get paid on word count basis and undertake substantive responsibilities for their stories.<sup>241</sup> When things go wrong, the „special“ professionals become dispensable. By outsourcing a considerable part of the news collection and editing and lacking explicit and open reporting policies, the editorial responsibility of chief editors may be reduced to confirming stories by making a couple of phone calls.

Fifthly, interactivity reflects the extent to which the news outlets take readers“ opinions into their editorial consideration. It should be, according to common sense, at least two-way communication and mutually responsive. It functions not only as a channel for the readers and viewers to complain, but also an important source of information to the news room and editorial decision. Both traditional forms of interactivity, such as letters to the editors, and digital platforms based on real time communication technologies can serve that purpose, as long as they adhere to two-way communication. From readers“ point of view, they should be able to lodge complaints, ask questions, demand verification of information sources, make suggestions and provide information. From editors“ point of view, on the other hand, they should respond to the readers“ complaints, meet the request for answers and authenticity, appreciate and take seriously suggestions and information, and more

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<sup>240</sup> Moeller et al., "Openness & Accountability: A Study of Transparency in Global Media Outlets."

<sup>241</sup> Boye De Mente, *China Understanding & Dealing with the Chinese Way of Doing Business!* (Essex: Phoenix Books and Publishers, 2012). 116

importantly, keep the interactivity transparent to all rather than keep it as a mere source of feedback.

Transparency of media outlets is important because an outlet achieving remarkable market success may not necessarily be as transparent and responsible as it claims to be. Pippa Norris maintains that the media watchdog cannot be effective if it is not credible and accountable for what it does.<sup>242</sup> Corporate transparency is not all about making catchy slogans that highlight the transparency rhetoric, but about demonstrating the way openness, accountability, credibility and relevance of corporate governance is materialized. The goals of media reform should aim at „making media organizations more transparent about their ownership, their editorial decision-making process, and the pressures and restraints on reporting“.<sup>243</sup>

It is not a question of whether the media truly want transparency or not. Transparency of the media does not come without a cost. A transparent media will not be able to manipulate the editorial content to the advantage of its own or its major stakeholders, as easily as a non-transparent outlet can. Its editorial policies will be placed under public supervision. The news room will be held accountable to its commitment to the public in the public sphere. The media will have to disclose its relationship with the political and commercial interests, making blatant political and market control more difficult. The outlets will have to place their personnel management under public surveillance so that exploitation and career blackmail are no longer a convenience for keeping the editorial staffers in line. The management will have to observe the open reporting policies and therefore make censorship orders open and disclose self-censorship procedures. Editors will have to be responsive to transparent interactivity with the readers and audience, which means that public opinions, particularly those critical ones, will have to be facilitated in a pluralistic manner. This is the price a media will have to pay for being transparent. Such a price, of course, is worthwhile when the voices of the underrepresented groups can be uttered, heard and taken seriously.

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<sup>242</sup> Pippa Norris, ed. *Public Sentinel: News Media & Governance Reform* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2010). 131

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.* 133



### 2.3.3 Transparency by the Media

Transparency by the news media largely lies in the extent of openness, accountability, credibility and relevance that the media is able and willing to push forward. Media organizations play a vital role as an essential factor in pluralistic communication and are supposed to honestly present facts and events and encourage free formation of opinions.<sup>244</sup> However, this free formation of opinion does not bring substantial freedom and transparency without adequately facilitating the opinions of the disenfranchised groups. Transparency by the media signifies how far journalism can go in expanding the public sphere in the interests of these underrepresented weak and poor.

This role, apart from common factors such as size and scale of investment, technologies and level of professional skills, is affected by policy environment and how the media are managed. Policy environment is restrained by institutional control by the Party-state. Business management is subject to both Party-state control and profit-seeking incentives.<sup>245</sup> At best, media products are the result of negotiation and bargaining between profit-seeking outlets and the Party-state's efforts to maintain control.<sup>246</sup> At worst, the media system created by fusion of Party-state and market power serves the interests of the political and economic elites while suppressing and marginalizing the voices of the oppressed and victimized.<sup>247</sup>

Figure 2.2 shows that Party-state control over the media is implemented by the CPD and the State Council at the top and editorial content at the bottom.

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<sup>244</sup> Susanne Nikoltchev, *Political Debate and the Role of the Media: The Fragility of Free Speech* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2004). 57

<sup>245</sup> Wenfang Tang, *Public Opinion and Political Change in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). 80

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.* 80

<sup>247</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, "The State, the Market, Media Control in China," in *Who Owns the Media?: Global Trends and Local Resistances*, ed. Pradip Thomas and Zaharom Nain (Penang: Southbound Sdn. Bhd., 2004). 179

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Figure 2.2 Party-state control over the media in China<sup>248</sup>

According to Tang Wenfang, the CPD does not only censor material, but also act as the principal coordinator of the media industry.<sup>249</sup> However, the CPD usually works behind the scenes. As shown in the previous discussion on policy environment, most administration work and policy-making is done by the government ministries and departments. Print media are controlled by the GAPP; radio and TV stations by the SARFT; online services and communication networks by the MIIT.<sup>250</sup> Administration of media groups is more complicated because these conglomerates are composed of varieties of subsidiary outlets. Jurisdiction of these conglomerates is determined by the nature of the head media. For example, a press group headed by a Party newspaper falls in the jurisdiction of the GAPP.

The Party-state control fosters editorial despotism within media organization. Editorial despotism means that the power to make editorial decisions is concentrated in the senior management, which then hampers transparency within the media organizations. Most Chinese news outlets, including newspapers, radio and television businesses typically are governed simultaneously by a board of

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<sup>248</sup> Tang, *Public Opinion and Political Change in China*. 80

Slight changes are made by adding the State Council to the top of the diagram because the ministries are under direct leadership of the State Council.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. 80

<sup>250</sup> Ibid. 80

directors and a Party commission. The chief editors decide what to publish while the chief executive managers make decisions for commercial activities such as advertising and distribution.<sup>251</sup> Senior management officials are appointed by the Party or the parent media group headed by a prominent Party mouthpiece.<sup>252</sup> They form the top layer of the media management. Many of these chief editors, like the one with *Xinmin Evening Post* [*Xinmin wanbao*], who proudly equalled himself with the Party, are so powerful that not only do they alone decide the content of each issue, but their censoring power far exceeds even that of the external superiors.<sup>253</sup>

The senior management officials including chief editors and chief executive directors are usually within the publicity section of the Party personnel system. The level of their ranks usually corresponds to the level of the outlets. A division-chief level (*xian chu ji*) official will be assigned to an outlet at the same level, such as a city newspaper. A bureau level (*si ju ji*) official usually takes up a position as leader of a media conglomerate at the bureau level. These officials are Party bureaucrats whose appointment and transfer are strictly kept within the Party personnel system and are subject to the approval of the Party publicity authorities at the corresponding levels.

The problem of transparency arises when the management does not have to listen to its lower level staff members internally and answer the demand for truth and relevance externally. The lack of openness reflects in the absolute management despotism which excludes the involvement of lower level journalists and editors in the decision making process. The situation deteriorates when the editorial work only caters for senior management decisions. The involvement of the lower level

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<sup>251</sup> Doris Fischer, "Censorship and Marketization: Institutional Change within China's Media," in *Regime Legitimacy in Contemporary China*, ed. Thomas Heberer and Gunter Schubert (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009). 184

<sup>252</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 21

<sup>253</sup> *Xinmin Evening Post* is a Shanghai-based newspaper under the direct leadership of the CCP Shanghai Committee that assigns the position of *Xinmin's* chief editor. According to White, the chief editor boasted there were no other censors because he was the censor himself. He considered himself as the CCP personified because he is highly consistent with the CCP leadership who assigned him the position.

Lynn T. White, *Local Causes of China's Intellectual, Legal, and Governmental Reforms* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999). 122

media workers in the editorial decision-making processing is diminished to the extent that even in *Southern Weekend*, an outlet that boasts rebellious journalism, reporters are declined to partake in making decisions as to whether a report is publishable. According to Li-Fung Cho's investigation of *Southern Weekend's* internal policies, „Whether a story can be done is the reporter's problem, but whether a story can be published becomes the editor's problem“.<sup>254</sup> The internal policies, the „compensation policy“ for example, which is alleged to protect the reporters, are usually unwritten, and hence not open, accountable or credible. These policies, at best no more than oral agreement out of goodwill, are made and executed at the discretion of the senior management, and therefore, unable to provide reliable, consistent and substantive support for serious journalism.

On the other hand, media transparency has been deeply affected by rampant commercialization. Sensationalism takes the form of serious journalism, but denies its principles at the heart, dressing the „unverified information“ with a convincing facade. Sensational reports manipulate with melodrama, emotion and entertainment and reduce the importance of reason and information in media practice.<sup>255</sup> The ultimate goal of sensationalism is profit.<sup>256</sup> The role of sensationalism, as Gadi Wolfsfeld maintains, is destructive to media environment.<sup>257</sup> Commercialization is also accompanied by rising rent-seeking corruption. High-profile corruption cases include the bribery of the eleven staff from official media including three from the Xinhua News Agency after a mining disaster took place in Fanzhi County, Shanxi Province in June 2002.<sup>258</sup> Another similar scandal occurred in Hongdong County, Shanxi Province, where around two hundreds journalists from various media across the country lined up to accept cash gifts in trade for not reporting a mining accident in September 2008.<sup>259</sup> These corruption cases are just the tip of an iceberg that has

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<sup>254</sup> Li-Fung Cho, "News Crusaders: Constructing Journalistic Professionalism within the Confines of State Control and Commercial Pressure," *Media Asia* 33, no. 3-4 (2006). 137

<sup>255</sup> Pål Kolstø, *Media Discourse and the Yugoslav Conflicts: Representations of Self and Other* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009). 27

<sup>256</sup> Robert Montague, *Live for Today! Plan for Tomorrow* (Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2010). 114

<sup>257</sup> Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and the Path to Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 44

<sup>258</sup> Viewed on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011 from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/zg/jx/2006-12/26/content\\_5534553.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/zg/jx/2006-12/26/content_5534553.htm)

<sup>259</sup> Viewed on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011 from <http://news.qq.com/a/20081027/000536.htm>

led to increasing concern about corruption as part of the deteriorating media environment.<sup>260</sup>

Media outlets have shifted their primary goal from serving the public towards earning profits.<sup>261</sup> Media products are increasingly regarded as a cultural product or commodity that can be sold for money apart from meeting official publicity obligations.<sup>262</sup> For example, same as in most Western countries, the first priority of a Chinese TV station is to make programs that aim at enlarging advertising revenue.<sup>263</sup> Also, much of the merit of senior management of media outlets is posited on profit turnover. This profit-oriented cultural market has been reinforced since Deng Xiaoping's Southern Cruise in 1992.<sup>264</sup> However, unfettered commercialization has engendered problems including sensationalism, corruption and media outlets' reluctance to invoke conflicts with the Party-state. These problems have inevitable impact on the transparency effect that journalism is devised to achieve.

As Christopher A. McNally points out, China's capitalist transition has not only enabled market forces to reshape editorial content, but also led to the rise of tabloidization and sensationalism.<sup>265</sup> Sensationalism is common because it is the easiest way for the management to „search for higher ratings that generates greater revenue“.<sup>266</sup> Fabricated and misleading news is a certain result of sensationalism when journalism goes so far that it becomes a maxim that „false news is better than

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<sup>260</sup> Anna Klyueva and Aimei Yang, "Media Transparency in Action: A Case Study of Media Coverage of a Controversy between Engos and a Paper Company in China," in *the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association, Chicago* ( 2009 ); Bryan Tilt and Qing Xiao, "Media Coverage of Environmental Pollution in the People's Republic of China: Responsibility, Cover-up and State Control," *Media, Culture & Society* 32, no. 2 (2010).

Bryan Tilt and Qing Xiao, "Media Coverage of Environmental Pollution in the People's Republic of China: Responsibility, Cover-up and State Control," *Media, Culture & Society* 32, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>261</sup> Daniela Stockmann, "What Kind of Information Does the Public Demand? Getting the News During the 2005 Anti-Japanese Protests," in *Changing Media, Changing China*, ed. Susan L. Shirk (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). 177

<sup>262</sup> Hugo De Burgh, *The Chinese Journalist: Mediating Information in the World's Most Populous Country* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003). 48

<sup>263</sup> Zeng Li, "The Past Revisited: Popular Memory of the Cultural Revolution in Contemporary China" (Northwestern University, 2008). 147

<sup>264</sup> Ibid. 147

<sup>265</sup> McNally, *China's Emergent Political Economy: Capitalism in the Dragon's Lair*. 143

<sup>266</sup> Manuel Alejandro Guerrero, *Empowering Citizenship through Journalism, Information, and Entertainment in Iberoamerica* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2009). 266

no news“ and „false news is better than true news“.<sup>267</sup> If fabricated news happens frequently and sensationalism prevails in a media, it has to be what Lincoln Steffens would call „a systematic problem“ for which the media system should be responsible.<sup>268</sup> Apart from political agenda and profit incentives, as Wanning Sun has argued, institutional routines of media production, technological imperative of news-making, encourage and reward the tendency to go sensational and spectacle, and as a result, the entire array of violation and disrespect of social, economic, and cultural rights in every life is largely ignored.<sup>269</sup> Senior management will cling to profit-driven incentives in the game of sensationalism when they believe the gains by playing with non-political content outbid the risk of getting caught and bad public exposure.

Also, profit-seeking incentives give rise to the media’s reluctance to invoke conflicts with the Party-state. As maintained by You-tien Hsing and Ching Kwan Lee, the Party-state designs and enacts control policies around permission, prohibition and various requirements, while the profit-seeking outlets implement, localize or particularize these policies.<sup>270</sup> In contrast with the incentives for profits and fame, the media seem to have little reason to offend the Party-state because the latter is apparently trading economic benefits for media loyalty.<sup>271</sup> The fact that few senior management of the news outlets in China have openly condemned or even discussed the top-down censorship orders in an open and unreserved manner and that few news outlets have openly acknowledged practice of self-censorship illustrates how hard it is for the senior management of news outlets to engage themselves in conflict with the Party-state. The Party’s publicity authority produces censorship orders and the senior management executes these orders and practices self-censorship. The obedience comes from the senior management’s need for securing their positions because they are subject to the vetting system coordinated

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<sup>267</sup> Alfred Emanuel Smith, *New Outlook*, vol. 68 (New York: Outlook Publishing Company 1901). 881

<sup>268</sup> Patrick F. Palermo, *Lincoln Steffens* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1978). 43

<sup>269</sup> Wanning Sun, "The Curse of the Everyday: Politics of Representation and New Social Semiotics in Post-Socialist China," in *Political Regimes and the Media in Asia*, ed. Krishna Sen and Terence Lee (2008). 32

<sup>270</sup> You-tien Hsing and Ching Kwan Lee, *Reclaiming Chinese Society: The New Social Activism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010). 184

<sup>271</sup> Lee, "Chinese Communication: Prisms, Trajectories, and Modes of Understanding." 17

between the CPD, the GAPP and the State Personnel Ministry.<sup>272</sup> On the other hand, journalists are also increasingly influenced by the market force. Many of them have developed an unconventionally pragmatic attitude towards ethics and accepted their new role as part of the profit-seeking media business and hired publicity officers for the Party.<sup>273</sup>

## 2.4 Concluding Remarks

Based on general principles of transparency, this chapter outlined media transparency in three aspects: policy environment, management and transparency effect. These aspects are important because transparency of policy-making processes, media outlets themselves and restraints on journalism have direct impact on the extent to which the idea of transparency can be substantiated. The news media, in particular, has responsibilities beyond many other industries in that its performance affects the integrity and transparency of the government, and shapes the public's perception of the world.<sup>274</sup> It is hard to expect transparency when the policy environment is full of uncertainty at unfettered discretion of the Party-state. There is growing dissatisfaction with the government officials for their delay, hesitation, wavering and indecision in executing social responsibilities.<sup>275</sup> Consequently, there has been a shifting of social expectation from the government

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<sup>272</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2008). 81

<sup>273</sup> Zhou He, "Chinese Communist Party Press in a Tug-of-War: A Political-Economy Analysis of the Shenzhen Special Zone Daily," in *Power, Money, and Media: Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China*, ed. Chin-Chuan Lee (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000). 142

<sup>274</sup> George Sylvie, C. Ann Hollifield, and Ardyth Broadric Sohn, *Media Management: A Casebook Approach* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, LLC., 2009). 45

<sup>275</sup> The discussion by Ma et al. was focused on the responses of the governments and the media of Hong Kong to the SARS in 2003. Their research identifies a complicated and contested connectivity between the media both in the mainland and Hong Kong. What happened in Hong Kong in the case study also reflects to large extent the situation that applies to most part of Mainland China.

to the media.<sup>276</sup> But, one should not expect significant transparency from outlets that are managed in a deficit of openness, accountability and credibility, or from a commercialization model that uses transparency rhetoric for making money and building brand rather than expanding the public sphere.

In the public sphere, the function of journalism has moved from its preliminary phase of being informative to the constructive phase of „public problem solving“, which indicates the increasing significance of public journalism in solving social problems.<sup>277</sup> To ensure this fundamental purpose of journalism, the news media must keep its first loyalty to citizens, particularly those who are underrepresented and disenfranchised, and first obligation to truth and maintain an independent monitor of power to hold politics and the media transparent and accountable.<sup>278</sup> Without substantive legal provisions for transparency commitment, it is easy for journalism to fall to the hands of various levels of elite politics, and become a political tool for political faction fights.<sup>279</sup> And, with significant lack of transparency comes the discretion of censorship orders and self-censorship practice, and hence frustration of public faith in promoting transparency through media efforts.

Moreover, transparency of internal management policies impacts on the media’s ability to enhance transparency externally. The concept of transparency will be no more than a market strategy if a media seeks to disseminate information about others while it keeps its own withheld, tends to hold others accountable while it remains unaccountable itself, demands credibility from others while being careless of its own, makes decisions relevant to market success but irrelevant to enhancing

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<sup>276</sup> Eric Kit-Wai Ma and Joseph Man Chan, "Global Connectivity and Local Politics: Sars, Talk Radio and Public Opinion," in *Sars: Reception and Interpretations in Three Chinese Cities*, ed. Deborah Davis and Helen F. Siu (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007). 27

<sup>277</sup> Aaron Barlow, "The Citizen Journalist as a Gatekeeper: A Critical Evolution," in *Public Journalism 2.0: The Promise and Reality of a Citizen-Engaged Press*, ed. Jack Rosenberry and Burton St. John (New York: Routledge, 2010). 41

<sup>278</sup> Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001).  
See also Cecilia Friend and Jane B. Singer, *Online Journalism Ethics: Traditions and Transitions* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007). 229

<sup>279</sup> Jingrong Tong, *Investigative Journalism in China* (London: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011). 54



transparency. The promotion of transparency will not be substantive unless the media hold this concept as a „higher purpose of benefiting relevant others ... without calculating any personal gain in return“. <sup>280</sup> Without adequate media transparency, press freedom may not be a valid indicator of transparency given the possibility that, as Manuel Mendonça and Rabindra Nath Kanungo are concerned, the practice of a news media may fail to fulfil the ideal in its practices in a given place and time. <sup>281</sup>

Nevertheless, the idea of transparency in itself does not guarantee fair and accurate reporting. <sup>282</sup> Not only should an outlet be able to openly admit to and correct their mistakes, but should also willingly subject itself to public supervision in order to avoid future failure. Also, not only should a media disclose its staff policies and reporting policies to the outsiders, but must then make these policies operable, specific and accountable. Interactivity is not an accessory to transparency rhetoric, but an essential to build credibility among the audience and readers, particularly those most dedicated consumers of the news products. Media transparency, therefore, calls for transparent policy environment and management policies, which in turn, serve to facilitate public knowledge and expression through transparent journalism, build up media credibility, and promote transparency in greater depth and breadth. Above all, media transparency is of no practical significance if this concept is not substantiated for sustaining and expanding the public sphere.

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<sup>280</sup> Manuel Mendonça and Rabindra Nath Kanungo, *Ethical Leadership* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2007). 73

<sup>281</sup> Bernard I. Finel and Kristin M. Lord, *Power and Conflict in the Age of Transparency* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002). 260

<sup>282</sup> Moeller et al., "Openness & Accountability: A Study of Transparency in Global Media Outlets."

## Chapter Three: Denial of Censorship: A Justification Problem

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter is not just looking at censorship *per se*, but how and why censorship is applied yet denied. The Party's publicity business increasingly finds itself in a dilemma in the Post-Mao era. On the one hand, positive self-promotion through Party media is no longer able to doctor public opinions as effectively as before.<sup>283</sup> On the other, social problems including, but not limited to, increasing polarization,<sup>284</sup> stratification,<sup>285</sup> failure of the reform of public services such as education<sup>286</sup> and the medical system,<sup>287</sup> land seizure and forced relocation,<sup>288</sup> and mass incidents,<sup>289</sup> arise at an alarming rate. Despite these problems, the media are called upon to play a *positive* role.<sup>290</sup> Meanwhile, they are often requested not to publish negative news or report government mistakes.<sup>291</sup> Increasingly, these requests are funnelled through the censorship apparatus.

However, two questions need to be answered in observing the censorship reality: 1) How are the negative connotations of censorship managed in its information control

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<sup>283</sup> Xinshu Zhao and Peilu Shen, "Some Reasons Why the Party Propaganda Failed This Time," in *Chinese Democracy and the Crisis of 1989: Chinese and American Reflections* (State of New York Press, 1993). 314

Also see Shuli Hu, "The Rise of the Business Media in China," in *Changing Media, Changing China*, ed. Susan L. Shirk (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). 77

<sup>284</sup> Shenggen Fan, Ravi Kanbur, and Xiaobo Zhang, eds., *Regional Inequality in China: Trends, Explanations and Policy Responses* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>285</sup> Kwok-Bun Chan, Agnes S. Ku, and Yin-Wah Chu, *Social Stratification in Chinese Societies* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2009).

<sup>286</sup> Ning Zhang, "A Conflict of Interests: Current Problems in Educational Reform " in *Economic Reform and Social Change in China*, ed. Andrew Watson (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>287</sup> Mikkel Bunkenborg, "Organizing Rural Health Care," in *Organizing Rural China, Rural China Organizing*, ed. Ane Bislev and Stig Thogerson (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012).

<sup>288</sup> Yongshun Cai, *Collective Resistance in China: Why Popular Protests Succeed or Fail* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>289</sup> ———, "Disruptive Collective Movements in China," in *Popular Protest in China*, ed. Kevin J. O'Brien (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>290</sup> Stephanie Hemelryk Donald and Michael Keane, "Media in China: New Convergences, New Approaches," in *Media in China: Consumption, Content and Crisis*, ed. Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, Michael Keane, and Yin Hong (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002). 6

<sup>291</sup> Liangrong Li, "The Historical Fate of 'Objective Reporting' in China," in *China's Media, Media's China*, ed. Chin-Chuan Lee (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994). 231

commitment? 2) Why is the official talk of transparency incapable of changing the censorship reality?

Therefore, this chapter describes the discursive strategies adopted in the censored censorship realities and argues that the media control measures are not censorship *per sé* but compelled by censorship's justification problems. These problems are rooted in the disjuncture between and the incompatibility of what the Party is and what it claims itself to be.

Following this line, this chapter argues that the present censorship regime has little to do with guarding communist ideology. In contrast to its damage to the CCP image, application and denial of censorship enhances the political and market control that has disconnected the CCP from its communist representation, and the media from its public nature.

### 3.2 Censorship and Censorship Reality

Censorship is the direct or indirect blocking of communication and access to certain information. It refers to „any attempt to limit or prevent free exchange of information“.<sup>292</sup> Censorship rules are the doctrines, open or secret, upon which actions are taken against what is defined by the censors to be unpleasant, harmful, sensitive, or inappropriate. Censorship can be carried out by either coercive government authorities, or spontaneously by the media or individuals who have the power or liberty to decide whether the content or implication of a certain piece of message or even its source should be withheld or blocked. The implementation of censorship may include a wide range of methods from mild warnings to brutal massacres.

The genres of censorship vary in terms of the type, value, object and subject of the information to be censored.<sup>293</sup> It rests on some rationale, usually for the purpose of

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<sup>292</sup> Philip Steele, *Censorship* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1999). 7

<sup>293</sup> Marshall Cavendish Corporation, *Sex and Society*, vol. I (Kuala Lumpur: Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2010). 284

protecting or defending the interests of the censoring authority and the power it represents. Moral censorship, typically related to the issue of pornography and violence, is carried out to defend a certain mainstream moral norm.<sup>294</sup> Military censorship forbids releasing of sensitive information that may jeopardise the national security, such as Section 798 of Title 18 of the US Code that forbids the revelation of classified information about secret codes and other communications intelligence.<sup>295</sup> Religious censorship happens when the authority believes that certain heretical information is harmful to the dominant faith.<sup>296</sup> Political censorship covers more extensive areas and involves sensitive information that the government would like to control, more often than not pertaining to the ideological pillar of the state power.<sup>297</sup> Self-censorship, in the form of self-discipline or conscious evasion of trouble, actually reinforces state information control largely for political reasons.<sup>298</sup>

To achieve a blocking effect, preventive measures or pre-emptive censorship is applied before the production, publication and circulation of books, pictures, animated cartoons or movies that may contain morally, religiously or ideologically objectionable information. Classification or banning of products of pornography and violence is a common practice worldwide. Intellectual discussions, however, may also be targeted. For example, anything that „touches on the government organs and actions“ was subject to heavy censorship by the German authorities in the 1910s against the rising democratic ideas and thoughts. Progressive newspapers such as *Frankfurter Zeitung* and one of its major contributors Max Weber found themselves constantly in a „difficult situation caused by the imposition of preventive censorship“.<sup>299</sup> In order to get any pro-democracy essays published,

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<sup>294</sup> Edward Quinn, *A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2006). 70

<sup>295</sup> Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *The Interplay of Influence: News, Advertising, Politics, and the Mass Media*, V ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2000). 110

<sup>296</sup> Klaus Petersen, "Censorship! Or Is It?," in *Interpreting Censorship in Canada*, ed. Allan C. Hutchinson and Klaus Petersen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc., 1999). 3

<sup>297</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power without Responsibility: The Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain*. 4

<sup>298</sup> Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>299</sup> The *Frankfurter Zeitung* was one of the few democratic papers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany. in which works of most of the great minds of the Weimar Republic were published.

Weber had to „avoid a direct assault on the Monarch himself“.<sup>300</sup> Chilling in effect, on the other hand, punitive censorship or post-publication censorship may be applied when a piece of work in question has been released to the public against the censorship rules. The measures range from prohibition or removal of the information to persecution of the writers and banning of the media sources, especially when the censoring authority senses direct or indirect threats to their fundamental interests.

All forms of censorship have a more or less political basis,<sup>301</sup> serving to either consolidate the power of the rulers or suppress that of their opposition. Generally, censorship is carried out in the interest of the censoring authority itself, such as a monarch, government or political party in power, to protect or reinforce its own political legitimacy, state power or ideology. Even Max Weber, to assist in eliminating the monarchy, and in promoting his democratic ideology, proposed his own version of censorship, which was „a creation of criminal code against publication of royal speeches and programs“.<sup>302</sup>

China’s censorship apparatus as well as the way censorship is carried out, remains lacking transparency because there are few rules and regulations legitimizing censorship. The CPD, which is believed to be the highest level of the censoring apparatus, is one of the few, if not the only, CCP organs that has no official website or even public disclosure of its address. It assigns senior managerial officials of media outlets at all levels and issues guidelines and scrutinizes media products without disclosing any of its censorship orders.<sup>303</sup> Censorship, of course, is not included in its ostensible official duties.

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Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Michael Steinberg, *Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984). 160

<sup>300</sup> Ibid. 157

<sup>301</sup> Zygmunt Hübner and Jadwiga Kosicka, *Theater & Politics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988). 27

<sup>302</sup> Mommsen and Steinberg, *Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920*. 161

<sup>303</sup> Mark Kesselman, William A. Joseph, and Joel Krieger, *Introduction to Politics of the Developing World* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2009). 91

Anne-Marie Brady believes that the CPD mainly cares about macro-level administration and overall social trends.<sup>304</sup> Joseph Y. S. Cheng, however, maintains that the CPD exercises influence over a much broader scope of the media from researching and drafting laws related to the media, to producing guidelines and policies, to checking over fifty mainstream official newspapers and journals in details.<sup>305</sup> The control of information by the Party-state is realized by the combination of self-censorship and top-down surveillance.<sup>306</sup> The censorship orders from the CPD largely deal with what the media should do or refrain from doing.<sup>307</sup> Apart from following these orders, the media apply self-censorship according their own interpretation of the general guidelines from the CPD. How self-censorship works, however, varies vastly among different media and remains undisclosed without exception. The list of censorship stories in Post-Mao China goes on, ranging from preventive filtering and prohibition to coercive clampdown.

Most China-based major websites, for example, practice filtering of „sensitive words“ [*mingan cihui*] to prevent messages containing those words from being posted on the BBS, blogs, micro-blogs and other public interfaces. Users of these words will be requested to take out the sensitive words or have part of the message automatically altered or replaced by a reminder phrase „filtered as sensitive words“. Considering the possibility that the CCP and its leaders might be mocked or humiliated in the cyber world, some websites include the names of the Chinese leaders, „*zhengfu*“ [the government] and „*gongchandang*“ [the CCP] in their filtering grid. An advertisement recruiting doctoral students of the Beijing Normal University was posted or pasted in March 2009 at <http://kaoyan.studyzez.com/news/18185.htm>. The advertisement included a perfunctory clause related to moral standards, requiring the applicants to

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<sup>304</sup> Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*. 93

<sup>305</sup> Huailin Chen and Joseph M. Chan, "Bird-Caged Press Freedom in China," in *China in the Post-Deng Era*, ed. Yushuo Zheng (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1998). 655

<sup>306</sup> Kevin Latham, *Pop Culture China!: Media, Arts, and Lifestyle* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, Inc., 2007). 37

Also see Latham, *Pop Culture China!: Media, Arts, and Lifestyle*. 37

<sup>307</sup> Tang, *Public Opinion and Political Change in China*. 80

„unswervingly stand up for the leadership of the „filtered sensitive words““.<sup>308</sup> Clearly, yet amusing, it should have read „the Chinese Communist Party“ instead of the phrase „filtered sensitive words“ to which the candidates are required to submit themselves wholeheartedly! Thanks to the automatic filtering mechanism, probably with the help of some software, the moral requirement clause in the advertisement turned out to be so unusual that it immediately became as well known as the Beijing Normal University itself. It is not clear whether the filtering had been done by the University before the message was cut and pasted to other websites, or in the posting or pasting process by the studyez.com, a small website that otherwise might remain unnoticed.<sup>309</sup> Nevertheless, the story and its effect still linger in public commentary. Given that different websites filter various vocabularies, no portals based in China, which practice filtering sensitive words, have explicitly disclosed their filtering criteria or providing any related explanations in their management policies.

### 3.3 Censorship of Censorship in Contemporary China

Censorship of censorship means anything that leads to knowledge, discussion, exemplification and explication of censorship is censored or denied. It is an institutionalized or individual system that censors open production, discussion and documentation of censorship rules and practice as result of an awareness of the derogative connotations of the term *censorship* being against the well received concepts of freedom and democracy. Censorship rules are kept unwritten, secret or so generalized that it is difficult to associate certain censorship practices with any

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<sup>308</sup> Hujiang English, "Beijing Shifan Daxue 2009 Nian Boshisheng Zhaosheng Jianzhang [2009 Doctoral Students Recruitment Advertisement of Beijing Normal University]," <http://www.hjenglish.com/kaobo/p343000/>.

<sup>309</sup> The content of the web page that the ad was posted or pasted on the studyez.com has been replaced by some irrelevant English learning material at the time of writing this chapter in April 2012. The article that gave first comment on this issue on the website *xinyusi* [the new threads] on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2008 has also been removed from the original web page <http://xys4.dxiang.com/xys/ebooks/others/science/dajia11/beishida.txt>. This advertisement is retrievable up to June 2012 from [hjenglish.com](http://www.hjenglish.com), a Shanghai-based commercial website that is specialized in education of English language.

written provisions. Censors rely on oral messages and usually refrain from producing written justifications for censoring decisions or even signing official statements of approval or rejection.<sup>310</sup> Censorship authority is institutionalized in the ruling power instead of by the rule of law. The harsher the censorship reality, the more intangible the censorship rules may turn out to be as censorship of censorship permits the censors to operate under assumed names.<sup>311</sup> Where censorship is censored, information control is practiced without open and explicit rules but at the discretion of the censoring authority or the management of an outlet.

The boundary between transparency and the tolerance of censorship is deliberately left blurred so that the censors, who can simultaneously be promoting transparency rhetoric, can tighten controls according to the needs of the moment. More importantly, it becomes increasingly difficult to justify censorship when the voices of the vast poor and victimized are stifled in the waves of capitalist economic development led by the Party which keeps calling itself representative of the fundamental interests of the people. These justification difficulties have resulted in prevention of public awareness of censorship, hence censorship of censorship.

In general, censorship of censorship rejects inquiries, commentaries and criticism that lead to any critical discussion of the censorship apparatus, policies, practice and their implications for the administration and management of journalism. While promoting transparency rhetoric in public, government agencies and officials blatantly rebuke any claims of a lack of transparency and press freedom. Media outlets, on the other hand, tend to seek flexibility in their reportage as much as possible and, to a point, even exhibit some degree of dissatisfaction with government information control while refraining from discussing or acknowledging self-censorship in their own management.

In practice, censorship of censorship involves various strategies to downplay the negative connotations of censorship. It takes various forms to deny the existence of censorship reality, namely positive self-presentation, countering accusations, toning

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<sup>310</sup> Robert Justin Goldstein, *Censorship of Political Caricature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1989). 14

<sup>311</sup> Sue Curry Jansen, *Censorship: The Knot That Binds Power and Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). 203



down, moral blackmail and denial of legal construction.<sup>312</sup> These strategies share a common purpose: to gloss over the censorship reality and sustain the censorship apparatus. The dilemma, however, is that these strategies do not comply with the official transparency rhetoric, nor do they help building the Party's image. Instead, censorship of censorship epitomizes the Party-state's difficulties in justifying its censorship apparatus because this apparatus has nothing to do with communist political values but aims to defend the rule of the Party-state as a mere mechanism of power.

### 3.3.1 Positive Self-presentation

The Party-state's positive self-presentation involves the apparent promotion of official transparency rhetoric and denial of any censorship reality. Commenting on the regulation of the Internet services in China, Cai Wu, Director of the State Council Information Office, maintained that Chinese netizens enjoy the greatest freedom of information and expression in the world.<sup>313</sup> Liu Jianchao, the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, denied at a press conference in October 2008, the existence of any harassment against free speech or of „internal rules“ formulated by local governments restricting foreign journalists from carrying out journalistic activities in China.<sup>314</sup> Zhang Fuhai, Director of the Department of International Exchanges and Cooperation of the GAPP, explicitly denied the existence of any censorship system in China at a press conference at the book fair

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<sup>312</sup> In 1992, Van Dijk deconstructed the connections between the press and racism by examining several discursive strategies that the press usually employ to defend their racism. These strategies include positive self-presentation, denial and counter-attack, moral blackmail, subtle denials, mitigation, defence and offence. Critical discourse analysis was adopted as Van Dijk's research methodology. However, Van Dijk did not define these strategies in his 1992 article, but used them as examples for his discourse analysis.

Teun A. Van Dijk, "Discourse and the Denial of Racism," *Discourse and Society* 3, no. 1 (1992).

<sup>313</sup> Hongwei Fan, "Zhongguo Dui Hulianwang Guanli Yongde Shi Guoji Tongxing Zuofa [China Regulates the Internet According to International Practice]," *Beijing Youth Daily*, 7th November 2006.

<sup>314</sup> Zeyuan Yu, "Zhongguo Banbu Xin Tiaoli, Waiguo Jizhe Caifang Bubi Guanfang Peitong [China Issued New Regulation, Foreign Journalists No Longer Need to Be Officially Escorted When Collecting News]," <http://www.zaobao.com/special/china/cnpol/pages1/cnpol081019.shtml>.

in Frankfurt in October 2009.<sup>315</sup> To echo such denials, the editorial of the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2010 edition of the *People's Daily* declared that it highly values the Chinese public's freedom of speech and publication, and defines the accusation of lack of freedom and transparency to be part of the Western anti-CCP and anti-China conspiracy.<sup>316</sup> Meanwhile, adoption of e-government and the promulgation of the *Decree of Government Information Openness* are well celebrated as demonstration of the Party-state's move towards transparency.<sup>317</sup>

The denial of existence of censorship rules and the self-promotion of a censorship-free image reflect the fact that censorship reality itself is censored and kept from public knowledge. Walter Lippmann argued in 1922 that propaganda work was impossible without some form of censorship, but China has never established an identifiable central censorship office, unlike the former Soviet Union and other authoritarian regimes.<sup>318</sup> In order to be able to ensure that censorship is out of public awareness, all censorship policies, rules and orders are kept undisclosed. Censorship orders are given by informal pressure such as oral orders by phone.<sup>319</sup> Recording such phone calls is of course strictly prohibited.<sup>320</sup>

Media outlets, on the other hand, are willing to present themselves positively as popular sources of information and, therefore, worthy destinations of marketing investment. Huaxi Metropolis Daily, for example, appears in the market as a fully commercialized and reader-oriented outlet with a corporate slogan of „*zeren Huaxi* [Responsible Huaxi]“. The secret to HMD's market success without breaking any

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<sup>315</sup> Miaozi, "Zhongguo Guanyuan Foureun Cunzai Xinwen Shencha Zhidu [ Chinese Officials Denied Existence of Censorship System]," <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4801458,00.html>.

<sup>316</sup> Wen Ren, "Woguo Gongmin Xiangyou Yanlun Chuban Ziyou Shi Buzheng De Shishi [It Is an Undisputable Fact That Our Citizens Enjoy Rights to Free Speech and Publication]," *People's Daily*, 25th October 2010.

<sup>317</sup> The e-government framework was initiated by the Central Government in 2001. National E-government Standardization Working Group was created in January 2002 to supervise and steer the construction of the framework. Since 2003, local governments have played a major role in building the e-government system.

Fengchun Yang, "The Style and Contents of China Government in Steering E-Government Construction and Implementation," in *Global E-Governance: Advancing E-Governance through Innovation and Leadership*, ed. J. Tubtimhin and R. Pipe (Amsterdam: IOS Press BV, 2009). 91

The *Decree of Government Information Openness* came into force in May 2008.

<sup>318</sup> Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*. 93

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.* 94

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.* 94

editorial policies and rules are kept distant from public knowledge? What internal censorship does it have to apply in order to transform negative stories into positive ones? These are questions to which answers are avoided in positive self-presentation.

Positive self-presentation can also be achieved by misleading public opinions in interpreting controversial media events. *Southern Weekend* is an outlet that enjoys global reputation for its investigative journalism and liberal editorial style.<sup>323</sup> It attracted attention both at home and abroad for its 19<sup>th</sup> November 2009 edition that carried two blank spaces on the front page (A1) and page A2 where the weekly published its exclusive interview with the U.S. President Barack Obama.<sup>324</sup> These

editorial policies and rules are kept distant from public knowledge? What internal censorship does it have to apply in order to transform negative stories into positive ones? These are questions to which answers are avoided in positive self-presentation.

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<sup>321</sup> Weimin Liu, "Dushilei Baozhi Zhuxuanlv Baodao De Chuangxin [Innovation of Mainstream Reportage]," *China Journalists*, no. 10 (2003). 28  
Translation by author.

<sup>322</sup> ———, "Zuo Jianshexing De Jiandu Yunlun - Huaxi Dushibao Yulun Jiandu De Shijian Yu Duice [Be Constructive in Media Surveillance: Huaxi City Newspaper's Strategies and Practice in Media Surveillance]," [http://www.360doc.com/content/09/0511/15/111008\\_3458108.shtml](http://www.360doc.com/content/09/0511/15/111008_3458108.shtml).  
Translation by author.

<sup>323</sup> Tong, *Investigative Journalism in China*. 62; Garry Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004). 184

<sup>324</sup> Please refer to Appendix 7 for the Pages A1 and A2 that carry blank spaces.

blank spaces were interpreted by some observers to be a combative response to official censorship.<sup>325</sup> Xiang Xi, the interviewer, was demoted from *de facto* number one leader to number two.<sup>326</sup> However, the demotion of Xiang Xi was denied by the news outlet to have anything to do with the blank spaces, but was „normal personnel adjustment“.<sup>327</sup> In fact, there is no evidence that the interview with Obama was censored because the Chinese version published on the weekly was identical to the English version from White House sources.<sup>328</sup> Therefore, some argue that these blank spaces have nothing to do with protest against censorship, but are the result of self-promotion [*ziwo chaozuo*] and presentation of fake contradictory opinions.<sup>329</sup>

Indeed, there is no evidence that the propaganda authority had been involved in formulating the questions to be used in the Obama interview, and there is no evidence that Xiang Xi was using blank pages to protest censorship. Further, there is no official document to support the allegation that the demotion of Xiang Xi was the consequence of his editorial decision on the particular edition.

Silence seems to be agreed upon by all parties. The Party's publicity authority does not want to place its censoring power in broad daylight and subject it to public scrutiny. It appears that the more the authority is accused of being responsible for the blank pages, the more innocent it turns out to be. On the other hand, the *Southern Weekend* seems to have gained a rebellious image against censorship,

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<sup>325</sup> Jason Dean, "Obama's China Interview Mystery," *The Wall Street Journal*, <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2009/11/19/obama%E2%80%99s-china-interview-mystery/>.

Sharon LaFraniere and Jonathan Ansfield, "In Obama Interview, Signs of China's Heavy Hand" *New York Times*, 19th November 2009; Dean, "Obama's China Interview Mystery."

<sup>326</sup> Chris Buckley, "China Demotes Editor after Obama Interview: Sources," <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/12/13/us-obama-china-censorship-idUSTRE5BC0BM20091213>.

<sup>327</sup> Riyao Feng, ""Nanfang Zhoumo" Fouren Xiangxi Diaozi Yu Chuli Aobama Zhuanfang Youguan [the *Southern Weekend* Denied Connection between Xiangxi's Demotion with the Treatment of the Interview with Obama]," [http://www.rfa.org/cantonese/news/china\\_media\\_obama-12092009122326.html/story\\_main?encoding=traditional](http://www.rfa.org/cantonese/news/china_media_obama-12092009122326.html/story_main?encoding=traditional).

<sup>328</sup> The English version of the interview is available from the website of the White House at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/interview-president-obama-xiang-xi-southern-weekly>.

<sup>329</sup> Wennuanyangguang, ""Kaitianchuang" Shijian Xianwei Renzhi De Benzhi - Zhizao Jia Fanduipai [Hardly Known Nature of The "Skylight Window" Drama: To Create False Opposition]."

mimicking the rebellious press which left blank pages to utter protests against the GMD censorship apparatus before 1949.<sup>330</sup> The news outlet has maintained this particular image without having to openly clash with the authority. Consequently, Xiang Xi, by default, has also had his name attached to the fight against censorship. Xiang, an official within the CCP officialdom, together with probably many others in his position who pose to be pushing the boundary of censorship, has had nothing to lose but much to gain as long as he refrains from explicitly declaring disobedience.

There seems to be an unspoken understanding that silence must be kept about the blank pages. The propaganda authority, the press and the demoted official have refrained from making any comments thereafter. What had happened behind the scenes of the blank pages is anyone's guess. Although silence may confuse and mislead the public and give rise to ill-informed speculation and debate, it creates room, at least in part, for interpretation in favour of each party.

### 3.3.2 Countering Accusations

Refuting against accusations is a strategy of offense-as-defence when the accused seeks self-justification and self-defence by attacking the credibility of the accusers. Chinese government officials and media outlets tend to defend the image created through positive self-presentation by counter-attacking against those who hold critical views of them. Bias and lack of objectivity in Western reports of China, are often used in both academic and official discourses to reject criticism from outside. Domestic protest, on the other hand, can easily be put down by simple but harsh clampdowns.

Listing the flaws in the reports by the Western media, such as using wrong pictures and biased comments on the Tibetan riot in March 2008, Wang Lili maintains that the Western concept of press freedom does not exist in reality in the West while the

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<sup>330</sup> Please refer to Chapter Six on how the press, including communist outlets, openly uttered against the GMD censorship before 1949.

Chinese public actually enjoys it in considerable measure.<sup>331</sup> Wang posits her argument on the observation that the news industry in the West is controlled by either the government or the capital, or both; therefore, press freedom is highly restricted. The problems in the Western media that Wang Lili refers to are largely true. However, she never explains how the Western media's wrong can be used to defend the censorship reality in China. Indeed, the pitfalls of Western journalism have demonstrated the fallacies in the Western media system and free market myth. But, these pitfalls are no justification for offense-as-defence purposes.

Similarly, with the stumble of Murdoch's News Corporation over its 2011-12 News of the World phone-hacking and bribery scandal, Chinese official outlets such as Xinhua and *People's Daily* whipped „the hypocrisy and empty sloganeering of the Western media and political elite“ who „hopped on their favourite soapbox to lecture China on the virtues of press freedom and human rights“.<sup>332</sup> In response to the publicly articulated concern about China's restrictions on press freedom by Barack Obama on the World Press Freedom Day on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2010, Jiang Yu, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, commented that the United States should „respect the truth, hold correct view on China's press freedom status, and stop finding groundless fault with China“.<sup>333</sup>

Such a countering strategy seems to be set in the logic of defensive counterattack. Firstly, the purpose of counterattack seems to be projecting a positive image. Media boom and unprecedented information accessibility have added considerable credit to the positive image that the Party-state and the media have built up.<sup>334</sup> Therefore, critical views that may lead to damage of such an image are regarded as part of the Western anti-CCP and anti-China conspiracy, Western hypocrisy and bias.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Lili Wang, "Xifang Yu Zhongguo De Xinwen Ziyou [Press Freedom in the West and China]," *Xinwen Yu Xiezu*, no. 6 (2008).

<sup>332</sup> Kent Ewing, "Murdoch's Misery, China's Delight," <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/MG26Ad01.html>.

<sup>333</sup> Zhiming Luo, "Zhongfang Duncu Meifang Zhengque Kandai Zhongguo Xinwen Ziyou Zhuangkuang [China Urges the United States to Hold Correct View on China's Press Freedom Status]," [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2010-05/07/c\\_1279935.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2010-05/07/c_1279935.htm).

<sup>334</sup> See *The CCP Central Committee Decision on Propaganda Policies of the Newspapers, Publications, News and Radio Broadcasting* issued on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1981.

<sup>335</sup> Ren, "Woguo Gongmin Xiangyou Yanlun Chuban Ziyou Shi Buzheng De Shishi [It Is an Undisputable Fact That Our Citizens Enjoy Rights to Free Speech and Publication]."

Secondly, it seems that the Chinese government and academia seldom judge press freedom in the West unless China is criticized. This is intended to find fault in the accuser so that the accuser can be denied credibility. Therefore, their accusation against censorship in China is „groundless fault-finding“ and lacks credibility. To challenge critical reports of China by Western media, some commentators, such as Xie Rongzhen, would point to how the US government manipulated the media to mislead the public in the report of the 2003 Iraqi War, implying that the Western media is running out of credibility and therefore, not qualified to criticize China.<sup>336</sup> Wang Lili, in the same vein, maintains that in the West the people have no press freedom as they think, and it is in Western discourse that the press freedom of the Chinese media and people is excluded.<sup>337</sup> The take-home message is that Chinese media administration becomes the victim of prejudiced accusations, and therefore, counterattack to such accusations is no more than self-defence.

However, the countering strategy aims at more than defensive strategy. This strategy distracts attention from the cause of censorship to the conflict between China and the West as two *de facto* hostile camps. It tries to draw on criticism of the Western media to justify or at least provide some leverage for the censorship reality in China. Still, such a strategy does not hold water because it avoids the fact that what happens in the West, manipulation of the media by politics and commercial interests at its simplest, happens in China in a similar fashion.

The problems that plague Western media can be attributed to the marriage between politics and the media.<sup>338</sup> This relationship is analysed in-depth, by Mobo Gao for example, in the case study of the promotion of patriotism in support of the Iraqi War by the private media in the United States despite the public opinion being apparently opposed.<sup>339</sup> But Mobo Gao’s analysis is drastically different from Xie Rongzhen’s argument. The latter counters accusations by setting up the Western

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Wang, "Xifang Yu Zhongguo De Xinwen Ziyou [Press Freedom in the West and China]."

<sup>336</sup> Rongzheng Xie, "Huigu 2008, Zhongguo Meiti Ling Meiguo Meiti Guamu Xiangkan [Looking Back on 2008, Chinese Media Amazed American Media]," <http://world.people.com.cn/GB/57507/8600726.html>.

<sup>337</sup> Wang, "Xifang Yu Zhongguo De Xinwen Ziyou [Press Freedom in the West and China]."

<sup>338</sup> Eric Louw, *The Media and Political Process*, 2 ed. (London: SAGE Publication Ltd., 2010; reprint, 2005). 1

<sup>339</sup> Gao, "Media Ownership: One Case Studies and Two Perspectives."

media as a „straw man“ for his attack. Gao, however, sets out to explain why private ownership and free market do not necessarily lead to press freedom in the West and discusses how press freedom can be influenced by politics and commercial interests.

This influence, or the collusive relationship between politics, commercial interests and the media, is at least against media ethics because it flagrantly defies the principle of editorial independence and media’s public nature. Similarly, the Murdoch’s ties to the British government can be defined as a scandal and destructive menace to healthy journalism according to both journalistic values and common sense. Therefore, their relationship is condemned in both the West and China.

Not only does the counterattack strategy avoid addressing the collusion between politics and the media in China, it also tries to justify and defend a relationship in which the Party-state and the media management have largely reached a consensus on political control of editorial content and pursuit of profit. Since the marriage between politics, commercial interests and the media is unjustifiable in the West, how can the intimacy between the Party-state and the media in China find its own justification and defence in the same logic?

### 3.3.3 Toning down

Establishment of a system of content review to monitor the press and publication industry using the term „*shendu* [review reading]“ instead of „*shencha* [censorship]“ is a typical form of toning down which features using discursive reasons to justify an act, minimize its negative effect, redistribute responsibilities or redirect the blame.<sup>340</sup> It is another discursive strategy of censorship because it aims to mitigate, upon full awareness of, the derogative connotations of censorship.

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<sup>340</sup> There are various English translations to the term ‘shendu’.  
The term ‘control reading’ is used in:  
Fischer, "Censorship and Marketization: Institutional Change within China's Media." 191  
Another term is ‘reading inspection’ in:



The definition of *shendu*, as vaguely stated in *the Provisional Measure on Review Reading of Newspapers and Periodicals*,<sup>341</sup> does not clearly explain its purpose and how it works. Its purpose, according to the official document, is to „strengthen the administration of, maintain the order of, and improve the quality of the press and publication“ by reviewing and evaluating newspapers and periodicals on a regular basis after their publication. In practice, under the leadership and guidance of the GAPP, publication administration authorities at provincial level and the central government agencies will urge the newspapers and publications within their jurisdiction to adhere to laws, regulations, and most importantly, to direct public opinion *correctly*. Reports are to be made on a regular basis to the GAPP, which will study and select major issues found therein to report to the State Council and the CCP Central Committee. The GAPP will present annual awards to the outstanding reviewing units, reviewers and reports.

Wang Shoucheng, awarded the honour of „Excellent Reviewer“ in 2009, further elaborated the purpose of the *shendu* system in his 2008 book.<sup>342</sup> He maintains that the danger of lack of supervision by public opinion, to quote Deng Xiaoping’s warning that „It is most dangerous to a society where no voice is heard“ and „It is most dangerous to a party when there is no different voice“, is no longer the case. He claims that the news media today tends to be „freer than appropriate“ and consequently more and more engaged in various kinds of scandal and misconduct. He also maintains that the power of the news media should be checked because „unchecked power, even that of the news media, is dangerous“.<sup>343</sup> The more tolerant the environment, the more the news media needs to be contained. Therefore, the fundamental purpose of *shendu* system is to „supervise and check the news media

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Edward X. Gu, "Social Capital and Institutional Change," in *Chinese Intellectuals between State and Market*, ed. Edward X. Gu and Merle Goldman (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004). 37

Also, 'media monitoring' is used in:

Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 21

MAmanda C. Quick, *World Press Encyclopedia: A* (Florence: Gale, 2003). 190

The literal version of 'review reading' is adopted in this chapter in order to reflect its downtoning effect.

<sup>341</sup> *The Provisional Measure on Review Reading of Newspapers and Periodicals* [*baozhi qikan shendu zanxing banfa*] was issued by the GAPP on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2009.

<sup>342</sup> Wang, *Baokan Shendu* [*Review Reading of Newspapers and Publications*].

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.* 33

to ensure the healthy development of the news and publication industry“.<sup>344</sup> According to Wang, unlike the *shencha* system of the nationalist GMD regime before 1949, the current *shendu* system is „the servant of the public interests and a friend of the press“.<sup>345</sup>

The toning down to minimize antipathy and objections is clear. In this way, public opinions are guided to the belief that the news media is dangerous and should not be set free. According to Wang Shoucheng, bribery, paid, fabricated and misleading news are certain results of media freedom; it is not the government that wants to limit press freedom, the evil nature of the media and their sins has invited it. He denies the coercive and clampdown nature of censorship, portraying *shendu*, „as a friend“ that is helping the media to avoid professional errors and misconduct and is guiding them in the right direction. The premise of this friendship is that the media must meet the quality standards ambiguously prescribed in the 2009 *Provisional Measure*. Failure to do so, according to clause 11 (3) of *Method of Annual Review of Newspapers and Periodicals*, will lead to suspension or termination of publication. Therefore, there is a price to be paid for having a „freer media environment“. The freer the environment, the more limit is imposed. According to this *shendu* system, the news media are unable to develop healthily without having its power curbed by the GAPP and other administrative authorities. Hence, limit of editorial activities is rhetorically legitimized to be necessary and inevitable.

However, the *shendu* system functions as an extension of elite politics and the power mechanism as the weak and poor do not have a place in such a review system. The reviewers are carefully selected experts who construct, or at least echo the Party line and official discourses. Such a system does not support effective supervision by public opinion and does not aim to hold the government and elite politics accountable. The accused „evil“ of press freedom is no more than a straw man borrowed from the West to justify the Party-state control over the media. As Wang Hui points out, unprofessionalism not only incurs but also invites

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid. 250

<sup>345</sup> Ibid. 250

interference by the state power and constitutes the social base for state control.<sup>346</sup> Therefore, not only does the *shendu* system reinforce control, it also serves to justify such control.

### 3.3.4 Moral Blackmail

Control, however, is not limited to the application of *shendu*, which mainly governs the post-publication inspection. Real time scrutiny is also a common practice. Moral blackmail, usually by taking advantage of others' moral weakness to justify one's immoral actions,<sup>347</sup> is more often than not adopted for justifying this type of scrutiny. This strategy transforms negative connotations of censorship such as control and loss of freedom into morally acceptable reasons such as protection and precautions. It is considered to be a discursive strategy of censorship because it creates a moral obligation so that objection to censorship is suppressed.

Moral blackmail here means to integrate a policy or act with a publicly recognized moral consensus or common sense when the intended consequences are not necessarily in conformity with the actual obligation. For example, to increase tax to cover government deficit for extravagant spending may incur objections and criticism whereas to do so in the name of improving social welfare, such as building a modern public hospital, generates a morally binding effect because it offers a lofty reason for a bulging government budget. Objections to increasing tax rates will be regarded as against the interest of public welfare. Therefore, the ransom we are obliged to pay is to support or follow the government decision in order to avoid being morally condemned. In the case of censorship, it is not desirable to restrict or interfere in accessibility to information. However, prevention of pornography and violence, particularly in order to protect minors, suits social values in most cultures and therefore constitutes a morally binding effect when

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<sup>346</sup> Wang and Xu, "'Qu Zhengzhi Hua De Zhengzhi" Yu Dazhong Chuanmei De Gonggongxing ["Depoliticized Politics and the Public Nature of Public Media]." 248

<sup>347</sup> Terrance C. McConnell, "Moral Blackmail," *Ethics* 91, no. July (1981).

policies and initiatives for the purpose of much more extensive and intensive information control are made in the name of protecting the children.

Motherhood is perhaps one of the warmest terms, and it can be employed in upholding the censorship legitimacy. The Mothers Reviewing Group [*mama pingshen tuan*] is a group of volunteer mothers recruited by the Beijing Hotline for Reporting Illegal and Unhealthy Internet Information, supposedly targeting pornographic, violent and other information considered inappropriate. With the help of these mothers using parental perspectives, the Hotline was able to report to the authority ten websites that had disseminated „profane“ information within a single day on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2010 alone.<sup>348</sup> China Mobile Shanxi Branch, following the Beijing Hotline, took a further step. According to the report on Shanxi Television on 25<sup>th</sup> December 2011, a group of mother technicians was organized to monitor websites that provide unhealthy information. Besides filtering 30,983 pieces of information defined as „inappropriate“ in 2011, the group remotely tested one hundred and ten terminals online and disabled the menus on some of the terminals that allegedly had access to inappropriate information.<sup>349</sup>

However, the moral blackmail that may lead to justification for unchecked censorship is worrying. What makes the mothers reviewers in Shanxi powerful is their capabilities and authority to scan, control and disable terminals online without having to disclose to the public the legal ground of their intrusion in the name of parental care. Although it is obvious that what is on the censorship list is not always confined to such, justification usually, if not always, rests on prevention of pornography and violence. The neutralization effect is prominent through parental outrage toward harms that may be done to the children. Thereby, censorship is seeking justification as a protective measure rather than a blocking apparatus.

The failed compulsory promotion of the Green Dam Youth Escort software has a similar justification problem. The content-control software, according to a directive

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<sup>348</sup> Li An, "Mama Pingshentuan Zhaomu Chengyuan, Zhuanmen Jiankong Wangluo Buliang Xinxi [Recruiting the Mothers Reviewers Group, Specifically Targeting Unhealthy Online Information]," <http://report.qianlong.com/33378/2009/12/26/118@5388518.htm>.

<sup>349</sup> The text of the TV report is also available from [http://www.sx.xinhuanet.com/jryw/2011-12/25/content\\_24404736.htm](http://www.sx.xinhuanet.com/jryw/2011-12/25/content_24404736.htm).

from China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) that came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009, was meant to keep the minors safe from pornography and violence online and, therefore, to be pre-installed in all new personal computers that were sold in the Mainland.<sup>350</sup> The purpose of the software, according to the MIIT directive nevertheless, was to „respond to the request of the massive teachers, students and parents“<sup>351</sup> and to „build a healthy and harmonious online environment“.<sup>352</sup> As many would understand, this means more than just to prevent pornography and violence, and includes politically sensitive content. Consequently, overwhelming objections from computer manufacturers, and more importantly, public concerns about privacy, information accessibility and data safety, forced the MIIT to change the pre-installation plan from compulsory requirement into one of voluntary choice.<sup>353</sup> Wary of the software's ability to block websites at the discretion of the authorities, record and report user's online activities, and the fact that sensitive content and websites such as youtube.com and facebook.com have been blocked, the users have every reason to object to installation and application of any software of this kind promoted by the government. Soon after the withdrawal of the government financial and policy support, the Green Dam project went bankrupt and was terminated in July 2010.<sup>354</sup> Its poor market performance has revealed the moral blackmail embedded in the officially alleged demand from the masses.

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<sup>350</sup> Michael Bristow, "China Defends Screening Software " <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8091044.stm>.

<sup>351</sup> Ying Bao, "Xin Diannao Bixu Zhuang Shangwang Guolv Ruanjian [News Computers Must Be Installed with Online Information Filtering Software]," *Xin Jin Bao*, 10th June 2009.

<sup>352</sup> Bristow, "China Defends Screening Software " .

<sup>353</sup> An online survey shows that 80% of the netizens hold suspicious attitude towards the software and worry about their privacy.

Shanyun Liu and Bin Li, "Diaocha Cheng Bacheng Wangyou Renwei Diannao Zhuang Guolv Ruanjian Qinfa Yinsi [Eighty Percents Netizens Believe Installation of Filtering Software Violate Their Privacy]," 10th June 2009.

Loretta Chao, "China Squeezes Pc Makers," <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124440211524192081.html>.

<sup>354</sup> Bin Li and Yinghui Niu, "Lvba Ruanjian Xiangmuzu Quefa Jingfei Zao Qiansan [the Green Dam Project Dismissed Due to Shortage of Fund]," *Jinghua Shibao*, 13th July 2010.

### 3.3.5 Denying Legal Construction

The censorship reality develops in the absence of transparent and relevant rules. Despite numerous government rules and regulations governing various sectors of the media industry, there has been no specific law for journalism to date. As indicated in a statement elaborating the achievements of China's legislature disclosed by the portal website of Central Government of China,<sup>355</sup> 231 draft laws and 1,133 executive rules have been proposed to the National People's Congress over the past thirty years.<sup>356</sup> However, the draft *Law of Journalism* [*xinwen fa*] is among the few that have been shelved since it was first proposed in the mid-1980s. Zhan Jiang believes that the suspension is all for the prior consideration of social stability because the law makers have been deterred by a superstitious analogy that the former Soviet Union fell apart right after the enforcement of its law of journalism.<sup>357</sup> On the other hand, the four freedoms having existed for 23 years in Mao's era and guaranteed by the 1978 Constitution, namely „to speak out freely, air their views fully, hold great debates and write *dazibao* [big character posters]“, were removed from the amended Constitution in the same year of the restoration of the CPD authority in 1980.<sup>358</sup> Denial of the Maoist freedoms in the post-Mao legal framework, according to Gerry Groot, is rooted in the Party-state's fear of potential threats from these rights, *dazibao* in particular.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Fei Chen, "Liushi Nian Shehui Zhuyi Fazhi Jianshe Chengjiu Xianzhu [Legal Construction Has Made Prominent Achievements over 60 Years]," <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/10136002.html>.

<sup>356</sup> NPC, the National People's Congress, is China's legislative branch of the state power. ———, "Xin Zhongguo Liushi Nian Shehui Zhuyi Fazhi Jianshe Budan Jiaqiang Chengjiu Xianzhu [Prominent Achievements Have Been Made in the Construction of Law over the Sixty Years of New China]," [http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2009-09/28/content\\_1428931.htm](http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2009-09/28/content_1428931.htm).

<sup>357</sup> Zhan Jiang is a professor of journalism from China Youth University of Political Sciences. CYUPS, located in Beijing, was established in 1985 under the direct leadership of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, designed to produce future leaders of the Communist Party of China. Viewed on Jan 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 from <http://media.people.com.cn/GB/22114/42328/145310/8792516.html>

<sup>358</sup> Tang Tsou, *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms: A Historical Perspective* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986). 322

<sup>359</sup> Gerry Groot, *Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Part, United Front Work, Corporatism, and Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2004). 113

Putting journalism and censorship in the legal frame work does not seem to be a welcome idea among the Party leadership. Chen Yun, former chief editor of the fortnightly *Jingji Xiaoxi* [*Economic Information*] in 1945 in Yan'an and later member of the top Chinese leadership in the 1980s and early 1990s, delivered his concerns about the press law not long after the CCP took over state power:

The GMD regime forged a *Press Law* during their reign. We communists took advantage of its loopholes by carefully studying its stipulation and finding its flaws. Now that we are in power, I think we'd better not have any press law in case others may take advantage of our loopholes. In the absence of the law, we can take the initiative and control the way we want.<sup>360</sup>

To avoid the bridle of the legal framework, authority over the media was assigned to the Party framework. As a result, the power was shifted from the government to the Party although the administrative work is carried out through government institutions. The Central Publicity Department was restored in October 1977 after being dismissed in the Cultural Revolution. According to the *Report on Establishing the Central Publicity Department* approved by the CCPCC on 31<sup>st</sup> October, the CPD is responsible for making the guidelines, strategies and policies of the propaganda, cultural and publication work.<sup>361</sup> In the early 1980s though, the Ministry of Education had most factual authority over ideological work. This status quo, however, was changed by the *Notice on Matters Relating to the Joint Management of Education System Cadres by the Central Committee Propaganda Department* issued in July 1982.<sup>362</sup> The *Notice* granted the CPD the power to co-decide the positioning of the cadres of the Ministry of Education above the bureau (*si, ju*) level by taking charge of „investigating, understanding, transferring, appointing, removing, nurturing, training, and political screening of cadres who are under the jurisdiction of the Central Committee and work in the education

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<sup>360</sup> Peizhang Zhong, "Zhengzhi Wenming Yu Xinwen Lifa [Political Civilization and Construction of the Law of Journalism]," *Lingdao Wencui* [*Selected works of the leadership*], no. 12 (2003). Translation by author.

<sup>361</sup> Lifeng Chen, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Lingdao Tizhi De Kaocha: 1921-2006* [*Observation on the Leadership System of the Ccp: 1921-2006*] (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 2008). 347

<sup>362</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu, zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu, 'Guanyu zhongyang xuanchuanbu fenguan jiaoyu xitong ganbu youguan shixiang de tongzhi.'" (82) Zutong 27 (July 23, 1982), BD, 366-67

John P. Burns, *The Chinese Communist Party's Nomenklatura System* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1989). 33

system".<sup>363</sup> By taking over the authority over the career ladders of high ranking cadres of the media administration authorities as well as those managing the media, the CPD has more influence over ideological work than ever before. This systemic arrangement has not only ensured the Party's control over critical positions regarding administration and management of the media, it has also defined administration and management of the media as a Party business within the Party framework rather than a mere public service under the jurisdiction of legal framework.

The Party-state loathes having its controlling power subject to statutory laws. As a result, the official promises of transparency and supervision by public opinion are unable to be substantively realized within a legal framework. One such example is the pledge that Premier Wen Jiabao, on behalf of the Central Government, made in March 2010 that „The government should create conditions for the people to criticize and supervise the government, and let news media fully play their oversight role so as to put the authorities under sunlight".<sup>364</sup>

But tellingly, Wen's pledge is subject to government discretion. First, it is through government efforts instead of a legal framework that conditions in favour of the people's criticism are to be created. Administration of journalism remains a matter of Party guidelines, government regulations, decrees and documents. Therefore, the extent to which the people are able to criticize the government is limited to what the government, and more realistically, its powerful officials can tolerate. Second, Wen's pledge does not define what conditions should be made to enable the people's criticism. Third, the substance of *full playing their oversight role* is ambiguous. What does „fully" mean? How full can it be? Who can decide the boundary of such „fullness"? This ambiguity leads to no answer to questions like: To what extent can the government and the Party be checked by the media? What if the people want to fully play their supervisory role while the Party does not want to give in? These questions are also closely related to the intrinsic conflict between journalistic values and Party logic. As a result, legal construction that may lead to

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid. 34

<sup>364</sup> John Milligan-Whyte and Dai Min, "Consensus Building in China and America," <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90780/91342/6917450.html>.



substantive progress of transparency through supervision by public opinion tends to be delayed and, more often than not, replaced by government pledges which usually do not carry any substance.

The lack of substance in Party-state pledges explains why the 2004 tentative efforts to create „legal conditions“ to grant journalism more rights in Shenzhen were frustrated. The draft of „The Regulation of Shenzhen Municipality on Preventing the Crime by Taking Advantage of Duty“, a bill to join social political efforts including that of the news media against abuse of state power, proposed „journalists“ rights to know and rights to reasonable no-fault suspicion“.<sup>365</sup> The proposal was made in the awareness of the flexible and fragile nature of investigative journalism against crimes that may involve powerful government officials. It is believed to have borrowed the Western „actual malice principle“ that significantly limits government officials“ ability to lay charges against journalists for reports against governments and officials.<sup>366</sup> The proposal excited discussion in the media and academia, most of which valued the initiative as a breakthrough. Yin Yungong, Director of the Institute of Journalism of China Academy of Social Sciences, quoted the proposal in an interview and maintained that government should work under public supervision.<sup>367</sup> Some from the judicial system also supported the draft. An article released on the website of the Yunnan Provincial People’s Court states that such rights are crucial to the news media in helping prevent crime committed by public servants.<sup>368</sup>

However, the stipulation of „rights to know and to no-fault suspicion“ was deleted in the final version of the bill before it was passed by the Guangdong People’s

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<sup>365</sup> Guodong Zhang, "Shenzhen Ni Lifa Guiding Jizhe Xiangyou Wuguocuo Heli Huaiyiquan [Shenzhen Intend to Legalize Journalists' Rights to Reasonable No-Fault Suspicion]," *Nanfang Dushibao*, 28th December 2003.

<sup>366</sup> Jin Kang, "Mohu De Heli Huaiyiquan Yibei Guanyuan Zuankongzi [Officials May Find Loopholes in the Ambiguous Stipulation of the Rights to Reasonable No-Fault Suspicion]," *Yanzhao Dushibao*, 18th July 2004.

<sup>367</sup> Taoyuan Yang, "Zhongyang Guanzhu Yulun Jiandu [the Ccp Central Committee Pay Close Attention to Media Supervision]," *Liaowang*, no. 31 (2004). 12

<sup>368</sup> Linyan Yang, "Yufang Zhiwu Fanzui Bixu Baozhang Meiti De Zhengdang Quanli [the Media's Justified Rights Must Be Ensured to Prevent Crime by Taking Advantage of Duty]," <http://www.gy.yn.gov.cn/Article/sflt/fslt/200910/15856.html>.

Congress in 2005.<sup>369</sup> The reasons for the deletion, as given by the drafting committee, included „lack of legal support of upper-level law such as the Law of Journalism“.<sup>370</sup> Such a reason is unconvincing. The rights to know and the rights to freedom of speech are enshrined by article 35 of the Constitution. These rights need to be specified in laws that substantiate enforceable provisions. Except for the overwhelmingly positive feedback in public opinion, there has been no open debate over the proposal. The real reason why the well received proposal was deleted remains unknown. Still, the frustration of the attempt to adopt the actual malice principle to enhance muckraking journalism is another demonstration of the difficulty in embracing protective rather than restrictive stipulation in the legal framework.

Without proper and specific protections, the news media find themselves under constant pressure from the coercive authority of state power. The „double action theory [*Shuangqi Lun*]“ forged by Wang Lijun, former head of Chongqing Public Security Bureau, in October 2010 is a telling example.<sup>371</sup> Wang threatened to sue any media or journalist who dared to attack the reputation of Chongqing law enforcement. He declared that

„If individual civil police officers were singled out for attack, said Wang, the officers would bring a suit against the journalist responsible in the courts, and the Public Security Bureau would sue the media organization“.<sup>372</sup>

Such a hard-line attitude has demonstrated the mentality that the media must be at the service of the Party-state and that there is no such a thing as journalism holding the Party and the government accountable. In contrast, Wang’s threat of exercising judicial power against the media is coercive because his *Shuangqi Lun* is rooted in

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<sup>369</sup> The final version of the bill is available from <http://www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/gd/laws/rosmoptcbtaod814/>.

<sup>370</sup> Guiru Li, ""Shenzhen Yufan Zhiwu Fanzui Tiaoli" Qicaoren Jieshi Weihe Shanqu "Zhiqingquan He Heli Huaiyi Quan" [Draftsman Explained Why The "Rights to Know and Rights to Reasonable Suspicion" Were Deleted]," [http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2005-04/25/content\\_1074368.htm](http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2005-04/25/content_1074368.htm).

<sup>371</sup> Wang Lijun was removed from his office of Deputy Mayor of Chongqing and placed under investigation soon after he visited the U.S. consulate in Chengdu on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2012. Viewed on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2012 from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-17539232>

<sup>372</sup> David Bandurski, "Are Chinese Media a Public Nuisance?," <http://cmp.hku.hk/2010/12/06/8762/>.

fact that the current legal framework is unable to provide legal support for effective supervision by public opinion.

The weaker the legal framework, the more discretion the Party-state has. With this discretion, the Party state is able to apply censorship without having to be held open and accountable by statutory legal framework. Although pledges to more transparency and favourable media environment are heard on various occasions, these pledges are made from a government control perspective and are denied in the construction of legal framework that may otherwise bestow some realistic legal rights upon media and its professionals. From a meta-censorship point of view, the denial of substantive legal construction will keep censorship covert and powerful in practice.

### 3.4 Changing Party, Changing Censorship

Censorship's justification problem lies in the disjuncture of the Party-state from the people, which has resulted in the collapse of the Party principle of journalism [*xinwen dangxing yuanze*] of „throat and tongue for both the Party and the people“ from within. It is on this Party principle of journalism that the Party-state has been resting its control over the media. First appearing in the CCP publication in 1929, this discourse has been reinforced in the reform era to define how journalism is to be administrated and managed.<sup>373</sup> Deng Xiaoping held that „Party newspapers and publications must propagate the Party's propositions“<sup>374</sup>. Jiang Zemin, former President of China, also maintains that „Our country's newspapers, radio and television broadcast are the throat and tongue of the Party, the government and the people“<sup>375</sup>. Wang Weiping, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Television Administration of GARFT, proclaimed that „Television is the tongue and throat of the Party and the people“, and those who do not follow this primary rule have a

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<sup>373</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 26

<sup>374</sup> Xiaoping Deng, "Muqian De Xingshi He Renwu [the Present Situation and Tasks]," in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, ed. Xiaoping Deng (Beijing: The People's Press, 1983). 236

<sup>375</sup> Guangchun Xu, "Jiang Zemin Xinwen Sixiang De Hexin Neirong [the Core Content of Jiang Zemin's Thought of Journalism]," *Xinwen Zhanxian*, no. 2 (2004). 4

„lack of IQ“ and are „unable to play the game“<sup>376</sup>. The „throat and tongue of the Party and the people“ discourse, stipulated as the number one Party Principle of journalism [*xinwen dangxing yuanze*], was reiterated by President Hu Jintao during his visit to the People’s Daily Press on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2008<sup>377</sup>. Guo Chaoren, former Director of the Xinhua News Agency, made a clear cut division between the news media being a Party instrument and being a means of social justice [*shehui gongqi*], arguing that the nature of news media as the throat and tongue of the Party and the people must never be changed by the reform<sup>378</sup>.

The semantic basis of the throat and tongue discourse implies a representation relationship between the Party and the people, and therefore legitimacy of the Party-state’s control over the media. This basis, however, is from time to time shaken by censorship’s justification problems because it is the weak and poor’s voices that are largely stifled. Hence, the Party’s implied representation rhetoric, as Gao points out, cannot explain why the Party and the media have strangled their own „throat and tongue“ by censorship and self-censorship.<sup>379</sup>

A workable explanation is that the Party has changed so much that it has drifted away from its original communist philosophical existence to its present representation that harnesses what McNally called „capitalism without democracy“.<sup>380</sup> The Party has remained in power for more than sixty years since 1949 without having its supreme authority being substantially challenged. However, the CCP today is vastly different from what it used to be due to „considerable changes in its composition, its attributes and its role“ over Post-Mao years.<sup>381</sup> Powerful Party elites have joined the new rich, either by reaping the success of the

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<sup>376</sup> Ying Zhang, "Dianshiju Zenme Guan? [How to Administrate Tv Shows?]," *Nanfang Zhoumo*, 1st February 2007.

<sup>377</sup> Chungao Feng and Jing Dong, "Xuexi Hu Jintao Zongshuji Zai Renmin Ribaoshe Kaocha Gongzuo Shi De Jianghua [Learning the Speech by Secretary General Hu Jintao on His Visit to People's Daily Press]," <http://media.people.com.cn/GB/40628/7563891.html>.

<sup>378</sup> Chaoren Guo, *Houshe Lun [on Tongue and Throat Argument]* (Beijing: Xinhua Press, 1997).

<sup>379</sup> Gao, "Media Ownership: One Case Studies and Two Perspectives." 2103

<sup>380</sup> McNally, *China's Emergent Political Economy: Capitalism in the Dragon's Lair*. 122

<sup>381</sup> Jean-Philippe Béja, "The Chinese Communist Party in Reform," *The China Journal (Canberra, A.C.T.)*, no. 58 (2007). 209

capitalist economy, forming what is called the „red capitalist class“,<sup>382</sup> or recruiting the capital elites to the party membership,<sup>383</sup> and central leadership,<sup>384</sup> not to mention the „grey income“ the few powerful harvested in their rent seeking.<sup>385</sup>

According to Marxist materialism, which is supposed to be the CCP’s fundamental philosophy, the superstructure is determined by and at the service of its economic base, and definitely not the other way around.<sup>386</sup> The CCP, which proclaims itself as a communist party of the people and represents their fundamental interests, is no exception. The role of the news media, which is also part of the superstructure, is mandated to follow the nature of the Party which changes along with its economic base. While the Party holds on to its throat and tongue parlance, and rests its pragmatic political legitimacy on the continued capitalist economic growth, a gap opens between the proclaimed communist representation and the capitalist economic base.<sup>387</sup> This gap has given rise to the dilemma in the Party’s publicity business mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. As a result, the present censorship machinery is not necessarily concerned with communist values but the interests of elite politics and capitalism that the Party actually represents.

In reality, the growing societal imbalance and disputes between the beneficiaries and the victimized have given rise to the need for the elite politics to reinforce the censorship system, particularly when conflicts arise between the powerful and the weak in media events that are defined as „negative news“. As the censorship apparatus makes everyday efforts to put a lid on „negative news“, the wealthy and powerful are provided with a shelter while the weak and victimized, in land seizures and forced relocation cases for example, are restrained from seeking help from the media and hence public support. The „good news“ for the poor, on the other hand, is sometimes on the censors’ list. According to Chen Guidi and Chun

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<sup>382</sup> Jonathan Unger, "Whither China? Yang Xiguang, Red Capitalists, and the Social Turmoil of the Cultural Revolution," *Modern China* 17, no. 1 (1991). 20

<sup>383</sup> Bruce J. Dickson, *Red Capitalists in China: The Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospects for Political Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). 32

<sup>384</sup> Shaun Rein, *The End of Cheap China: Economic and Cultural Trends That Will Disrupt the World* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2012). 15

<sup>385</sup> Tak-Wing Ngo, *Rent Seeking in China* (New York: Routledge, 2009). 15

<sup>386</sup> Gao, "Media Ownership: One Case Studies and Two Perspectives." 2103

<sup>387</sup> McNally, *China's Emergent Political Economy: Capitalism in the Dragon's Lair*. 122

Tao, the approval of a reform program by the former Chinese Premier Li Peng that relieved the rural households from heavy taxes was refused to be released publicly because „if it were known that Li approved it, everyone everywhere would get on the bandwagon before the consequences of the program were known“.<sup>388</sup> The way that „bad news“ for the powerful and „good news“ for the weak are censored has demonstrated that censorship in modern China has considerably hampered the interests of the disenfranchised groups although the latter, according to the CCP charter, is supposedly represented and pioneered by the Party.

Moreover, the political elites and capital elites have forged an alliance of common interests. While the policy settings are made to support the development of the new entrepreneurs, the economic elites have to find themselves fully incorporated in the activities of the Party-state.<sup>389</sup> Many of the political elites are themselves entrepreneurs or part of the network of the economic elites, such as the family of Li Peng.<sup>390</sup> The trading between power and money [*quan qian jiaoyi*] cannot happen in the absence of the interest-based relationship between these two parties.<sup>391</sup> Both elite groups, as pointed out by Yu-ming Shaw, „grab illegal wealth“.<sup>392</sup> The political elites use their power to step into and benefit from the market activities while the market elites harvest much more than what they have invested in the political-

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<sup>388</sup> Guidi Chen and Tao Chun, *Zhongguo Nongmin Diaocha [an Investigative Report on the Chinese Peasantry]* (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 2004).

Also see Mobo Gao, "Reviews," *The China Journal* no. 52 (2004). 115

<sup>389</sup> David S. G. Goodman, *The New Rich in China: Future Rulers, Present Lives* (New York: Routledge, 2008). 33

<sup>390</sup> Li Peng is former Chinese Premier (1988-1998) and NPC Chairman (1998-2003). His son, Li Xiaopeng and daughter Li Xiaolin are dominant figures of China's energy industry. Li Xiaopeng, former head of Huaneng Corporation, now assumes the position of Vice-Governor of Shanxi Province, the biggest producer of coal and electricity in China. Li Xiaolin is Vice-President of China Power Investment Corporation and President of the Hong Kong-listed China Power International Development Corporation.

Tim Oakes, "Building a Southern Dynamo: Guizhou and State Power," in *China's Campaign To "Open up the West": National, Provincial, and Local Perspectives*, ed. David S. G. Goodman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). 167

<sup>391</sup> Cheng Li, "Promises and Pitfalls of Reform: New Thinking in Post-Deng China," in *China Briefing 2000: The Continuing Transformation*, ed. Tyrene White (Armonk: M E Sharpe Inc., 2000). 148

<sup>392</sup> Yu-ming Shaw, *Changes and Continuities in Chinese Communism: The Economy, Society, and Technology* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988). 50

economic elites relationship both in terms of monetary profits and policy patronage. Both the elite groups make money in the reciprocal preferential treatment.<sup>393</sup>

Wary of the power and potential of the news media, the last thing that the political elites would like to see is public discussion of the intimacy between the elite politics and capital, including local government officials and property developers for example. The media are censored and obliged to apply self-censorship on behalf of the Party-state which actually patronizes the elite politics and capital. Such a censorship system, of course, cannot find justification in this contradictory commitment. The disconnection between the Party and the people, in return, has created a side-taking question for the media: „Are you going to speak for the Party or the people?!“

This is a question that Lu Jun, former Deputy Director of the Planning Bureau of Zhengzhou City asked in retort to a journalist in an interview. Apparently, blundering on the disparate relationship between the Party and the people, Lu revealed the censorship taboo that the media should, without saying, be censored or self-censored for the Party and against the people when the two run into dispute. Lu was immediately suspended from his position for his taboo-breaking slip of tongue.

The Planning Bureau plays a decisive role in determining what a piece of land is to be used for. According to sections three and five of *the Regulations for the Implementation of the Land Administration Law of the PRC* and article 17 of *the Law of Urban Real Estate Management*, the planning authority is responsible for defining the purpose of land in general plans. Any changes to the use of land must be submitted to the planning authority for review and approval. It was reported that a piece of land in Xigang village of Zhengzhou was allocated for affordable housing for low-income people.<sup>394</sup> Instead, twelve expensive townhouses and two detached houses were built and sold underhand. The developer's profit was estimated over fifty million yuan (equivalent to about 7,700,000 Australian dollars).

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<sup>393</sup> Czeslaw Tubilewicz, *Critical Issues in Contemporary China* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006). 70

<sup>394</sup> Zhengzhou is the capital city of Henan Province. Mr. Lu is an official of deputy bureau (si, ting) level.

Xinhua, "Official Probed over 'People-or-Party' Blunder,"

[http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-06/22/content\\_8309791.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-06/22/content_8309791.htm).

When questioned by a reporter from China National Radio, Mr. Lu apparently lost his temper, unmasking the meta-censorship taboo.<sup>395</sup>

Lu's blunder was his anger with the media's attempt to disclose the relationship between the elite politics and capital. By declaring the CCP and the people as mutually incompatible, Lu, a typical high ranking local political elite, implicitly rejects communist ideology. To Lu and many others, the Party is a ruling power instead of a congregation sharing the proclaimed ideology. As Wang Hui maintains, „The party is no longer an organization with specific political values, but a mechanism of power“.<sup>396</sup> Censorship is intensified to reinforce such a mechanism. Consequently, censorship is censored because of its justification problem in the Party-versus-the-people reality. In effect, Lu's question epitomizes the disjuncture between the Party and the masses.

### 3.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter describes how censorship is censored to explain the justification problem of the Post-Mao censorship apparatus. This problem arises when the CCP strongly endorses capitalist developmentalism and censors the voices of the victimized and the poor.

The justification problem epitomizes the discrepancy between what the Party is and what it claims itself to be. The legitimacy, or the *raison d'être*, of the Party is supposed to be based on its commitment to „equality in human society“ and „privileges of the working class“.<sup>397</sup> However, Chinese politics has undergone „a dynamic and changing process“.<sup>398</sup> The orthodox Marxist ideology and Maoist practice of „big democracy“ have given way to capitalist pragmatism and

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<sup>395</sup> Zhengzhou is the capital city of Henan Province. Mr. Lu is an official of deputy bureau (si, ting) level.

Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Wang, *The End of Revolution*. 6

<sup>397</sup> Gao, "A Boom Financed by Taxes on the Poor." 20

<sup>398</sup> Mobo Gao, "Book Review," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 57, no. 2 (2003). 391



developmentalism at all costs in the reform era.<sup>399</sup> The communist principles have gradually ceased to exist in practice and retreated to pure ideology in an ideological dilemma.<sup>400</sup> The reduction of legitimacy comes along with dilution of the communist nature of the CCP, which has seen China develop into one of the most exploitative and unequal nations on the earth.<sup>401</sup>

This justification problem and discrepancy have also demonstrated what Wang Hui points out as „the structural contradictions“ because the Post-Mao China is full of „internal tensions and contradictions“.<sup>402</sup> These internal tensions and contradictions are reflected in the difficulties in reconciling communist ideology and capitalist economic base. These difficulties, in turn, have complicated the justification problem and deepened the transparency illusion.

Therefore, given its justification problems, censorship is intensified yet censored and denied. Discussion of the censorship reality becomes a taboo. Not only has the justification problem engendered a sophisticated censorship and self-censorship system in the Post-Mao era, but it has also rendered the official transparency rhetoric hollow and self-defeating. The disjuncture of the representation relationship between the Party-state and the victimized workers and peasantry, has created the social political base for this complex censorship system, and therefore needs to be addressed when discussing problems related to media transparency.

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<sup>399</sup> ———, *The Battle for China's Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

<sup>400</sup> Shaoquan Zhang, *The Impact of Elitism on Ideology in China (1980-2000)* (Wuhan: The Mid-China Normal University Press, 2006). 61

<sup>401</sup> Gao, "A Boom Financed by Taxes on the Poor." 20

<sup>402</sup> Wang, *The End of Revolution*. 79

## Chapter Four: Media Malpractices, Grassroots Professionals and Three Dilemmas

### 4.1 Introduction

China's media has undergone a dramatic growth both in size and turnover in the reform era, particularly the commercialized outlets and their websites. Most big cities now have their own local newspapers and broadcasting services, and some are marketed across the country. Among the most successful are those commercialized subsidiaries of conglomerates each flagshipged by a major official outlet, a result of media conglomeration initiated in 1996. While the Party media provide sanitized official messages, their fellow non-official outlets adopt a much more flexible way of reporting and cover everyday life more extensively.

The emergence of a marketized media supported by the digital revolution seems to promise more press freedom by virtue of its very existence.<sup>403</sup> This alternative media seems to promise more transparency with the help of new technologies.<sup>404</sup> Technological development, such as the expansion of cyber space and coverage of satellite television, as Joseph Man Chan and Jack Linchuan Qiu maintain, is boosting media liberalization in China.<sup>405</sup> Simultaneously though, media malpractice such as paid, fabricated and misleading news, has been on a rampant rise.<sup>406</sup> To tackle this problem, the CPD and media administrative authorities launched *Sanxiang Xuexi Jiaoyu Huodong* [Three Learning and Education Programs] to promote massive education of socialist journalism among the media

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<sup>403</sup> Marina Yue Zhang and Bruce W. Stening, *China 2.0: The Transformation of an Emerging Superpower--and the New Opportunities* (Singapore: John Wiley and Sons (Asia) Pte. Ltd., 2010). 57

<sup>404</sup> Richard Baum, "Political Implications of China's Information Revolution: The Media, the Minds, and Their Message," in *China's Changing Political Landscape: Prospects for Democracy*, ed. Cheng Li (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2008). Also see George D. Haddow and Kim Haddow, *Disaster Communications in a Changing Media World* (Oxford: Elsevier Inc., 2009). 36

<sup>405</sup> Joseph Man Chan and Jack Linchuan Qiu, "China: Media Liberalization under Authoritarianism," in *Media Reform: Democratizing the Media, Democratizing the State*, ed. Monroe Edwin Price, Beata Rozumilowicz, and Stefaan G. Verhulst (London: Routledge, 2002). 42

<sup>406</sup> Tong, *Investigative Journalism in China*. 97

professionals. Information control tightens in the name of keeping the media environment in order.

One might assume that a market-driven media industry would be freer and more independent because it has to be accountable to the market.<sup>407</sup> But various forms of corruption, such as sensationalism and blackmail, have kept metastasizing throughout the media industry.<sup>408</sup> The accountability of the Chinese media in this context is increasingly hampered as media malpractice, including prominently but not limited to fabricated and misleading news, has been on a rampant rise.<sup>409</sup> The proportion of news found to be „fake and false“ [*xujia xinwen*] increased from approximately 3% in 2000 to 5.02% in 2007.<sup>410</sup> From 2010 to October 2011, one hundred and sixty fake and false news items were placed under investigation by the GAPP, 22.9% of the total cases investigated by the GAPP.<sup>411</sup> Given that the total amount of information has been multiplying daily, the absolute number of fake and false items is far more alarming than the moderate increase of two percentage points.

A question raised in this chapter is: Why does media malpractice persist despite that market forces supposedly impose higher standards on credibility and that the Party-state keeps intensifying control and promoting socialist journalism and transparency rhetoric?

Instead of looking at this malpractice as a problem of individuals and their ideological weakness as official discussion tends to lead us to believe, this chapter argues that the problem is systemic and is unlikely to be improved by compulsory government education programs and coercive punishments. Instead, the origin of

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<sup>407</sup> Zhu, "1998: Ziyou Zhuyi Xueli De Yanshuo [1998: Discourse on Theory of Liberalism]."

<sup>408</sup> Kate Xiao Zhou, *China's Long March to Freedom: Grassroots Modernization* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009). 155

<sup>409</sup> David Bandurski and Martin Hala, *Investigative Journalism in China: Eight Cases in Chinese Watchdog Journalism* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010). 123

Also see Daniel C. Lynch, *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, And "Thought Work" In Reformed China* (Chicago: Stanford University Press, 1999). 61

<sup>410</sup> Jun Zhou, "Journalism Anomie During China's Social Transition," *Journal of International Communication*, no. 9 (2009). 45

<sup>411</sup> Jing Qu, "Xinwen Chuban Zongshu: Jiaqiang Xinwen Caibian Guifan, Yanfang Xujia Shishi Baodao [Gapp: Strengthen Standards of News Collection and Editing, Prevent Fake and False News]," [http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/2011-11/10/c\\_111158795.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/2011-11/10/c_111158795.htm).

this problem lies in the Party-state control and profit-seeking management that have given rise to three dilemmas, namely the market, ethics and identity dilemmas. These dilemmas have led to increasing alienation of the professionals from management and caused pervasive indifference to official ideological and ethical rhetoric. Taking fabricated and misleading news as a prominent phenomenon of media malpractice, this chapter explains how these three dilemmas have been imposed on journalists and editors and analyses how the Party-state rhetoric, therefore, is irrelevant to these professionals when they have to struggle for survival rather than for journalism.

The terms „journalists“ and „editors“ here refer specifically to grassroots professionals and practitioners who collect and edit news. These professionals are either formally or informally employed and making their living on the profession of journalism. The use of these terms is not confined to the definition in the MAPC, which limits the title of „journalist“ and „editor“ to those who are granted press cards. The reality is, however, the number of officially accredited professionals is much smaller than that of the practitioners who are actually involved in journalistic operations. While senior media management officials are entitled to press cards, many grassroots professionals are not.

This chapter uses „malpractice“ rather than „corruption“ to describe professional negligence and misconduct. Corruption is a general word which entails loss of moral integrity, abuse of power and illegal rewards. Corruption is often associated with power and abuse of power whilst malpractice with professional integrity and loss of that integrity. Whilst both managerial officials and professionals can be involved in corruption cases, malpractice is usually limited to professional negligence and misconduct. One of the high profile corruption cases is the fall of Li Yuanjiang, former head of the Guangzhou Daily Press Group and a press baron who was sentenced to twelve years in prison in 2004 for a wide range of corruption activities including taking bribery and involving in capital flight.<sup>412</sup> However, the

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<sup>412</sup> Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 114

According to Zhao's detailed case study and analysis, Li Yuanjiang's corruption case is an ample reflection of how the fusion of political, media, and business power in China can be personified in senior management officials in a highly commercialized, conglomerated and Party-state

causes of corruption of high-ranking officials are as complex as different they are from that of the professional malpractice, and therefore, are not discussed in this chapter.

## 4.2 Media Malpractices

Malpractice is usually referred to in legal terms as „negligence committed by a professional that causes a recipient of his or her services to suffer an injury, loss or damage“. <sup>413</sup> Professional malpractice features „breach of commonly recognized professional standards“. <sup>414</sup> Media or press malpractice consists of three fundamental elements, namely duty, breach and damage. This chapter uses „malpractice“ instead of „corruption“ because the latter implies intentional breach of duty whilst the former includes both intentional breach and unintentional negligence. It involves various journalistic misconducts that go against ethical principles, including but not limited to, inaccuracy, sensationalism and press harassment. <sup>415</sup> As a result, the professional principles of truth and objectivity are considerably impaired when media credibility is compromised by bribery, paid news, distortion, blackmailing, fabricated and misleading news and other forms of misconduct. This chapter aims to explain the causal connections between malpractices and the political and market control over the media system. Discussion will show that such media malpractice derives from at least two sources: the pursuit of profits and political control, the former more likely in a capitalist market economy and the latter in authoritarian or

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controlled media system. What makes high-ranking officials corrupt is different from the causes of professional malpractice because the general professionals are situated in drastically different political, economical and social conditions.

<sup>413</sup> Arnold J. Goldman and William D. Sigismond, *Business Law: Principles and Practices* (Mason: Cengage Learning Inc., 2010). 84

<sup>414</sup> Samuel L. Davis, Helen Griff Weisgal, and Wendy Negggers, "Trial Techniques," in *Nursing Malpractice*, ed. Patricia W. Iyer (Tucson: Lawyers and Judges Publishing Company, 2001). 789

<sup>415</sup> Valerie Howarth, "Social Work and the Media: Pitfalls and Possibilities," in *Social Work, the Media and Public Relations*, ed. Bob Franklin and Nigel Parton (London: Routledge, 1991). 118

semi-authoritarian politics.<sup>416</sup> Both scenarios are unmistakably the case of China today.

In fact, it is ostensible that both profit and power impact on professional malpractice over the first decade of the twenty-first century because China is a hybrid of authoritarian elite politics and a capitalist market economy. The fact that both official media and profit-seeking, market-oriented commercialized media are involved can, at least in part, demonstrate that information control, education of politically engineered journalistic values, and market forces cannot prevent media malpractice from happening. On the contrary, these factors contribute to the market, ethical and identity dilemmas that alienate grassroots professionals from ethical standards and integrity.

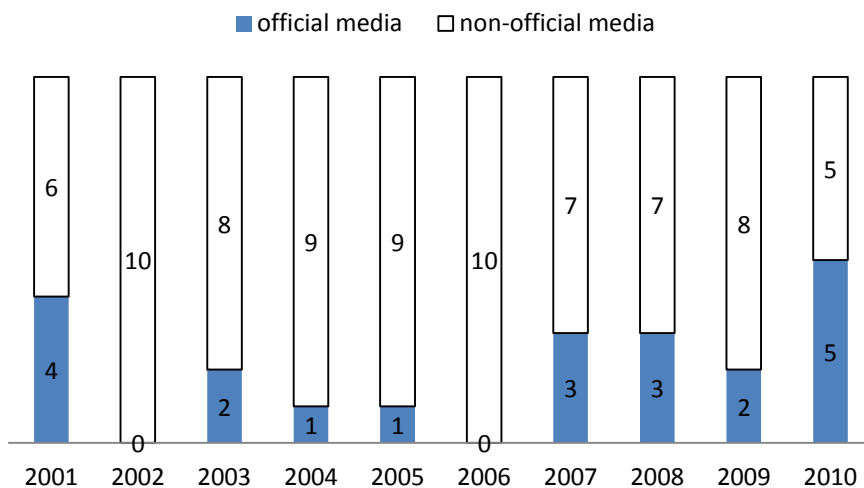


Figure 4.1: Top ten fake and false news items in China from 2001 to 2010

(Source *Xinwen Jizhe* 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011)

The above chart shows the top ten fabricated and misleading news items produced by official and non-official outlets from 2001 to 2010. The irony is that fabricated and misleading news, a strategy that Lagerkvist calls „breaking social taboo for

<sup>416</sup> Peter Ho, "Self-Imposed Censorship and De-Politicized Politics in China," in *China's Embedded Activism: Opportunities and Constraints of a Social Movement*, ed. Peter Ho and Richard Louis Edmonds (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008). 20

profits<sup>417</sup> produced by official media has been steadily on the rise since 2006. Clearly, both official news media and non-official outlets have been involved in producing the top ten fabricated and misleading news items, showing that both are experiencing the problem of malpractice in a similar way.

High-profile official media cases include the „steamed bun stuffed with paper mince“ report forged by a Beijing TV reporter in July 2007. The news of „paper buns [*baozi*]“ was shown on a popular program „*Transparency*“ of the satellite channel. The sensational allegation of buns stuffed with paper mince, a sensitive issue related to highlighted food safety concerns, turned out to be forged. The reporter was sentenced to one-year jail for „committing the crime of infringing business reputation“.<sup>418</sup> Another eye-brow raising case placed Xinhuanet.com, the portal of Xinhua News Agency, the official Chinese government news agency, in an awkward situation. A report on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008, „Sleepless in the midst of the Pacific Ocean“ presented a vivid story of China’s manned space flight *Shenzhou Seven*. The story, full of nationalist pride and enthusiasm, adopted an on-the-spot narrative style to illustrate operational details of the first Chinese extravehicular activity which did not take place until two days after the report.<sup>419</sup> The incidence of similar cases was also on the rise in 2009 and 2010, which has led to increasing concern about various forms of professional misconduct as part of the deteriorating media environment.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> Johan Lagerkvist, "China's Online News Industry: Control Giving Way to Confucian Virtue," in *China's Science and Technology Sector and the Forces of Globalisation*, ed. Elspeth Thomson and Jon Sigurdson (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 2008). 197

<sup>418</sup> Zhong Wu, "A Fake Story About Fake Buns," <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/IH01Ad01.html>.

<sup>419</sup> An apology statement by Xinhuanet.com is available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-09/26/content\\_10117833.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-09/26/content_10117833.htm). The statement does not define the message as ‘fake news’. Instead, it explains that the whole incident was an ‘operational error’ that ‘a drafted article’ was posted online by the editor. The statement avoids talking about how fake the content is and how the fake content was produced and published. The statement implies that there would have been nothing wrong if the message had been posted *after* the spacewalk took place. The Telegraph, "China Fakes Reports from Space " The Telegraph, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/3082804/China-fakes-reports-from-space.html>.

<sup>420</sup> Klyueva and Yang, "Media Transparency in Action: A Case Study of Media Coverage of a Controversy between Engos and a Paper Company in China."

According to Zhang Taofu, more fabricated and misleading news items were produced by commercialized non-official news media, particularly local newspapers, which took up 63% between 2001 and 2010.<sup>421</sup> Striking stories include a forged series on the escort mission of the Chinese Navy in the Gulf of Aden, including a catchy story titled „Chinese warships successfully forced stalking unidentified submarines to surface“ was released on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> January 2009 by *Huaxi Metropolis Daily* [*Huaxi Doushibao*] and *Qingdao Morning Post* [*Qingdao Chenbao*] respectively. The story was reprinted and reposted immediately by many newspapers and almost all Chinese news portals. After spreading rapidly, the story was declared on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2009 as „incorrect“ by international maritime analysts.<sup>422</sup> The two newspapers received official warning from the GAPP and paid a moderate fine of CNY30, 000.<sup>423</sup> The reporter, Tong Qizhi, was banned from journalism for life. This incident triggered another round of debate over ethical crises in journalism reflected in paid news, blackmailing and fake news. Media „self-salvage“ was called for.<sup>424</sup> Criticisms included inappropriate MBA models of management, the degeneration of journalists, the weak rule of law and a lack of Internet administration.<sup>425</sup>

At the administrative level, professional malpractice has been understood and treated as a problem of failure in professional standards by individual journalists in the context of a market economy. In an interview by the *China Press and Publication Journal* on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Qu Huisheng, vice chairman of the All-China Journalists Association, attributed the problems to: a lack of standard practice in a „transition period“; the youth of the professionals; and incompetence at

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Tilt and Xiao, "Media Coverage of Environmental Pollution in the People's Republic of China: Responsibility, Cover-up and State Control."

<sup>421</sup> Taofu Zhang, "Xinwen Jizhe 2001-2010 Nian 'Shida Jia Xinwen' Yangben Fenxi [Sample Analysis of the Top Ten Fake News Appraised by the Journalists from 2001 to 2010]," *Xinwen Jizhe*, no. 5 (2011).

<sup>422</sup> MarineBuzz.com, "Encounter of Indian Submarine with Chinese Warships Off Somalia," <http://www.marinebuzz.com/2009/02/05/encounter-of-indian-submarine-with-chinese-warships-off-somalia/>.

<sup>423</sup> An equivalence of approximately AUD4,615.00

<sup>424</sup> *Cutting off the malignant tumour: a self-salvage campaign by the media*. Viewed on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011 from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/zgix/2009-03/23/content\\_11057839.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/zgix/2009-03/23/content_11057839.htm)

<sup>425</sup> *Cutting off the malignant tumour: a self-salvage campaign by the media*. Viewed on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011 from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/zgix/2009-03/23/content\\_11057839.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/zgix/2009-03/23/content_11057839.htm)



managing the rules of socialist journalism. The propaganda authority launched massive education programs such as the *Sanxiang Xuexi Jiaoyu Huodong* [Three Learning and Education Programs] in 2003, namely educating practitioners about the Theory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Marxist Perspectives on Journalism and Journalistic Professional Ethics, reiterating socialist ideological ideals and defining professional ethics. Yet, nothing in these education programs or punitive measures is new. New rules were promulgated.<sup>426</sup> At management level, businesses have had their professionals engage in various education and training courses. Severe punishment was imposed on responsible journalists and editors. Despite the promotion of official ethical rhetoric and coercive punishment, malpractice keeps growing, and the most low-level professionals are increasingly alienated from the management and the administrative authorities. This underlying systemic problem is best explained by examining the market, the ethics and the identity dilemmas facing these practitioners.

### 4.3 The Market Dilemma

The market dilemma refers to the situation in which media professionals are torn between difficulties in surviving exploitative management and possible conflicts with political correctness. Practitioners have to constantly expose themselves to inadequate pay, excessive workloads, aggressive evaluation systems and a real potential of a loss of employment. The majority have to stay on the safe side and take only calculated risk.<sup>427</sup> Media outlets are managed as money-making machinery, and the employees are treated as dispensable parts. Professionals are, more often than not, required or driven to contribute to profits. Their survival is

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<sup>426</sup> For example, a number of regulatory documents were issued by the administrative authorities, including *Methods on Punishing Newspapers and Journals for Publishing Fabricated and misleading news* promulgated by APP in 1999; and *Notification on Taking Practical Measures to Halt Fabricated and misleading news* by GAPP in 2009; and *Regulations regarding Prevention of Fabricated and misleading news Reports* by GAPP in 2011.

<sup>427</sup> Bandurski and Hala, *Investigative Journalism in China: Eight Cases in Chinese Watchdog Journalism*. 57

increasingly determined by their contribution to market performance rather than quality reportage.

The market-driven media are now managed as profit-seeking businesses that prioritize lowering the cost and maximizing the revenue.<sup>428</sup> Exploitative management finds its easy justification in market discourses.<sup>429</sup> The reformed subsidiaries of media groups are encouraged to work toward profits, not only to sustain their own development, but more importantly to support the whole media system. The majority of the state-owned media no longer receive subsidies, and have to manage their own financial resources, including advertising sales, from the market.<sup>430</sup> The news media today has become part of the „system of „responsibility for profits and losses“ implemented by Deng Xiaoping in 1981,<sup>431</sup> resulting in a shift of media’s loyalty from the Party to the market.<sup>432</sup> To ensure market success in a climate of intensified competition when the subscription rates are low and media products very cheap or free,<sup>433</sup> the first thing a media management tends to consider is to cut down expenses by lowering personnel cost and boosting advertising sales.

First, to cut costs, the salary of the grassroots journalists is kept low. Despite the surging of advertising sales,<sup>434</sup> the journalists are poorly paid.<sup>435</sup> The vast majority are paid in a „cost system“ rather than a „wage system“ in which their income relies

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<sup>428</sup> Zhou, *China's Long March to Freedom: Grassroots Modernization*. 174; Cui, ed. 2009: *Report on the Development of China's Media Industry*. 47

<sup>429</sup> Chihyu Shih, *Negotiating Ethnicity in China: Citizenship as a Response to the State* (London: Routledge, 2002). 20

<sup>430</sup> Karin Deutsch Karlekar, "Freedom of the Press 2005: China," <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&country=6715&year=2005>.

<sup>431</sup> Becky Chiu and Mervyn Lewis, *Reforming China's State-Owned Enterprises and Banks* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc., 2006). 61

<sup>432</sup> Karin Deutsch Karlekar and Eleanor Marchant, *Freedom of the Press 2007: A Global Survey of Media Independence* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008). 102

<sup>433</sup> Jinqiu Zhao, *The Internet and Rural Development in China: The Socio-Structural Paradigm* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2008). 166

<sup>434</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 55; Cui, ed. 2009: *Report on the Development of China's Media Industry*. 8

<sup>435</sup> Michael Backman and Charlotte Butler, *Big in Asia: 25 Strategies for Business Success* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003). 53

Shyam Tekwani, "Media & Conflict in Asia," in *Media & Conflict Reporting in Asia*, ed. Shyam Tekwani (Singapore: AMIC & WKWSCI, 2008). 5

on the number of words published and costs reimbursed.<sup>436</sup> Bonuses are calculated on the basis of the revenue they are able to generate.<sup>437</sup> It is common for grassroots professionals to earn most of their monthly income based on word counts for print or minutes broadcast.<sup>438</sup> Basic salaries are set at a level near or below the minimum line that makes ends meet. In 1995, for instance, *Huaxi Metropolis Daily* produced an evaluation system based on „merits“ and fixed the base monthly salary of journalists at 300 yuan.<sup>439</sup> In contrast, the average salary of employees of state-owned units in Sichuan Province in 1995 was 4,952 yuan per year or 412.67 yuan per month.<sup>440</sup> Each journalist is required to finish at least one news report every day. Extra payment is made according to their published word count. Those who fail to finish the mandatory workload always have their salary reduced.<sup>441</sup> Television and radio reporters are in similar situation.

CCTV is one of the wealthiest media in China. However, the salaries of its employees, particularly those informally employed professionals, do not go very far.<sup>442</sup> It is reported that Zhao Pu, a former CCTV anchor under informal employment contract, released on his *weibo* in 2010 that his monthly salary had remained less than 6,000 yuan over his five years of employment with CCTV.<sup>443</sup> In contrast with Zhao's income, the average property price in Beijing reached 16,057 yuan per square meter at the end of 2009.<sup>444</sup> Rent of a one-bedroom

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<sup>436</sup> Bandurski and Hala, *Investigative Journalism in China: Eight Cases in Chinese Watchdog Journalism*. 106

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.* 106

<sup>438</sup> Mente, *China Understanding & Dealing with the Chinese Way of Doing Business!* . 116

<sup>439</sup> Yilong Xu, "City Newspapers: Rise of Marketized Media," *Jinghua Times [Jinghua shibao]*, 25th December 2008.

CNY300 values about AUD46.15 at the exchange rate of AUD1.00=CNY6.50.

<sup>440</sup> NSBC, "Average Wage and Index of Formal Employees," <http://www.stats.gov.cn/ndsj/information/zh1/d241a>.

<sup>441</sup> Xu, "City Newspapers: Rise of Marketized Media."

<sup>442</sup> Yuanzhi Zhou, *Capitalizing China's Media Industry: The Installation of Capitalist Production in Tv and Film Sectors* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 2008). 185

<sup>443</sup> Zhao Pu became famous for his emotional reports on the Sichuan Earthquake in 2008. It is also reported that many CCTV reporters in his similar employment status are also poorly paid.

Shuai Yan, "Zhao Pu Bao Yueshouri Buzu 6000 Yuan, Hendo Yangshi Zhuchiren Shouru Xibo [Zhao Pu Said His Monthly Salary Less Than 6,000 Yuan, Many Cctv Hosts Are Poorly Paid]," <http://media.people.com.cn/GB/40606/13163468.html>.

<sup>444</sup> Tian Chi, "Touzi Chaozuo Bijin Fangshi Hongxian Zhiyou [Investment and Speculation Approaching the Red Warning Line]," *China Youth Daily*, 7th December 2009.

apartment usually costs at least two-thirds to one half of the monthly salary, let alone expenditures on food, transport and other daily necessities.<sup>445</sup> Given that he has been an ace anchorperson since 2008, Zhao remains a moderately paid, although better paid than the low income workers and peasants, casual employee outside the formal employment system. He was suspended in April 2012 immediately after he had posted a message on his *weibo*, warning people not to drink gelatine yoghurt because it caused health problems. The message broke the toxic capsule scandal that many gelatine products including capsules for medical purpose and yoghurt were made from rotten leather shoes.<sup>446</sup> The toxic gelatine scandal was proven true in later CCTV reports.

Zhao Pu was not suspended for his open complaint about his income but his unauthorized exposure of an issue related to food security which is highly disturbing and hence sensitive. Curiously, he has refrained from explaining or commenting on his suspension, and remained unresponsive to speculations in public opinion. The whole process of suspension lacks transparency because there has been no announcement of suspension either from CCTV or Zhao Pu. He has just disappeared from the screen as of June 2012. Zhao Pu and many others in similar situation are silenced, at least in part, by the coercive political control and exploitative management.

Second, advertising sales is treated as everybody's business. Those who are able to attract advertising revenue are most likely to be recruited and promoted.<sup>447</sup> As Yuezhi Zhao opines, the tide of commercialization and consumerism has changed newspapers from readers' newspapers to advertisers' newspapers that „move upmarket in readership composition and in catering to elite interests in editorial

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16,057 yuan is exchanged for about 2,470 Australian dollars; and 6,000 yuan for about 923 Australian dollars at the rate of 1:6.5.

<sup>445</sup> Zhou, *Capitalizing China's Media Industry: The Installation of Capitalist Production in Tv and Film Sectors*. 185

<sup>446</sup> Want China Times, "Cctv Host Off-Air for 10 Days after Controversial *Weibo* Post," <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?id=20120422000077&cid=1101>.

<sup>447</sup> Yingmin Zhi, *New Media Imperial: Brand, Capital and Industrialization in the Competitive Environment [Xin Chuanmei Diguo: Jingzheng Geju Xia De Pingpai, Ziben He Chanyehua]* (Beijing: China Waterpower Press, 2005). 232

orientation".<sup>448</sup> Revenue generated from advertising businesses has become the economic base of the Chinese media.<sup>449</sup> It is a common practice that professionals, including those on casual employment contracts and correspondents' stations [*jizhe zhan*], are assigned a line for advertising sales.<sup>450</sup> Those who fail to seal enough deals are fired.<sup>451</sup>

Although the article 28 of the *Measure for Administration of Press Card* (MAPC) and the article 22 of the *Measures for Administration of Newspaper and Journal Correspondents' Stations* (MANJCS) forbid journalists and correspondents' stations to get involved in advertising contracts, particularly by practising paid news and blackmailing, there is no stipulation to prevent the news media management from pressing or encouraging its professionals engaging in advertising sales promotion. In reality, it is also common practice that subscription and advertising sales tasks are assigned to journalists and editors.<sup>452</sup> Even if no written assigning of revenue generating is in place, incentives in the form of bonuses also encourage use of every means to cultivating advertisers. Those who have social resources and means to attract advertising sales can receive up to 20% of the revenue as commission.<sup>453</sup> Those without resources and connections have to try their best to get themselves connected.

Another method to cut down management costs is to cut back or withhold costs for collecting news. In some cases, journalists have to pay out of their own pocket for the first instance, and they will not be reimbursed unless their reports are accepted

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<sup>448</sup> Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 118

<sup>449</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, "From Commercialization to Conglomeration: The Transformation of the Chinese Press within the Orbit of the Party State", *Journal of Communication* 50, no. 2 (2000).

<sup>450</sup> Correspondents' stations are offices or branches established outside the city where the media's headquarter is located.

<sup>451</sup> Wen Yi, "Unfolding the Confusion of the Correspondent Stations of the Chinese Media [Pojie Zhongguo Chuanmei Zhudi Jizhezhan Kunhuo Zhi Mi]," [http://www.peacehall.com/cgi-bin/news/gb\\_display/print\\_version.cgi?art=/gb/china/2006/05&link=200605101511.shtml](http://www.peacehall.com/cgi-bin/news/gb_display/print_version.cgi?art=/gb/china/2006/05&link=200605101511.shtml).

<sup>452</sup> Tianding Wang, "With Regard to a Number of Major Journalistic Bribery Cases in Recent Years [Cong Jinnian Lai Jiqi Zhongda Jizhe Shouhui Shijian Shuoqi]," *Zhongguo Tushu Pinglun [China Books Review]*, no. 7 (2009).

<sup>453</sup> Zhongdang Pan, "Improving Reform Activities: The Changing Reality of Journalistic Practice in China," in *Power, Money, and Media: Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control* ed. Chin-Chuan Lee (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000). 86

by the chief editors and published.<sup>454</sup> Fu Hua, a former journalist with *China Business News*, was known to the China observers in the West as an activist and investigative reporter. He was one of the professionals sentenced to jail for accepting bribes for newsgathering activities. While acknowledging that he had accepted 15,000 yuan, Fu defended himself in the court, stating that the money was to cover his expenses for gathering the news because his employer did not cover costs.<sup>455</sup> *China Business News* could not repudiate Fu's testimony. Many journalists have to work in similar underpaid conditions and adapt to the cost-sensitive management that seeks to reduce operation costs as much as possible.<sup>456</sup> Journalists are encouraged to have their costs covered by the businesses interviewed, and it is a common practice that 200 to 400 yuan will be given as a gratuity by the business to the journalists covering their stories. A journalist may earn up to one third of his annual income in this way.<sup>457</sup> Paid news, therefore, is not something surprising while objectivity and truth are abandoned in the „soft social news“.<sup>458</sup>

CCTV also adopts a reimbursement income system. For most CCTV employees, the gap between fixed salary and aggregate income is filled in by reimbursement income, which increases their revenue on the one hand, and, on the other, gives rise to „fraudulent ways to collect money“ including claiming reimbursement with fake receipts.<sup>459</sup> Low pay and incentives to make money by all means have led to collapse of professional integrity. This collapse is seen in corruption cases of CCTV employees including the case of Feng Ji who was sentenced to 11 years in prison in 2004 for accepting bribes.<sup>460</sup>

To ensure submission of employees, media outlets are keen to introduce various sophisticated, quantified evaluation systems as „incentives“. Such a system

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<sup>454</sup> Karlekar and Marchant, *Freedom of the Press 2007: A Global Survey of Media Independence*. 102

<sup>455</sup> Jie Liu, "Journalist Denied Charges in Court," *Jinghua Times*, 13th May 2009 2009.

<sup>456</sup> Xiguang Li, *Zhengfu Fayanren 15 Jiang [15 Lectures on Government Spokesperson]* (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press Ltd., 2006). 17

<sup>457</sup> Qian Jin, "How Much Gratuity Can a Journalist Receive?," <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14677/22114/32867/34347/2555859.html>.

<sup>458</sup> Myung-Jin Park and James Curran, *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (London: Routledge, 2000). 24

<sup>459</sup> Zhou, *Capitalizing China's Media Industry: The Installation of Capitalist Production in Tv and Film Sectors*. 187

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.* 187

determines how much the employees get paid and even their career future. Apart from the requirements of maintaining ideological adherence, this system, although varying from one outlet to another, normally take into account the number of words published or minutes of program sent on the air, credits as per feedback from readership and senior management and other quantifiable variants such as contributions to the advertising sales turnover. According to Su Qinglu, Deputy Director of the official media group Shijiazhuang Daily Press, his subsidiaries have adopted a point system to evaluate the journalists' merits on a monthly basis and in addition to the word count.<sup>461</sup> According to this system, each brief news item counts for two points, and a lengthy one for sixteen points. Those who lag behind will lose their jobs.<sup>462</sup>

Similarly, *China Youth Daily* (CYD) uses a credit point system, under which journalists are awarded cash bonuses according to the frequency with which their stories are favourably mentioned by high-level party and government officials.<sup>463</sup> That the CYD's evaluation system is smarmy to the bureaucracy reflects the paper's determined collaboration with the Party-state's political control agenda. As this political control is increasingly legitimized by portraying the disenfranchised groups as sources of danger and social instability, the media plays an indispensable role in rationalizing and popularizing this portraying. Accordingly, the media subscribes to class containment and displaces class antagonism.<sup>464</sup> When addressing crime and social injustice involving transgressors from the disenfranchised groups background, the CYD and many other outlets do not seem to hesitate, as Yuezhi Zhao illuminates, to produce editorials banging on presumably universal values of journalistic professionalism and judicial justice „to negate class divisions and conflicts“.<sup>465</sup> In a CYD editorial commenting on a murder case, Wang Binyu, a migrant worker who committed the murder, was described as „psychologically

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<sup>461</sup> Qinglu Su, "Internal Evaluation Measures Practical to News Agencies Should Be Established and Improved," *News Front*, no. 3 (2003).

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>463</sup> Richard Baum, "Political Implications of China Information Revolution: The Media, the Minds and Their Message," in *China's Changing Political Landscape: Prospects for Democracy*, ed. Cheng Li (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008). 177

<sup>464</sup> Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 274

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.* 274

distorted” and „extremist“ so that not only people like him are perceived dangerous, any sympathy for these people is also „a signal of danger“.<sup>466</sup> While clearly constructing the weak, victimized and desperate transgressors as the internal „other“ of the society, the CYD „was blunt in its hegemonic mission to displace class politics and defuse class conflict“.<sup>467</sup> Enhancing this class containment dimension, the CYD’s evaluation system uses money as a direct incentive to encourage reportage and editorials to follow the paper’s blatant depoliticization of public opinion and its collaboration with the political status quo. This money incentive works with coercive implications particularly when it is associated with employment contracts and contraction of regular salary.

The evaluation system is part of a sophisticated personnel system, aimed not only at managing personnel costs, but also editorial control. Large numbers of casual staff are employed with their title prefixed by „*teyue* [special]“, such as „*teyue jizhe*“ and „*teyue bianji* [special editor]“. To most readers, the ornamental „special“ may suggest that the correspondent or editor must be so special that the outlet would go out of its way to recruit them. In fact, “special” here means no more than “guest” and cheap labour, and the outlet does not have to provide a basic salary, welfare, or health care and above all, managerial accountability and responsibility for them. The employer pays only by word count.<sup>468</sup> In most cases, writers will not get paid or their cost reimbursed unless their work is accepted and then published.<sup>469</sup> While media managers have the decisive say on what to report, accountability and responsibility are largely shifted to the lower level professionals. If anything goes wrong, most of the blame and punishment will fall on the guests or low-level staff based on the widely accepted principle that “writers take their own responsibilities [*wenze zifu*]”. By outsourcing a considerable part of news collection and editing

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<sup>466</sup> Yuheng Xiao, "Yulun Tongqing Sharenfan Wang Binyu Shige Weixian Xinhao [It Is a Dangerous Signal That Public Opinion Sympathizes with Murderer Wang Binyu]," *China Youth Daily*, 9th September 2005.

Also see Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 275

<sup>467</sup> Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 275

<sup>468</sup> Oliver Melton and Adam Pillsbury, "Get a (Non-Teaching) Job: Workin' for the Man," in *The Insider's Guide to Beijing 2005-2006*, ed. Adam Pillsbury (Beijing: True Run Media, Inc., 2005). 585

<sup>469</sup> Bandurski and Hala, *Investigative Journalism in China: Eight Cases in Chinese Watchdog Journalism*. 106



work, the editorial responsibilities of the chief editors is reduced to informal verification with the authors. When there are problems, management usually can escape with a vague apology but does not have to bear responsibility in a substantial way. The wage and evaluation systems are adopted to ensure that the journalists write for survival rather than for journalism.

Bearing in mind the problems described here, abuses in journalism are likely to worsen when journalists see their brethren rewarded on a private sector basis while they themselves continue to be compensated on the public sector basis.<sup>470</sup> A journalist in desperate financial circumstances is likely to blackmail or extort a business by threatening them with a piece of negative news or reports that may result in bad publicity. Alternatively, a business might want to bribe the journalist so that bad news does not go to press, or that good news does. Although management might give a hint to their employees that well received reportage will bring possibilities of better financial reward and career ladder, the boundaries are defined by the media management and administrative authorities and subject to change from time to time<sup>471</sup>. Most low-level practitioners have to „live in the world as it is constructed for them by their political leaders and jog along as best as they can“.<sup>472</sup> As a result, professional values and ethical standards have collapsed.

#### 4.4 The Ethical Dilemma

The ethical dilemma refers to situations in which a professional has to work within conflicting values. Media professionals have to either adhere to the ideological requirements of staying strictly in line with the Party propaganda on one end of the double bind of the cognitive dissonance, or manage to speak out at the risk of their career or personal freedom on the other, or swing between these two ends with

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<sup>470</sup> Ang and Wang, "The Principal-Agent Problem in Chinese State-Owned Media." 6

<sup>471</sup> Park and Curran, *De-Westernizing Media Studies*. 19

<sup>472</sup> Burgh, *The Chinese Journalist: Mediating Information in the World's Most Populous Country*. 104

compromises to both.<sup>473</sup> Journalists and professionals increasingly face a dilemma of quality and topicality of information with political correctness.<sup>474</sup> According to Stephen J.A. Ward, „modern journalism ethic is built upon the twin pillars of truth and objectivity“.<sup>475</sup> However, the modern Chinese mass media is like a high-speed train powered by strong economic growth and steered by weak ethical commands. The profit drive and political influence are so strong that Ward’s two pillars are largely ignored. The ethical commands, in contrast, are usually weak particularly in terms of the managerial accountability. On the one hand, management encourage sensationalism to ensure market success while on the other, professionals bear most of the ethical responsibility. In practice, management harvest the fame and takes the credit for market success while ethical accountability and responsibility is largely shifted downwards.

The *Code of Ethics of the Chinese Journalists*, passed by the Fourth Board of Governors of the ACJA in January 1991 and revised in January 1997, is full of contradictions and confusion. It sets a restrictive moral framework for all media professionals but has limited operational meaning in practical journalism. At the operational level, chief editors and executive managers of *Sheweihui* or *bianweihui*, decide what to report or not to report. Lower level editors and journalists follow their decisions and work out how to make the content acceptable to their management. Moreover, although media management is supposed to protect their employees, media organizations offer little security shelter for employees, particularly when reports incur conflict between the journalists and state power apparatus. There are barely any legal provision that explicitly ensures professional rights and personal safety of reporters. As a result, this lack of organizational accountability has resulted in the further alienation of professionals and widened the gap between transparency rhetoric and media practice.

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<sup>473</sup> Zhou He, "How Do the Chinese Media Reduce Organizational Incongruence? Bureauratic Capitalism in the Name of Communism," in *Chinese Media, Global Contexts*, ed. Chin-Chuan Lee (New York: Routledge, 2003). 193

<sup>474</sup> Fischer, "Censorship and Marketization: Institutional Change within China's Media." 184

<sup>475</sup> Stephen J. A. Ward, "Truth and Objectivity," in *The Handbook of Mass Media Ethics*, ed. Lee Wilkins (New York: Routledge, 2009). 71

Apart from the requirements of professional integrity, the *Code of Ethics* entails contradictory values in terms of official rhetoric and management practice. The responsibility to keep a balance between being factual and being loyal to the Party-state is laid upon the lower level journalists and editors without specifying where the boundary is. The *Code of Ethics* attaches much importance to ideological requirements, emphasizing that journalists must enhance their political awareness in the interests of the big picture of social stability, stick to the principle of „directing public opinion correctly“, and particularly hold on to „positive publicity“. <sup>476</sup> Although the *Code of Ethics* also states that journalists should be brave and criticise misdeeds and corruption, the contradiction between being transparent and propagandistic simultaneously is such even management sometimes acknowledge such. <sup>477</sup> Trying to contribute to social transparency, investigative journalists may find themselves hunted by powerful local officials. To managers, investigative reports add credit to their transparency rhetoric and boost ratings. These managing officials usually care more about how to play with transparency rhetoric without upsetting the core interests of the local officialdom, whilst the journalists and editors are often confused by the go no-go gauge devised at the discretion of the Party-state and the media management.

The story of Yao Haiying, a journalist with the *Changjiang Business News*, was tellingly typical in terms of this ethical dilemma. In September 2009, Yao was hunted down by the officials from the Procuratorate of Wuhan’s Jiang’an District for his investigative report on the suspicious role that some procurators from Jiang’an had played in a criminal case related to trade secrets. Yao had won vast support from his readers and Internet users. His report was reprinted and reposted by many others. Irritated officials, allegedly under the pressure of the CPD and the Supreme People’s Procuratorate, ended up withdrawing their intended punishment

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<sup>476</sup> ACJA, "Zhongguo Xinwen Gongzuozhe Zhiye Daode Zhunze [Code of Ethics for Chinese Journalism Practitioners]," [http://news.xinhuanet.com/zgix/2009-11/27/content\\_12550248.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/zgix/2009-11/27/content_12550248.htm).

<sup>477</sup> White, *Local Causes of China's Intellectual, Legal, and Governmental Reforms*. 122

and apologized to Yao, admitting that „Yao did nothing wrong“.<sup>478</sup> However, Yao was by no means the winner.

*Changjiang Business News* took a drastically different attitude towards Yao’s case. They initially took a strong stand protecting Yao in September. According to Cao’s report, senior management from the newspaper had exhibited courage and refused to turn Yao in when the Procuratorate officials were trying to arrest him.<sup>479</sup> However, the situation deteriorated in October when *Changjiang*’s management suddenly decided not to protect Yao any more. His report was quietly removed from the *Changjiang* sources. Yao was then „requested“ by his employer to „stop writing for a while“, and had to resort to the Internet for public support and subsequently published a blog article calling for help.<sup>480</sup> *Changjiang* quickly followed up with an official missive to major portals explaining that Yao’s blog article had nothing to do with the newspaper and „went seriously astray from truth“.<sup>481</sup>

Two reasons might have contributed to the drastic change of management’s attitude: direct pressure from the procuratorate, and the fear that the managers themselves might incur trouble with their own performance evaluations for confronting local officialdom. It was reported that the managers became nervous when they received reinforced summons from the director of the procuratorate with three exclamation marks requesting the paper to turn Yao in.<sup>482</sup> These exclamation marks were unspoken threats implying fury of the procuratorate officials and possible revenge. The other and more important reason was, some senior management officials (names not released in Cao’s report) were about to undergo annual performance

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<sup>478</sup> Yong Cao, "Journalist Summoned and Intimidated in the Name Of "Counter Corruption": The Procuratorate Apologized after Criticised by the Superiors," *The Southern Weekend*, 28th October 2009.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> A collective version of Yao’s story and links to related reports by other media are available and viewed on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2011 from [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_48a78aca0100g5h1.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_48a78aca0100g5h1.html). The link to Yao’s original blog article at <http://yaohaiying315.blog.sohu.com/134088788.html> is not available at the time of writing this chapter. Attempts to view Yao’s article at sohu.com will result in a reminder ‘This article has been abducted by aliens or hidden by the blogger’.

<sup>481</sup> Cao, "Journalist Summoned and Intimidated in the Name Of "Counter Corruption": The Procuratorate Apologized after Criticised by the Superiors."

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

evaluation. This evaluation system was established in 1957 and reiterated in 1979 to determine how high a bureaucrat can move up the career ladder.<sup>483</sup>

The coercion and pressure that the performance evaluation system imposes on media management officials demonstrates how the scope of their actions is narrowed down so as to make these officials instrumental to the Party-state's interests. The cadre evaluation system has been carried out by the Party organizational apparatus at various levels since the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee initiated reform of the cadre evaluation system in November 1979.<sup>484</sup> The system covers cadres both in public offices and institutional organizations [*shiye danwei*] including the news media. Reform of the state personnel system reiterated the importance of performance evaluation in the 1980s when Zhao Ziyang proposed in 1987 that „promotions, demotions, rewards, and punishments would be based on performance“. <sup>485</sup> Since 2002, China's institutional organizations have undertaken further reform of the personnel system, which has eventually transformed most of the employees into informal workers, with the exception of senior managerial officials.<sup>486</sup> The evaluation system today plays a critical role in determining specifically the career ladder of senior officials. For instance, senior media management officials can be promoted to a local propaganda chief or city Party chief.<sup>487</sup> As Yuezhi Zhao maintains, „Because the party is the only political game in town, an individual with the career ambition to climb up the bureaucratic ladder must perform well and with ingenuity in a censorship post“. <sup>488</sup> This system ensures that promotion and demotion of high ranking officials remain determined by the Party-state personnel system. Anyone who dares to challenge this system or embarrass the local Party and government apparatus will be ousted from officialdom.

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<sup>483</sup> Miriam K. Mills and Stuart S. Nagel, *Public Administration in China* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993). 111

<sup>484</sup> Susan H. Whiting, *Power and Wealth in Rural China: The Political Economy of Institutional Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). 101

<sup>485</sup> Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). 590

<sup>486</sup> Zhou, *Capitalizing China's Media Industry: The Installation of Capitalist Production in Tv and Film Sectors*. 173

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.* 173

<sup>488</sup> Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 47

*Changjiang*'s managerial officials displayed a common „significant risk aversion“.<sup>489</sup> They would not endanger their offices and promotion to protect a journalist or to maintain any lofty rhetoric. Although investigative reports add credit to the media's brand and could help the Party-state tackle corruption problems, aggressive journalists will still likely be suspended or fired.<sup>490</sup> The managerial officials have no accountability and take no responsibility for their management decisions because the ethical burdens are laden on the professionals. It is these professionals who have to take primary punishment when their reportage annoys the local officialdom. By withdrawing official support for Yao, the *Changjiang* management wanted to reassure their fellow local political elites that the paper would by no means go against them. The balance between being transparent and loyal to the Party-state's positive publicity is, therefore, at times maintained by sacrificing common professionals like Yao.

Offstein and Morwick hold that the managers of an organization need to protect all three parties, namely employees, management and the organization.<sup>491</sup> However, the Offstein list is only nominal to many of the managers of Chinese media outlets. The media only want to protect the management, the organization and the major stakeholders. The latter include the authorities of state power and officialdom because local governments are usually the major investors in most local media at provincial level and below.<sup>492</sup> Journalists and editors at lower level are excluded from this protection list because the *Code of Ethics* decided by the authorities and senior management are full of contradictory ethical demands. It does not require the media management to assume primary responsibility for professional activities or stipulate any ethical accountability on the part of the media organizations. On the other hand, ethical burdens, such as „to be brave to criticize misdeeds and corruption“, „directing public opinion correctly“, „positive publicity“ are all laden on

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<sup>489</sup> Janelle Plummer and John G. Taylor, *Community Participation in China: Issues and Processes for Capacity Building* (London: Earthscan, 2004). 8

<sup>490</sup> Bandurski and Hala, *Investigative Journalism in China: Eight Cases in Chinese Watchdog Journalism*. 106

<sup>491</sup> Evan H. Offstein and Jason M. Morwick, *Making Telework Work: Leading People and Leveraging Technology for High-Impact Results* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2009). 113

<sup>492</sup> Lynda Lee Kaid and Christina Holtz-Bacha, *Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, vol. 1 (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008). 99

the professionals. As to the pervasive indifference to these ethical ideas among the media professionals, the confusion embedded in the *Code of Ethics* and the lack of a sense of security in everyday work is tellingly relevant.

#### 4.5 The Identity Dilemma

The identity dilemma in this chapter refers to a situation in which media professionals are lost between who they are and who they are mandated to be, a result of the coercive control by administration and management. The Chinese equivalent to „journalist“ is „*jizhe*“, literally, meaning „the person who records“. It could be anyone who cares, including but not limited to those who are academically educated and professionally prepared. Media professionals today, however, have to struggle for a journalistic license, or press card issued by the administrative authority.<sup>493</sup> The reality is that this license is too hard to get. According to Li Dongdong, Deputy Director of the GAPP, among the 4,497,000 media personnel in the news and press industry, only 219,016 are eligible for the press card, less than five percent.<sup>494</sup> As Zhan Jiang commented, the identity of journalists should not be limited by the press card but should be empowered by the constitutional rights to information and expression.<sup>495</sup> The difference between a journalist and a non-practitioner only lies in their professional skills and the way they deploy their skills. In either case, they are entitled to the rights to know, to inform and to investigate.

The identity issue escalated into a problem after the enforcement of the MAPC in 2005. Eligibility for press cards is to a large extent dependent on the employers. According to the MAPC, academic education and training is not enough to qualify as a journalist. A media professional must acquire a Press Card before carrying out any journalistic activities. Although Cards are issued by the GAPP, the senior

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<sup>493</sup> Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*. 81

<sup>494</sup> Yujuan Wang and Yumei Wang, "Zai Xiang Nv Xinwen Gongzuozhe Wenhao," *Zhongguo Xinwen Chuban Bao*, 11th March 2011 2011.

<sup>495</sup> Jiang Zhan, "Chengguan Dasi Le Yige Zhen Jizhe [ a Real Journalist Is Beaten to Death by City Administration Enforcement Squads]," *Nanfang dushi bao*, 12th January 2008.

management of media businesses generally have power over eligibility. According to article 26, for example, only media employers can apply for the issue and renewal of press cards for their employees. Individual applications by media workers are not to be accepted. Applications for reissuing press cards, due to wear and tear, stain and loss, can only be made through the employer (articles 19 and 20). The validity of a card cannot be longer than the tenor of each related employment contract. Termination of a contract means the end of the validity of the press card (article 18). Moreover, according to sub-article 2 of article 12, news agencies will not apply for press cards for those who are not formally employed though they may be contracted to make news or programs, e.g. as column correspondents, staff writers, special correspondents and others who collect and edit news on full-time or part-time basis.<sup>496</sup> The verification of the authenticity of a press card also relies on the employer (article 26). Media outlets are required to publicize the „National Press Card Administration and Verification Network System“, which provides verification of authenticity of press cards. However, most media including the mainstream newspapers, portals, television and radio stations and their websites loathe practising the article 26 because they have employed too many practitioners who are not eligible for press cards.

In contrast, punitive measures while irrelevant to management are coercive to media workers. According to article 30, punishment for news agencies breaching the rules is capped by warning or a moderate fine of „below 30,000 yuan“, a negligible sum when media businesses were turning over 185.4 billion yuan in 2008.<sup>497</sup> Punishment for journalists, however, ranges from warning to fine, then to

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<sup>496</sup> Media organizations, like other institutional organizations, have two employment systems. One is formal employment system; the other is informal employment system. There are about 1.3 million institutional organizations and they hire 30 million formal employees. The reform of state personnel system initiated in 2002 has eventually transformed most employees of organizational institutions into informal employees. Most grassroots media professionals, likewise, are hired in the informal employment system. High ranking officials, however, remain in the formal employment system, and can be promoted through the CCP bureaucratic ladder. Zhou, *Capitalizing China's Media Industry: The Installation of Capitalist Production in Tv and Film Sectors*. 173

<sup>497</sup> 30,000 yuan is in equivalence to about 4,615 Australian dollars at the rate of 1:6.5. 185.4 billion yuan is approximately valued at 31.4 billion Australian dollars. 60.63% of the turnover came from advertising sales.



suspension, to revocation of their press cards, and to life ban of their livelihood. The MAPC has given media organizations and their senior management decisive power over the fate of their employees, but provides no petition for employees to petition. In such a circumstance, lower level professionals tend to be obedient to management. Journalists and editors, who would identify themselves as „persons who record and report“ rather than those who merely take notes and follow orders, are increasingly alienated.

The identity dilemma is also epitomized in inadequate representation of grassroots professionals. This identity problem is not a matter of whether they are members of a professional association, but whether they are entitled to any representational rights. Unlike professionals in other industries such as translators, teachers, and carpenters who organize and join professional associations on voluntary basis, the membership of ACJA, a quasi-official association under the leadership of the CPD, is mandatory for all journalists. The ACJA is powerful because any journalist who wishes to progress in his or her career will have to rise within the federation first.<sup>498</sup>

Yet, such membership does not mean a pathway towards satisfying career ambitions or an opportunity to voice professional rights and concerns. The Board of Governors of the ACJA is made up of representatives from the institutional members only. It is the media organizations, as direct or institutional members, that are entitled to exclusive full voting rights within the ACJA. The Association has been chaired by prominent officials from the central state apparatus since its establishment in July 1949. The present chairman of ACJA is Tian Congming, a ministerial level official and a member of the standing committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), former director of the State Administration of the Radio, Film and Television and former head of Xinhua. By default, managerial officials are granted the rights to represent media professionals under their management. These officials are entitled to the right to elect and be

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According to the Report, the turnover of the total media industry in 2008 reached 422 billion yuan or about 65 billion Australian dollars. But the revenue that is not involved in journalism is not included in this statistics.

Cui, ed. 2009: *Report on the Development of China's Media Industry*. 8

<sup>498</sup> John Herbert, *Practising Global Journalism* (Oxford: Reed Educational and Professional Publishing Ltd, 2001). 158

elected for ACJA leadership and to make strategic decisions whilst the grassroots professionals are denied these rights. The ACJA represents the voice of the central state apparatus. Lower level or subsidiary associations take care of academic seminars, professional awards, and social activities such as outings and karaoke contests but not appeals, petitions and protests.

It is understandable, then, that the ACJA fails to acknowledge the existence of administrative and management problems in media outlets and encourages a „house-cleansing“ mentality. For example, the most commonly adopted solution to cases of fabricated and misleading news is to suspend or fire the reporters and editors held responsible while leaving untouched the systematic problems producing them. Membership of ACJA also does not guarantee any realistic channel for the accused to lodge an appeal. The fate of individual media workers, including guest writers who commit wrong, is the least that the Association is concerned about. Given the identity problems, however, seeking representation beyond official arrangement is legally forbidden and risky.<sup>499</sup> It has become a political survival strategy for the grassroots professionals to stay in line with the ACJA and cope with the business guidelines set by the administrative authorities and senior management which prioritize political compliance and profits over serious journalism.

#### 4.6 Concluding Remarks

The Chinese media system, under pressure from both Party-state control and the pursuit of profits,<sup>500</sup> fosters exploitative management, ethical confusion and inadequate representation. The confusion of „party logic“ and „market logic“, as Yuezhi Zhao identifies to be contradictory in Chinese media,<sup>501</sup> has placed the vast majority of media professionals under what Park and Curran have called „both

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<sup>499</sup> Timothy Cheek, *Living with Reform: China since 1989*, vol. 1 (Black Point: Fernwood Publishing Ltd., 2006). 70

<sup>500</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 152

<sup>501</sup> Yongnian Zheng, *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor: Culture, Reproduction and Transformation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010). 156

political and economic exploitation“.<sup>502</sup> These problems breed market dilemma, ethical dilemma and identity dilemma, which have in turn significantly alienated grassroots media professionals from official ideological and ethical rhetoric. These dilemmas have not only engendered the malpractice problems, but have also hampered media transparency. Following this line, this chapter argues that these dilemmas have resulted in collapse of the officially promoted transparency rhetoric and professional standards, and hence led to pandemic media malpractice.

When sensationalism prevails and becomes a phenomenon of the media industry, it has to be what Lincoln Steffens would call „a systematic problem“ for which the administrative authorities and management should be responsible.<sup>503</sup> While the state power remains coercive, profit concerns have increasingly driven Chinese media outlets towards pragmatic developmentalism. Media workers are driven into the „McDonaldization“ of the media industry where journalism is managed as no more than commodities to be consumed like hamburgers.<sup>504</sup> Disillusioned professionals are forced to follow orders and become part of the fast food media production line. They have to struggle to survive the market, ethical and identity dilemmas on a daily basis. The pressure caused by these dilemmas is enormous, constant and alienating, which has led these professionals to desperate situations when they are financially stressed, ethically confused and deprived of their rights. Consequently, these professionals are increasingly alienated from management and official rhetoric.

Also, the discussion of media malpractice dilemmas has further revealed the media transparency illusion. Such an illusion is epitomized in the Party-state“s attempts to implant Party logic and market logic into media professional ethics and standards so as to justify control of the media. However, such attempts are unable to foster a healthy media system, as amply demonstrated in the failure of the *Sanxiang Xuexi Jiaoyu Huodong* to curb the pandemic malpractice. It has failed because the Party logic and market logic do not care about the grassroots professionals. These logics

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<sup>502</sup> Park and Curran, *De-Westernizing Media Studies*. 19

<sup>503</sup> Palermo, *Lincoln Steffens*. 43

<sup>504</sup> Robin Andersen and Jonathan Alan Gray, *Battleground: The Media*, vol. 1 (West Port: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2008). 68

serve Party-state politics and capital rather than the proclaimed Marxist journalism, encourage a no-holds-barred profit-seeking and political risk-sensitive management, and consequently suppress professional quest for truth and objectivity. Therefore, media malpractice problems cannot be solved by reinforcing state control, ideological education campaigns or market incentives, but by addressing and solving the market, ethics and identity dilemmas.

## Chapter Five: Marketization and Conglomeration of State-owned Media: a Media Transparency Myth?

### 5.1 Introduction

According to the *Theory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics* and the Scientific Perspective of Development, „problems existing in the process of development“ can only be solved by „further development“.<sup>505</sup> In a macro sense then, ongoing economic reform will eventually lead to a solution to existing problems including those related to the superstructure. This language has been translated into the reform of the news media system [*xinwen tizhi gaige*] based on the rationale pertaining to marketization, corporatization and conglomeration. Market discourses have led to a boom in the media industry with expectations that official promise of transparency and supervision by public opinion would eventually be fulfilled.

Apart from the public listing of *Beijing Youth Daily* on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in December 2004,<sup>506</sup> a recent move towards further marketization and corporatization is the initial public offerings (IPO) and public listing in April 2012 of the people.com.cn [*renmin wang*], the online branch of the *People's Daily* and the mouthpiece of the CCP Central Committee. This move, being the new high point of reform of the state-owned news media outlets over the past three decades, implies the introduction of non-state capital to more Party media. It also implies increasing influence of the market. Meanwhile, state control remains unabated.<sup>507</sup> In light of this increasing complexity, there have been beliefs that the censorship regime will lose its effectiveness due to the fragmentation of authority resulting

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<sup>505</sup> President Hu Jintao reiterated in his Speech at the APEC CEO Summit 2010 in Yokohama that the problems that China is facing can only be solved by further development. Viewed on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 from <http://money.163.com/10/1113/11/6LC7Q5K400254JQQ.html>.

<sup>506</sup> Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 116

<sup>507</sup> Chin-Chuan Lee, "The Global and the National of the Chinese Media: Discourse, Market, Technology and Ideology," in *Chinese Media, Global Contexts*, ed. Chin-Chuan Lee (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003). 24

Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). 42

from the rapid expansion of the media in both size and content,<sup>508</sup> and introduction of new market-oriented programs.<sup>509</sup> It is widely recognized that news media with less official identity and more market drive tend to be more flexible, freer in their reportage, and therefore, more credible and transparent.<sup>510</sup> Even Party media and their affiliates are impelled to adopt more-or-less market-oriented strategies and have exhibited more flexibility than ever before.<sup>511</sup> Some scholars, Xiao Yuanlin for example, attribute the trend of market-oriented reform to the inspiration of Western management, compelling competition in the marketplace, and the need to establish market order.<sup>512</sup> The introduction of private and foreign capital, limited as it is, has led some like Kate Xiao Zhou, to believe that marketization and ongoing conglomeration will result in liberalization, sooner or later.<sup>513</sup> Some have claimed that conglomeration of the flourishing media outlets will weaken the Party-state's control over and the media as the market is playing a prominent role in the newly established corporate governance.<sup>514</sup> In the same vein, Liu Junning asserts that press freedom is predicated on the „invisible hand of the market“.<sup>515</sup>

These beliefs in the magic of the market have set the tone of market discourses and created an illusion of transparency. As Chin-Chuan Lee has critiqued, many would believe that, by following the current trend of marketization, substantive freedom and transparency is just a matter of time.<sup>516</sup> However, neither profit-driven nor

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<sup>508</sup> Michael A. Keane, "Broadcasting Policy, Creative Compliance and the Myth of Civil Society in China," *Media Culture & Society* 23(2001). 793

<sup>509</sup> Minxin Pei, *From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). 165

<sup>510</sup> Susan L. Shirk, "Changing Media, Changing China," in *Changing Media, Changing China*, ed. Susan L. Shirk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). 5

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.* 5

<sup>512</sup> Yuanling Xiao, "Dalu Dangbao Jituanhua Fazhan Zhi Yanjiu - Yi Renmin Ribao He Guangzhou Ribao Weili [Study on Conglomeration of the Official Newspapers in the Mainland: Case Studies on the People's Daily and Guangzhou Daily]" (National Chengchi University, 2004). 46

<sup>513</sup> Zhou, *China's Long March to Freedom: Grassroots Modernization*. 165

<sup>514</sup> Zhu, "1998: Ziyou Zhuyi Xueli De Yanshuo [1998: Discourse on Theory of Liberalism]."

Also see ———, *Shuzhai Li De Geming [Revolution in the Study]*. 344

Park and Curran, *De-Westernizing Media Studies*. 22

<sup>515</sup> Junning Liu, *Gonghe Minzhu Xianzheng: Ziyou Zhuyi Sixiang Yanjiu [Republic, Democracy, Constitutional Rule: Study on Liberal Thoughts]* (Shanghai: Sanlian, 1998). 362

Also see Lee, "The Global and the National of the Chinese Media: Discourse, Market, Technology and Ideology." 19

<sup>516</sup> Lee, "The Global and the National of the Chinese Media: Discourse, Market, Technology and Ideology." 19

Party-state-steered media have so far lived up such expectations. Lee also points out that the market advocates are curiously silent on issues of fairness, power and domination and largely ignorant of the plight of Chinese peasants and workers.<sup>517</sup> Therefore, to discuss the possibility of media transparency today, one must understand whether reform is meant to generate and improve transparency or to encourage pursuit of profit *and* enhance state control.

Media reform has basically taken two steps. Firstly, market-oriented business management [*qiyehua guanli*] was adopted to revitalize outlets. Secondly, conglomeration and corporate governance reassured control by the Party-state. Tracing these steps, this chapter examines why increased financial autonomy and market-oriented management has failed to generate any substantive media transparency. It is argued that the goal of reform of public news media is largely about maximizing profit and reinforcing effective state control over journalism rather than substantiating the officially promised transparency and supervision by public opinion.

## 5.2 Business management and Marketization

Business management refers to the management system in which the media, although still regarded as political and cultural institutions, are managed as business enterprises.<sup>518</sup> Since its application, media outlets have been gradually transformed from government bureaucracies to business enterprises, and their financial sources shifted from government subsidy to the market. This transformation made it necessary for outlets to start to streamline their operations and take cost analysis, profit targets and government taxation into consideration.<sup>519</sup> The decision to reform was made when the media industry was facing financial difficulties and shrinking readership while by the late-1970s, the government was unable to continue to

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid. 19

<sup>518</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 53

<sup>519</sup> Ibid. 53

afford fully subsidising it.<sup>520</sup> As Yuezhi Zhao observes, the government investment priorities then were in such areas as science and education rather than in the media.<sup>521</sup>

The first financial challenge the news media had to face at the threshold of the reform era was the soaring cost of inputs which constituted a direct threat to their survival. The price of newsprint, for example, rose from 760 yuan per ton in 1979 to 1,900 yuan in 1988 within the planned allocation system and 3,400 yuan per ton on the market.<sup>522</sup> Given the shortage of centrally allocated supply, a large proportion had to be purchased on the market at a much higher cost, a common scenario of the double track system of resource allocation.<sup>523</sup> The situation for radio and television stations was even worse because the programs were delivered on free-to-air basis. Outlets relied heavily on government subsidies and the modest incomes generated by subscription and distribution sources became increasingly insufficient to sustain everyday operations, not to mention further development to accommodate the public's increasing demand for more media services.<sup>524</sup> As subsidies declined, more than two thirds of the media could hardly make ends meet.<sup>525</sup>

In addition, the financial situation of newspapers deteriorated under *youfa heyi*, the circulation system in which subscription and distribution were taken over, monopolized by the postal service and treated as a political obligation.<sup>526</sup> Subscriptions and distribution were guaranteed by being assigned to the postal network. However, both the press and the postal service obviously lacked

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<sup>520</sup> Miao Di, "Between Propaganda and Commercials: Chinese Television Today," in *Changing Media, Changing China*, ed. Susan L. Shirk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). 92

<sup>521</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 53

<sup>522</sup> Compiling Committee of the *Annals of Harbin, Annals of Harbin: Newspapers, Radio and Television* (Harbin: Heilongjiang People's Press, 1994). 227

<sup>523</sup> Before the double track system of goods supply was abolished, limited amount of materials for production was supplied within the planned economy at fixed rate while the unfulfilled part of the need had to be met by resorting to the opening-up market at the rate determined by the demand and supply.

<sup>524</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 53

<sup>525</sup> Xiangwei Lai, *Meiti Fazhan Yu Guojia Zhengce: Cong Yanlun Ziyou Yu Xinwen Ziyou Sikao Chuanbo Chanyi Quanli* (Taipei: Wu-nan Tushu Chuban Gufen Youxian Gongsì, 2005). 53

<sup>526</sup> *Youfa heyi* means integrating postal service with newspaper circulation. Rensheng Bai, *Zhongguo Xinwen Tongshi Gangyao [General History of Journalism in China]* (Beijing: Xinhua Press, 1998). 454



incentives to expand subscriptions because they were not allowed to take initiative to broaden distribution channels, expand the size of issues and adjust prices without prior permission by the administrative authorities.<sup>527</sup>

In 1985, for example, the Henan Administration of Post and Telecommunication raised the commission rate chargeable to newly established newspapers and magazines to 35%. Official newspapers and periodicals continued to be charged 35% within the *youfa heyi* system in 1987.<sup>528</sup> It was also common for cash flows of the press to slow considerably. This slowing resulted in part because it usually took a long time for subscriptions collected by post offices to be transferred to the newspapers. Annual or quarterly subscriptions were collected in lump sums in advance. Newspapers, however, were only reimbursed by monthly instalment. Even the *People's Daily* was in serious financial trouble because millions of its subscription fees were misappropriated and delayed by the postal service to such an extent that the former hardly had sufficient funds for newsprint.<sup>529</sup> As a result, the media lost incentives and abilities to fund new technologies and expansion of services.

In a joint report to the Ministry of Treasury, eight newspapers at central level including the *People's Daily* proposed application of „public institutions, business management“ at the end of 1978, pleading for permission to try „independent accounting and retainable surpluses“.<sup>530</sup> Soon after the proposal was approved, the media started to transform gradually from total government institution into market-oriented businesses. Consequently, whilst government subsidies were gradually pruned, market forces were reintroduced and commercialized financing encouraged.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Zhiyong Wu, "Lun Youfa Heyi Tizhi De Queli [on Establishment of *Youfa Heyi*]," *Lishi dang'an*, no. 3 (2006). 124

<sup>528</sup> Wenjie Shao, *Henan Shengzhi: Wujia Zhi* (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press, 1994). 227

<sup>529</sup> Institution of Journalism of China Academy of Social Sciences, *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* (Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Press, 1989). 131

<sup>530</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 53  
Xinxun Wu and Guanjun Jin, *Zhongguo Chuanmei Jingji Yanjiu 1949-2004* (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2004). 17

<sup>531</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 53  
McNally, *China's Emergent Political Economy: Capitalism in the Dragon's Lair*. 134

The first step toward financial autonomy was to allow paid commercial services. *Tianjin Daily* took the lead to produce advertisements on its 4<sup>th</sup> January 1979 issue. *Wenhui Bao* placed an ad for Swiss-made Radar watches on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1979, the first for foreign products.<sup>532</sup> Shanghai People's Radio Station aired the first audio advertisement on 15<sup>th</sup> March 1979.<sup>533</sup> The first TV commercial since the start of the reform era was introduced on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1979 by Shanghai TV.<sup>534</sup>

For newspapers, the limitation on page numbers stood in the way of advertising. Early in reform era when various aspects of the national economy were given access to market and eager to promote themselves, there was no shortage of advertising clients. Yet, it was common in cities like Guangzhou, Beijing and Shanghai that an advertisement proposal had to wait for one or two months before being published.<sup>535</sup> The *People's Daily* was the only daily nationwide that had the luxury of printing eight pages per issue. Municipal dailies were only allowed four and had too much obligations for official news and editorials to spare room for advertising.

In 1987, *Guangzhou Daily* was the first municipal newspaper to be allowed to expand eight pages, and these were used to meet advertising demand. Not surprisingly, the limit that advertisement should not exceed one eighth of total pages was soon broken.<sup>536</sup> Backed up by this new revenue and expanded pages, *Guangzhou Daily* was also able to adopt journalism more relevant to its readers' interests. As a result, its daily circulation increased from 200,000 copies per issue in 1981 to 337,000 in 1988 and 610,000 in 1995.<sup>537</sup> In light of the obvious financial

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<sup>532</sup> Zhi, *New Media Imperial: Brand, Capital and Industrialization in the Competitive Environment* [*Xin Chuanmei Diguo: Jingzheng Geju Xia De Pingpai, Ziben He Chanyehua*]. 5

<sup>533</sup> Yun Liu and Qi Cai, "2008 Nian Guangbo Guanggao Jingying Gaikuang," in *Report on Development of China's Media Industry (2009)*, ed. Baoguo Cui (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2010). 177

<sup>534</sup> Yuhong Zhang, *Fumian Baodao Bushi Huai Dongxi: Zhongguo Xinwen Shijian Zhong De Zhenmingti* (Taipei: Showwe Information Co., Ltd., 2010). 175

<sup>535</sup> Hongwen Lan, *Mianxiang Xinwenjie* (Beijing: Jinguang Jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995). 33  
Peng Cao, *Zhongguo Baoye Jituan Fazhan Yanjiu [Study on the Development of China's Press Groups]* (Beijing: Xinhua Press, 1999). 166

<sup>536</sup> Lai, *Meiti Fazhan Yu Guojia Zhengce: Cong Yanlun Ziyou Yu Xinwen Ziyou Sikao Chuanbo Chanyi Quanli*. 72

<sup>537</sup> Shengmin Huang and Yan Zhou, *Zhongguo Chuanmei Shichang Da Bianju* (Beijing Citic Publishing House, 2003):189

benefits, the CPD reduced restrictions even further after Deng Xiaoping's southern tour in 1992.<sup>538</sup> As a result, advertising sales turnover via newspapers, television and radio surged from 0.23 billion yuan in 1983 to 174.1 billion yuan in 2007.<sup>539</sup> The media were able to develop relative financial autonomy and survived the withdrawal of subsidies.

The other step was to move from *youfa heyi* to self-reliant circulation. The postal service did not like the idea of allowing the newspapers to take control of subscriptions and distribution. In 1984, given the heavy distribution costs and insufficient government subsidies, *Luoyang Daily* pleaded to Luoyang People's Post to lower the commission rate from 25% to 20%. The proposal was instantly rejected. As a result in 1985, *Luoyang Daily* decided to become the first in the nation to operate self-reliant distribution [*ziban faxing*]. As a result, its daily circulation volume almost doubled from 62,000 copies to 110,000 copies in the following year.<sup>540</sup> More and more newspapers then began to practice self-reliant distribution and found it a good way not only for cutting back costs, but also to expand their market. *Guangzhou Daily* started self-reliant distribution in 1990 and elevated it to the height of „a matter of life or death“ in 1991. Its own delivery system guaranteed that readers received their newspapers before 7:30 am, matching the Cantonese custom of „morning tea with newspapers“.<sup>541</sup> *Huaxi Metropolis Daily* initiated door-to-door sales in 1996, aiming to generate personal ties between itself and its readers.<sup>542</sup>

Self-reliant distribution system rubbished the *youfa heyi* restraints on printing volumes, delivery times, subscription channels and cost management. To maintain distribution income, post offices started to give up their monopoly mindset and

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Lai, *Meiti Fazhan Yu Guojia Zhengce: Cong Yanlun Ziyou Yu Xinwen Ziyou Sikao Chuanbo Chanyi Quanli*:68

<sup>538</sup> Hong Yu and Zhengqiang Deng, *Zhongguo Dangdai Guanggao Shi* (Changsha: Hunan kexue jishu chubanshe, 2000). 127

<sup>539</sup> Xinxun Wu and Hongbo Gao, "Cong Guanggao Shuju Kan Zhongguo Chuanmei Chanye 30 Nian," in *Report on China's Media Industry (2009)*, ed. Baoguo Cui (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2010). 404

<sup>540</sup> Zhi, *New Media Imperial: Brand, Capital and Industrialization in the Competitive Environment [Xin Chuanmei Diguo: Jingzheng Geju Xia De Pingpai, Ziben He Chanyehua]*. 11

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.* 16

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.* 28

sought cooperation with newspapers by lowering commission rates and tolerating the co-existence of postal and self-reliant distribution. By the mid-1990s, the *youfa heyi* system disappeared.<sup>543</sup>

Having obtained financial and distributional autonomy, the Party media began to boom. The number of newspapers, radio and television stations experienced a dramatic rise between 1979 to the mid-1990s. The number of newspapers with national serial numbers [*quanguo kanhao*] increased from 186 in 1978 to 2,089 in 1995.<sup>544</sup> Local serial number [*difang kanhao*] papers surged to 6,453.<sup>545</sup> With this rise came increases in information volume. Total printed pages rose from 11.4 billion in 1978 to 170.1 billion in 2007.<sup>546</sup>

Radio and television experienced a similar growth. The number of television stations rose from 47 in 1982 to 923 in 1997,<sup>547</sup> and radio stations from 99 in 1979 to 298 in 1999.<sup>548</sup> The boom followed the Document No. 37 of the CCP Central Committee in 1983 which lifted restrictions on establishment of radio and television stations at city and county levels.<sup>549</sup>

Public access to the media also increased considerably. In the mid-1990s, „television villages“ – where every household has a television set – no longer hit the

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<sup>543</sup> Jun Yuan, *Xinwen Meijie Tonglun [General Discussions on Journalism]* (Beijing: Beijing Guangbo Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2000). 213

<sup>544</sup> Baoguo Cui and Xiaoqun Zhang, *Zhongguo Baozhi Chanye Fazhan Gaikuang [Outline of the Development of China's Newspapers]*, ed. Baoguo Cui, Report on Development of China's Media Industry (2009) (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2010). 41

Each openly circulated newspaper must obtain a publication licence from the administration authorities. The licence bears a serial number indicating whether a publication is nationally or locally distributed.

<sup>545</sup> Bing Tong and Han Lin, *Ershi Shiji Zhongguo Xinwenxue Yu Chuanboxue: Lilun Xinwenxue Juan [Chinese Journalism and Communication: Theoretical Journalism]* (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2001). 19

<sup>546</sup> Cui and Zhang, *Zhongguo Baozhi Chanye Fazhan Gaikuang [Outline of the Development of China's Newspapers]*. 41

<sup>547</sup> Huaying Li and Rui Shen, "Cong Shuju Kan Gaige Kaifang Sanshi Nian Zhongguo De Dianshiye," in *Report on Development of China's Media Industry (2009)*, ed. Baoguo Cui (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2010). 208

<sup>548</sup> See NSB, "Public Report on the Implementation of the 1979 Plan of National Economy," (Beijing: National Statistics Bureau, 1980).

Hanqi Fang, "Zhongguo Xinwen Shiye Bainian [One Hundred Years of Chinese Journalism]," *Xinwen Sanwei*, no. 12 (2000). 45

<sup>549</sup> Zhiyue Wu, "Dui Jianli Guangbo Dianshi Xin Tizhi De Sikao," *Beifang Chuanmei Yanjiu*, no. 3 (2005).

headlines.<sup>550</sup> Many non-Party and semi-official newspapers adopted flexible editorial styles in reporting social events, and increasing content diversity attracted an unprecedented number of private subscriptions. Household subscription rates rose from 48.48 to 92.69 copies per one hundred persons per year,<sup>551</sup> demonstrating the popularity of non-Party newspapers with private subscribers. At the same time, the subscriptions for official newspapers kept falling in both urban and rural areas.<sup>552</sup>

There has been structural reform of the media since the adoption of business management in 1979. The former exclusively public outlets have been generally divided into Party [*dangbao dangkan*] and non-Party media [*fei dangbao dangkan*]. This division, however, was made in terms of organizational structure and management models, with the former being regarded as official mouthpieces and the latter as marketized outlets. The Party news media outlets consist of the government and CCP mouthpieces from central to local levels including official newspapers, TV and radio channels. Non-Party media includes subsidiaries of media groups, financially autonomous radio and television channels, and outlets sponsored by but not managed by state-owned enterprises, institutions and organizations. Private ownership is seen in some new media businesses as well. Portals such as Sohu, Sina and Netease were set up using private investment and are listed on overseas stock exchanges.<sup>553</sup>

### 5.3 Conglomeration and New Corporate Governance

As the media has grown into a dynamic part of the national economy, it has also become increasingly hard for the state to effectively control it through direct discipline. The implications of this shift are two-fold: 1) Party media are losing

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<sup>550</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 53

<sup>551</sup> Hongguang Xie and Jianwu Wen, *Zhongguo Xiaokang Zhi Lu* (Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji Chubanshe, 2000).

<sup>552</sup> Hui Lin, *Wei Wancheng De Lishi: Zhongguo Xinwen Gaige Qianyan [Unfinished History: Front of the Journalism Reform in China]* (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2004). 142

<sup>553</sup> Sohu, Sina and Netease went public on NASDAQ in 2000 and Tecent in Hong Kong in June 2004.

audience to the market-oriented outlets that adopt more flexible editorial styles; and 2) control of editorial decisions by the Party-state has become increasingly difficult.

It was obvious that the Party newspapers and journals saw their readership shrinking that central and provincial level broadcasters were losing audience to lower level radio and television stations that were more flexible and provided more entertainment.<sup>554</sup> While the Party media is perceived by the state as the most important instrument for guiding public opinion, its popularity is relatively lower than non-Party media.<sup>555</sup> The emergence of city newspapers in the mid-1990s accelerated the marginalization of the official ones.<sup>556</sup> As a result, it became harder and harder for the Party-state to implement direct supervision and control. The Party media, on the other hand, could not afford to lose its dominance in shaping public opinion and the focus of their reform has shifted from surviving financially to reinforcing political control.

### 5.3.1 Conglomeration

Conglomeration offers an ample solution for the above two implications. Conglomeration in the Post-Mao China is a process to restructure single outlets into a multi-functional and multi-platform conglomerates each headed by a Party media. There are no exceptions. The head media of each group has ultimate power over the subsidiary outlets. Press groups are led by a Party newspaper and include periodicals, magazines, Internet portals, publishing houses and other profit-making branches unrelated to publication business such as real estate branches.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Guping Wu, "Yushi Jujin, Gaijin Xinwen Xuanchuan [Keep Pace with the Times, Improve Journalism and Propaganda]," *Xinwen Jizhe*, no. 8 (2008).

<sup>555</sup> Stockmann, "What Kind of Information Does the Public Demand? Getting the News During the 2005 Anti-Japanese Protests." 180

<sup>556</sup> Lin, *Wei Wancheng De Lishi: Zhongguo Xinwen Gaige Qianyan [Unfinished History: Front of the Journalism Reform in China]*. 140

<sup>557</sup> Appendix 6 on page 232 shows the levels and numbers of press groups approved by the GAPP as of end of 2009.

There were forty-one such press groups at the end of 2009, two of which are at the central level, twenty-five at provincial level, and fourteen at municipal level.<sup>558</sup> Radio and television groups, under the governance of the SARFT, were also restructured in similar way. Wuxi Broadcasting and Television Group, the first of its kind, was established in June 1999.<sup>559</sup> The number of these groups rose to eighteen at the end of 2004.<sup>560</sup> Provincial and local media groups have also been established by conglomerating profit-generating businesses that are not directly related to journalism.<sup>561</sup>

Guangzhou, capital city of Guangdong Province, had eighty-nine newspapers with a national serial number at the end of 1998, sixty-five of which were established after 1979.<sup>562</sup> The Guangzhou Daily Press Group was the first of its kind, conglomerated on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1996. The Group is flagshipged by *Guangzhou Daily* and consists of fifteen local newspapers, five magazines and two websites. The supportive branches of its industry chain such as printing, distribution and advertising have been corporatized and marketized. Its full subsidiary, Guangzhou Dayang Industrial Co Limited, owns 90% share of the public listed Guangdong China Sunshine Media Co., Ltd., which runs advertising, printing, and press retailing businesses. Guangzhou Daily Printing Centre, with a production capacity of 4.7 million double sided standard newsprint pages per hour, provides printing service not only for the newspapers and magazines within the group but also for

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<sup>558</sup> Cui and Zhang, *Zhongguo Baozhi Chanye Fazhan Gaikuang [Outline of the Development of China's Newspapers]*. 44

Please refer to Appendix 6 for a detailed list.

<sup>559</sup> Zhao, "The State, the Market, Media Control in China." 195

<sup>560</sup> Yicheng Luo, Jinhai Zhang, and Bo Shan, *Zhongguo Meiti Fazhan Yanjiu Baogao [Report on the Development of China's Media]* (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2005). 21

There was no clear division between the editorial and market sectors within these conglomerates. Since late 2004, the SARFT has ceased to accept application for establishment of new radio and television conglomerates that are public institutions and managed as business enterprises. However, conglomeration of mere market divisions [*jingyingxing yewu*] including advertising and distribution businesses is not prohibited.

<sup>561</sup> A recent example is the establishment of Anhui Radio and Television Media Group in February 2010. The business scope of this Group focuses on profit-generating businesses such as advertising and TV shopping channels that are not directly related to journalism.

Yuebo Li and Yi Song, "Anhui Yanyi Jituan, Anhui Guangdian Chuanmei Chanye Jituan Jinri Chengli [Anhui Performance Art Group and Anhui Radio and Television Media Group Are Established Today]," <http://ah.anhuinews.com/system/2010/02/22/002665673.shtml>.

<sup>562</sup> Compiling Committee of the Annals of Guangzhou, *Guangzhou Shizhi [Annals of Guangzhou]*, vol. 16 (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Publishing House, 1999). 946

those from other parts of Guangdong. The revenue of the group reached 3.96 billion yuan in 2008 and supported an average circulation of 1.85 million copies per day.<sup>563</sup>

### 5.3.2 Restructured Corporate Governance

Corporate governance is, „the system by which companies are directed and controlled“,<sup>564</sup> which involves „a set of processes, customs, policies, laws, and institutions“. <sup>565</sup> It deals with a set of relationships between a company’s management, its board, its shareholders and other stakeholders, and provides structure through which corporate objectives are set.<sup>566</sup> The reform of China’s media, by shifting the management of outlets from the state bureaucracy to business management and then into new Party-dominated corporate governance, has seen the establishment of a system that allows marketization for profit purposes on the one hand and maintains effective editorial control over the other.

The corporate governance with Chinese characteristics is manifested in the way objectives of conglomeration are limited to profit without jeopardizing editorial control by the Party-state. Rather than editorial autonomy in their own interests, the financial success of the media groups serves to reinforce the Party-state’s political control.

The new Party-dominated corporate governance adopted in conglomerated media groups shares the following features: 1) flagship status of a Party media; 2) *Shewehui* system; 3) the separation of news production and *jingyingxing yewu* [profit-generating businesses].

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<sup>563</sup> The information about Guangzhou Daily Press Group is available from its official website, viewed on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2011 from <http://co.gzdaily.com/201106/10/62881.shtml>.

<sup>564</sup> Andrew Hicks and S. H. Goo, *Cases and Materials on Company Law*, 6 ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). 239

<sup>565</sup> H. Kent Baker and Gary E. Powell, "Management Views on Corporate Governance and Firm Performance," in *Corporate Governance and Firm Performance*, ed. Mark Hirschey, Kose John, and Anil K. Makhija (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2009). 84

<sup>566</sup> OECD, *Environment in the Transition to a Market Economy: Progress in Central and Eastern Europe and the New Independent States* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 1999). 159



First of all, the new corporate governance has enabled incorporation of media businesses into a group of market entities and put the non-Party outlets under direction and control of the leading Party mouthpieces. The primary goal of conglomeration is to ensure the dominance of the official outlets and prevent them from being marginalized. The relationship between the state and the reformed news outlets is demonstrated by the flagship status of the Party mouthpieces.

Flagship status is a function of political significance. Although some Party media, such as *Guangzhou Daily*, are behemoths within the conglomerates under their leadership, it is not uncommon for leading official outlets to be much smaller than the subsidiaries. In 2000 for example, the average circulation volume of Party newspapers was no more than 60% of that in the mid-1980s.<sup>567</sup> The integration of the weakening official outlets and the flourishing non-Party media within one organization assures the leadership of the official outlets despite their inability to compete in both domestic and overseas marketplaces. Hence, market competition, as Yuezhi Zhao elucidates, provides a perfect excuse for the Party-state to consolidate its power over the media by merging existing outlets or establishing conglomerates.<sup>568</sup> Endorsed by its leadership authority, the head Party media is able to reallocate resources within the group including financial and human resources as well as hold coercive power over the subsidiaries and their professionals. Meanwhile, conglomeration has not necessarily been the result of voluntary unions, but usually arranged by the Party-state through administrative orders.<sup>569</sup> By taking over non-Party outlets, a small number of media groups are able to bring many more non-Party outlets under close surveillance.

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<sup>567</sup> Jun Wang and Weihong Wang, "Shilun Dangbao Yu Zhuliu Meiti [Tentative Talk on Party Newspapers and Mainstream Media]," in *Renmin Gongheguo Dangbao Luntan [Party Newspapers Forum of the People's Republic]* (Beijing: Zhongguo Chuanmei Daxue Chubanshe, 2006). 259

<sup>568</sup> Zhao, "Who Wants Democracy and Does It Deliver Food? Communication and Power in a Globally Integrated China." 66

<sup>569</sup> Chin-Chuan Lee, Zhou He, and Yu Huang, "'Chinese Party Publicity Inc.' Conglomerated: The Case of the Shenzhen Press Group," in *Political Regimes and the Media in Asia*, ed. Krishna Sen and Terence Lee (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008). 15

Fen Lin, "Turning Gray: Transition of Political Communication in China, 1978--2008" (The University of Chicago, 2008). 55

The Wenhui-Xinmin Press Group is a telling example of takeover of a much more affluent and influential marketized semi-official outlet<sup>570</sup>. *Xinmin Wanbao* was a more commercialized media while *Wenhui Bao* remained a Party mouthpiece chaired by the head of the Shanghai Propaganda Authority. In the 1990s, *Xinmin Wanbao* was known for its flexible editorial style and aggressive marketing strategies that were quite different from Party newspapers. Its *Summer Hotline*, initiated in 1994 for example, listened to the readers and helped common people to contact the government for help with everyday difficulties. Not only was *Xinmin Wanbao* distributed nationwide, in 1994 it became the first news outlet to establish overseas branches including an office in Los Angeles to promote the newspaper among the Overseas Chinese. It also set up a special subsidiary in charge of international distribution and advertising business. *Xinmin Wanbao*'s circulation volume surged to 1.85 million per issue in 1990 and had remained around 1.7 million until the conglomeration took place in 1998.<sup>571</sup> Its advertising revenue kept mounting and reached 720 million yuan in 1998, an increase of 13% from 1997.<sup>572</sup> In contrast, *Wenhui Bao*'s advertising revenue was 106 million yuan in 1998, only 14.72% of the *Xinmin Wanbao*'s.<sup>573</sup> At the time of the conglomeration, *Wenhui Bao*'s circulation had fallen from 1.71 million in 1983 to less than 0.5 million in 1997.<sup>574</sup>

The marriage between the two was ordered by the Shanghai Municipal Government and CCP Shanghai Publicity Department.<sup>575</sup> Although *Xinmin Wanbao* was financially stronger and more influential, its non-Party mouthpiece status makes it inferior. *Wenhui Bao* took the flagship status, and its former Party Chief, Wang

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<sup>570</sup> Both *Xinmin Wanbao* and *Wenhui Bao* are located in Shanghai.

<sup>571</sup> Junji Xu, *Zhongguo Guanggao Shi [History of Advertising in China]* (Beijing: Zhongguo Chuanmei Daxue Chubanshe, 2006). 248

<sup>572</sup> Institution of Journalism of China Academy of Social Sciences, *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian [Almanac of China's Journalism]* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1999). 118

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.* 118

<sup>574</sup> Huilin Hu and Xi Chen, *Zhongguo Wenhua Chanye Pinglun [Review of China's Cultural Industry]*, vol. 9 (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 2009). 154

Yuezhi Xiong, *History of Shanghai [Shanghai Tongshi]*, vol. 14 (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 1999). 256

<sup>575</sup> Cao, *Zhongguo Baoye Jituan Fazhan Yanjiu [Study on the Development of China's Press Groups]*. 220

Zhongwei, became the head of the new Wenhui – Xinmin Press Group.<sup>576</sup> Not only was *Xinmin Wanbao* subordinated, it had to surrender its advertising business to the group. Losing its financial advantage and autonomy, *Xinmin* was unable to improve its competitiveness by upgrading its equipment, printing quality, and raising salaries, suffering a major blow to its management and editorial incentives.<sup>577</sup> Subsequently, its circulation dropped to one million copies in 2002, a dramatic 41.18% decrease.<sup>578</sup> The conglomeration did not boost the *Wenhui Bao*. Its distribution volume remained at around 400,000 up to 2007.<sup>579</sup> Nevertheless, *Wenhui Bao* has successfully taken control of the financial resources and senior personnel administration within the group, and therefore, is able to effectively constrain all subsidiaries. Subsidiaries cannot preclude the commitment to deliver official messages whilst the head outlets are able to strengthen the official voice through their non-Party subsidiaries.

This form of corporate governance has also enabled the co-existence of marketization of the business operation and enveloped control over editorial content by establishing a corporate governance of *Sheweihui* [Publishing House Committee], e.g. board of directors under the leadership of the Party committee [*dangwei lingdaoxia de Sheweihui fuzezhi*]. Although the application of this governance varies from one outlet to another, dominance by the Party-state through *Sheweihui* is identical.

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<sup>576</sup>Wang Zhongwei had been the Deputy Party Chief of Shanghai Administration of Press and Publication (1993-1995), Party Chief and Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *Wenhui Bao* (1995-1997), Deputy Director of the Secretariat of the CCP Shanghai Committee (1997-1998), Director of the Information Office of the Shanghai Municipal Government (1997-1998). Given the level and nature of a news outlet in China is reflected by the official level of its Party Chief, *Wenhui Bao* ranks the second official newsprint in Shanghai next to *Jiefang Daily*.

<sup>577</sup>Zhi, *New Media Imperial: Brand, Capital and Industrialization in the Competitive Environment* [*Xin Chuanmei Diquo: Jingzheng Geju Xia De Pingpai, Ziben He Chanyehua*]. 168

<sup>578</sup>The circulation volume of *Xinmin Wanbao* remained 1.03 million copies per issue in 2010, ranking 46 among the top 100 best selling dailies worldwide Zhongyuan Chen, "2010 Nian Shijie Ribao Faxingliang Qian 100 Ming Paihangbang [Top 100 Best Selling Dailies Worldwide in 2010]," *Xinwen Jizhe*, no. 9 (2010):13. Nevertheless, it cannot go any further than what is allowed by the group administration as its financial resources and senior personnel administration are subject to the senior management of the press group.

<sup>579</sup>Shanghai Culture Yearbook Compiling Committee, *Shanghai Culture Yearbook* (Beijing: Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, 2007).

In July 2004, the CPD and GAPP jointly issued the *Notification on Division of Administration and Management and Strengthening Administration of Transferred Newspapers and Periodicals*, reiterating that the Party and the government should refrain from participating in the management of newspapers and periodicals.<sup>580</sup> By withdrawing from management, all Party and government officials are precluded from holding concurrent posts in administration authorities and media outlets, Party and government agencies should not have financial connection with media outlets, nor get involved in advertising and distribution. Such an official document creates the impression that the Party and the government are willing to step away from interfering in the management of the news outlets so that the journalism is less influenced by politics.

However, according to the same notification, the administration and management systems [*zhuguan zhuban zhidu*] must be retained and observed, meaning that media outlets remain administered by government supervisory agencies and subject to the leadership of the head media within each conglomerate. The mandatory structural arrangement of the senior management of the media groups has not only reinforced Party leadership, but also enabled its influence in a less noticeable manner. By adhering to the administration and management system, the outlets must subject themselves to the administrative authority and the guidance of the sponsoring or responsible government agencies.

Structurally, the senior management of media groups is composed of a Party committee and a *Sheweihui*. Both are subject to the Party leadership. As stated in a GAPP document, a press group must have a Party committee to which the

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<sup>580</sup> According to the *Guanyu guanban fenli he huazhuan baokan jiaqiang guanli de tongzhi*, government department and administrative authorities should draw a line between administration and management of the media outlets under their jurisdiction. Some county and district level Party newspapers will be transformed into non-Party papers or merged into higher level Party newspapers or conglomerates. The former administrative [*zhuguan*] and sponsoring [*zhuban*] institutions are no longer responsible for the personnel management, finance and distribution of the transformed outlets.

Xinhua, "Jiaqiang Guanban Fenli He Huazhuan Baokan Guanli [Strengthening Administration of the Division of Administration and Management and Transferred Newspapers and Periodicals]," <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper79/12077/1087267.html>.

*Sheweihui* reports.<sup>581</sup> *Sheweihui* is equivalent to a board of directors and is the senior executive body of a media group. The head of *Sheweihui* usually chairs the Party committee concurrently. *Sheweihui* undertakes responsibility for everyday management whilst critical decisions must be approved by the Party committee. *Sheweihui* is usually divided into two divisions. The editorial board [*Bianweihui*], headed by a chief editor, consists of a number of deputy chief editors who are in charge of the editorial content and responsible for editorial work of subsidiary outlets.<sup>582</sup> The management board [*Jingweihui*] is usually made up of a number of deputy presidents in charge of the profit generation section.<sup>583</sup> The *Sheweihui* is generally headed by a president [*shezhang*], who usually simultaneously assumes the position of the head of the Party committee.<sup>584</sup> Within such a corporate structure, the chief editor, unlike the popular organizational arrangement before conglomeration, has ceased to be the highest ranking leader of senior management and instead become subject to the president and Party committee both of which represent the ultimate leadership of the Party. The subsidiary news outlets usually resemble the parent group in terms of their organizational structure in which their chief editors, who are sometimes recruited openly from outside the Party bureaucracy, are subject to the leadership of the Party committee of corresponding level as well as that of the parent media group.

As the everyday management of the news outlets is divided into editorial work and market operations, much flexibility has been given to the latter while the Party is able to concentrate on the former to keep the editorial decision-making process under immediate Party surveillance.

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<sup>581</sup> The *Basic Conditions and Reviewing Procedures regarding Establishing Press Groups*, GAPP Document No. 914, was issued on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2002 and remains in effect as of the end of 2011. According to Fischer, a typical newspaper publishing house is headed by *Sheweihui*, which is supervising everyday management of the news outlet including both editorial and market operation.

Fischer, "Censorship and Marketization: Institutional Change within China's Media." 184

<sup>582</sup> Ibid. 184

<sup>583</sup> Ibid. 184

<sup>584</sup> Chunying Cai, *Women's Participation as Leaders in the Transformation of the Chinese Media: A Case Study of Guangzhou City* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest LLC, 2008). 110

Before 1996, the management of *Guangzhou Daily* used to be headed by a chief editor responsible to the Editorial Board [*Bianweihui lingdao xia de zongbianji fuzezhi*].<sup>585</sup> The ten-people senior management was made up of nine senior editors and only one non-editor.<sup>586</sup> Since conglomeration, the Guangzhou Daily Press Group has been under a president who chairs the collective leadership of the *Sheweihui* [*Sheweihui lingdao xia de shezhang fuzezhi*]. The number of non-editors increased to five. Chief Editor ranks number two instead of number one. This arrangement effectively places the chief editor in a less senior position. The president does not have to step into everyday editorial work. Even so, the supreme position of the presidency over the chief editorship has practically drawn the editorial free range within the Party's orbit.

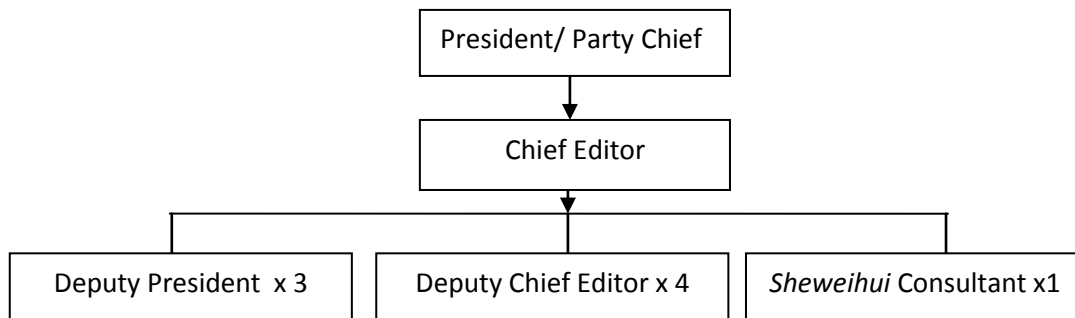


Fig. 5.1: Organizational structure of the senior management *Sheweihui* of Guangzhou Daily Press Group. Source: <http://co.gzdaily.com/201106/10/62345.shtml>

After conglomeration, the ten-people *Sheweihui* of Guangzhou Daily Press Group is composed of one president, one chief editor, three deputy presidents, four deputy chief editors and a consultant. The deputy presidents are members of the management board while the chief editor and the deputy chief editors make up the editorial board. The number of senior editors in the senior management is significantly reduced in the new corporate governance, and so is the power of the chief editor who now has to report to the Party committee and *Sheweihui* headed by the president.

<sup>585</sup> Yanjun Sun, *Baoye Zhongguo [Journalism in China]* (Beijing: Sanxia Publishing House, 2002). 314

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.* 315

The Wenhui-Xinmin Press Group has a similar corporate structure in terms of senior management. The Party Committee and the president took over control of the supreme authority from the editorial boards of the former individual outlets and have ultimate power regarding both editorial and market operations although they do not necessarily have to interfere in the everyday operation of the subsidiary outlets. Not only has the senior management of the press group taken the power to reallocate all editorial, financial and personnel resources within the group including taking over the life line advertising business of the *Xinmin Wanbao*, it also has maintained coercive influence over the subsidiary editorial and management boards.

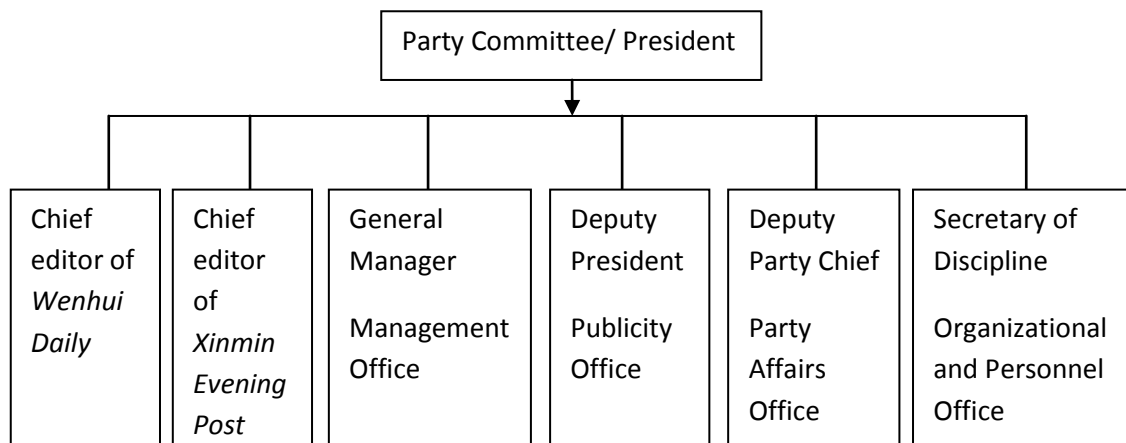


Fig. 5.2: Organizational structure of the senior management *Sheweihui* of Wenhui-Xinmin Press Group<sup>587</sup>

The leadership model featuring senior management chaired by a president accountable to the *Sheweihui* prevails in the current conglomerated media groups. The chair of *Sheweihui* overlaps with the Party committee chief, integrating in effect Party leadership with management decision-making process. In this way, Party-state control has been significantly consolidated through the *Sheweihui* governance.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid. 315

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<sup>585</sup> Yanjun Sun, *Baoye Zhongguo [Journalism in China]* (Beijing: Sanxia Publishing House, 2002). 314

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<sup>587</sup> Ibid. 315

In addition, by separating the editorial section from the market section, the new corporate governance has strategically lifted sanctions on marketable operations while deliberately leaving the editorial sector aside. In practice, all media outlets are encouraged to follow the principle of „clear division of editorial management and market operations [*caibian yu jingying fenli*]“, meaning editorial functions should by no means be treated the same way as the profit-seeking sector. Advertising, printing, distribution and other profit generating branches can be fully commercialized and open to non-state capital to maximize financial success without much interference from the administrative authorities. The market performance is more often than not evaluated by profit rather than quality of reportage.<sup>588</sup>

Financially, the separation of editorial and market management enables private and foreign capital investment. Media marketing sections were officially opened to non-state capital with the 2003 promulgation of *Administration Measures for Foreign Investment in Distribution of Books, Newspapers and Periodicals*. In 2004, \$133 million USD poured in to establish fifty-five foreign owned printing businesses, and the GAPP approved the entry of eleven foreign owned businesses with paid-up capital of 570 million yuan to explore distribution.<sup>589</sup>

Structurally, however, the state control of the editorial sector has not been affected by this influx of private and foreign capital. Editorial control remains a no-go area for non-state capital. The three-year road map that the GAPP set in 2008 for the reform of the press has left the news production division largely irrelevant. Liu Binjie, Director of the GAPP, presented the plan as follows:

First step is to complete reform of the non-public sphere newspapers and publications sponsored by state-owned units and public institutions; the second step involves the non-public sphere newspapers and publications sponsored by social organizations such

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<sup>588</sup> Zhou, *Capitalizing China's Media Industry: The Installation of Capitalist Production in Tv and Film Sectors*. 16

<sup>589</sup> Baoguo Cui, *2004-2005 Nian: Zhongguo Chuanmei Chanye Fazhan Baogao [2004-2005: Report on Development of China's Media Industry]* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2005). 206

as industrial associations; the third step is to complete reform of the newspapers and publications sponsored by ministries at central government level.<sup>590</sup>

According to Liu, such reform is confined to marketizing the profit generating sector, particularly the establishment of distribution branches that apply market oriented corporate governance. In order to clarify questions regarding subjects and purposes of the reform, Document No. 114 issued by the State Council in 2008 reiterated that it is the market sector of the former public cultural institutions and units that are to be transformed into enterprises.<sup>591</sup> What was tellingly omitted was the editorial sector.

While being allowed an entrée, private and foreign capital has nevertheless been strictly prohibited from partaking in the editorial business. None of the Internet portals of private and foreign background including the NASDAQ enlisted sohu.com, sina.com, netease.com have been officially granted licenses to collect and edit news. These popular new media have to either repost or compile messages produced by state-owned outlets. The SARFT and the Ministry of Commerce co-issued official document No. 44 in October 2004 so that foreign investors could establish joint ventures to produce television and radio programs on a number of conditions including at least 51% shareholding by the Chinese partner. This is the first official consent to possible foreign involvement in producing media content. However, the State Council's *Opinions on Introducing Foreign Capital to Cultural Industry* in August 2005 overruled and diminished such possibility, not to mention any further possibility of involving non-state capital in news production. Prohibition of non-state sector involvement in media content production was reiterated by Sun Shoushan, Deputy Director of GAPP, at the China Game Industry Annual Conference in Dalian on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2010 when he declared, „China has always forbidden foreign capital from entering the publication area“ because „it was not part of the commitment China made to the international community upon

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<sup>590</sup> Xujun Tang and Yue Zhuo, "2008 Nian Baoye Guanjianci [Key Words for the Press in 2008]," in *Report on the Development of China's Media Industry (2009)*, ed. Baoguo Cui (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2009). 64

Translation by author.

<sup>591</sup> The State Council No. 114 document in 2008 is an update of the official document No. 105 issued in 2003. The new document is titled *Regulations on Transformation of the Market-based Public Cultural Institutions into Enterprises in the Reform of the Cultural System*.

joining the WTO".<sup>592</sup> This notion is quite contrary to expectations that WTO entry will force China to adapt its media administration to WTO conventions.<sup>593</sup> In addition, article 10 of the „restricted category“ of the *Foreign Investment Catalogue (2011 Revision)* issued by the Ministry of Commerce further bars foreign investment in news outlets, publication of books, newspapers and periodicals, establishing radio and television network, production of radio and television programs, Internet websites and related services except music business.<sup>594</sup>

#### 5.4 Concluding Remarks: Demythologizing Marketization and Conglomeration

Allowing profit-driven market forces and new forms of corporate governance, the CCP has actually strengthened its control over the media, contrary to the expectation that marketization and release from government subsidies would lead to a freer and more transparent media. Business management and conglomeration in the reform era has reinforced and assured the dominance of the Party media. Although marketization in the post-Mao period has led to the emergence of private or semi-private media, these outlets are not licensed to produce news. The boom has not only reinforced profit-seeking market logic, but also in effect camouflaged the media's commitment to Party logic by enhancing the flagship status of the Party media and Party-state control.

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<sup>592</sup> Xu, "Wangyi Shiyu Youxi Nianhui, Banshu Jiama Wangyou Jianguan Lidu [Netease Absent at the Cgiac, Gapp Tighens up Supervision over Online Games]."

<sup>593</sup> Mu Lin, "Changes and Consistency: China's Media Market after WTO Entry," *Journal of Media Economics* 7, no. 3 (2004).

Joseph Man Chan, "Crying Wolf for Domestic Liberalization:WTO and TNMCS in the Chinese Academic Discourse on Media Reforms," in *Transnational Corporations and National Media Systems* (2004).

<sup>594</sup> *Foreign Investment Catalogue* is an official document issued by the Ministry of Commerce. Since its first issue in 2002, it has been revised for three times, in 2004, 2007 and 2011 respectively. The *Catalogue*, as a ministerial level legal document, defines which area is open or closed to foreign investment nationwide. Each version of the *Catalogue* has unexceptionally forbid foreign investment in the news and publication area, particularly in terms of content production and physical construction.

The new corporate governance rules have effectively divided the profit-generating market sector from editorial content production. The former has been given an almost no-holds-barred access to the market and is open to private and foreign investment while the latter remained carefully out of the reach. Media outlets are allowed to reap benefits from commercializing the printing, distribution and advertising businesses. The journalistic content production, however, has not been included either in GAPP's 2008 three-year road map or in the current media reform agenda.

Through the conglomerated organizational structure and the new corporate governance, the Party-state is able to maintain political control and keep commercialized outlets in line. Leadership of the Party media within each group is now consolidated and the loyal conveyance of official messages through non-Party media is guaranteed. In this way, the new Party-dominated corporate governance suppresses substantive expansion and empowerment of the underrepresented voices, and therefore, stands in the way of media transparency.

More significantly, the mixture of Party-state control and market discourse has resulted in consensus among the Party-state media authorities and media management that the CCP leadership should be safeguarded by all means.<sup>595</sup> This consensus is summarized in the media administration's cardinal principles that the news media must be „led by statesman (the Party bureaucrats), managed as enterprises, operated in market and serving society“.<sup>596</sup> Among these doctrines, the Party's leadership is the leading and kernel principle. This chapter argues that this consensus is the premise and goal of business management and conglomeration. It is all about consolidating political control and reaping economic profit.

Following this line, this chapter demythologizes the transparency illusion created by the market discourse that rests on the ongoing media commercialization and conglomeration. The media's financial autonomy and prosperity have not led to the vitalization of journalistic values of truth and objectivity in favour of the weak and

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<sup>595</sup> Lee, He, and Huang, ""Chinese Party Publicity Inc." Conglomerated: The Case of the Shenzhen Press Group." 29

<sup>596</sup> Jinsong Lang, *Zhongguo Xinwen Zhengce Tixi Yanjiu* (Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House, 2003). 135

poor. As many Chinese elite politicians and intellectuals fancy various models and pathways towards liberal democracy such as those in Korea, Taiwan, Russia, East Europe, Japan and Singapore, and look down upon India's democracy, they tend to ignore the fact that both India and China have a population of workers and peasants much larger both in number and proportion than that in any aforementioned liberal democracies that have benefited either from the Cold War-conditioned economic development or direct patronage from the United States.<sup>597</sup> Discussing China following Korea or Singapore's model pre-supposes the reverence of liberal democracy while attaches little importance to China's international (such as the relationship with the United States) and national conditions (vast population of disenfranchised groups, for instance). What is often made light of is the fact that the weak and the poor in China have little place in the so-called public sphere dominated by the elites either through political or market control, or through both. As Yuezhi Zhao maintains, the role of Chinese workers and peasants and their voices remain a key problematic for media and democratisation in the Post-Mao China.<sup>598</sup> Journalism remains a political tool as „a mechanism of power“.<sup>599</sup> Just because the media have grown richer and strong in the current trend of conglomeration does not mean effective expansion of the public sphere.<sup>600</sup> Therefore, it is hard not to concur with Mobo Gao that the media reform featuring state-conditioned commercialization and conglomeration is part of the Party-state's capitalist market agenda.<sup>601</sup> This agenda leads media transparency to nowhere but rhetoric and illusion.

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<sup>597</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, "Media and Elusive Democracy in China," *The Public* 8, no. 4 (2001). 42

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.* 42

<sup>599</sup> Wang, *The End of Revolution*. 6

<sup>600</sup> ———, "Zaiwen "Shenme De Pingdeng"? Lun Dangdai Zhengzhi Xingshi Yu Shehui Xingshi De Tuojie [Revisiting "Equality of What"?-- on the Disjuncture of Contemporary Political Forms and Social Forms]." 68

<sup>601</sup> Gao, *The Battle for China's Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution*.

Also see Mobo Gao, "Netizenship and Its Implication on Democratization in China," in *Whither China's Democracy? Democratization in China since the Tiananmen Incident*, ed. Joseph Y. S. Cheng (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2011). 163

## Chapter Six: ‘Skylight Windows’, Media Activism Revived?

### 6.1 Introduction

To open a „Skylight window [*kai tianchuang*]“, a metaphor of blank space left on publications, dates back to the media protests against the heavy censorship implemented by the Nationalist GMD Government before 1949. It seems to be reviving today as a protest against the CCP censorship apparatus. Since the start of the reform era, China’s news media, has from time to time been spurred by complaints about intensified information control. A recent example was the blank spaces left on a number of newspapers on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2011, suggesting grievance against censorship orders banning reporting and commentaries on the tragic Wenzhou high speed train collision on 23<sup>rd</sup> July. This protest is considered to be a „new high point for China’s developing and professionalizing media“. <sup>602</sup> Implying to readers that there is something to be said but forbidden so, these blank spaces are interpreted by Wu Fan to be a collective protest against today’s CCP Party-state and its publicity authority. <sup>603</sup>

Such comments have not only revived memories of media activism before 1949, but have also built up expectations of similar media movements as the media today are increasingly financially prosperous, technologically equipped and market-oriented. Disobedience is celebrated as commercialized outlets’ „one-dimensional“ efforts to break away from state control. <sup>604</sup> This interpretation has created a media activism myth that gives rise to commentaries that commercialized outlets are seeking editorial independence in a way that resembles what happened in the past. Much less noted, yet significant nevertheless, is that media activism today is drastically different from that before 1949 and therefore has different implications

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<sup>602</sup> David Bandurski, "Chinese Media Muzzled after Day of Glory," <http://cmp.hku.hk/2011/07/31/14332/>.

<sup>603</sup> Fan Wu, "Baijia Meiti Kai Tianchuang De Yuanyin He Yingxiang [Causes and Effects of the Skylight Windows Opened by a Hundred Newsprints]," <http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/11/8/9/n3338870.htm%E4%BC%8D%E5%87%A1-%E7%99%BE%E5%AE%B6%E5%AA%92%E4%BD%93%E5%BC%80%E5%A4%A9%E7%AA%97%E7%9A%84%E5%8E%9F%E5%9B%A0%E5%92%8C%E5%BD%B1%E5%93%8D>.

<sup>604</sup> Pei, *From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union*. 14

as to the extent to which the media can contribute to press freedom and transparency.

Media activism today seems to be in a dilemma. On the one hand, it can be immediately interpreted as a protest against the state censorship apparatus and information control. On the other, despite grievances emerging here and there from time to time, few outlets have maintained a consistent and constant standpoint with a clear and loud voice against the censorship apparatus. Whilst leaving blank spaces on newsprints today may be inspired by the memory of skylight windows in the past, its level of protest should not be simply interpreted as equal to that of the pre-1949 period.

Media activism obtains its name because it always goes against the will of state hegemony, as termed by Tim Jordan as acts of „civil disobedience“.<sup>605</sup> According to Henry Yuhuai He, opening a skylight window means „leaving a blank in a publication to show that something has been censored“.<sup>606</sup> It was a media response to the scrutiny system of the Guomindang (GMD) government before 1949.<sup>607</sup> By this definition, a space left blank on publications can be called a skylight window when:

- the space is left blank on purpose as an editorial decision;
- the purpose is to reveal and protest against the censorship apparatus.

The pre-1949 skylight windows had overtly challenged and embarrassed the ruling GMD government. Not only did the blank spaces serve as a protest tactic, they also escalated into direct confrontation between the media and the GMD’s censorship regime in 1945 when numerous progressive and leftist media outlets across the country openly refused to subject themselves to its censorship apparatus. That was an age when non-compliant outlets could be suspended or forced to close down at

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<sup>605</sup> Tim Jordan, *Activism!: Direct Action, Hacktivism and the Future of Society* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2002). 61

<sup>606</sup> Henry Yuhuai He, *Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People's Republic of China* (Armonk: M.E.Sharpe Inc., 2001). 221

<sup>607</sup> Jialu Liang, *Zhongguo Xinwen Ye Shi: Gudai Zhi 1949 Nian [History of Chinese Journalism: From Ancient Times to 1949]* (Nanning: Guangxi People's Press, 1984). 350



any time while editors and writers had to from time to time risk their freedom and even their lives. Some journalists were actually assassinated.<sup>608</sup>

However, as information control has been tightened and censorship prevails in the reform era, few media outlets have dared to declare non-compliance with censorship orders. What usually happens is that newspapers and journals follow the orders and replace the censored content with something acceptable to the authorities. Even when part of a newspaper page or book was left blank and interpreted by commentators as an unuttered protest, the outlet would usually downplay such rebellious implications or compensate with positive and less critical reportage. Although it is not uncommon that activist journalists and editors are suspended, fired or persecuted for their outspoken journalism, few outlets constantly and consistently follow the bold line. Soon after a skylight window fades from public attention, most outlets involved will carry on their profit-making stories and positive publicity obligations: business as usual.

Given the heavy censorship both before 1949 and in the reform era, a research question arises: Why is the media today are much less combative and media activism so much weaker than before 1949? By answering this question, this chapter aims to challenge the following seemingly popular sentiment, namely that the re-emergence of skylight windows suggests a rising media activism parallel to that before 1949 as a result of the media commercialization and marketization. I will argue that:

- The rising media activism is not powered by the reformed outlets in which senior management remains in collusion with the Party-state. Rather, the most prominent activist elements have been those professionals who not only dare to stick their necks out, but are willing to risk their career and freedom for outspoken journalism.
- The activism in the reform era is different from that before 1949 because the media, except for the activist professionals, lack ideological and professional conviction to revive media activism in a pre-1949 manner. Instead, the media have reached consensus with the Party-state on political control and pursuit of profit.

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<sup>608</sup> Chun Song and Jianhua Zhu, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Cidian [Dictionary of the Chinese Communist Party]* (Changchun: Jilin Wenshi Chubanshe, 1988). 407

To substantiate these arguments, a historical comparative case study is adopted in this chapter. Firstly, some pages will be spent on the anti-censorship movement, *Jujian Yundong*, to exemplify the revolutionary legacy of the pre-1949 media activism. Secondly, three skylight windows in the reform era will be examined to show how the media activism re-emerged with much less challenging effects. Thirdly, this chapter identifies activist professionals as the key participatory elements of the rising media activism. Finally, a notion is put forth that the frustration of the media activism in the reform era lies in the new consensus reached between the Party-state and the profit-seeking media on political and market control, which has also demonstrated and reinforced their disjuncture of political representation.

## 6.2 Media Activism before 1949

### 6.2.1 Skylight Windows

The origin of the skylight windows dates back to the republican movement before the Xinhai Revolution. *Guofeng Daily* [*National Wind Daily*], first published in Beijing in early 1911, was one of the progressive newspapers that targeted their criticism of monarchism and, after the foundation of the Republic, warlords and those who attempted to restore monarchism.<sup>609</sup> *Guofeng Daily* has been remembered for its two skylight windows. One was on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1911, the day after the Wuchang Uprising that symbolized the Republic Revolution. Prohibited by the censors of Qing court from carrying any report on the Wuchang Uprising, *Guofeng Daily* titled its front page with a protesting remark that „This newspaper has a lot of information about Wuchang. However, due to interference by the police, all relevant information has to be withheld. Forgiveness by the readers is

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<sup>609</sup> Yimin Chen, Pei Jiang, and Yi Wang, *Lao Xinwen: 1912-1920 [Old News: 1912-1920]* (Tianjin: Tianjin People's Press, 2003). 62

appreciated".<sup>610</sup> The rest of the front page was left blank. The skylight window humiliated the ruling Qing court because it revealed that the latter was too weak to afford any bad publicity. The blank page triggered wide speculation about the impending doom of the royal reign. The other skylight window took place four years later. Protesting against Yuan Shikai's attempt to restore the monarchy,<sup>611</sup> the front page of 12<sup>th</sup> December 1915 edition was left entirely blank. Jing Dingjun, the Chief Editor, was immediately arrested and kept in prison until Yuan died in 1916.<sup>612</sup>

After Jiang Jieshi took power in 1925 and ordered the purge of many thousands of communists, leftists and labour union organizers in 1927,<sup>613</sup> the Nationalist GMD government suppressed any news media that was perceived to be threatening its one-party rule. In response, newsprints left blank spaces on their publications to protest censorship orders. *Wenhui Bao*, *Shen Bao* and many other democratic newspapers had opened skylight windows after their editorials were banned by GMD censorship orders.<sup>614</sup> The CCP *Xinhua Daily* opened a skylight window on its 6<sup>th</sup> January 1940 edition. Its front page carried a headline in bold letter „Anti-Japanese War First! Victory First!“ and left its upper half front page blank. At the bottom of the blank space, there was a brief comment: Two editorials of today's issue, namely *On Victories of Attacks Launched in the Winter*, and *Rise up! Put*

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<sup>610</sup> Ibid. 62

Translation by author.

<sup>611</sup> Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) was former President of the Republic of China from 1912 to 1915. He restored Monarchism on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1916 and declared himself Emperor Hong Xian. His imperial reign lasted only eighty-three days in the midst of uprising nationwide against the restoration before he died of uraemia.

James Zheng Gao, *Historical Dictionary of Modern China (1800-1949)* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009). 135

<sup>612</sup> Ming Zhang, "Wanqing Baoren De Geming Jia Fengqing [Revolution and Romance of the Journalists in Late Qing Dynasty]," *Caijing Magazine* 253, no. 26 (2009). 147

<sup>613</sup> Jiang Jieshi is also known as Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975), former president of the nationalist GMD regime of Republic of China.

Groot, *Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Part, United Front Work, Corporatism, and Hegemony*. 16

<sup>614</sup> Renbao Zhuang, "Yi "Jiubao" Yundong [Memory of The "Saving the Newspaper" Movement]," in *Cong Fengyu Zhong Zoulai*, ed. Wenhui Bao Baoshi Yanjushi (Shanghai: Wenhui Bao Chubanshe, 1993). 75

*down the Traitors*, are withheld as per ordered. Readers' understanding is highly appreciated.<sup>615</sup>

Skylight windows on publications before 1949 explicitly revealed and protested against censorship. Publishers refused to replace censored content with something else acceptable to the censors. The editorial decisions were made to embarrass, challenge and protest against the censorship apparatus at the risk of the newspapers being forced to close down and journalists being persecuted. Both the activist newspapers and journalists were willing to take the risks for their ideals of press freedom and democracy.

### 6.2.2 *Jujian Yundong* [Rejecting Censorship Campaign]

In the afterglow of the Anti-Japanese War, Jiang Jieshi and the GMD regime seemed to have a better chance than ever to win over the liberal elements of the intelligentsia and media. In his speech on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945 to celebrate victory in the war against the Japanese invasion, Jiang Jieshi uttered his belief in perpetual peace based on equality and freedom of mankind, and promised democracy and cooperation through „letting the by-gones be by-gones [*bu nian jiu e*]“ and „being nice to others [*yu ren wei shan*]“.<sup>616</sup>

But the GMD regime never gave up its attempt to silence critical and dissident voices. Jiang's failure to generate or at least bring hope to democracy and economic recovery, accompanied by his tyrannical style, quickly drained his democracy and cooperation rhetoric. Meanwhile, publication scrutiny escalated. Strict censorship laws were heavily imposed, and many publications were forced to shut down.<sup>617</sup> As scrutiny and censorship became intensified, the growing appeal for press freedom

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<sup>615</sup> Jialin Liu, *Zhongguo Xinwen Tongshi [History of Chinese Journalism]*, 2 ed. (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2005). 507

Translation by author

<sup>616</sup> Xianwen Zhang, *Jiang Jieshi Quanzhuan [Full Biography of Chiang Kai-Shek]* (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press, 1996). 584

<sup>617</sup> Ping-kuen Yu, *Research Materials on Twentieth-Century China: An Annotated List of Ccm Publications* (Washington D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1975). 30

and resentment against tyrannical control fermented into increasing protest against the censorship apparatus.

One of the best remembered media activist movements during this post war period was *Jujian Yundong* in the GMD territory launched in August 1945. Newspapers, journals and commercial publishing houses stopped abiding by any form of censorship rules and orders at the risk of being suspended or shut down. Publishing houses and newspapers in major cities openly refused to follow the censorship orders and stopped sending print copies to government scrutiny agencies. Statements and editorials were issued to denounce the GMD censorship regime. *Jujian Yundong* became a milestone of media activism by openly rubbishing and rejecting the censorship rules, orders and apparatus. Moreover, apart from staging strongly worded criticisms, *Jujian Yundong* featured ideological consensus among and broad participation by democratic intellectuals, political groups and news outlets. It completely rejected the government censorship apparatus and demanded incorporation in the constitution of the rights to freedom of speech.

The *Jujian Yundong* started with Huang Yanpei's open refusal to hand in for scrutiny his book, *Return from Yan'an*, before its publication on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1945. This book recorded favourably the democracy and freedom Huang had seen and experienced in Yan'an<sup>618</sup>. Following Huang's non-compliance, a statement was jointly drafted by Zhang Zhirang, Yang Weigong, Fu Binran on behalf of and endorsed by sixteen political journals in Chongqing, then provisional capital city of the nationalist GMD government, and was published on 17<sup>th</sup> August.<sup>619</sup> The statement declared that these journals would stop sending in print copies for scrutiny from 1<sup>st</sup> September.<sup>620</sup> Ten journals in Chongqing jointly issued an additional edition on 15<sup>th</sup> September, reiterating that they would stop applying to the government authority for registration of newly established newsprints and

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<sup>618</sup> Edmund S. K. Fung, *In Search of Chinese Democracy: Civil Opposition in Nationalist China, 1929-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). 257

<sup>619</sup> Chongqing was the capital city of the nationalist GMD government from 20<sup>th</sup> November 1937 to 4<sup>th</sup> May 1946.

<sup>620</sup> Fushen Yao, *Zhongguo Bianji Shi [the Editorial History of China]* (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 1990). 422

sending in any script for scrutiny.<sup>621</sup> Among the less than forty journals in Chongqing, thirty-three had joined the *Jujian Yundong* by 27<sup>th</sup> August.<sup>622</sup> Furthermore, what the *Jujian Yundong* initiated in Chongqing was quickly and strongly echoed by twenty-seven newspapers and journals in Chengdu, eleven in Kunming, and many more in Guilin, Xi'an, Beiping and Shanghai. An overwhelming wave of protest and defiance nationwide was rising against the GMD's controls. The protest forced the government into making a choice between fiercer clampdowns and abolition of the censorship system.

The target of *Jujian Yundong* was specifically the GMD wartime censorship system. Ten political journals and journals including *Xianzheng* and *Guoxun* jointly published on 15<sup>th</sup> September a four-page *United Supplementary Edition*. Huang Yanpei, Chief Editor of *Guoxun*, declared at the editorial meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> August that his *Guoxun* Bookstore would publish the special edition without applying to the GMD propaganda authority for registration or sending in editions for scrutiny.<sup>623</sup> Ye Shengtao, Chief Editor of *Zhongxuesheng*, drafted *An Open Letter from Seventeen Cultural Organizations to the Journals in Chongqing* to support the *Jujian Yundong* in Chongqing, and published on 9<sup>th</sup> September, in the second issue of the *United Supplementary Edition*, one of his most remembered articles *We Never Want Censorship of Publication and Journalism*, in which he stated that:

We don't need such a system. It is not because my thought and speech was banned or deleted, or your thought and speech was banned or deleted, or someone else's thought or speech was banned or deleted. Even if my thought and speech or yours as well as that of anyone else was not banned or deleted, or our speech is not to be banned or deleted in the future, we still don't need such a system. As long as such a system

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<sup>621</sup> The ten journals were *Xianzheng*, *Guoxun*, *Zhonghua Luntan*, *Minzhu Shijie*, *Minxian*, *Zaisheng*, *Dongfang Zazhi*, *Xin Zhonghua*, *Zhongxuesheng* and *Wenhui Zhoubao*. Notably, the communist *Zhongsu Wenhua* and *Xiandai Funv* did not partake in the jointly issued additional edition, showing that the CCP did not want to impress the GMD government with any leading role in the *Jujian Yundong*.

<sup>622</sup> Guoyong Fu, *Bidi Bolan: Bainian Zhongguo Yanlunshi De Yizhong Dufa [Waves under the Pen: Reading the Centennial History of Freedom of Speech in China]* (Nanning: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2006). 77

<sup>623</sup> Ding Shang, *Huang Yanpei*, 2 ed. (Beijing: The People's Press, 1990). 115

exists, there will always be someone suffering from spiritual persecution. We and those people are spiritually connected, and their persecution is our suffering too.<sup>624</sup>

Ye Shengtao condemned any restraint on free publication, stating that:

Censorship is a manufactured criteria and yardstick to which thoughts and speeches have to conform before getting published. This means some thoughts and speeches cannot be published and people cannot express themselves freely. Think about it. How unreasonable is that?<sup>625</sup>

Ye's hatred of censorship was also echoed in the open letter jointly issued by sixteen newspapers, journals and news agencies in Chengdu in support of the Chongqing initiative. The letter targeted „all rules and systems that may limit the freedom of speech of the people“ and demonstrated the determination of the news industry to „eliminate for good the censorship system and prevent it from reviving in any form in any part of the Chinese territory“.<sup>626</sup>

### 6.2.3 Broad Participation and Ideological Consensus

The fundamental social base for *Jujian Yundong* and source of the disillusion was the apparent ideological dispute between the idea of freedom and democracy as defended by the CCP then and GMD one-party dictatorship. Following the end of the Anti-Japanese War in 1945, the GMD decided to reconstitute administration alone, as reaching consensus on a coalition government grew dimmer.<sup>627</sup> The dictatorship, iron fist rule and corruption of Jiang's regime as well as his indifference to the widespread disease and starvation of the Chinese people

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<sup>624</sup> Guoyong Fu, *Wenren De Diqi: Bainian Zhongguo Yanlunshi Jianying [Backbone of Intellectuals: A Centennial Silhouette of the History of Freedom of Speech in China]* (Kunming: Yunnan People's Press, 2007). 189

Translation by author.

<sup>625</sup> Yang Pang, *Ye Shengtao He Tade Jiaren [Ye Shengtao and His Family]* (Shenyang: Chunfeng Wenyi Chubanshe, 2001). 192

Translation by author.

<sup>626</sup> Xihua Zhao and Yuanshun Ding, *Minmeng Shihua [History of the Democratic League]* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1992). 100

<sup>627</sup> Michael Dillon, *Contemporary China: An Introduction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009). 250

bothered both the domestic public and the United States, the major source of financial and military aid for the GMD.<sup>628</sup>

This dispute eventually alienated the non-GMD political groups and the intelligentsia.<sup>629</sup> Their broad engagement in *Jujian Yundong* was attributed, at least in part, to the pervasive disillusion among democratic political personages, groups and media. Huang Yanpei, the leading figure, was one of the „disillusioned“ democratic academics.<sup>630</sup> He was a prominent democrat [*minzhu renshi*], chairman of the Democratic National Construction Association in 1945, activist of the Democratic Salvation Movement, and a founding member of the China Democratic League. Huang's disillusion was broadly echoed within the news and publication industry when the public voice was stifled by the GMD. The intellectuals and middle class were deeply frustrated not only because their livelihood was worsened beyond despair, but also because their political engagement was denied. As Lawrence Kaelter Rosinger observed, pandemic inflation imposed a deadly effect on their livelihood while democracy and freedom had never been operative at any time.<sup>631</sup> „Incompetent and corrupt“ was the common phrase increasingly heard from journalists in describing the GMD regime that resorted heavily to the wartime censorship system in its attempt to try to silence critical voices.<sup>632</sup> The alienation of the democratic political groups, intelligentsia and the press resulted in their broad participation in *Jujian Yundong* and their ideological consensus with the CCP on democracy and freedom.

Among the first sixteen journals that endorsed the statement of rejecting scrutiny came from various backgrounds that shared Huang's position, *Minzhu Shijie* was associated with leftist GMD background, and *Xiandai Funv* and *Zhongsu Wenhua* related to the CCP. The rest of the fourteen journals were sponsored either by an

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<sup>628</sup> Sandy Donovan, *Madame Chiang Kai-Shek: Face of Modern China* (Mankato: Compass Point Books, 2007). 10

<sup>629</sup> Groot, *Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Part, United Front Work, Corporatism, and Hegemony*. 27

<sup>630</sup> Edmund S. K. Fung, *The Intellectual Foundations of Chinese Modernity: Cultural and Political Thought in the Republican Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 ). 136

<sup>631</sup> Lawrence Kaelter Rosinger, *China's Crisis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945). 65

<sup>632</sup> Suzanne Pepper, "The Kmt-Ccp Conflict, 1945-1949," in *The Nationalist Era in China, 1927-1949*, ed. Lloyd E. Eastman, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). 306



MPG, intellectual associations or commercial publication businesses.<sup>633</sup> The CCP official mouthpiece, *Qunzhong* [*The Mass*] made its first official declaration on 18<sup>th</sup> September to stop abiding by the censorship rules. As a result, the vast ideological consensus on democracy and freedom among the CCP, MPGs and the non-GMD media constituted a strong opposition to the GMD dictatorship and its censorship apparatus.<sup>634</sup>

Ideologically, the democracy and freedom practiced in Yan'an by the communists offered an alternative model for the liberal intelligentsia to pursue their political ideals. Strategically, *Jujian Yundong* aimed at a policy outcome to substantiate the rights to freedom of speech.

Yan'an was the place of birth and practice for Mao's „New Democracy“, which provided an effective platform for the CCP United Front Work<sup>635</sup>. After the Anti-Japanese War, the new democratic united front aimed to unite as many social political forces as possible including, at times, the national bourgeoisie and big landlords, against the imperialist and feudal forces.<sup>636</sup> The democratic intelligentsia were as increasingly attracted by Yan'an democracy and Mao's comprehensive proposal of coalition government as they were disillusioned by deteriorating living conditions and the GMD's dictatorship.<sup>637</sup>

During his visit to Yan'an, Huang Yanpei had a conversation with Mao Zedong. Huang raised a question of the cycle of life and death in politics. He argued that

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<sup>633</sup> Please refer to Appendix 7 for a detailed list of the sixteen outlets.

<sup>634</sup> The CCP, having to have its newspapers and publications constantly censored, had kept calling for major modification to the censorship system. In a statement drafted by Guo Moruo on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1945, the CCP appealed that 'Censorship system, except for that concerning military secret, should not exist any longer. All laws and orders that impose limit on the people should be abolished so that the people can have the freedom of assembly, association, speech and publication'

Shaoci Zhang, Ziyu Tian, and Jin'an Chen, in *Kangri Zhanzheng Da Cidian* [*Grand Dictionary of the Anti-Japanese War*] (Wuhan: Wuhan Chubanshe, 1995):496.

<sup>635</sup> Winberg Chai, *Essential Works of Chinese Communism* (Santa Barbara: Pica Press, 1970). 232

<sup>636</sup> Groot, *Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Part, United Front Work, Corporatism, and Hegemony*. 25

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.* 26

history was made up of cycles of successes and failures, and no one was able to escape that cycle.<sup>638</sup> Mao answered that:

We have found the new path. We can jump out of such a cycle. The new path is democracy. The government dare not slacken off provided that it is subject to the people's supervision. The political systems will not perish after the death of the leaders provided that everybody takes responsibility.<sup>639</sup>

Agreeing with Mao, Huang took the Yan'an model of democracy as a valid alternative to the GMD's dictatorship. He commented in his 1945 book *Return from Yan'an* that:

Mao Zedong is right. The cult of personality will not happen so long as major policies are decided by the public. Only when everything is disclosed to the people, can this place flourish with the people and the people can engage themselves in the cause. I am convinced that the cycle of successes and failures can be effectively broken by such democracy.<sup>640</sup>

Encouraged by what he had seen in Yan'an and his refreshed faith in democracy promised by the CCP through the practice in Yan'an, Huang Yanpei stood up first to reject the GMD censorship apparatus and initiated *Jujian Yundong*. To Huang and many others, freedom and democracy were not just an empty promise or abstract concept, but ideas that could be put into practice. Such consensus took shape among democratic political groups and the intelligentsia and subsequently fermented into collective action against censorship and dictatorship.

Strategically, the participants of *Jujian Yundong* demanded policy outcomes. Unlike the skylight windows which were relatively passive protests, open rejection of the censorship system was by no means a mild and individual appeal aiming at incremental progress of press freedom, but rather an outburst of systematic attacks nationwide against government media control. Furthermore, not only did *Jujian Yundong* demand abolition of the wartime censorship system, but it also called for prevention of any legislation that might lead to enforcement of censorship in the future.

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<sup>638</sup> Shouhe Ding, *Zhongguo Lidai Zouyi Dadian [Dictionary of Chinese Political History]* (Harbin: Harbin Press, 1994). 27

<sup>639</sup> Ibid. 27

Translation by author.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid. 27

Translation by author.

The *Jujian Yundong* succeeded, at least temporarily, in realizing its two policy goals, namely abolition of the wartime censorship system and reinforcement in the constitution of rights to freedom of speech. As a direct policy outcome, a resolution was passed at the Tenth Standing Committee of the GMD Central Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> September that the wartime censorship system was to be repealed on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1945 in the territory ruled by the GMD.<sup>641</sup> Section Four of the *October Tenth Agreement* between the CCP and the GMD stated that:

As to the freedom of the people, it is unanimously agreed that the government should safeguard the freedom of personal liberty, religion, speech, publication, assembly and association that the people in a democracy can enjoy on daily basis. The present laws and orders (against this principle) should be abolished or modified according to this principle.<sup>642</sup>

The abolition of wartime censorship and modification of publication laws was reaffirmed in Chapter Two and the Annex of the *Heping Jianguo Gangling Cao'an* proposed by the CCP and the Democratic League, and passed on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1946 at the Political and Consultative Conference, and finally legislated in the *Constitution of the Republic of China* at the National Constitutional Assembly on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1946.<sup>643</sup> The biggest difference between the constitutional rights to freedom of speech stipulated in the May 5<sup>th</sup> 1936 version and the 1946 version lies in limits to the rights. The 1936 version stated that „Every citizen shall have freedom of speech, writing and publication. Such freedom shall not be restricted except *in accordance with law*“<sup>644</sup>. The 1946 version, however, stated that the freedoms and rights enumerated in the preceding articles shall not be restricted by law, except in case where a restriction is necessary...for...promoting the public

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<sup>641</sup> However, the wartime censorship system still applied in the territory formerly occupied by the Japanese, which is known as *shoufu qu*.

<sup>642</sup> Youyu Zhang, *Xianzheng Luncong [Tribune on Constitutionalism]*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 1986). 220  
Translation by author.

<sup>643</sup> The *Heping Jianguo Gangling Cao'an [Draft Programme for peacefully building the country]* is also known as *Administration Programme of the Political and Consultative Conference [zhengxie shizheng gangling]*.

<sup>644</sup> Ch'ao-ying Shih and Ch'i-hsien Chang, *The Chinese Year Book, Part II* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, Limited, 1936). 285

interest".<sup>645</sup> The 1936 version made it possible for the government to make laws and orders at its discretion against the freedoms and rights. The 1946 version, largely based on the draft proposed by the CCP and the Democratic League despite some „unilateral KMT revisions“, was revised to minimize the legitimacy of state interference against such freedoms and rights.<sup>646</sup>

The dynamic journalism following the end of the Anti-Japanese War was fundamentally a result of broad participation by and the ideological consensus among the CCP, democratic political groups, intelligentsia and the press. China was at a time when the nation had to make a choice of where to go next. By the end of Anti-Japanese War, the CCP had grown into a powerful force and controlled many areas of China and therefore exerted considerable influence on the media. The GMD government was not able to establish effective control of the whole country, let alone the disputed ideological system.

The practice of democracy and freedom in Yan'an seemed to offer a laudable alternative to the GMD's censorship and dictatorship realities. The democratic political groups, intelligentsia and the general public, having been increasingly disillusioned by the GMD dictatorship and worsening living conditions, had fostered increasing sympathy for the CCP and their political agendas. Their participation and consensus constituted a social base for the pre-1949 media activism with a valid argument against the GMD censorship apparatus and regime legitimacy.

### 6.3 Skylight Windows in the Reform Era

Skylight windows did not re-emerge until the 1980s when ideological consensus on the nature of socialism started to break up and the economy started to diverge from

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<sup>645</sup> William C. Kirby, "The Chinese Party-State under Dictatorship and Democracy on the Mainland and on Taiwan," in *Realms of Freedom in Modern China*, ed. William C. Kirby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). 116

<sup>646</sup> Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945-1949* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999). 138

the Maoist communism. The Party-state's priority was that the CCP must restructure its ideological system and re-establish its control over the media system.<sup>647</sup> This ideological change gave rise to the problem of censorship. Dissident voices were suppressed. Unlike those before 1949, a typical skylight window in the early years of the reform era was not one opened in newspapers, but a blank space left in a journal or book. Moreover, the Twenty-first century has seen a steady rise of blank spaces both in commercial publications and sometimes even official mouthpieces.<sup>648</sup>

The so-called skylight windows in the reform era, could hardly parallel those before 1949. Unlike the dissident press before 1949, the media in the reform era are much more cautious, carefully avoiding direct and open confrontation with the authorities, even when a skylight window is allegedly opened. Three prominent examples of skylight windows will be examined hereunder to show how media activism in the reform era is different from that in the pre-1949 in terms of participation and ideological consensus.

The first such skylight was no more than an *operational negligence*. The Chinese central government staged an Anti-Bourgeois Liberalism Campaign after its clampdown on the pro-democracy student movement in late 1986.<sup>649</sup> A number of dissident liberals, including the journalist Liu Binyan, the astrophysicist Fang Lizhi

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<sup>647</sup> Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*. 44

<sup>648</sup> For example, the official *Dalian Daily* opened a skylight window on the front page of its electronic version of its 15<sup>th</sup> August 2011 edition. The blank space was originally carrying an official decision made by CCP Dalian Committee and Dalian government to remove the Fujia Chemical Plant from suburban residential area. The decision was made in response to a massive demonstration on 14<sup>th</sup> August by the Dalian residents requesting the removal of the Plant that produces paraxylene.

It is reported that the chemical plant restored production in late September, and that the promise to remove the chemical plant was repealed in December.

David Bandurski, "Dalian Protests Erased from Social Media," <http://cmp.hku.hk/2011/08/14/14785/>.

VOA, "Dalian Px Xiangmu Fuchan, Guangfang Beizhi Chu'erfan'er [Dalian Px Project Restored, the Government Promise Repealed]," <http://www.voachinese.com/content/article-20111231-dalian-px-136472918/792448.html>.

However, the *Dalian Daily* skylight window is not discussed in this discussion, but will be in follow-up researches.

<sup>649</sup> Yu-lin Yu, "Change and Continuity in Ccp's Power Structure since Its 13th National Congress: A "Line" Approach " in *Two Societies in Opposition: The Republic of China and the People's Republic of China after Forty Years*, ed. Ramon Hawley Myers (Hoover Press Publication, 1991).

and the writer Wang Ruowang, were deprived of Party membership, and their publications banned.<sup>650</sup> The January 1987 issue of the *Literary Review* [*Wenxue Pinglun*] carried in its content list the title of an article by Liu Binyan, even though the article had been removed according to censorship orders from the central propaganda authority. Given the liberal stand of Liu Zaifu, then Chief Editor, retaining the title in the content list has been interpreted as a sign of liberal media protest against the Party censorship regime.<sup>651</sup>

However, this well celebrated incident turned out to be no more than an accident. Liu Zaifu acknowledged that he had duly followed the ban and ordered the article be removed.<sup>652</sup> Hu Sheng, the head of the China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), was furious though. He accused the journal of „using skylight windows against the Party“ at a CASS internal meeting. Liu, however, defended himself by insisting that it was purely operational negligence by the printing house staff who had forgotten to remove the title from the index as well. In an interview with *Jingji GuanCha Bao* [*The Economic Observer Newspaper*] on 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2009, Liu Zaifu reiterated that the whole skylight saga was „absolutely an operational negligence“.<sup>653</sup>

Although he has been sympathetic towards Liu Binyan to the extent that his journal did not publish any article critical of the dissident liberal during the 1987 anti-liberalism campaign,<sup>654</sup> Liu Zaifu has never set himself against the Party-state or openly questioned the legitimacy of its censorship apparatus. As described by his daughter Liu Jianmei, Liu has always been a mild reformist who would resort to amelioration, compromise and dialogue rather than confrontation.<sup>655</sup> It is obvious

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<sup>650</sup> Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner, *The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Cass): Shaping the Reforms, Academia and China* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007). 88

<sup>651</sup> He, *Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People's Republic of China* 221

<sup>652</sup> Zaifu Liu, "Aiyuan Jiaozhi De Wangshi: Hu Sheng Jishi [Past Interwined with Love and Hate: Hu Sheng in Memory]," *Du Shu*, no. 12 (2010).

<sup>653</sup> Yuhuai He, *Cycles of Repression and Relaxation: Politco-Literary Events in China, 1976-1989* (Bochum: N. Brockmeyer, 1992). 435

Zaifu Liu, "Nashi Fuyou Huoli De Niandai [That Was a Dynamic Age]," *Jingji GuanCha Bao* [*The Economic Observer Newspaper*] 2009.

<sup>654</sup> He, *Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People's Republic of China* 221

<sup>655</sup> Jianmei Liu, "Bo Yu Jie: Shenchu Nide Shetai Kongkong Dangdang [Refuting Yu Jie: Show Your Coated Tongue, Empty]" <http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001022870>.

that some are willing to celebrate with a sense of pride such negligence as a deliberate skylight window.<sup>656</sup> The irony is that neither the Chief Editor nor the journal was dissident or keen to use any skylight window to overtly challenge the Party on purpose. It was neither an editorial decision, nor deliberate and open protest against the censorship. It does not conform to either aspect of Henry Yuhuai He's definition. The asserted grievance against the banning orders, if any, was reserved and unuttered.

Another well-known skylight window is seen in Ba Jin's *A Book Telling the Truth* published by Sichuan Wenyi Chubanshe [Sichuan Art and Literature Publishing House] in 1990. The book collected articles that the author had written between 1977 and 1990. Ba Jin, a writer profusely honoured by the Party, wrote an article titled „Cultural Revolution Museum“ in 1986. The article proposed the establishment of a museum as a historical reminder to prevent tragedies that many had experienced in the political movement from happening again. The content was far from divergent from the official discourse when addressing the Cultural Revolution. However, Ba Jin connected the ongoing *Qingwu Yundong* [*Eliminating Spiritual Pollution Campaign*], an ideological campaign against liberalism in the mid-1980s, with his memory of the Cultural Revolution. He warned of a possible repetition of the purge he had experienced. The article implied objection to the massive clampdown by violence and ideological controls, which the government happened to be using against the rising liberalism, lest it went out of control. Ba Jin's alert became something the media administrative authority found sensitive and inappropriate in such a circumstance. As a result, the article was not included in the 1990 version and the 1991 reissue. But the title was deliberately retained in the content list and the corresponding page left blank, appearing to be a skylight window.

However, neither the publishing house nor Ba Jin was a dissident. The so-called skylight window was the result of a well-informed compromise agreement between the provincial media administrative authority, the author and the publisher, with a

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<sup>656</sup> Binyan Liu, *Liu Binyan Zizhuan* [*Autobiography of Liu Binyan*] (Taipei: China Times Publishing Company, 1990). 380

full knowledge and understanding of the matter rather than an outburst of protest or agony. Li Zhi, Deputy Director of the Propaganda Department of CCP Sichuan Provincial Committee in charge of journalism and publication work, is Ba Jin's nephew. He urged the publishing house and Ba Jin to withdraw the article many times and reported the case to He Jingzhi, then Deputy Minister of Culture. The publishing house then contacted Ba Jin and suggested removal of the article and retention of the title in the content list<sup>657</sup>. Ba Jin completely understood the situation and agreed, because, he „would not like to have the rest of the book kept out of the reach of the readers because of two or three articles“;<sup>658</sup> for which he felt sorry.<sup>659</sup> Besides, he insisted that „it is not my intention to open a skylight window“.<sup>660</sup>

Although Ba Jin had personally suffered from violence and persecution during the Cultural Revolution, he had never attributed his suffering to the Party. Also, there is no evidence that the publishing house was trying to use a skylight window for protest purpose. According to Ba Jin, the publisher was worried that the publication of his article might lead to some undesirable consequences.<sup>661</sup> By suggesting removal of the article and retaining the title in the index, the publisher was trying to find a balance between avoiding possible political risks and respecting the prestigious author. The media administrative authority, given Li Zhi's kinship with Ba Jin, gave tacit consent to the compromise. He Jingzhi also took an ambiguous noninterventionist attitude, responding to the reports of the case by, „trusting this matter will be appropriately handled“.<sup>662</sup> In such a situation, removal of the article and retention of its title in the content list might have been the best choice to the publisher, the author and the administrative authority as no one was getting hurt. Mutual understanding between the three parties was indispensable in making peace

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<sup>657</sup> Jinhai Tang and Xiaoyun Zhang, *Ba Jin De Yige Shiji [Ba Jin's Century]* (Chengdu: Sichuan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2004). 557

<sup>658</sup> Zhi Li, "Cong 'Cunmu' Tanqi [a Talk Started with 'Title Retained']," in *Shengming De Kaihua: Ba Jin Yanjiu Jikan Juanyi [Blossom of Life: Collective Research on Ba Jin Volume I]*, ed. Sihe Chen and Cunguang Li (Shanghai: Wenhui Publishing House, 2005). 225

<sup>659</sup> Yong Fan, *Nitu Jiaoyin Xubian [Footprint on Earth (Continued Edition)]* (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 2005).

<sup>660</sup> Tang and Zhang, *Ba Jin De Yige Shiji [Ba Jin's Century]*. 557

<sup>661</sup> Mingde Gong, "Sanjian Ba Jin [Three Visits to Ba Jin]," [http://blog.tianya.cn/blogger/post\\_read.asp?BlogID=206048&PostID=8453909](http://blog.tianya.cn/blogger/post_read.asp?BlogID=206048&PostID=8453909).

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.*



out of such a compromise. Therefore, the so-called skylight window should not be conveniently taken as a protest or demonstration of dissidence against the Party or its publicity apparatus. Nor is it comparable to the skylight light windows before 1949, which were opened deliberately to protest against and humiliate the censorship authority.

The third case appeared on *Huashang Bao* [*Chinese Business View*]. The CBV is a commercialized, state-owned metropolitan newspaper based in Xi'an. David Bandurski salutes the CBV with his hat off for its bold editorial style exhibited in reporting the Wen-Yong high speed train collision on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2011 which claimed forty lives.<sup>663</sup> The paper joined a one-week nationwide media quest for open investigations from the day of the accident. The quest culminated on 29<sup>th</sup> July with „the new high point of degree of variety and professionalism“.<sup>664</sup> The CBV had prepared to publish three pages of editorials in its 30<sup>th</sup> July edition, but these pages were reported to have been censored by orders from the Party publicity authority. As a result, the commentaries on page B3, which called for independent investigation and a constitutional path to the truth, were replaced by irrelevant articles whilst parts of pages B2 and B4 were left blank. Page B2 carried a square blank with the title „When you lie, your nose grows“, suggesting the officials from the Ministry of Railway were trying to lie to the public.<sup>665</sup> The page B2, particularly, is widely quoted as a newly opened skylight window against the censorship apparatus.

However, the pages which carried bold content were never included in the publicly released newsprints. Only draft copies were posted on the Internet without the possibility of verifying their authenticity. The CBV reportage over the previous week was as aggressive as many other media. Its silence after 30<sup>th</sup> July was also no different from anyone else. The media being muzzled is as tragic an outcome as the accident itself. This might be the reason that many commentators admire the courage and boldness of the outlets, even if their efforts were short and case-

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<sup>663</sup> Bandurski, "Chinese Media Muzzled after Day of Glory."

<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

Please refer to appendix 6 for the reportedly censored CBV page B2.

specific. But, the reality is that the CBV and other outlets followed censorship orders and withdrew their follow-up reports. Although CBV appeared to be keen to produce editorials and commentaries as timely as other competitors, it did not go any further when censorship orders arrived. Whether the outlet deserves a „hat-off“ salutation remains a myth.

Not only were the allegedly censored pages replaced, but the newspaper also stopped following up its investigations and making further commentaries. According to Henry Yuhuai He’s definition, a skylight window should be an editorial decision that uses blank space as an openly uttered protest. It is noted that the blank spaces on the withdrawn CBV pages were not skylight windows, as Bandurski recognizes, „The spaces were waiting for other content, in one case a cartoon, before they had to be pulled altogether“.<sup>666</sup> There has been no evidence that the CBV has made any editorial decision that overtly goes against the censorship regime.

In contrast with the ambiguous protest signs, market rating has always played a clear role in promoting bold journalism. Yuezhi Zhao maintains that, „Social problems, if articulated within the confines of Party- sanctioned investigative reporting, seem to be profitable both for the media and for the management of social tensions.“<sup>667</sup> In an age when readers have access to unprecedented sources and amounts of information, no commercialized outlets can afford to neglect newsworthy opportunities generated by events such as the Wen-Yong train collision. Being unable to attract the readers’ attention and meet their expectation means losing subscriptions and the market. It will not be such a difficult editorial decision to publish reader-oriented content when there is a market share to win and the political risk is low. The heated up media discussion around the Wen-Yong accident before the censorship orders was, at least in part, out of such concern about market performance, or as discussed in Chapter Three, positive self-presentation. Relatively, however, it is a much harder decision for senior management to make to

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<sup>666</sup> Ibid.

<sup>667</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, "Underdogs, Lapdogs and Watchdogs: Journalists and the Public Sphere Problematic in China," in *Chinese Intellectuals between State and Market*, ed. Edward X. Gu and Merle Goldman (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004). 57

take a rebellious stand when censorship orders arrive and political risk becomes high. Note that what is to be published is always an editorial decision made by the senior management. These officials are Party bureaucrats whose existing interests are sanctioned by the Party-state.<sup>668</sup>

Moreover, the CBV, like many other commercialized outlets, is not free from the influence of local politics. In contrast to its involvement in the one-week extensive report of the train collision, its editorial strategy has been cautious in reporting issues concerning local politics. Although the paper bitterly condemned the Ministry of Railways for its high speed train fervour and lack of transparency, it has taken an ambiguous editorial attitude towards the problematic construction of local transport infrastructure. Despite its inferred grievance against the censorship orders regarding the Wen-Yong collision case,<sup>669</sup> it exhibited much enthusiasm in positive promotion in favour of the local Xi'an government.

CBV spared no efforts in hailing the new subway in Xi'an with headlines on its front pages on 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September 2011. The subway was officially opened on 16<sup>th</sup> September. However, it has been haunted by various construction quality problems since its start of operation, such as failed cabin doors and water leakage at platforms. These problems, whilst having been extensively covered by the media outside Xi'an, have largely been ignored by the CBV and other local media. The paper kept silent until for unknown reasons the glass door on the platform at the Zhouhoutai Stop cracked on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2011, resulting in considerable public concern about safety. CBV reported on its website that only minor problems had occurred when a driver failed to stop a train with its doors accurately docking against the glass doors on the platform.<sup>670</sup> Other local media also made similar reports.<sup>671</sup> These reports were far from investigative. In its report,

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<sup>668</sup> Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 106

<sup>669</sup> Yitian Liu, "Wangyangbulao Qianchezhijian, Zhongguo Gaotie Quanmian Jiangsu [China High-Speed Trains Slow Down for Previous Accidents]," *Huashang Bao*, 17th August 2011.

<sup>670</sup> Kun Ren, "Xi'an Ditie Zhantai Yi Pingbimen Boli Turan Baolie, Yuanyin Buming [a Glass Safety Door at the Platform of the Subway in Xi'an Cracked. Cause Remains Unknown]," <http://news.hsw.cn/system/2011/09/27/051114552.shtml>.

<sup>671</sup> Tang Wang, "Jinqi Xi'an Ditie Xiao Wenti Duo, Wangyou Baoliao Ditezhan Boli Baolie [Xi'an Subway Troubled by Minor Problems Lately, Netizens Reported Cracked Glass in the Station]," [http://news.cnwest.com/content/2011-09/28/content\\_5284978.htm](http://news.cnwest.com/content/2011-09/28/content_5284978.htm).

CBV redirected the possible construction quality issue to the discussion of similar problems with the subway in Shanghai. The report finishes with reassurance of the quality of glasses chosen for the Xi'an subway, without showing any intention of further investigation.

The three skylight window stories, like many other similar ones, appeared in the form of blank spaces without carrying any ostensible statement related to censorship. Nevertheless, these blank pages are easily interpreted to be hinting at a protest. Some would believe that the reformed outlets tend to render the government censorship useless.<sup>672</sup> It might be true that these outlets will not object to the idea of having some degree of editorial autonomy, particularly when they have „found lucrative news material by joyfully sniping at the travails of other areas“;<sup>673</sup> but to say that they are willing to repudiate the Party-state media administrative system and thereby embark on a new stage of activism is, based on current evidence, unwarranted.

As many outlets tend to ignore some Party's guidelines such as the CPD and SAFRT's prohibition from practising media supervision outside their home jurisdiction,<sup>674</sup> most media outlets usually choose to stay on the safe side by keeping editorial content within the tolerance of local officialdom. Expressions of resentment against inhibited editorial suppression, if any, are case-specific, temporary and fragmentary, and soon swamped by positive publicity and pervasive submission.

#### 6.4 Media Activism, Whose Activism?

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<sup>672</sup> Pei, *From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union*. 165

<sup>673</sup> Ashley Esarey, "Cornering the Market: State Strategies for Controlling China's Commercial Media," in *Discontented Miracle: Growth, Conflict, and Institutional Adaptations in China*, ed. Dali L. Yang (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 2007). 8

<sup>674</sup> Benjamin L. Liebman, "Changing Media, Changing Courts," in *Changing Media, Changing China*, ed. Susan L. Shirk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). 165

As demonstrated above, there has been no real skylight window activism in the Post-Mao period as there were in the GMD period. Media activism before 1949 was based upon broad participation by political groups, the press and intelligentsia and vast consensus on democracy and freedom. This consensus was not only concerned with the participants of the activism but also in the interests of the general public, whose living conditions, as described by Joseph K. S. Yick, kept deteriorating under the GMD dictatorship and bureaucratic capitalism.<sup>675</sup> This broad participation and consensus had led to the collective anti-censorship campaign of the *Jujian Yundong*.

#### 6.4.1 Absence of pre-1949 Participation and Consensus in the Post-Mao Era

In contrast, the skylight windows in the Post-Mao era are no more than blank spaces left on publications which neither carry any ostensible explication of the existence of censorship nor openly declare any protest or disobedience against the censorship apparatus. At best, these blank spaces physically resemble the skylight windows in the pre-1949 period and borrow the latter's revolutionary legacy to allude to existence of censorship and create room for speculation of possible activism. At worst, these blank spaces can be used by the profit-driven and politically sensitive media for building brand and securing market share. While the profit-seeking outlets' implied disobedience is ambiguous and largely unuttered, obedience is pervasive and obvious, particularly when the media managers have developed a vested interest in sustaining the current political economic order by following the party line while pursuing financial gains.<sup>676</sup>

The pre-1949 broad participation and ideological consensus are tellingly absent in the Post-Mao era and reflect the major weakness of media activism today. Instead, a new consensus on political control and pursuit of profit has been established between the Party-state and the media, which has resulted in the awkward situation

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<sup>675</sup> Joseph K. S. Yick, *Making Urban Revolution in China: The Ccp-Gmd Struggle for Beijing-Tianjin 1945-1949* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1995). 106

<sup>676</sup> Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 82

that the media activism now faces. Activism, if any, exists only among the few journalists and editors who dare to cross the line whilst they barely have any political or organizational support. They are considered as activists because they try to practise journalism despite that this practice constitutes civil disobedience and defies the new consensus. The new consensus is demonstrated by how these activist professionals are treated as disposable labour and how the media are in line with the Party-state.

The Nanfang Daily Press Group and its subsidiary outlets are known in the West as being rebellious and combative.<sup>677</sup> *Nanfang Dushi Bao* [*Southern Metropolis Daily*], one of its subsidiaries for example, is considered „gutsy“ and noted for its „trenchant and critical approach“.<sup>678</sup> The SMD owes its reputation, at least in part, to the 2003 in-depth reporting of „the case of Sun Zhigang“ that resulted in the abolition of the *Chengshi Liulang Qitao Renyuan Shourong Qiansong Banfa* [*Custody and Repatriation Procedure*].<sup>679</sup> This policy outcome is celebrated as a textbook example of media activism against corruption, enhancing governance capability and winning support from the people.<sup>680</sup>

However, just because the SMD has become a celebrated outlet, that does not mean that the activist professionals who have helped the SMD and the conglomerate build up their brand are also able to share this success. On the contrary, many of them have ended up being suspended, fired or even persecuted. Below are some examples:

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<sup>677</sup> *Nanfang Daily* is the official media of the CCP Guangdong Provincial Committee and the Guangdong Provincial Government.

<sup>678</sup> Philip P. Pan, *Out of Mao's Shadow: The Struggle for the Soul of a New China*, II ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2009). 235  
Dillon, *Contemporary China: An Introduction*. 98

<sup>679</sup> *Chengshi Liulang Qitao Renyuan Shourong Qiansong Banfa* [*Custody and Repatriation Procedure for Vagrants and Beggars in Urban Areas*], or briefly as the *Custody and Repatriation Procedure*, was established on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1982 by the State Council and abolished in 2003. It was an administrative procedure that gave the urban police the discretionary power to detain and repatriate migrants from rural areas if they failed to produce on demand hukou [household registration] information, temporary living permits or identity cards  
Hu, "The Rise of the Business Media in China."  
Susan Jakes, "Hostages of the State,"  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,458835,00.html#ixzz1aj6DjY7i>.  
Sophie Beach, "Rise of Rights?," <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2005/05/rise-of-rights/>.

<sup>680</sup> Pan, *Out of Mao's Shadow: The Struggle for the Soul of a New China*. 255

- Deputy Chief Editor Xia Yitao was removed from his position on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2005 for a front page report of the Deputy Governor of Guangdong Province being punished for a mining accident.<sup>681</sup>
- General Manager Yu Huafeng and editor Li Minying were fired, arrested and accused of corruption in January 2004. Both of them had been actively engaged in reporting the case of Sun Zhigang and SARS in 2003, which annoyed the provincial leadership.<sup>682</sup>
- Cheng Yizhong is known as a hardcore activist heavily engaged in reporting the case of Sun Zhigang and SARS in 2003. He was removed from his positions as Chief Editor of *Xin Jing Bao* in March 2004, and Chief Editor of the SMD in October 2004. He was then transferred to another department that was not related to journalism. Later, Cheng Yizhong and his fellow management team members Yu Haifeng and Lin Minying were arrested for alleged „corruption and embezzling public funds“.<sup>683</sup>
- Jiang Yiping, Deputy Chief Editor of the press group in charge of the SMD, was demoted from her position in December 2008. Jiang is known for her objective editorial style, both as a writer and editor.<sup>684</sup>
- Zhu Di, editor of a historical column, was suspended in April 2010 for the publication of an article by Hong Zhenkuai titled *Patriotism does not Mean Love for the Royal Court*.<sup>685</sup>

The list goes on. These are the professionals who have been directly responsible for the aggressive news products that have accredited the SMD as an outspoken outlet. However, the fact that these people have been purged demonstrates that one can hardly expect a commercialized and so-called rebellious outlet to protect its professionals who go against the new consensus. Although some of the activists hold higher editorial positions, their careers are still in the hands of the Party-state’s media administrative authority and subject to the powerful *Shewehui* governance.

The SMD’s success lies in its consensus with the Party-state. The primary goal of the SMD is making profits and playing a politically safe game. As its Chief Editor Zhuang Shenzhi claimed, the paper has been „making the best newspapers across

<sup>681</sup> Tong, *Investigative Journalism in China*. 112

<sup>682</sup> Pan, *Out of Mao's Shadow: The Struggle for the Soul of a New China*. 263

<sup>683</sup> Beach, "Rise of Rights?."

<sup>684</sup> Tong, *Investigative Journalism in China*. 58

<sup>685</sup> The article was published on the 11<sup>th</sup> April 2011 edition of the SMD. But the online version of the article has been removed from the official website of the newspaper. It is reposted to various social media platform and is available from [http://blog.caijing.com.cn/expert\\_article-151289-4873.shtml](http://blog.caijing.com.cn/expert_article-151289-4873.shtml) .

Reporters Without Borders, "Propaganda Department Sets Rule for Covering Shanghai Expo and Qinghai Earthquake," <http://en.rsf.org/china-shanghai-expo-earthquake-qinghai-censorship-29-04-2010,37231.html>.

the country".<sup>686</sup> The SMD boasts seventh largest paper in China with a circulation volume of 1.85 million copies per issue and an annual advertising turnover for 2.8 billion yuan in 2010.<sup>687</sup>

Zhuang reiterates that the SMD has stayed strictly in line with the Party's guidelines. He acknowledges that it was true that the SMD was a bit bold in its early stage, but its recent success should be attributed to its wisdom in handling the boundaries.<sup>688</sup> Such wisdom, according to Zhuang, comes out of its commitment to the official discourse of „pushing the social progress in a steady and harmonious way“, or in other words, maintaining the social order and political status quo. Its corporate structure has consolidated this commitment and consequently the political control, and ensures the consensus on the leadership of Party logic and promotion of market logic. According to Zhuang, the corporate structure of the SMD since 2003 features three parallel operational boards under the supreme leadership of *Sheweihui*. The three boards are editorial board [*bianweihui*], management board [*jingweihui*] and administrative board [*xingzheng weiyuanhui*]. As a subsidiary of the Nanfang Daily Press Group, the SMD is ultimately subject to the leadership of the conglomerate's *Sheweihui* and Party committee.

#### 6.4.2 New Consensus and Implications

The new consensus on political and market control between the Party-state and the media has been reached in the context of capitalism, marketization and commercialism. Activism has been doomed by its conflict with this consensus. The

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<sup>686</sup> Shenzhi Zhuang, "Ban Zhongguo Zuihao De Baozhi: Nanfang Dushi Bao Zhubian Liaotian Shilu [Making the Best Newspaper in China: An Interview with the Chief Editor of Nanfang Metroplis Daily]," <http://news.sohu.com/54/93/news213299354.shtml>.

<sup>687</sup> SMD, "Nangfang Dushibao Jianjie [Brief Introduction to the Smd]," <http://g2.oeeee.com/index.php?m=Esindex&a=intro&>.

However, the SMD figure of distribution and advertising turnover is different from that from non-SMD resources. According to Lin Yao's investigation, the SMD distribution statistics is 1.4 million copies per issue and advertising sales turnover is two billion yuan in 2010.

Lin Yao, "Zhongguo Baoye Guanggao: 2010nian Huigu 2011nian Zhanwan [Advertising on Chinese Newspapers: Look Back on 2010 and into 2011]," *Zhongguo Baoye*, no. 3 (2011).

<sup>688</sup> Zhuang, "Ban Zhongguo Zuihao De Baozhi: Nanfang Dushi Bao Zhubian Liaotian Shilu [Making the Best Newspaper in China: An Interview with the Chief Editor of Nanfang Metroplis Daily]."



profit-seeking outlets and their senior management have unswervingly stayed in line with censorship orders and political requirements, and are unlikely and unwilling to risk their positions and prosperity for their fellow professionals, particularly when the political risk becomes high. To these senior management officials, there is no such thing as journalism on behalf of the public free of political control and market influence. Consequently, implications of the new consensus are three-fold.

Firstly, this Party-state-media consensus diminishes the potential predicted by Qian Gang and David Bandurski, that „commercialization, emerging professionalism and technological advance are shifting the press agenda-setting power from the Party-state to the media“.<sup>689</sup> In fact, the consensus has actually rendered such shift of power, if any, meaningless because the assumption of such a shift is made upon binary and dualistic consideration of the Party-state and the media as two choices set against each other. Such consideration is something that Yuezhi Zhao has warned of in 1998 in addressing the limitations of a heavily commercialized media system. As Zhao has argued, the risks of such binary considerations lie in:

...the reduction of freedom of the press to either unaccountable Party or corporate control of the media, the conflation of democracy of either the rule of a vanguard Party or the market, and the conceptualization of the media as either an instrument of the Party propaganda or as generating an objective value-free reflection of reality and public opinion.<sup>690</sup>

The celebrated shift of agenda-setting power to the marketized media according to Western liberal model has failed to result in any viable activism. As Zhao also argues, the liberal journalistic values and their application are more often than not defined and determined by the social political forces that possess the greatest political and economical power and discourse hegemony that defines social political realities.<sup>691</sup> Such interlocking of political and corporate control of the

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<sup>689</sup> Gang Qian and David Bandurski, "China's Emerging Public Sphere: The Impact of Media Commercialization, Professionalism and the Internet in an Era of Transition," in *Changing Media, Changing China*, ed. Susan L. Shirk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>690</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 9

<sup>691</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, "Weishenme Jintian Women Dui Xifang Xinwen Keguanxing Shiwang? [Why We Are Dissatisfied Today by the Objectivity of the Western Journalism?]," *Xinwen Daxue* 9, no. 2 (2008). 11

media is just as true in the capitalized authoritarian China as in liberal democracies like the United States.

Secondly, the new consensus results from and, in turn, reinforces the Party-state's adaptive management of the incompatibility of communist ideology with a new capitalist economic base, as well as the conflict between the public sphere and the influence of politics and profit incentives. This incompatibility and conflict have given rise to justification problems of information control because it is largely the voices of the weak and poor that have been stifled.<sup>692</sup> When it is hard to find justification, adaptation is made to steer the media from seeking substantive supervision to making profits under the Party-state's political sanction and capitalist market agenda. As Christopher A. McNally has observed, a number of adjustments have been made accordingly: some topics once considered taboo became tolerated; new administrative structures have been adopted to oversee a much bigger expanse of the media industry; the Chinese populace have access to choices of media outlets and media content unprecedented in the PRC history; the media flourishes both in number and revenue; and yet, the media system overall remains in a period of significant contraction.<sup>693</sup>

In turn, this adaptation has consolidated the new consensus, which is very similar to the way in which a consensus has been reached in the North America. On the one hand, the U.S. media is plagued by what Hackett and Zhao have identified as the long-standing tension and logical contradiction between free market capitalism and democracy.<sup>694</sup> On the other, these contradictions are mediated in the consensus established upon political and financial interests between the government, corporations and the media system.<sup>695</sup> As a result, the political and market status quo, at stake as it is, is dynamically controlled. Noam Chomsky has argued that the economy and the social and political life are dominated by domestic elements that

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<sup>692</sup> Guidi Chen and Chuntao Wu, *Will the Boat Sink the Water?: The Life of Chinese Peasants*, trans. Hong Zhu (New York: Public Affairs, 2006). 94

<sup>693</sup> McNally, *China's Emergent Political Economy: Capitalism in the Dragon's Lair*. 132

<sup>694</sup> Hackett and Zhao, *Sustaining Democracy?: Journalism and the Politics of Objectivity*. 165

<sup>695</sup> Goodman and Goodman, *The Exception to the Rulers: Exposing America's War Profiteers, the Media That Love Them and the Crackdown on Our Rights*.

———, *Static: Government Liars, Media Cheerleaders, and the People Who Fight Back*.

are sensitive to the needs of corporations and the government.<sup>696</sup> What Chomsky reveals in the United States is happening in China in a similar manner. The Chinese media are politically sensitive and profit-driven as much as their American counterparts. Given the effective control by politics and market forces, there are no contrarities in the liberal capitalist democracies like United States.<sup>697</sup> Similarly, there are no contrarities in the capitalist market-liberal agenda prescribed by the Chinese authoritarian Party-state if the weakness of media activism in the Post-Mao era is interpreted according to Chomsky's revelation. The liberal prediction of press freedom based on a free market misses what the Party-state-media consensus is trying to mitigate: the logical contradictions between communist ideology and capitalist economic base as well as between free market capitalism and democracy, a problem embedded both in Western liberal democracies and capitalized authoritarian China. Hence, how can media activism thrive without contrarities?

Thirdly, this new consensus reflects and aggravates the political disjuncture of representation of the Party-state and the media. Political control is intensified to maintain the media as part of the Party-state's mechanism of power. Market control is encouraged by profit incentives. Such control has denied the media's functionality as a public sphere, which, as Wang Hui argues, is closely related to the basic way in which the public's rights to know and social communication are realized and politics is operated.<sup>698</sup> The denial of the media's public nature is manifested the irrelevance of media boom to the expansion of public sphere,<sup>699</sup> and the absence of subjectivity of the workers and peasantry in the media content production.<sup>700</sup>

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<sup>696</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1989). 108

<sup>697</sup> Ibid. 108

<sup>698</sup> Wang and Xu, "'Qu Zhengzhi Hua De Zhengzhi' Yu Dazhong Chuanmei De Gonggongxing ["Depoliticized Politics and the Public Nature of Public Media]." 235

<sup>699</sup> Wang, "Zaiwen 'Shenme De Pingdeng'? Lun Dangdai Zhengzhi Xingshi Yu Shehui Xingshi De Tuojie [Revisiting "Equality of What"?-- on the Disjuncture of Contemporary Political Forms and Social Forms]." 68

<sup>700</sup> Jan Jacob Karl Eyferth, "Introduction," in *How China Works: Perspectives on the Twentieth-Century Industrial Workplace*, ed. Jan Jacob Karl Eyferth (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006). 14

Such denial is embedded in the broader picture of the socioeconomic marginalization of the workers and peasantry in the reform era, in which, as Wanning Sun exemplified, the discourse and imaging shaping in media content is well beyond the reach of those from the lower strata of the society.<sup>701</sup> Besides, the public nature of the media becomes suspicious because, as Wang Hui maintains, the representation proclaimed by the Party-state is increasingly blurred and unwarranted.<sup>702</sup> Wang Hui also argues that disjuncture of representation in journalism manifests the fact that workers and peasants do not have any agent of their own on the political arena; instead, the state has transformed itself into the agent of global capital and a mere mechanism of power, and the relationship between the workers and the state have changed from a representation one into a conflicting one.<sup>703</sup> The officially promoted and even forced privatization of the national and collective economy have exerted profound impact on or to some extent destroyed the life style and culture of the people from bottom strata of the society including ethnic groups in remote areas.<sup>704</sup> This conflicting nature of the relationship between the Party-state and the workers and peasantry has determined the disjuncture of the former's political representation and given rise to the need to increase political control.

Furthermore, the irrelevance of media prosperity to the workers and peasantry, absence of their subjectivity, and their conflicting relationship with the state have not only resulted from the media's disjuncture of their public nature and political representation, but have also resulted in the media's pervasive reluctance to confront the Party-state. The rural community, for example, has unprecedented access to television broadcasting since the initiation of the Cuncuntong [village to village connection] rural direct broadcast satellite [DBS] project in 1998.<sup>705</sup> By the

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<sup>701</sup> Sun, *Maid in China: Media, Morality, and the Culture Politics of Boundaries*.

<sup>702</sup> Wang and Xu, ""Qu Zhengzhi Hua De Zhengzhi" Yu Dazhong Chuanmei De Gonggongxing ["Depoliticized Politics and the Public Nature of Public Media]." 237

<sup>703</sup> Wang, "Shangshengqi De Maodun, Tixixing Weiji Yu Biange Fangxiang [Contradictions, Systematic Crisis and Direction of Reform in the Rise Period]." 83  
 ———, *The End of Revolution*. 6

<sup>704</sup> Wang and Xu, ""Qu Zhengzhi Hua De Zhengzhi" Yu Dazhong Chuanmei De Gonggongxing ["Depoliticized Politics and the Public Nature of Public Media]." 243

<sup>705</sup> Amitabh Kumar, *Implementing Mobile Tv: Atsc Mobile Dtv, Mediaflo, Dvb-H/Sh, Dmb, Wimax, 3g Systems and Rich Media Applications* (Burlington: Elsevier Inc., 2010). 503

end of 2004, television broadcasting service has covered 94.3% of the rural area and people in these areas spend 166 minutes in average per day before the screen, 46 minutes than urbanites, according to a CCTV investigation.<sup>706</sup> However, this access is irrelevant to the rural audiences. Only one percent of the programs are directly relevant to rural issues such as villages, peasants, agriculture and migrant workers from rural areas.<sup>707</sup> Similar irrelevance is seen in other media. Among more than 9,000 journals and magazines, only 187 are related to the rural community; among the approximately 2,000 newspapers, only a handful are targeted at farmer readers.<sup>708</sup> Market-oriented newspapers, as Yanhong Li has expounded, target readers with the spending power that advertising clients value, and cannot champion the interests of the marginalized groups at the expense of their main market.<sup>709</sup>

In contrast to the media's indifference to the absence or loss of subjectivity of the workers and peasantry is the embracement of globalization and manufacture of transnational imagination,<sup>710</sup> middle-class and elite oriented programs,<sup>711</sup> proliferation of non-political content that basically ignore the needs, concerns and petitions of the workers and the peasantry. The chance for the latter two to have their voices heard *through* the media is diminished. The media's political submission, sensitive obedience so as to avoid confrontation, and profit-driven commercialism have paved the way for political and market control. Lü and Zhao have argued that, as the Party's representation becomes ambiguous, the problems of the mass media epitomize the crisis of contemporary social democracy; and no public interests are possible in the public sphere when the participation and

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<sup>706</sup> Ying Li and Jiguang Tuo, "Nongmin Pingdeng Huayuquan De Shixian Tujing [Ways to Realize the Peasants' Equal Rights to Speech]," *Dangdai Chuanbo*, no. 3 (2007). 17

<sup>707</sup> ———, "Ruhe Wei Cunmin Fafang "Kuoyinqi" : Luelun Nongming Pingdeng Huayuquan De Shixian Tujing [How to Distribute 'Speakers' to the Peasants: Brief Discussion on Ways to Realize the Peasants' Equal Rights to Speech]," *Xinwen Jizhe*, no. 1 (2007). 37

<sup>708</sup> *Ibid.* 37

<sup>709</sup> Yanhong Li, "Representing the Underprivileged? Reporting on the Rights of the 'Peasant Labourers' under Market Forces," in *Free Markets Free Media?: Reflections on the Political Economy of the Press in Asia*, ed. Cherian George (Singapore: Asian Media Information and Communication Centre, 2008). 58

<sup>710</sup> Sun, *Leaving China: Media, Migration, and Transnational Imagination*.

<sup>711</sup> Zhao, "Underdogs, Lapdogs and Watchdogs: Journalists and the Public Sphere Problematic in China." 53

competition in this domain is based upon anything but equality and freedom.<sup>712</sup> The dominance by the powerful has resulted in the collapse of the public sphere and hollowed out the latter's public nature.<sup>713</sup> Since the media does not represent the weak, poor, victimized and disenfranchised groups, how can anyone expect commercialized outlets to engage themselves in media activism against the Party-state and the stifling media system itself?

## 6.5 Concluding Remarks

Comparing the media activism before 1949 and in the reform era, this chapter maintains that current media activism, skylight windows for example, is drastically different from that before 1949, in terms of participatory elements and ideological consensus. *Jujian Yundong* staged a protest against censorship and dictatorship, and made an outspoken quest for policy outcome. The movement was participated in by a broad range of democratic political groups, intelligentsia and the media, and based upon their consensus on freedom and democracy, which had laid down the foundation for *Jujian Yundong*'s policy outcomes.

This chapter argues that such a consensus, however, is tellingly absent in the reform era. Instead, the Party-state and the media have reached a new consensus on political control and pursuit of profit. The three skylight window examples have demonstrated the media's reluctance to confront the Party-state. News outlets in post-Mao China are restructured to suit unrestrained commercialization and political control, intertwined with the fusion of Party logic and market logic.<sup>714</sup> The consensus between the Party-state and the media is rooted in such a fusion and constitutes a coercive pressure on the vast majority of professionals, particularly when some disobedient individuals have been severely punished.<sup>715</sup> Such a consensus has resulted in the absence of subjectivity of the workers and the

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<sup>712</sup> Lv and Zhao, "Zhongguo De Xiandaixing, Dazhong Chuanmei Yu Gonggongxing De Chonggou [Reconstruction of China's Modernity, Public Media and Their Public Nature]." 16

<sup>713</sup> Ibid. 16

<sup>714</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 2

<sup>715</sup> Ibid. 160

peasantry in journalism and demonstrated the disjuncture of the political representation of the media.

As a result, the officially promoted concept of transparency and supervision by public opinion has been hollowed out by this confusion of Party logic and market logic. State power and the reformed media are not necessarily in diametrical opposition to each other. Even in a most outspoken outlet, the editorial board is strictly subject to political control. Besides, most news outlets, following or driven by the tide of commercialization and busy with making profits, do not seem to have any activist agenda beyond the Party line. The media, in general, do not have a clear, consistent and persistent pursuit for policy outcomes which aim for journalism free of political and market control. Media activism is constantly under pressure from such control.<sup>716</sup>

Unlike the Yan'an practice of freedom and democracy, the transparency and supervision by public opinion rhetoric are no more than manipulated concepts catering for elite politics and capital. These manipulated and emptied concepts have exerted a stifling impact on the public sphere, and increasingly alienated themselves from the social base of public consensus on freedom and democracy. Reciprocally, as Wang Hui implied, the hollowed out ideological and political values are compensated with reinforced power structure and mechanism.<sup>717</sup>

Therefore, skylight windows in the Post-Mao era have demonstrated the transparency illusion built on the consensus on political and market control. At best, these blank spaces allude vaguely to the existence of media grievance against the censorship apparatus. At worst, they can be employed, drawing from the pre-1949 activism legacy, as a market strategy for profit and reputation. In reality, activist professionals are dispensable at any given time. Media activism, if any, is a grassroots initiative, action and struggle without any systemic or organizational support. The media are just as suppressive as the Party-state apparatus, both disjunct from their political representation of the public.

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<sup>716</sup> Latham, *Pop Culture China!: Media, Arts, and Lifestyle*. 37

<sup>717</sup> Wang, *The End of Revolution*.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion: Transparency Illusion and Disjuncture of Representation

### 7.1 Summary: from Illusion to Disillusionment

This thesis argues that the transparency illusion, the gulf between the official transparency rhetoric and the information control reality, cannot be simply understood as being a conflict between the state power and the media, or merely as a matter of censorship. Instead, such an illusion comes from the incompatibility of the CCP's nominal ideology with its elite politics and capitalist economic base. This incompatibility makes it impossible for the CCP to substantiate the concept of transparency and its promised supervision by public opinion, leaving the concept and promise hollow and empty. The Party-state may find that the Western term of „transparency“ has a more modern connotation than the long existing traditional metaphoric concept of „*mingjing gaoxuan*“ (clear mirror hung aloft, meaning honesty and justice). Or „transparency“ can at least be used to gloss over the harsh reality that stifles the public sphere. Therefore, the government seems to have no hesitation in promoting transparency in its official discourse as being part of its efforts to shift to „scientific development“ and build up a „harmonious society“. However, in practice so far, such promotion at best gives rise to the hope that someday in the future there will be transparency and press freedom as the reform continues. At worst, it helps to maintain the status quo, from which powerful political and capital elites have benefited the most. It is from considering what media transparency is that this thesis unfolds its main argument from chapters two to six, each of which discusses one sub-argument related to the concept of media transparency.

Chapter Two conceptualizes media transparency as a multi-faceted concept of transparency in journalism. This chapter refuses to regard the problem of the Chinese media system as merely a matter of censorship because the cause of the transparency illusion lies in the lack of substance of the Party-state's rhetoric and market discourses. The profit-seeking media, including those most financially



successful and editorially influential ones, do not necessarily oppose the state power as victimized and martyred propaganda puppets. The Party-state and the profit-seeking media have reached a consensus on political and market control, and hence loathe substantiating the concepts of transparency and supervision by the media. Censorship reality is part of the picture of the media environment. However, it should not be simplified into a problem of lack of freedom and incomplete marketization as many would do by banging on Western liberal democracy and free market discourses such as Cao Changqing, Jiao Guobiao, Minxin Pei, Zhu Xueqin, and Liu Junning.

Therefore, Chapter Two explains what media transparency is and what the major constraints on media transparency are. The chapter specifies media transparency on the basis of the fundamental principles of transparency, namely openness, accountability, credibility and relevance. Three aspects are transparency for the media, of the media and by the media respectively. The chapter identifies the impact of the policy environment, the degree of transparency of the media and elements of constraints on media transparency.

In Chapter Three, the policy constraint is demonstrated in the discursive censorship and self-censorship strategies. Censorship is applied yet denied due to censorship's justification problems. These discursive strategies, including positive self-presentation, defensive attack against accusation, mitigation, moral blackmail and denial of relevant legal construction, attempt to justify the present policies and legitimize the clampdown reality. In practice, such rationale is also adopted by the marketized state-owned news outlets that apply self-censorship. However, none of the strategies based on the rationale has been successful in prinking up the fact that the Party-state and the outlets no longer represent the public and therefore, are unable to legitimize the former two's consensus on political control and pursuit of profits.

Chapter Four focuses on the pandemic media malpractice. The chapter argues that it is the Party-state-controlled and profit-seeking media system that should be responsible because this system fosters exploitative management, ethical confusion and pervasive alienation. This chapter rejects the official rhetoric that media

malpractice originates from lack of professional consciousness and socialist ideological awareness among the professionals. Instead, this chapter attributes the rampant rise of various kinds of professional malpractice to the existing market, ethical and identity dilemmas that have alienated grassroots professionals from the hollowed-out official ideologies and elite concepts of so-called socialist journalism. Such alienation has demonstrated the transparency illusion and the disjuncture of the media from its public nature.

Chapter Five discusses how marketization and the new corporate governance adopted in media conglomerates have considerably consolidated the Party-state's control over the media; contrary to the illusion that press freedom is predicated on market forces. Not only have the media conglomerates established new corporate governance, this new governance also has reinforced Party-state's political control. The integration of state power and the media camouflaged by marketization and commercialization has also reinforced the news consensus between the two on political and market control. This new consensus has diminished the space for public participation and denied the subjectivity of the workers and the peasantry in the public domain, and hence considerably squeezed the social base of the public sphere. This is a process of what Habermas has called re-feudalization,<sup>718</sup> or in some scholars' eyes, double-feudalization.<sup>719</sup> The consolidation of this consensus has demonstrated the Party-state and the media's further disjuncture from their political representation.

Chapter Six examines the rising media activism to demythologize the transparency illusion borne on misinterpretation of the past and the present. Such an illusion lays emphasis and expectation on the market-oriented media whilst ignoring its blatant consensus with the Party-state on political and market control. The illusion tries to draw from the past to interpret the present whilst ignoring the fact that the combative and laudable past was built on broad participation by democratic

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<sup>718</sup> Robert C. Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 1991). 4  
Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991). 231

<sup>719</sup> Jiang Zhan, "Jingtí Meiti De "Shuangchong Fengjianhua" [Be Aware of the 'Double-Feudalization' of the Media]," *Qingnian Jizhe*, no. 3 (2005). 9

political groups, the intelligentsia and the media and their vast ideological consensus on freedom and democracy against dictatorship and censorship. These ignored facts, however, have determined the major weakness of the media activism today.

Most marketized outlets play a critical role in selling official rhetoric, making media products and behaviour look like a response to market demand rather than ideological indoctrination. Although many of them are no longer branded as official mouthpieces, they are in effect loyal messengers of the elite discourse posing as non-official media or market oriented outlets.<sup>720</sup> The outlets and their senior management are the major beneficiaries of commercialization and conglomeration, and therefore, loathe confronting the Party-state. Although sometimes they may pose to explore the boundaries, they seldom mean to cross the line. This has engendered, at least in part, the irony that „media challenge to state control can boost the ability of the state to manipulate public opinion“.<sup>721</sup>

As summarized above, this thesis has provided answers to the questions raised in the opening chapter:

- Media transparency is defined as a multifaceted concept that includes openness, accountability, credibility and relevance of media administration, management, and operation. This transparency does not bear any substance unless it is rooted in the purpose to expand the public sphere in the interests of the underrepresented and disenfranchised groups, and hold both politics and the media system transparent and accountable.
- Denial of censorship is rooted in the difficulties in justifying the censorship and self-censorship apparatus. These difficulties are due to the fact that the Party-state and the media have reached consensus on political control and ceased to represent the workers and peasantry. This consensus has demonstrated that the Party has metamorphosed into a mere mechanism of power and agent of capitalism. In result, the media transparency problem is

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<sup>720</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 158

<sup>721</sup> Stockmann, "What Kind of Information Does the Public Demand? Getting the News During the 2005 Anti-Japanese Protests." 182

rooted in the Party-state and the media's disjuncture of political representation.

- Pandemic media malpractice results from the Party-state controlled and profit-driven media system that fosters exploitative management, ethical confusion and denial of identity and representation of the professionals. This result further demonstrates the transparency illusion as the grassroots professionals are increasingly alienated from the Party-state rhetoric and market discourses.
- By using market forces and a profit-driven management style, the CCP has actually strengthened its control over the media through the new corporate governance in marketization and media conglomerates. Contrary to the illusion that press freedom is predicated on the market and financial autonomy, the Party-state and the media have reached consensus on political control and pursuit of profit on the bandwagon of commercialization and conglomeration. Such a consensus has led to the lack of substance of the concepts of transparency and supervision by public opinion.
- Media activism in the reform era is not a parallel with that of pre-1949. The major weakness of the former lies in its lack of broad participation and vast ideological consensus on democracy and freedom that were distinctive in the latter. Misinterpretation of the media activism today is rooted in the illusion that market forces and financial autonomy will lead to freedom and transparency. The weakness, on the other hand, shows that the media are disjunct from their public nature and political representation of the weak and poor.

The discussion of the transparency illusion, therefore, has generated a picture of transparency disillusion. However, this thesis does not only focus on the disillusion *per sé*, but also considers the cause of the illusion and disillusion. The cause stems from the discrepancy between the Party-state's capitalist nature and the communist representation on which it posits its legitimacy. This discrepancy has resulted in the disjuncture of political representation of the Party-state and the news media from

the public. Given this discrepancy and disjuncture, the Party-state and the media loathe substantiating the rhetoric of transparency and supervision by public opinion, and hence lead to the media transparency problems.

The government voice which promotes the transparency rhetoric and supervision by public opinion is so loud and widespread that it has been not only integrated into the mainstream elite ideal but also has led to an overwhelming stifling of public discussion that leads to questioning of the official ideology, political system and its legitimacy. Such rhetoric is part of the Party-state politics and the market discourses because it is an autocratic, exclusive, compulsory and brain-washing parlance, sweetened with modern linguistic pragmatism, and manufactured and manipulated by the very small number of elites in power. Such rhetoric and discourses built upon the consensus on political and market control suppress any discussion that aims for expansion of the public sphere and hamper the utterance and delivery of the voices of the underrepresented and disenfranchised groups.

## 7.2 Disjuncture of Representation

The transformation from „the People’s Dictatorship“ in Mao’s era to the current consensus on political and market control should not be conveniently seen as a „a result of negotiation“ between the Party-state and market forces,<sup>722</sup> because negotiation implies conflict of interests and contrarities. However, given the consensus, there is no such thing as contrarities between the Party-state, the market and the profit-driven media. Rather, the transformation has been a process of disjuncture of representation, resulting from a trend of depoliticization within which both China and the West are deeply involved.<sup>723</sup> Wang Hui maintains that „China’s depoliticization process has had two key characteristics: firstly, the „de-theorization“ of the ideological sphere; secondly, making economic reform the sole

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<sup>722</sup> Ho, "Self-Imposed Censorship and De-Politicized Politics in China." 37

<sup>723</sup> Wang, *The End of Revolution*. 6

focus of party work“.<sup>724</sup> Unlike depoliticized Western democracy, which features „weakened party systems“ and „the decline in the parliamentary-democratic systems“,<sup>725</sup> depoliticization in China has seen the Party-state and the media increasingly disjunct from their representation of the public, particularly those victimized and disenfranchised groups. This disjuncture of representation is manifested in how the CCP has transformed into an agent of capitalism, the consequent loss of substance in its ideological system and its impact on the media“s political representation.

Firstly, that China remains a one-party rule state does not necessarily mean the ruling party remains unchanged. On the contrary, the intensified political control is attributed to the changing of the Party into a representative of capitalism. China today is considered to be a capitalist country in terms of the structure of its national economy regardless of its alleged socialist ideology.<sup>726</sup> Some observers, such as Elisabeth Alles drawing on Marx“s description of the nineteenth century England, and Laurence Coates mapping the dominant social grouping, have identified China“s economy as „wild capitalism“.<sup>727</sup>

According to Christopher A. McNally, capitalism entails three elements including a distinctive drive to extract and accumulate capital, the structuring role of the market, and, more importantly, emergence of a capital-oriented class.<sup>728</sup> These three elements have unmistakably dominated the economic and political reality of China“s society today. One cannot attribute China“s problems to socialism when the capitalist market is playing a dominant role in allocating resources and the public sector keeps decreasing and is responsible for less than thirty percent of the national economy.<sup>729</sup> Not only have the political and capital elites established a tight alliance

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<sup>724</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>725</sup> Ibid. 6

<sup>726</sup> Gao, *The Battle for China's Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution*. 185

<sup>727</sup> Elisabeth Alles, "Class Struggles in China Today: Towards a Third Chinese Revolution?," *China Perspectives*, no. 1 (2012). 3

Laurence Coates, *Is China Capitalist?* (Umeå: Förlaget Rättvisböcker, 2000).

<sup>728</sup> Christopher A. McNally, "Reflections on Capitalism and China's Emergent Political Economy," in *China's Emergent Political Economy: Capitalism in the Dragon's Lair*, ed. Christopher A. McNally (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>729</sup> Hui Wang, "Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity," *Wenyi Zhengming*, no. 6 (1998). 9

to solidify their status, but such alliance has also provided space for their mutual accommodation.

Moreover, capital has been politically recognized,<sup>730</sup> whilst its exploitative nature has been depoliticized and glossed over by the media as if capitalism is the only game in town.<sup>731</sup> The political recognition of capital has been escalated to the extent that capitalist entrepreneurs are recruited to the Party membership since the reign of Jiang Zemin. Liang Wengen, CEO of private-owned SANYI Corp and one of the wealthiest capitalist entrepreneurs in China, gained his Party membership in 2004 although his initiative to join the Party was to „multiply his chances to attract girls in the countryside“ upon his first submission of application eighteen years before.<sup>732</sup> In September 2011, Liang was nominated for a candidate of alternate member of the Party’s Central Committee.<sup>733</sup> Liang’s promotion marks the start of sharing, if not taking over yet the central state power with the capital elites and capitalism. Besides, the political elites have made considerable fortunes either for themselves, or more commonly and pragmatically, for their family members.<sup>734</sup> Their way of devouring the social fortune has given birth to crony capitalism,<sup>735</sup> and network capitalism,<sup>736</sup> which is responsible for increasing social inequality, polarization and disturbance.

As a result, the Party has been disconnected from its communist values and metamorphosed into a mere mechanism of power. Wang Hui and Chen argue, citing Habermas, that „with the linking of public and private realms, not only certain functions of the sphere of commerce and social labour are taken over by

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<sup>730</sup> McNally, "Reflections on Capitalism and China's Emergent Political Economy." 21

<sup>731</sup> Sun, "The Curse of the Everyday: Politics of Representation and New Social Semiotics in Post-Socialist China." 31

<sup>732</sup> Zongwen Zhu, "Jiemi Zhongguo Shoufu Liang Wengen De Rudang Licheng [Uncover the Journey of China's Number One Rich Liang Wengen to Join the Party]," <http://business.sohu.com/20110927/n320716484.shtml>.  
Translation by author.

<sup>733</sup> Rein, *The End of Cheap China: Economic and Cultural Trends That Will Disrupt the World*. 15

<sup>734</sup> Mobo Gao, "The Transitional Role of the Hu-Wen Leadership in China: A Case Study of Liu Xiaobo," in *A New Stage of Development for an Emerging Superpower*, ed. Joseph Cheng (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2012). 176

<sup>735</sup> Christopher A. McNally, "China's Capitalist Transition: The Making of a New Variety of Capitalism," in *Capitalisms Compared*, ed. Lars Mjosef and Tommy H. Claus (Oxford: Elsevier Ltd., 2007). 199

<sup>736</sup> McNally, "Reflections on Capitalism and China's Emergent Political Economy." 10612

political authorities, but conversely political spheres are taken over by the societal powers“; <sup>737</sup> which will lead to „Re-feudalization“ of the public sphere and politics. <sup>738</sup> This re-feudalization diminishes the possibility for the workers and peasantry to engage the public sphere and have their voice heard because the base and space for these underrepresented and marginalized groups have largely collapsed. <sup>739</sup> The public sphere has turned into an amphitheatre where the state, market forces and interest groups compete for power. <sup>740</sup> As Wang Hui maintains,

„The party is no longer an organization with specific political values, but a mechanism of power. Even within the party it is not easy to carry on real debate; divisions are cast as technical differences on the path to modernization, so they can only be resolved within the power structures. <sup>741</sup>

The change of production methods and the nature of the Party, therefore, have engendered the disjuncture of representation of the Party-state and the state-owned media, and such disjuncture is pervasive in the public domain. As Wang Hui maintains,

The social base of the disjuncture of the representative politics lies in the reality that the political, economic and cultural elites and their interests are disconnected with the social mass. Such disjuncture is directly manifested when the political party, media and legal system fail to represent relevant social interests and public opinions. It is a multifaceted crisis of the party politics, public sphere and legal system. <sup>742</sup>

Disequilibrium has been widened between rural and urban areas, coastal and inland regions, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak. <sup>743</sup> The failure of socialism and democracy and the crisis of the party legitimacy are revealed in not

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<sup>737</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. 231

<sup>738</sup> Hui Wang and Yangu Chen, *Wenhua Yu Gonggongxing [Culture and Public Sphere]* (Beijing: Shenghuo Dushu Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian, 2005). 132

<sup>739</sup> Lv and Zhao, "Zhongguo De Xiandaixing, Dazhong Chuanmei Yu Gonggongxing De Chonggou [Reconstruction of China's Modernity, Public Media and Their Public Nature]." 10

<sup>740</sup> Ibid. 6

<sup>741</sup> Wang, *The End of Revolution*. 6

<sup>742</sup> ———, "Zaiwen "Shenme De Pingdeng"? Lun Dangdai Zhengzhi Xingshi Yu Shehui Xingshi De Tuojie [Revisiting "Equality of What"?-- on the Disjuncture of Contemporary Political Forms and Social Forms]." 69  
Translation by author.

<sup>743</sup> Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*. 30



only the unequal distribution of social fortune and polarization, but also the sinking status of labour in the process of production and the social stratification.<sup>744</sup>

Secondly, loss of substance in the ideological has followed the Party's metamorphosis because there is no room for conciliation between communist ideology and exploitative capitalism. As a result, the Party-state has to coin ambiguous conceptual terminologies such as „Touching the stones while crossing the river“, „Three Represents“ and „Scientific Development“ to blur the fronts of the conflicting values and interests within the contradictory modernity, trying to create an overlapping or at its best a consensus zone. Hence is the creation of „socialism with Chinese characteristics“ in the reality of capitalism with Chinese characteristics.<sup>745</sup> When one leadership and its concept fails to provide solutions to social political problems, successive leaderships will have to coin one concept after another to further blur the ideological perceptibility and carry on the current modernization fervour. The Party has to constantly blur its official ideology to the extent that it ends up opposing or debasing its very original political ideals.

Following the seizure of state power in 1949, the CCP has increasingly changed into a bureaucratic machine that no longer possesses its own distinctive evaluative standpoint or social goals, and its relationship with the state has become a structural-functionalist one.<sup>746</sup> This is a process of statification of the party, or changing the Party from an organization of particular political values into a machinery of state power. This process has ultimately excluded the workers and peasantry from leadership positions in the party, the government and largely the People's Congress today.<sup>747</sup> The short-lived communist practice in the mid-1960s, including „efforts at social remobilization and stimulation of political life outside the Party-state context“, re-organization of factories to bring about workers' management, and various social experiments, have been totally abandoned.<sup>748</sup>

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<sup>744</sup> Wang, "Zaiwen "Shenme De Pingdeng"? Lun Dangdai Zhengzhi Xingshi Yu Shehui Xingshi De Tuojie [Revisiting "Equality of What"?-- on the Disjuncture of Contemporary Political Forms and Social Forms]." 78

<sup>745</sup> Gao, *The Battle for China's Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution*. 185

<sup>746</sup> Wang, *The End of Revolution*. 9

<sup>747</sup> *Ibid.* 10

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid.* 9

Instead, politics in the reform era has been dominated by political and capital elites who represent powerful interest groups. These elite interest groups are able to facilitate private capture of the state properties in a relatively strong state because the Party has managed to maintain the continuity of its power structures by altering its official ideologies.<sup>749</sup>

Before 1949, the political ideal of the CCP was to establish a „new democracy“ distinct from the Guomindang’s „fake democracy“ and dictatorship.<sup>750</sup> It promised democracy and freedom, which were political ideals shared and echoed by the minor party groups,<sup>751</sup> intelligentsia and the populace. The legitimacy of the Party-state was based on increased representation of workers and peasantry and its alliance with the minor party groups through the United Front Work. However, the statification of the party, a process that Wang Hui defines as „from Party-state to state-party“,<sup>752</sup> started soon after the CCP came to power. The early stage of the Cultural Revolution, which called for re-examination of the party’s political values, re-organization of factories for „democratic management“ and social experiments in various schools and work units, was „possibly the last“ attempt to change the course of the statification, which failed because it conflicted with the fundamental interests of the ruling elites and therefore fell to a renewed enforcement of the Party-state system.<sup>753</sup>

Statification of the Party and weakening its official ideology were fast-tracked since Deng Xiaoping decided to shelve the „capitalism or socialism“ debate over the nature and direction of the reform.<sup>754</sup> Socialism with Chinese Characteristics turns out to be no more than Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics.<sup>755</sup> The seizure of state property and various forms of corruption by the political elites and their

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<sup>749</sup> Yan Sun, *Corruption and Market in Contemporary China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). 8

<sup>750</sup> Bruce Gilley, *China's Democratic Future: How It Will Happen and Where It Will Lead* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). 17

<sup>751</sup> Groot, *Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Part, United Front Work, Corporatism, and Hegemony*.

<sup>752</sup> Wang, *The End of Revolution*. 8

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.* 9

<sup>754</sup> He, *Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People's Republic of China* 24

<sup>755</sup> Gao, *The Battle for China's Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution*. 185

family members, which had triggered the student movements in the 1980s, has developed into a rampant social phenomenon. No new political countermeasures or initiatives were institutionalized against corruption during the successor Jiang Zemin's term of office, although anti-corruption was included in the official discourse.<sup>756</sup> It was also during Jiang Zemin's reign that the Party membership was opened to private entrepreneurs, justifying the political alliance between the political and capital elites within the state-party framework. The road map for the reform was so ambiguous that the communist party ideology was gradually hollowed out. Developmentalism, therefore, became the only answer.

Consequently, open discussion, not to mention critical journalism, was stifled. Meanwhile, Deng Xiaoping Theory, including his „no debate argument“, was written into the constitution and became the leading ideology after de-legitimization of Marx-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thoughts.<sup>757</sup> This is not only a deliberate blurring of ideological concepts but also, more significantly, contempt for public discussion on the part of the Party-state. The disruption of public debate over the direction of the reform led to policies of suppression which have devastated the media environment.

To gloss over the ideological confusion and the social reality plagued by increasing problems of inequality, polarization, corruption and emerging disjuncture of the Party-state's representation, a new vocabulary of party terminology „Three Represents“ was coined by Jiang Zemin as his brand of leadership and updated leading ideology. However, not only was the „Three Represents“ self-contradictory and therefore unable to draw a clear picture of the Party, but it also further hollowed out the Party's political values. It almost goes without saying that „the most advanced productive forces“ suggest non-state capital and capitalism, and that „the most advanced culture“ is the modernized discourse manipulated at the

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<sup>756</sup> Lowell Dittmer, "Sizing up China's New Leadership: Division over Labour, Political Background and Policy Orientation," in *China under Jiang Zemin*, ed. Hung-mao Tien and Yunhan Zhu (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2000). 45

<sup>757</sup> *Ibid.* 45

discretion of the political, capital and intellectual elites who have benefited the most from the status quo of the social political order.<sup>758</sup>

Before the „Three Represents“, the Party had, at least theoretically, positioned itself as the *avant-garde* of the workers, peasants and soldiers. Afterwards, however, it proclaimed representation of the fundamental interests of „the largest number of Chinese People“. The debased representation has included capitalist productive forces and method and officially recognized their vanguard status. The attempt to represent everyone aims to conceal the fact that the representative nature of the Party has drastically changed. Hence the previous representation of workers, peasants and soldiers is quietly replaced and practically denied. The self-contradictory simultaneous representation of the exploiters and the exploited has rendered the previous political values of the Party null and void, and yet failed to give the new ideology any substantial political meaning. This hollow proclamation of representation has not only in effect denied the existence of increasing social stratification and polarization, but also exhibited the Party elites“ indifference to the suffering of the victimized and disenfranchised groups.

The Hu Jintao – Wen Jiabao administration exhibited a certain degree of concern about the suffering workers and peasantry at the early stage of their office. They apparently realized the consequences of the over-exploitation of the environment. They appeared to have recognized the needs of the people from lowest strata of the society and increasing social grievance. The abolition of agricultural taxes in 2006 was a milestone of their new governance. However, this progress was soon offset by re-emerging „random charges“ heavily laden on the farmers by local officials and kept outside the government“s bookkeeping.<sup>759</sup> Whilst the locomotive of the capitalist economy keeps powering on, the social problems which were unsolved and expanding during the Jiang – Zhu administration remain so under the Hu-Wen leadership.

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<sup>758</sup> Guy Sorman, *Empire of Lies: The Truth About China in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Encounter Books, 2010). 186

<sup>759</sup> Dillon, *Contemporary China: An Introduction*. 36

It is within such a context that the transparency rhetoric, promise of supervision by public opinion and pledge to reform the political system are unprecedentedly disseminated via the media and official discourse. Efforts were made to put forth a new set of political terminologies to try to distinguish the Hu-Wen administration's political vision from that of the Jiang – Zhu leadership. Following the short lived slogan of „Eight honours and eight shames“, the abstract concepts of „scientific development perspective“ and „harmonious society“ were launched in 2003. These concepts can even hardly be called „ideology“ because they do not convey any ideological ideals or functional values. At best, they can be regarded as the Hu-Wen administration's conscious theoretical adjustment to the single-minded developmentalism during the Jiang-Zhu administration. At worst, they are as empty and hollow as the echo one can hear from a wishing well. As Mobo Gao put it so well:

But there is no such thing as „scientific development“. You can have balanced or unbalanced development, depending on what you mean. You can have development that favours the rich and the powerful only or development that brings along the poor and the advantaged. You can have development that harms the environment and exhausts the resources or you can have sustainable development that protects the environment and leave resources for future generations. But neither of these is either „scientific“ or „non-scientific“. Science may aim to pursue the truth; but what is perceived or agreed to be „scientific“ does not mean it is good for human society. Furthermore, there is no such thing as the holy grail of the „scientific“.

Nor is there such a thing as „harmonious society“. People can be taught to behave towards each other civilly and politely; but there are always tensions and conflicts among different sectors and different strata of any society. A successful leadership is one that has the power and the imagination to allocate resources in such a way that innovation and creativity is encouraged and at the same time even the most disadvantaged feel that there is something worth living for, or at least feel that they are cared for.<sup>760</sup>

These political slogans, posing as pragmatic party ideology or values, are so abstract and hollow that people have no idea what they are all about and simply don't pay attention.<sup>761</sup> The hollowed political ideals have epitomized what Max Weber defined as a „crisis of rationality“ in that the structure of cognition,

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<sup>760</sup> Gao, "The Transitional Role of the Hu-Wen Leadership in China: A Case Study of Liu Xiaobo." 185

<sup>761</sup> Duncan Hewitt, *Getting Rich First: Life in a Changing China* (London: Vintage, 2008). 416

instrumentality and morality is manipulated by elite politics and literati,<sup>762</sup> which reflects the gap between the populace and the cultural experts whose manufactured culture does not have practical meaning in everyday life.

Thirdly, the disjuncture of political representation of the Party-state and its embracement of capitalism has exerted considerable impact on the media. Contrary to common intuitive, the commercialized news media, reaping financial success yet posing as victims of information control, have been steadily transformed into a profit-making mechanism. This mechanism sees the media heavily invest in the middle-class market and lose interest in facilitating the voices of those from the lowest strata of the society who are the real victims of the intensified political and market control of information. The irrelevance of growth of the media market to expansion of the public sphere has exemplifies the „depoliticized politics“ in the media when the outlets are allowed and encouraged to adopt business management, marketize its profit-seeking divisions and maximize their profits,<sup>763</sup> as long as they stay between „the Party line and bottom line, between commercial success and political correctness“.<sup>764</sup>

It is a process of modernization or, more pragmatically interpreted, adaptation to market logic. From Max Weber’s „the disenchantment of the world“ perspective,<sup>765</sup> the irrelevance of growth of the media to the expansion of public sphere is the result of the development at the expense of the ideological substance. Loss of ideological substance leads to loss of ideological consensus and rise of disputes. The loss of ideological consensus thereby must be compensated by certain changes in order to maintain order and control. Therefore, a new set of market discourse has been established to promote capitalist marketization and new ideological

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<sup>762</sup> Hui Wang, *Wang Hui Zixuanji [Self-Selected Works of Wang Hui]* (Nanning: Guangxi Normal University Press, 1997). 5

<sup>763</sup> Wang, *The End of Revolution*.

<sup>764</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 144

<sup>765</sup> Christoph Wulf, "Religion and Rituals," in *Culture and Education*, ed. Birgitta Qvarsell and Christoph Wulf (New York: Waxmann Verlag GmbH, 2003). 26

terminology „in its most potent expressions in the worship of reason; in its faith in economic development, the market system and the legal-political system“.<sup>766</sup>

The media's disjuncture of representation of the public is also manifested in the former's role as a Party-state's messenger in the marketplace. While the editorial rigidity of official outlets, a self-evident cause of loss of readership and audience, remains largely unchanged, the commercialized media have taken over the committed role posing as client-oriented commercial outlets.<sup>767</sup> Official messages are mingled with reportage that pertains to entertainment, sports, finance and other middle-class-oriented content with easy and relaxed editorial style, or in a depoliticized manner.<sup>768</sup> This is so because the semi-official media are perceived, from market-oriented point of view, to be more credible than the official ones, as the result of the former's dissociation from the government, and the Party publicity authorities are fully aware of this reality.<sup>769</sup>

The disjuncture of political representation shows that the Party-state and the media keep moving on into their future without relationship to their origins.<sup>770</sup> This process of diremption has not only rendered official rhetoric and market discourses increasingly irrelevant to the social realities, but has also disconnected the media from its public nature and representation of those who desperately need to have their voices heard. The media reform, therefore, has functioned as a systematic arrangement to shift the role of shaping public opinion from official mouthpieces to commercialized outlets. Meanwhile, the financial benefits are so enormous that both the media and their senior management have developed considerable vested interests in the current marketized media system.<sup>771</sup> These interests, in turn, have constituted obstacles to progress of substantive media transparency.

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<sup>766</sup> Wang, *The End of Revolution*. 75

<sup>767</sup> Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. 158

<sup>768</sup> Lee, "The Global and the National of the Chinese Media: Discourse, Market, Technology and Ideology." 8

<sup>769</sup> Stockmann, "What Kind of Information Does the Public Demand? Getting the News During the 2005 Anti-Japanese Protests." 181

<sup>770</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: First MIT Press, 1990). 72

<sup>771</sup> Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. 82

### 7.3 Impact of Media Transparency on the Public Sphere Today

Given the consensus between the Party-state and the media on political control and pursuit of profits, transparency becomes more important than mere press freedom. Freedom does not reduce the media's desire for profit, and as also discussed in Chapter One, is not adequate enough to hold politics and the market accountable, either in a liberal democracy or capitalized autocracy. In the reform era, commercialization and depoliticization have been encouraged and managed at the cost of the media's public nature. In contrast, policy environment, media management and professional activities that are open, accountable, credible and relevant aim at defining, consolidating and reinforcing this public nature, so that the ideas of transparent government governance and supervision by public opinion can be substantiated.

Media transparency calls for legislation that substantiates the concept of transparency regarding media policies, rules and practice. Its primary goal is to clarify the role of the media as an indispensable part of the public sphere without being undermined by any political and market control. Whilst „the rule of law“ has become a legal maxim almost as popular as the transparency rhetoric, it cannot be immediately embraced as a progress of modernization in contrast to the „rule of man“. The codification of rules and construction of legal institution are more often than not driven by the CCP's pursuit of more power over its citizens,<sup>772</sup> and the policy innovation is heavily involved with conflict and preservation of the power shared by various interest groups.<sup>773</sup> The procedures of proposing, drafting, revision, finalizing and passing of rules and law related to journalism should be transparent. Any progress of rule of law in ideal or rule by law in reality will be meaningless if it does not substantiate transparency.

One case in point is the legislation of the *Law of Response to Emergencies (draft)*. The draft was proposed to the National People's Congress Standing Committee in

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<sup>772</sup> Donald C. Clarke, "Political Power and Authority in Recent Chinese Literature," *The China Quarterly* 102, no. June (1985).

<sup>773</sup> Susan L. Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). 88



June 2006. Its article 57 forbade the news media from publishing news concerning industrial accidents, natural disasters, and public health and security crises without prior authorization of the government.<sup>774</sup> The first hearing of the draft in June 2006 incurred a huge wave of criticism both at home and abroad. The enormous scale of objections was such that the draft had to be revised. Under the pressure of the public opinion, the article 57 was deleted in the revised final draft which was passed in 2007. The deletion was hailed as a victory of the media power.<sup>775</sup>

This particular case shows that there is no such thing as benevolence under political control. This is so because of disjuncture of the Party-state and the media from their political representation of the public. The consensus between the Party-state and the media on political control and pursuit of profits is in essence against the spirit of transparency and democracy. Therefore the state power and censorship apparatus are constantly alert and nervous to the extent that they will keep producing legislation processes that legalize government actions against the expansion of public sphere, in the name of keeping social stability or even promoting transparency. Hence, it is important that the intention of policies and their making process must be made transparent to the public before these policies can be claimed to improve the media environment.

Another aspect of media transparency lies in the performance of the media in terms of its own transparency. Although news outlets tend to prefer editorial autonomy, this autonomy does not necessarily lead to media transparency. It is about whom and what the media represent. Freedom without transparency can contribute to what Noam Chomsky is critical of „media control“ and „manufactured consent“,<sup>776</sup> whether in a liberal democratic country like the United States or an authoritarian country like China. Without adequate media transparency that aims to substantiate the public nature of the media, the concept of public sphere remains what Vincent Mosco calls an „idealism of the phantasm and the false materialism of the public

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<sup>774</sup> Lei Yang, "China Mulls Emergency Management Law," [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-06/24/content\\_4742725.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-06/24/content_4742725.htm).

<sup>775</sup> Jiang Zhan, "To Enhance Social Progress by Journalist Legislation: Reflection on the Eighth Journalist Day," *Youth Journalists*, no. 21 (2007). 36

<sup>776</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, 2 ed. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002).

sphere as a space to be defended by defining the public as a set of social processes that carry out democracy, namely advancing equality and the fullest possible participation in the complete range of economic, political, social, and cultural decision-making...<sup>777</sup>

For this reason, the journey towards media transparency can be seen as a constant struggle against political and market control. The *Jujian Yundong* in 1945 has established a role model for the news outlets, professional practitioners and the intelligentsia. Following the combative role models, increasing numbers of activist journalists, editors, academics and their supporters today have paid and are paying the price for advocating serious journalism and professional ethics. Also, there has been considerable and increasingly dynamic online participation by the very ordinary people via various e-media from semi-official to underground platforms, which „has significant democratization effects“.<sup>778</sup> Nevertheless, we have to understand that media activism initiated by commoditized media does not necessarily aim at transparency and a market-oriented free media can always choose to maximize their profits rather than its public nature. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that activism without transparency is compromised in a media ecosystem dominated by political and market control.

Constant struggle for media transparency calls for bottom-up efforts, challenging the authority of the elite politics and the authoritarian political culture. Closest to this rationale in China's history of modernity is the „mass line“ democracy in Mao's era that features mobilizing the power of the mass to attain collective goals.<sup>779</sup> Such mass line, however, has been degraded and substituted in the reform era with modernization discourse and elite ideals promoted in the name of good of individuals. Yet, challenging the political and market control is not something that can be accomplished without broad participation and ideological consensus on the

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<sup>777</sup> Vincent Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication*, 2009 ed. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1996). 152

<sup>778</sup> Gao, "Netizenship and Its Implication on Democratization in China." 151

<sup>779</sup> Thomas Kwan-Choi Tse and John Chi-Kin Lee, "China: Defending Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," in *Citizenship Education and Lifelong Learning: Power and Place*, ed. Michael Williams and Graham Humphrys (Hauppauge: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2003). 112

public nature of the public sphere in the ultimate interest of the public, the major ingredient for the success of the 1945 *Jujian Yundong*.

Given the constraints on media transparency, this thesis aims to substantiate the concepts of media transparency and identify the undermining problems. Media transparency is difficult yet promising because it is rooted in the interests of the social base of this concept, the underrepresented and disenfranchised groups whose voices could not be heard otherwise. Media transparency is relevant because it aims to hold both politics and the media accountable. It is vibrant because its power lies in the substance rather than positive connotations implied yet suppressed by the official rhetoric and market discourses. The substantiated idea of transparency will become more and more powerful because it facilitates freedom of the press and further holds this freedom public and transparent.

#### 7.4 Limitations and future research

This thesis has examined issues surrounding the question of media transparency and considered it to be a central topic regarding press freedom in a capitalist authoritarian context intertwined with transparency rhetoric and stifled public sphere reality. The discussion has mainly focused on traditional media, particularly on newspapers and passing by radio and television broadcast. Other forms of new media based on digital and web 2.0 technologies, the microblogs and social networks for example, and their impact on media transparency and democratization are less than adequately explored. This oversight might lend credence to criticism from various perspectives such as technological determinism or even its opposite social construction of technology (technological constructivism). The former believes that digital revolution is able to knock down the wall of information control.<sup>780</sup> The latter believes that human action, such as quest for press freedom, shapes technology. For example, former U.S. Vice President Al Gore proclaimed

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<sup>780</sup> Zhang and Stening, *China 2.0: The Transformation of an Emerging Superpower--and the New Opportunities*. 57

that the historical genesis of information technology is „inseparable from our (the Americans‘) quest for freedom -- from the printing press that Thomas Paine used to print „Common Sense“ to the explosion of talk radio and the growth of the Internet“.<sup>781</sup>

The author is aware that public participation with the help of the Internet and wireless accessibility is a dynamic and indispensable part of the media environment and public sphere as a whole. However, discussion of the impact of the new media and technological advance cannot be valid until it is placed in a certain social political framework, which is the political and market control that has been discussed herein. In this regard, two explanations might be made in response to possible criticism of my inadequate discussion of new media and online technology: 1) the Party-state does not pay attention to the growth of traditional media any less to that of the new media. Both traditional and new media are governed in the same social political environment and subject to political and market control in similar way. Research in the traditional media is highly relevant and referential to the discussion of new media. 2) Online technology can be used by anyone who has access to it, be it the strong or the weak, the informed or ill-informed, the elite and the disenfranchised. However, the bigger the gap between the strong and the weak, the more likely the media is controlled by elite political and market forces. Talks on technology and new media cannot make any fundamental difference without addressing the cause and impact of such control, which is discussed as a problem of media transparency in this thesis. Nevertheless, the author does not make light of the new media and its impact on press freedom. Future research in this domain will extend the present study from traditional media to new media as well as from media outlets to public participation and their reciprocal impact on each other to observe potentials and possibilities of media transparency.

Most of the pages have been spent on analysis and empirical discussion of media transparency as a multifaceted idea. The discussions aim to lead to consideration of the Party-state and the media‘’s disjuncture of political representation that is causal

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<sup>781</sup> Al Gore, "Remarks of Vice President Al Gore as Delivered to the Federal-State-Local Telecomm Summit," in *The Federal-State-Local Telecomm Summit* (Washington D.C.: Forbes 1995). (the Americans‘) is added by author.

to the problems. However, due to the limit of length, this thesis has been far from adequate in unfolding the solution part, which is significant and worth further research with much deliberation.

Future research will concentrate on how media transparency is to be institutionalized in the given social political context. Inevitably, future research cannot bypass further debate over the role of the mass media in democratization of China through transparency. The discussions and debates will explore how concepts like transparency and supervision by public opinion are generated and promoted without substance or manipulated by elite discourse power. The research will examine Habermas' argument of „cultural and political public sphere made possible and supported by the mass media“.<sup>782</sup> Focus will be paid to the differences between nominalism and essentialism and their implications for the Party-state politics and the mass media.

Habermas' belief in the public sphere and the mass media lies in his approval of the dominance by experts of „professional abilities“ and intellectuals who supposedly „consider...all relevant points of view impartially“ and „take all interests involved equally into account“.<sup>783</sup> Many of these „experts“, however, can be working for the elite conceptual system. This system includes the official ideology, elite ideals and various concepts which, in turn, update and support the system. The experts are able and equipped to coin and systemize ideals and discourse, including the popular concept of transparency itself, in favour of the elite politics by gearing up the linguistic innovation borrowing the afterglow of the Enlightenment legacy. The carefully and wisely designed conceptual system, as hollow and empty as lofty and reverential it may seem to be, constitutes an effective ideological defence for the elite politics and its legitimacy, and suppresses substantial expansion of the public sphere.

In addition, the source of the acclaimed experts' impartiality and equality has hardly been identified whatsoever, and therefore problematic and unaccountable.

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<sup>782</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, trans. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005). 289

<sup>783</sup> *Ibid.* 290

This is a typical problem of the elite ideal system that keeps producing sophisticated concepts, transparency for instance, and refrains from and even prevents substantiating these concepts. Likewise, not only has the Habermasian proposal of public sphere created a phantasmatic romance of free media as an actual entity occupying a particular space, his presupposition of elite idealism has in effect mystified the nature, purpose and value of public sphere. As Vincent Mosco has pointed out,

What we call the public media is public not because it occupies a separate space, relatively free from market considerations, but because it is constituted out of a particular patterning of processes that privilege the democratic over commodification. To the extent that it does not, the expression public media diminishes in value.<sup>784</sup>

The problems of media transparency in China, for the same reason, can hardly be solved without further looking into the elite ideal system in the way that Michel Foucault questioned and rejected the „blackmail of Enlightenment“.<sup>785</sup>

Habermas“ trust in the reverence of expertise and experts echoes the trend of rationality in the modern European political culture and coincides with the elitization of China“s political and media discourse as well. It demonstrates the source of the „crisis of rationality“ that Max Weber antithesized.<sup>786</sup> To critique this elite politics and its ideal system, Wang Hui“s has asked a question of „Modernity? Whose agenda of modernity?“<sup>787</sup> Mobo Gao“s has also raised the discussion of „Democracy? What democracy?“<sup>788</sup> This, likewise, will lead us to a further question of „Media transparency? Whose media transparency?“ in the future research.

These questions will form an interesting ground for exploring the nature, essence and ultimate goal of media transparency and its connection with democratization in contemporary China“s social political context. Therefore, media transparency shall be further discussed and pursued as a form of „substantive or functional democracy

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<sup>784</sup> Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication*. 154

<sup>785</sup> Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley, 2 vols., vol. 1, *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984* (London: Penguin, 2000). 312

<sup>786</sup> Wang, *Wang Hui Zixuanji [Self-Selected Works of Wang Hui]*. 5

<sup>787</sup> *Ibid.* 9

<sup>788</sup> Gao, "Netizenship and Its Implication on Democratization in China."

over nominal or formal democracy“ in the spirit of essentialism against nominalism.<sup>789</sup>

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<sup>789</sup> Ibid. 152

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 List of rules and regulations concerning newspapers<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>790</sup> The listed documents remained in force up to 17<sup>th</sup> March 2011 and are available from the GAPP website at the time of completion of this thesis on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2012. Translation is provided by the author of this thesis.

Source: <http://www.gapp.gov.cn/cms/html/21/1385/201103/713324.html>



**Appendix 2 List of rules and regulations concerning radio and television  
broadcasting<sup>791</sup>**

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<sup>791</sup> As of 12<sup>th</sup> November 2011, there were thirty-nine SARFT regulations and 301 regulatory documents in effect regarding the radio, film and television media. Those that have impact on domestic journalism are selected herein. The listed documents remain in force and available from the SARFT website at the time of completion of this thesis on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2012. Translation is provided by the author of this thesis.

Source: <http://www.chinasarft.gov.cn/articles/2008/05/01/20080430174044440479.html>

<sup>792</sup> This content of this document is not available on the SARFT website despite that it is included in the list of regulatory documents in force. Source: <http://www.chinasarft.gov.cn/articles/2010/11/17/20101117144446990554.html>

**Appendix 3 List of rules and regulations concerning digital and online  
media<sup>794</sup>**

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<sup>794</sup> Source: <http://www.miit.gov.cn/n11293472/n11293832/n11294042/n11302330/index.html>

#### Appendix 4 List of general rules and regulations concerning journalism

Title	Issuing Authority	English title	Date of promulgation DD/MM/YYYY
关于严防虚假新闻报道的若干规定	GAPP	<i>Regulations regarding Prevention of Fabricated and misleading news Reports</i>	14/10/2011
新闻采编人员不良从业行为记录登记办法	GAPP	<i>Methods on Registering Records of Malfeasance by Journalist and Editorial Practitioners</i>	17/05/2011
订户订购进口出版物管理办法	GAPP	<i>Administrative Measures for Subscribing to Imported Publications</i>	25/03/2011
出版物市场管理规定	GAPP	<i>Regulations on Administration of the Publication Market</i>	25/03/2011
国务院关于修改《出版管理条例》的决定	SC	<i>The State Council Decision on Revising the Regulations on Administration of Publication</i>	19/03/2011
音像制品管理条例	SC	<i>Regulations on the Administration of Audio-visual Products</i>	19/03/2011
新闻记者证管理办法	GAPP	<i>Measures for Administration of the Press Card</i>	24/08/2009
报刊记者站管理办法	GAPP	<i>Measures for Administration of Newspaper and Journal Correspondent Stations</i>	06/08/2009

新闻出版总署立法程序规定	GAPP	<i>Regulations on the Legislative Procedure by the General Administration of Press and Publication</i>	27/04/2009
新闻出版行业标准化管理办法	GAPP	<i>Administrative Measures for Standardization of the Press and Publication Industry</i>	29/04/2008
出版专业技术人员职业资格管理规定	GAPP	<i>Administrative Measures for the Professional Qualification for the Publication Professions</i>	21/02/2008
报纸出版管理规定	GAPP	<i>Regulations on Administration of Newspaper Publication</i>	30/09/2005
加强和改进舆论监督工作的实施办法	CPD	<i>Implementation Methods on Strengthening and Improving Supervision by public opinion</i>	30/04/2005
关于进一步加强和改进舆论监督工作的意见	GOCPCPC	<i>Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Supervision by public opinion</i>	24/03/2005
国务院关于非公有资本进入文化产业的若干决定	SC	<i>State Council Resolutions on Investment by Non-public Capital in the Cultural Industry</i>	13/04/2005
出版管理条例	SC	<i>Regulations on Administration of Publishing Industry</i>	25/12/2001
印刷业管理条例	SC	<i>Regulations on Administration of Printing Industry</i>	02/08/2001
印刷品广告管理办法	GAPP	<i>Administrative Measures for Advertisement on Presswork</i>	01/03/2000
出版管理行政处罚实施办法	GAPP	<i>Measures for Implementation of Administrative Penalty on</i>	01/01/1998

法		<i>Publication Malfeasance</i>	
新闻出版保密规定	SSA	<i>Regulations on the Protection of Secrets in News Publishing</i>	01/10/1992
国务院关于严厉打击非法出版活动的通知	SC	<i>Notice Regarding Striking Hard Against Illegal Publishing Activities</i>	06/07/1987

## Appendix 5 Apology Letter from HMD to CWA

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## Appendix 6 List of Press Groups Established upon Approval by the GAPP

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**Appendix 7** The Sixteen Outlets Initiating the *Jujian Yundong* in August 1945

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<sup>795</sup> The CVES, headed by Huang Yanpei, was part of the Chinese Democratic League.

<sup>796</sup> The Minzu jiefang xingdong weiyuanhui [National Liberation Action Committee] was established in January 1945 in Chongqing and later reorganized into Chinese Peasants and Workers Democratic Party in February 1947.

<sup>797</sup> Zhang Ximan, professor of the Central University and co-founder of Jiusan Xueshe, was the founder of *Minzhu yu Kexue* established in Chongqing in 1945.



## Appendix 8 Reportedly Censored Page B2 of CBV<sup>798</sup>

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<sup>798</sup> Bandurski, "Chinese Media Muzzled after Day of Glory."

## Appendix 9 Blank Spaces Left on the *Southern Weekend*<sup>799</sup>

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<sup>799</sup> Southern Weekend, *Southern Weekend*, 19th November 2009.

## Appendix 10 List of *Pinyin* – Chinese Characters

<i>Pinyin</i>	Chinese Characters
<i>baomu</i>	保姆
<i>bianweihui</i>	编委会
<i>bianweihui lingdao xia de zongbianji fuzezhi</i>	编委会领导下的总编辑负责制
<i>bumen guizhang</i>	部门规章
<i>bu nian jiu e</i>	不念旧恶
<i>caibian yu jingying fenli</i>	采编与经营分离
<i>Chengdu Shangbao</i>	成都商报
<i>Chengshi Liulang Qitao Renyuan Shourong Qiansong Banfa</i>	城市流浪乞讨人员收容遣送办法
<i>daibiaoxing duanlie</i>	代表性断裂
<i>dangbao dangkan</i>	党报党刊
<i>Dangdai Shangbao</i>	当代商报
<i>dangwei lingdaoxia de Sheweihui fuzezhi</i>	党委领导下的社委会负责制
<i>dazibao</i>	大字报
<i>236efang kanhao</i>	地方刊号
<i>Dongfang Zazhi</i>	东方杂志
<i>fazhijia</i>	法制化
<i>fei dangbao dangkan</i>	非党报党刊
<i>Fen Shu Keng Ru</i>	焚书坑儒
<i>gongchandang</i>	共产党
<i>Guangming Daily</i>	光明日报
<i>Guanyu dangqian wending gongzuo de tongzhi</i>	关于当前稳定工作的通知
<i>Guanyu guanban fenli he huazhuan baokan jiaqiang guanli de tongzhi</i>	关于管办分离和划转报刊加强管 理的通知
<i>guifanhua</i>	规范化
<i>guifanxing wenjian</i>	规范性文件

<i>Guofeng Daily</i>	国风日报
<i>Guolun</i>	国论
<i>Guoxun</i>	国讯
<i>Heping Jianguo Gangling Cao'an</i>	和平建国纲领草案
<i>hukou</i>	户口
Hunan Dianguang Chuanmei Gufen Youxian Gongsi	湖南电广传媒股份有限公司
<i>Jiang Zemin Xinwen Sixiang De Hexin Neirong</i>	江泽民新闻思想的核心内容
<i>jingyingxing yewu</i>	经营性业务
<i>Jingji Guancha Bao</i>	经济观察报
<i>jingji xiaoxi</i>	经济消息
<i>jingweihui</i>	经委会
<i>jizhe</i>	记者
<i>jizhe zhan</i>	记者站
<i>Jujian Yundong</i>	拒检运动
<i>kai tian chuang</i>	开天窗
<i>Lianghui</i>	两会
<i>mama pingshen tuan</i>	妈妈评审团
<i>mingan cihui</i>	敏感词汇
<i>mingjing gaoxuan</i>	明镜高悬
<i>mingxi chanquan</i>	明晰产权
<i>Minxian</i>	民宪
<i>minzhu renshi</i>	民主人士
<i>Minzhu Shijie</i>	民主世界
<i>Minzhu yu Kexue</i>	民主与科学
<i>qiyehua guanli</i>	企业化管理
<i>qianguize</i>	潜规则
<i>Qingdao Chenbao</i>	青岛晨报
<i>Qingwu Yundong</i>	清污运动
<i>quanguo kanhao</i>	全国刊号

<i>quan qian jiaoyi</i>	权钱交易
<i>Qunzhong</i>	群众
<i>renmin wang</i>	人民网
<i>Sanxiang Xuexi Jiaoyu Huodong</i>	三项学习教育活动
<i>Shangshengqi De Maodun, Tixixing Weiji Yu Biange Fangxiang</i>	上升期的矛盾，体系性危机与变革方向
<i>shencha</i>	审查
<i>shendu</i>	审读
<i>Sheweihui</i>	社委会
<i>Sheweihui lingdao xia de shezhang fuzezhi</i>	社委会领导下的社长负责制
<i>shezhang</i>	社长
<i>shezhang fuzezhi</i>	社长负责制
<i>shiye danwei</i>	事业单位
<i>shuang Qi Lun</i>	双起论
<i>Sichuan Wenyi Chubanshe</i>	四川文艺出版社
<i>si ju ji</i>	司局级
<i>sitai heyi</i>	四台合一
<i>suzhi</i>	素质
<i>teyue bianji</i>	特约编辑
<i>teyue jizhe</i>	特约记者
<i>touming</i>	透明
<i>Wenhui Zhoubao</i>	文汇周报
<i>Wenxue Pinglun</i>	文学评论
<i>wen ze zi fu</i>	文责自负
<i>xian chu ji</i>	县处级
<i>Xiandai Funu</i>	现代妇女
<i>Xianzheng</i>	宪政
<i>Xin Jing Bao</i>	新京报
<i>xingzheng fagui</i>	行政法规
<i>xingzheng weiyuanhui</i>	行政委员会

<i>Xinmin wanbao</i>	新民晚报
<i>xinwen fa</i>	新闻法
<i>xinwen shencha</i>	新闻审查
<i>xinwen tizhi gaige</i>	新闻体制改革
<i>Xin Zhonghua</i>	新中华
<i>Xuesheng Zazhi</i>	学生杂志
<i>xujia xinwen</i>	虚假新闻
<i>yifa</i>	依法
<i>yi tui wei jin</i>	以退为进
<i>yu ren wei shan</i>	与人为善
<i>Zai Sheng</i>	再生
<i>zeren Huaxi</i>	责任华西
<i>Zhanshi Jiaoyu</i>	战时教育
<i>zhengdang guojiahua</i>	政党国家化
<i>zhengfu</i>	政府
<i>zhengfuling</i>	政府令
<i>Zhonghua Luntan</i>	中华论坛
<i>Zhongsu Wenhua</i>	中苏文化
<i>Zhongxuesheng</i>	中学生
<i>zhuban</i>	主办
<i>zhuguan</i>	主管
<i>zhuguan zhuban zhidu</i>	主管主办制度
<i>ziban faxing</i>	自办发行
<i>ziwo chaozuo</i>	自我炒作
<i>Zongbianji fuzezhi</i>	总编辑负责制

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