

**CHANGES AND THEIR CAUSES OF THE CHINESE MEDIA IN A
REFORMING AGE**

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ABSTRACT

Media in China is regarded as an important part of the ruling Communist Party's cause. The "Party principle", "mouthpiece role", and the "mass line" are all essential elements in the Party's journalism theories and practices. Along with two decades of remarkable economic growth, China's media have also witnessed great changes: rapid marketization, improved professionalism, more freedom of press, and even beginning to function as a watchdog, the concept of the western journalism. After generalizing main features of the current journalist practices in the Chinese media, the paper explores the reasons behind those changes. The reasons are complex and contains macro- and micro-level factors what interact and affect each other. The economic reform seems to be the driving force, the Internet has posed great challenges towards the traditional media, the emerging rich, sophisticated, and democracy-thirsty intellectuals and the educated also push for media reform, but the government has played a decisive role in all the process. Although media commercialization does not change the fundamental conceptualization of Chinese journalism, and the media have to operate in a dilemma between the Party principle and the market principle, against a changing social-economic-political backdrop, China's media sector is sure to see even greater changes and to hear a plurality of voices.

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Dedicated to my family

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Methodology and Organization of the Paper.....	5
Media and Journalism with Chinese Characteristics.....	7
Media Structure.....	7
“Party Principle” (Dangxing Yuanze).....	10
“Mass Line” Theory.....	11
Internal Reference (Nei Can).....	13
Mouthpiece Role and Other Notions Shaping China’s Media.....	14
Major Changes in Chinese Media.....	19
Breaking News Reporting.....	19
Investigative Reporting.....	22
More Emphasis on Duiwai (Overseas-oriented) Reporting.....	24
New Style in Coverage of “Two Sessions” (Liang Hui).....	28
The Causes.....	29
Market-driven Media Commercialization: Part of Economic Reform.....	29
Challenges From the New Media: Internet and Mobile Phones.....	36
Social Stratification: “Middle Strata” Expansion.....	45
Government Reform: A Return to the Mass line, Rule of Law.....	51
Conclusion.....	67

Introduction

With a remarkable GDP growth of an average 8 percent in more than two decades, China has been seen by many as an emerging power in the international arena. While its economic phenomenon has attracted the eyeballs of many economists, the development of the news media in the world's biggest developing country has also been a focus of study of both Chinese and international scholars and journalistic practitioners.

With fast economic development, China's media simultaneously have undergone rapid changes. Since early 1990s when China began to take a more market-friendly rout after Deng Xiaoping's southern tour speech, China's media has witnessed proliferating development. The number of newspaper in China has increased from 186 in 1978 to more than 2000, the number of magazines from 930 to 9000-plus, broadcast stations have reached 277 and TV stations 2262, and academic and research institutions on media and related fields have also multiplied.

When I came back to Beijing in January 2004 after 11-month stay in South Korea, I was surprised to find many new newspapers and magazines appear on the newspaper stand, and new programs and channels hit the airwaves. One example for the newspaper is the New Beijing Newspaper (Xin Jing Bao). I was even more surprised to find that, with a short period of existence, this newspaper has become popular among Beijing citizens and many of my journalist colleagues.

Another thing I cannot omit to mention is that during my 11-month stay in South Korea in 2003, I missed two of the most important news coverage of Xinhua,

the coverage of the battle against the deadly SARS epidemics at home and the US war against Iraq. What made these two events more important in China's media circle was that the coverage of these two events made China's media won different reputation in the international community—applause from the former and criticism from the latter. The timely and non-biased coverage of Iraq war was in sharp contrast to the tardy and irresponsible coverage of SARS as the virus began to spread at an early stage.

I will elaborate the details of the two coverage in the Changes part of this paper. The question here is what made these two events be so differently handled by the Chinese media?

Given their journalistic skills presented in the Iraq war coverage, Chinese journalists have no reason to ignore the vital disease with so many lives at stake. Finance & Business (Caijing), the biweekly magazine known for its bold coverage of controversial issues in connection with China's economic reform, saved its reputation in this battle by beginning reports on SARS and its causes in depth in the February of 2003, when most of its domestic counterparts were occupied with the impending war in Iraq.

"It was not simply a medical issue concerning a particular disease," says Hu Shuli, the magazine's managing editor. "It was hard news with a great human touch, such as you seldom encounter. And it also concerned the people's right to know."¹

As Min Dahong, a media expert with the Institute of Journalism and

¹ Breaking News Ground, HK edition. <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn>, Aug.22, 2003.

Communication of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences put it:

“If the initial silence on SARS that prevailed among the Chinese press indicates an awkwardness in responding to public crisis, the performance of a vanguard like Caijing shows the potential of their capacity to honor the people's right to know once they are determined”.²

The Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists proclaims that “The public’s right to know of events of public importance and interest is the overriding mission of the mass media.”³ Then, in this SARS case, who deprives people of their right to know in the first place? On whom we should put the blame, the government leaders, the bureaucrats, the Party, or those silence-keeping media? These questions cannot be answered unless the complex interwoven relationships between government, media and the people are unraveled.

The media in China play quite a different role from those in western countries in many aspects ranging from their ownership and structure to the Chinese social context and political culture. It can never separated with politics in China in light of its origin and its reform trajectory. The interrelationship between the three parties, namely the media, the audience and the government, will have to be analyzed from economic, social, technological and political aspects.

The reason that I picked up the above two coverage in this Introduction part is that they are most typical examples that reflect the Chinese way of practicing journalism. I mentioned earlier that many changes in the news media circle had taken place during my stay in South Korea, but a lot more changes have been

² Ibid.

³ Biagi, Shirley. *Media Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media*. New York: Wadsworth/international Thomson Publishing Cimpany, 1999. p.365, cited by Gilbson, Donald. *Communication, Power and Media*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2004. p.65.

occurred in China in the recent years and deep causes are laid behind, as the country is becoming rich, prosperous, and a global player.

A program in May 2004, to some degree, shocked me when the invited guests spoke publicly criticizing the China Soccer Association (CSA), a governmental institution in charge of all the soccer clubs in China. The program, Night of Soccer, was broadcast on every Thursday evening by CCTV channel-5, the most favorite sports TV channel in China and could be watched all over the country. That day's program focused on the development of China's soccer, which is possibly the most concerned sport by the Chinese people. The host, Liu Jianhong, invited famous sports reporters from different newspapers and scholars from academic circles, including Zheng Yefu and Liang Xiaomin, a sociologist and an economist from Beijing University and Qinghua University respectively, both top universities in China.

All of the invited guests put their fingers on the CSA, and argued the only way to improve the performance of the Chinese soccer teams was to get the CSA out of the way of the operations of all soccer clubs in China, and put the soccer in the market. Professor Liang pointed out that the reform is a match between the new and old system (ti zhi), namely the market logic and government manipulation.

One could argue that the program could do so -- letting journalists and scholars express their views unfavorable to a government institution through the country's Central Television, one of the official media and mouthpiece of the Party -- mainly because they were talking about soccer, and its reform has nothing to do with

the ideological work and politics. However, such scenes and criticism of government institutions are still rare in China and could never have been happened even a couple of years ago.

The problem that faces the Chinese soccer is also the one that faces the Chinese news media, that is the market logic versus government manipulation. Due to the government manipulation, Chinese media were gagged when the SARS first broke out in late 2002; Because of the market logic, the Xinhua News Agency, China's only wire service, beat its foreign counterparts by 10 seconds and became the first to report the start of the Iraq war.

With the lesson learned a year ago, the Chinese media adopted a very different stance in the second time, when a SARS patient diagnosed in China in April, 2004, by providing timely, clear-cut, and transparent reports on a daily basis. Unlike the first time with panic and rumors, this time Beijing residents seemed to rest at ease with these responsible reports.

There are too many cases demonstrating a new atmosphere currently brewing in the Chinese media, but still the traditional or old way of China's practicing journalism cannot change overnight, as the two-folded features of the Chinese media reflected by the coverage of the Iraq war and SARS epidemics.

Methodology and Organization of the Paper

After summarizing changes and features of the current Chinese media, I adopt a comprehensive approach in this paper to try to explore the causes behind these

changes. My strategy is to combine the macro- and micro-factors. By exploring the complex and contingent interactions of these factors, including media technologies, political culture, historical legacy, media structure, party system, style of executive leadership, the characteristics of individual citizens, and the like, I will try to unveil the causal relationship between the changes of the Chinese media and the economic, political, technological and social changes taking place in China.

After the Introduction and Methodology parts, I begin the body part of the paper with an overview and critique of the Chinese Communist Party's model of political communication and of the Party's journalism theories and practices. The next part is an assessment of the recent changes that the Chinese media have been undergoing. In the third part of the paper body, I try to explore the deep reasons behind these changes. The last part is a brief conclusion and discussion of the implications of the media changes with also a prediction of the media's development in the future.

The primary data for this paper were gathered during my work in Xinhua News Agency, which involve three aspects. The first, monitoring of media content, including television watching, radio listening, newspaper reading, and Internet surfing. The second, documentary research, which includes press reports, Party and government documents, journalism and broadcasting yearbooks, academic journals published by journalism schools and research institutions, and also papers on the Website on media reforms. The third, interviews. Media monitoring and literature research were supplemented by interviews with journalists in Beijing and some

working in other cities. Most of them were journalists in big and famous news organizations in China. Due to politically sensitive nature of the subject, however, the interview data has been used either as background material or cited anonymously to respect the desire for confidentiality of most informants.

I cite many Xinhua's journalistic practices and phenomenon in this paper. In light of Xinhua's leading and influential role in the Chinese media, suffice it to say that Xinhua's journalistic practices and phenomenon are typical in other Chinese news organizations.

Media and Journalism with Chinese Characteristics

Media Structure

It is important to consider right from the start the simple fact that China's media structure and content are different from the West when they came into being.

One cannot understand China's "Party journalism" (Zhao, 1998) without knowing the historical background of its origin and the conceptual framework of the Party.

The Party press can be tracked back to radical journals of the late 1910s and early 1920s, in which students and intellectuals voiced their opposition to imperialism and to Chinese warlords. Many future Party leaders, such as Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, and Mao Zedong, were involved in publishing radical journals before the founding of the Communist Party in 1921.⁴ The first Party organ, the Guide (Xiangdao) was published in 1922. During its first united front with the Nationalist Party between

⁴ Zhao, Yuezhi. *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998. p.14.

1924 and 1927, the Party created a number of labor, peasant, women, and youth journals in an organizing effort. From the beginning, therefore, the Party established organs and non-Party publications that were nevertheless under its leadership. During war times, Party organs were important for the Party's war effort as well as for political and economic construction of the revolutionary bases.⁵

The Party's journalism during the revolutionary war years did not make much change either in conceptualization or in structure after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. By the end of the 1980s, China had developed a rather elaborate media network. Xinhua was the largest news organization with three major departments: domestic with bureaus in all provinces; international with more than ninety foreign bureaus⁶; and translation, providing reports from foreign countries for restricted distribution among Party and government bureaucracies⁷.

People's Daily is the organ of the Party Central Committee. Central People's Radio (CPR) and China Central Television (CCTV) are monopolies. These four outlets are at the very top of the Chinese news hierarchy, and are also called central (zhongyang) media. This media structure is more or less reproduced at the provincial and municipal levels. The structure is both hierarchical and monopolistic. Typically, a province or a city (or prefecture district) has a Party organ, a radio station, and a television station. As the most important local news outlets, they are under the direct control of a local Party committee. The four major national organizations are

⁵ Fang Hanqi, Chen Yeshao, and Zhang Zihua. *A Brief History of Chinese Journalism*. Beijing: Chinese People's University Press, 1982, p152-153. Cited in Zhao, p.15.

⁶ Until now, Xinhua has more than 100 overseas bureaus.

⁷ The department has a daily newspaper called Reference News, whose circulation top all other Chinese publications. Interestingly to foreigners, the paper is devoted to translations of articles about China and many international commentaries that have appeared in foreign publications.

the agenda-setters of the country and are the public indicators of what is acceptable for all the other media in China to say and do.

While most western media organizations are private, and have been developed independently from governmental influence, Chinese ones are started by government agencies and primarily act as agency spokespeople. These state-owned media groups serve as the framework for the entire Chinese media structure and exercise a great deal of power in determining which stories can be covered and what approach journalists should take when reporting a story.

Xinhua is the biggest news group in China and has established a vast media network that covers every region of the world's most populous country. It not only provides news to nearly every national and provincial news organizations in China, but also controls several influential newspapers and magazines such as Xinhua Daily Telegraph, Reference News, and Outlook magazine. Because of Xinhua's leading role in the Chinese media, many examples of Xinhua I cite in this paper are also typical phenomenon in other media in China.

Since the emergency of television in China, CCTV has become a most influential media outlet in China because of its popularity and vitality. Its broadcasts reach a total population of nearly one billion, ranging from large cities to small villages. In some small villages there are only two or three TV channels available, and CCTV 1 is undoubtedly one of them. The news broadcasting in CCTV-1 at 7:00 p.m.--7:30 p.m. every day is the government's important outlet to propagate its

policies.

Media organizations in China, like any institutions (shiye danwei), are absorbed into the national administrative rank system, which consists of the central level, the provincial or ministerial level, the district level, the county level, and the township level. Each newspaper, at the time it starts publishing, is assigned a rank, usually once level below its sponsoring or supervising body. Thus, a central-level organ (such as Xinhua, CCTV, and the People's Daily) commands the ministerial rank; China Daily, Guangming Daily and Economic Daily have the vice-ministerial rank; and the provincial-level papers (such as the Jilin Daily or the Chinese Petroleum Daily) are accorded the district/bureau rank. The media with higher level are supposed to have more freedom in reporting than those with lower level rank. Government agencies and state-own enterprises are required to subscribe certain party organs, such as People's Daily.

Since 1949, state media control has meant government has the sole right to appoint editorial staff; and the ability to impose specific rules, such as being loyal to the state, and codes of conduct, such as publish positive reports favorable to the government and the stability of the society. The high-ranking leaders in Xinhua and People's Daily are promoted to their posts because of loyalty to the party or to higher level government officials, rather than for their journalistic talents or management skills. Violations of regulations can mean server punishment, and if serious, suspension of publication.

"Party Principle" (Dangxing Yuanze)

The central concept that underlies the Party's domination over the media is the

“Party principle”, which is the essential principle guiding the journalistic work in China’s socialistic system⁸.

Every newcomer to Xinhua will have to learn the party principle as the first and the most important lesson. A typical journalism textbook describes the Party principle as comprising three basis components: that the news media must accept the Party’s guiding ideology as its own; that they must propagate the Party’s programs, policies, and directives; and that they must accept the Party’s leadership and stick to the Party’s organizational principles and press policies.⁹

Here I need to clarify the meaning of the word “propaganda”. The concept of propaganda in the Chinese context, Timothy cheek has argued, should not be understood in the pejorative sense but in the literal sense of the word: “Propaganda is nothing more than the attempt to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people’s thinking, emotions, and thereby behavior.”¹⁰ The media are instruments to propagate the Party’s policies and directives, to persuade people about the correctness of a policy, and to tell them the good results of a particular policy. The news functions to mobilize people and sustain morale as in the case of war propaganda definitely left a legacy for the Party’s approach to journalism.¹¹

“Mass Line” Theory

Before 1949, the Party controlled all media operations in areas under its control. When the Party came to power in October 1949, the administrative and technical operations were shifted to the government, while the Party controlled

⁸ He Xinhua and Cheng Mei. A Teaching Program for Journalism Theory. Beijing: Higher Education Press, 1999. p156.

⁹ Ibid. p.160.

¹⁰ Timothy Check. Redefining Propaganda. p52. Cited in Zhao, p26.

¹¹ Check, p53

ideology. Staff members are considered government employees.

The Chinese Communist Party's notion of the role of the media in the political process is based on its theory of the political communication; that is, the "mass line." The Party, composed of the most farseeing and revolutionary elements of the people, is supposed to be able to define the general interests of the people by remaining close to them. The Party leaders study their situation, collect their opinions, and turn these into systematic policies. Journalism, which is an integral part of Party work, is one means of communication whereby the Party implements the mass line.

The dominant mode of communication is supposed to be a two-way process, which is also termed as "coming from the masses and going into the masses" (cong qunzhong zhong lai, dao qunzhong zhong qu). The media are supposed to report the people's opinions, concerns, and aspirations and to inform the leadership of the performance of cadres who are working directly with the people.

In mass line theory, the greatest threat to the leadership of the Party is its detachment from the people.¹² In this theory, journalists are a bridge between the Party and the people. As what the Party principle requires, journalists must propagate the party's policies by reporting them in the newspaper and on TV and various media. It is a top-down flow of information what the government wants the people to know. Meanwhile, there also exists a down-up flow of information provided by the journalists through the form of internal reference (Nei Can) reporting to the top leaders for decision-making. Andrew Nathan has interpreted this function

¹² Cheek. p 58.

of the press as an intelligence mission for the leaders.¹³

Internal Reference (Nei Can)

Because of Xinhua's nature and its big network across the country, Xinhua is one of a few news organizations that provide Nei Can to the decision-makers. Xinhua has at least one bureau located in the capital city of all the provinces, sometimes also with two or three sub-bureaus in some big or important cities of the province.

For example, in the northeastern province of Jilin, Xinhua has a main office in Changchun, capital of the province. Meanwhile, there are also two other smaller offices in the cities of Jilin and Yanbian.

Reporters are encouraged to write in-depth reports on all sides of the society to provide references for the central government to refer to. One and the most important feature of the internal reference is that these news stories, many of them in-dept writings, are deemed by the government as not proper for public reporting. So they are printed out in the form of Nei Can for internal circulation instead of news stories for nationwide news media. These Nei Can stories are in contrast to the so-called positive reporting and reflect or disclose the negative side of the society, including topics such as disastrous mine accidents, local explosions, strikes of laid-off workers, the poor and harsh life of the peasants in the rural areas, corruptive acts of local high-ranking party cadres, the people's negative opinion on the party's leadership, people's complaint against government policies, and the like. Such reports are classified as Nei Can, because the government thinks they might cause social instability, damage the image of

¹³ Andrew J. Nathan. Chinese Democracy. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. p.154. Cited in Zhao. p.25.

party cadres, undermine the party's rule, or forge a bad image of China on the world arena.

These internal references are divided into several grades. Many governmental institution and state-run enterprises can subscribe them. But some of them are so confidential that they are written solely for government top leaders and are usually limited to issues of utmost importance to the government. Therefore, the stories on the Internal Reference are usually more influential than those printed on newspapers, because they directly reach Chinese decision-makers, such as president or premier.

Moreover, Xinhua's editors who are in charge of the Internal Reference must be Party members, although the writers could be non-Party members. Xinhua reporters are encouraged, in a reward-mechanism, to write such reference for the leaders. They not only feel honored to write stories on public opinion and the dim side of the society for the top leaders, but they can get monetary reward as well if their reports are read and commented by the leaders, or are rewarded with Xinhua's excellent news judged by senior journalists at Xinhua's Beijing headquarters.

Mouthpiece Role and Other Notions Shaping China's Media

Apart from Party principle, many other notions also define the role of China's media. As Cheek put it, China's journalism has both transformational/agitational and administrative roles under the Party.

Lenin's notion that the Party newspaper should be the Party's collective propagandist, agitator, and organizer was instrumental in shaping the Chinese Party's journalism policy. The Party proclaims itself to be the vanguard of the proletariat

representing the interest of the people. Within this ideological construct, the media serve as the mouthpiece of the Party and, by definition, serve as the mouthpiece of the people, too.

Unlike the western concept of regarding the media as a watchdog, Party journalism regard the media as “ears, eyes, throat, and tongue” (er mu hou she) of the Party and government. “Mouthpiece” role is actually part of the Party principle, and also reflect the media’s bridge function. Every generation of Chinese leaders, namely Mao, Deng, Jiang and the present Hu, had and has stressed the “mouthpiece” role of the media.

Market economy does not change the fundamental conceptualization of Chinese journalism. Ding guangen, then head of the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the CPC and also a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC central Committee, said in his speech in 2001. “The Chinese media should seek a development path that carries Chinese characteristics. The reform should take into full consideration of the need for building socialist ethics, follow the rules of the socialist market economy and the demands of journalism itself, and draw on the success of economic reforms and the beneficial practices of other countries...Under no circumstances can the news media alter its roles as the mouthpiece of the Party and the people...News media should help promote reform, safeguard social stability, and help create a sound environment for the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics...”¹⁴

¹⁴ Party Publicity Chief of China’s Media Work. Xinhua. Oct. 29, 2001.

While Western media scholars, through painstaking critical analysis, have concluded that news is not completely objective and value-free as advertised but actually carries ideological orientations and embodies a set of enduring values, the Chinese Communist Party openly declares that news is value-laden.

The Party demands that news carry its ideology and value orientations, and it contends that values can be and should be expressed through the selection, juxtaposition, and presentation of news. Therefore, a "good" news item should have a clear political orientation, advocate or criticize, and make an explicit or implicit value judgment.

Bearing this in mind, many "excellent stories" voted by Xinhua or stories that won domestic journalistic prize have been those with clear correct political orientation, favorable to the government, or supportive of China's diplomatic relations with other countries.

One could clearly tell China's stance through its coverage of either domestic or international events. For example, any story revealing the dim side of the US society and disclose "bad" acts, racial discrimination or fake democracy, will never be missed by the Chinese media. Meanwhile, concerning the Party's leadership and the whole Chinese society, the media, in most times if not always, show the bright side of the story, and leave the dark side only to certain number of people as I mentioned before in the form of Internal Reference.

Here is an example. As Aug. 22, 2004, the 100th anniversary of Deng Xiaoping's birth, was approaching, mainstream media, with the order from the

Publicity Department (Zhong Xuanbu), staged numerous programs and stories eulogizing what the reformer had done to the Chinese society. However, the French Press Agency, its French abbreviation AFP, one of the three major world's wire services along with Associate Press (AP) and the Reuters, wrote a story named *Not Everyone Fond of Deng's Legacy*, citing many people's negative views on Deng's reform and revealed deeper social conflicts among different strata in the Chinese society. As we can expect, Xinhua, the only Chinese wire service ambitiously struggling to compete with those three world front runners, would never have written such story and released it to its thousands of foreign and domestic clients, although the content is also another side of the true story.

In addition, notions such as "stimulating" and "encouraging" often appear in discussions about the functions of China's media. The notion of "education" is also significant for an understanding of the paternalistic role of the media. China has a long tradition of scholar-officials "propagating" the moral teachings of the dynasty and fostering a good and moral society. Journalism emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century in a context that ensured the "polemical and educational nature of the venture." Indeed, "Chinese journalism was already educational journalism" before Marxism had any impact.¹⁵ The Party infused this Confucian belief with the Leninist concept of a vanguard whose task is to enlighten the people and help them to see their own interests.

Journalism in China is not just journalism in the literal meaning. Journalism

¹⁵ Check. p54.

must have a “guiding character” (zhidao xing). Until now, propaganda department of the Party continues to sets specific guidelines on news reporting. News, therefore, is often selected on the basis of its relevance to the central task of the Party and the government and reported from the Party’s perspective. As a result, news is usually not about breaking events but about trends, tendencies, and achievements over time.

Providing role models is one responsibility of journalism as defined by the Party. Coverage of the deeds of role models, interviews with their colleagues praising them, and government top leaders’ call for the learning of them always lavishly appear in major newspaper and television channel, especially at a time when the government deems there is a “social need” to portrait some role models for the mass to follow.

As part of the celebration of 2004 May Day, Xu Zhenzhao, a port worker, appeared for a couple of consecutive days in prime time on CCTV-1’s news broadcasting, which is one of the channels that reach the largest population and cover the broadest areas in China. Another case is the coverage of Ren Changxia, a late policewoman, former director of the public security bureau in Dengfeng city, central China’s Henan Province. Her heroic deeds were continuously broadcasted and reported in various media, including television, newspaper, and website for tens of days.

In addition, media also reported Chinese senior leaders calling on nationwide learning of the policewoman. President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and other high-ranking officials made remarks on Ren’s outstanding deeds. A report meeting

on her deeds was held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, with hundreds of participants, including government officials and representatives from all walks of life in Beijing. Hu said Ren Changxia had always carried in her mind the tenet of "serving people heart and soul" and set a good example for all party cadres in law enforcement. Wen called on policemen and officials in various political and law enforcement departments to follow the example of Ren and to make more contributions to the country and people through implanting the important thoughts of "Three Represents" (Sange Daibiao)¹⁶.

What the key words here are worth noticing: "law enforcement" and "three represents." Publicity officials hope to make use of media's coverage to improve the work attitude of people in law enforcement sector and, meanwhile, to propagate the Party's "Three Represent" thought in the society.

Major Changes in Chinese Media

Breaking News Reporting

Decades ago, one could read many stories like Chinese leaders held meetings with some presidents from a tiny African countries. Two-day or three-day-old news were common in Xinhua's filed stories. One could watch little exciting international news on TV and only had a few Party organs, journals and TV channels to choose from. But after more than two decades of reform, although there is still continuity in the old journalistic practice, great changes have taken place in various media in China.

¹⁶ "Three represents", put forward by former Chinese president Jiang Zemin in 2000, refers to what the Communist Party of China currently stands for, that is, It represents the development trends of advanced productive forces, it represents the orientations of an advanced culture; it represents the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people of China.

According to the Chinese notion of journalism that I mentioned before, news is usually not about breaking events but about trends, tendencies, and achievements over time. But nowadays, breaking news, both international and domestic news, have become increasingly important in daily news reporting, as China is endeavoring to compete with its western powers in this field, and as the competition among domestic media is becoming more and more fierce.

A very example of the changes would be the reporting of the US-led war in Iraq in 2003. The war in Iraq received unprecedented coverage in the Chinese media, which led to many breakthroughs in the history of the country's news media. Xinhua news agency, China's only wire service, beat its international counterparts by 10 seconds to be the first to report the start of the war on March 20, 2003, which set a record in the history of the agency since 1931 when it was established. In the following two weeks, Xinhua filed a total of 13,919 news reports, commentaries, round-ups, and features on the war in Chinese, English, French, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic, which were readily picked up by clients around the world.¹⁷

CCTV covered the war in real-time, marking another first in Chinese journalism. Three of its then 12 channels, namely CCTV-1, CCTV-4, and the English channel of CCTV-9, used sources or footage from CNN, FOX TV, and Al-Jazeera, as well as Xinhua, to keep their millions of viewers informed as the war progressed.

CCTV's war coverage was rewarded with dramatically soaring ratings and

¹⁷ Breaking News Ground. Ibid.

commercial revenues. In the March of 2003, the ratings of CCTV-4 alone increased 28 times, while CCTV's commercial income hit 100 million yuan (US\$12 million), 30 percent higher than that in the same period last year. Its timely and balanced coverage of the war in Iraq "signals the reform of the Chinese press and a trend to go international", said Zhao Shuqing, a researcher with CCTV.¹⁸

In the May of 2003, CCTV launched a brand new channel CCTV-13, a 24-hour news channel. It is China's first news-only channel and was widely regarded as one of the major reforms Chinese media is taking.

In October 2001, for the first time in APEC's history, Xinhuanet.com, the website of Xinhua News Agency, has introduced multi-media services to cover all meetings held in Shanghai. Xinhua's coverage even won over foreign journalists' compliment. An editor of a News Zealand news website www.scoop.colna said in a email message to Xinhuanet.com that the coverage is "without a doubt the best website ever produced for an international event that I have come across in recent years. The way photographs in particular have been implemented is user friendly, comprehensive and timely."¹⁹

Such cases in point are abundant. The Chinese media have been attaching more and more importance to the coverage of breaking news, such as the Chinese hostage-taking crisis in Pakistan in 2004, North Korea's train explosion in 2004, stories on the six-party talks, the death of Arafat, the east Asian tsunami disaster, the 2003 strong earthquake of Iran, and many more. Currently, even the coverage of

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Xinhua. Oct. 19, 2001.

entertainment news, such as Oscar award and various international film festivals, have become a part of the media competition.

Investigative Reporting

Along with the more timely and balanced daily reports by Chinese media with increasing number of human interests stories, another most significant development in Chinese journalism since the 1990s has been the rise of investigative reporting -- news that exposes official corruption and social problems.²⁰

Investigative reporting usually thrives during periods of social unrest and reform. Its ebb and flow depends on a mass audience informed enough to demand more details of the access and distribution of economic and political resources and on a political system that was tolerant enough of critical views (Weir & Noyes, 1984).²¹

Investigative reporting always has an activist tinge—journalists commit themselves to watchdogs power, to uncover and document facts and to bring the powerful to account (Weir & Noyes, 1983).²² This passion and fervor was transported to the Chinese mainland in the early 1990s where it was carefully tried out by journalists and warmly embraced by the audience. After decades of government propaganda and an overwhelming share of positive news, negative reports and their implications brought a breath of fresh air and fueled the jaded appetite of a passive audience.

Protest et al. argued that the investigative school of reporting was the journalism of outrage—by exposing political corruption, government inefficiency and

²⁰ He Zhou. 2000. cited by Herbert, John. *Practicing Global Journalism: Exploring Reporting Issues Worldwide*. Oxford: Focal Press, 2001. p.150.

²¹ Cited by Shao Guosong and Zhou Shuhua in *The Myth of Chinese Investigative Reporting*, a paper presented at the Annual Conference of International Communication Association in Korea, July 2002.

²² Ibid.

social injustice, they probed the public conscience and helped defined morality of the society. (Protest et al. 1991). The journalism of outrage, although still remained to be improved, has been taking shape in China.²³

This kind of “outrage” is a relatively new concept in Chinese journalistic practice. The Chinese news media make no secret that they are the mouthpieces of the party and media outlets at every level are under the direct supervision of party operatives to propagate the party policies and directive (Zhao, 1998). However, the Chinese media are more restricted in theory than in practice, especially after the introduction of the reform policies in the last twenty years. Realization of its power as a watchdog of social ills, if not of its government, has been gradually gaining hold among media professionals in the country.

In 1980, CCTV launched *Observations & thoughts*, one of China’s earliest investigative programs. By using surveillance cameras, it exposed the private use of public-owned vehicles in its second episode (Cao & Lan, 2000). But investigative reporting in its real earnest did not begin until the early 1990s when commercialization spurred competitions among stations under the “producer-responsibility” system in which the producer of a particular show was accountable for funding and profit of the show’s success (Chu, 1994).

On May 1, 1993, CCTV introduced a one-hour morning program “*Oriental Horizon*,” in which a segment, *Focus of the Moment*, took an in-depth look at a particular issue. A year later, in April 1994, another prime time news show, *Focus*, formally debuted.

²³ Ibid.

These shows quickly gained momentum and popularity because of their fresh, unconventional critical look at issues of the day. Many investigative reporting techniques including on-the-spot reporting, subjective camera, hard-nosed interviews were used to provide perspectives on current affairs, background analysis and hot social issues.

Ten years after the beginning of Focus, such investigative reporting has been popular throughout the nation. To follow the example set by the CCTV, local TV stations have produced more than 60 similar programs with a watchdog nature, and a lot of in-depth and watchdog writings have since appear in various newspapers too. Xinhua's "Xinhua focus" is one of such kind of reports, and is often picked up by its nationwide clients of newspaper and provides clues for TV stations to make investigative programs of their own.

The "Focus" program was created following an attempt by CCTV testing whether the government and public were truly prepared to accept similar exposures of corruption.²⁴ It symbolizes an attempt to test public opinion and the receptivity of the government to criticism in a more open society and in a more economically competitive environment. It shows that the media can act as more than just a government mouthpiece and can play a role, albeit a limited one, in matters such as the fight against corruption.²⁵

More Emphasis on Duiwai (Overseas-oriented) Reporting

The so-called Duiwai (overseas-oriented) reporting is in contrast to Duinei

²⁴ Li Xiaoping. Significant Changes in the Chinese Television Industry and Their Impact in the PRC: An Insider's Perspective. August 2001. Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, The Brookings Institution

²⁵ Ibid.

(domestic-oriented) reporting. Duinei reporting is written in Chinese and targets Chinese audience and those who know Chinese, while Duiwai can be translated as overseas-oriented or foreigners-targeted reporting written in foreign languages, such as English, French and Russian.

China sees the overseas-orientated reporting a key aspect of Chinese government's diplomacy, and an important channel to further promote China's image and enhance its international influence. China wants to make use of it to positively influence the international public opinion, as what it does in the domestic-orientated reporting -- to positively influence the domestic public opinion.

If the people of any country do not trust their own national media, they will turn to the international press, including that of a country, which is in conflict with theirs.²⁶ The more trust the press gains with users, the more effectively it will set agendas. This is also the mindset of Chinese media policy-maker. That China tries hard to strengthen its oversea-oriented reporting is, like fighting a battle with the western media, to guide the world's opinion and occupy the very front.

Xinhua News Agency, one of the oldest news organizations in new China, celebrated its 60th anniversary of its overseas-oriented reporting in the August of 2004. At an exhibition in Xinhua's pen-shaped headquarters building, a red-banner hanging outside the building proudly read "we make China known."²⁷

With a goal to make Chinese voice heard and louder in the world and compete with the western media, China is trying to strengthen its Duiwai reporting in the

²⁶ Li Xiguang, Web Revolutionizes China's Media. <http://www.qinhua.edu.cn>

²⁷ Currently, Xinhua files news stories in seven languages, Chinese, English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and Portuguese.

recent years, especially in terms of breaking news coverage in English. The Publicity Department, which is in charge of publicity and ideological work of the central media, has clearly different criteria, goals, and code of conduct in the two differently audience-targeted reporting.

Compared with the domestic-oriented reporting, overseas-oriented reporting has more freedom and vertically no off limits, especially in coverage of the international news. For example, every year as long holidays, such as China's National Day Oct. 1 and Spring festival, approach, the Publicity Department often orders to report less so-called "negative news", both domestic and international, including street protest, ethnic uprisings and explosions, in a bid to create a more harmonious and auspicious atmosphere for holidays. But it is only for the news in Chinese. The foreigner-targeted reporting written in foreign languages, however, does not have such limits, simply because even China does not report, western media will, and keeping silent will only make Chinese media lose their reputation.

The English-language newspaper China Daily began in 1981 and is now sent by satellite to a number of other countries for printing and distribution. China Daily aims to serve the increasing number of foreigners in China, as well as Chinese who understand and want to improve their English. The editorial policies of China Daily differ from those of other newspapers in Chinese. The paper's principal goals are objectively presenting China and China's news to its unique group of readers and providing services and entertainment specially suited to those readers'.

Meanwhile, in order to win over their foreign audience, Chinese media try

hard to shake off its image as a boring government mouthpiece. One of the most obvious effects of the changes is the appearance of a new news anchor of CCTV-9, Edwin Maher. The veteran from Australian television was being touted by the channel as one of its few non-Asian “news” anchors. Just a year after his appearance, several other western faces have also showed up on the CCTV international’s financial news and sports news programs.

Maher’s morning newscasts are CCTV International’s attempt to attract a larger western audience—specifically in the United States, where the show is aired during evening prime time. Jiang Heping, controller of CCTV-9 and the deputy director of CCTV’s overseas service, was behind the decision to, for the first time in China’s television history, employ staff from non-Chinese backgrounds to anchor such news program, which sometimes has political orientation.

“These reforms are putting Chinese wine into a foreign bottle,” Jiang said, adding that “we are taking great efforts to minimize the tone of propaganda, to balance our reports, and to be objective. But we definitely won’t be reporting as much negative domestic news as the western media.”

Jiang said CCTV International’s goal is not only to provide the world with a window on China, but also “to voice a Chinese perspective on world affairs and to break the western voice’s monopoly on the news. Our opinions on the world are quite different from those of CNN and the BBC.”

Besides, CCTV have launched two news channels broadcast in Spanish and French since October 2004, another step to strengthen the overseas-orientated

reporting. The name change of the Publicity Department, which is in charge of the "propaganda" work of the whole nation, is also a case in point to shed the propaganda role. Knowing that propaganda has a derogatory meaning in English, Zhongxuan Bu²⁸ changed its English name in the December of 1997 from the former "Propaganda" Department of CPC Central Committee to the current Department of "Publicity" of CPC Central Committee.

New Style in Coverage of "Two Sessions" (Liang Hui)

In the last part of the changes, I will focus on the changed style in covering China's annual "two sessions", namely the yearly meeting of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the simultaneously held plenary sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC)²⁹.

The "two sessions", usually held in every March, are one of the biggest and the most important issues every year for all the Chinese media, and now for the foreign media as well.

In the past, Chinese media devoted more coverage of State leaders and less to deputies and members from grass-roots units, but now the two parties are reversed. Yu Guoming, professor and director of the Public Opinion Research Institute of the People's University of China, said, the increased coverage of ordinary deputies and members signals a significant change in the news reporting on the two sessions.

In the past, stories based on interviews with officials were largely verbatim reports, without response, of what the officials said, but now there is emergence of

²⁸ It is an institution under the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee. Its main function is to implement the CPC Central Committee's policies on publicity work and decided focal point of the Party's publicity work according to political line at different periods.

²⁹ For more information on the CPPCC and the NPC, please log on English version of the website <http://www.china.org.cn>.

“different voices” in the news coverage.

Issues affecting the daily lives of ordinary citizens have become the focus of the annual two sessions, and the news writing style has become more practical instead of cliché. Xinhua, the People’s Daily and CCTV have significantly changed their traditional coverage styles, opting instead for more intimate, inspiring and readable stories, in accordance with the journalistic style rather than propaganda.

The Causes

Market-driven Media Commercialization: Part of Economic Reform

The changes in the Chinese media are taking place against a bigger backdrop of China’s economic reform, a transition from the planned economy to the market economy. The relationship between government and the media has changed dramatically during the process ---- particularly in the way the government’s financial policies operate with regard to the press.

One by-product of China’s economic reform is the growing commercialization of the Chinese media. According to official statistics, between 1978 and 2003, the number of newspapers in China increased from 186 to 2119, while the number of magazines increased from 930 to 9074³⁰. Most of these media are still owned by the Party-state, receiving more or less subsidy from the government. However, advertising and subscribing income has become the major source of revenues for the media, except for newspapers and magazines directly run by the Party and the government organs (dangzheng jiguan). Media commercialization has provided

³⁰ Chinese Statistical Yearbook 2004. Compiled by National Bureau of Statistics of China. 2005

new incentives and opportunities for journalists to cover lively, sensational, provocative and diverse stories, and expose political corruption, even though it may offend government officials.

As China's economic environment is getting more market-friendly, the media have also been put into the market that emphasis on profit and competition. China's media commercialization began in 1978, accelerated in 1992, and more or less completed by the mid-1990s.³¹ Press subsidies, which have been in effect since 1949, started to take a toll on the state treasury in the mid-1980s. Until then, the state had provided almost guaranteed revenues to the press through subscriptions and direct financial assistance.

The state set out in 1978 to grant selected papers a measure of financial autonomy by allowing them to operate on a profit-seeking basis. The state insisted that the central government should subsidize the central-level newspapers, and that the provincial-level newspapers could ask their local governments for compensation, but that the lower-level newspapers had to solve their own problems.

Reform and openness since the 1980s had created a growing demand by foreign and domestic enterprises for effective advertising channels. Media commercialization, therefore, is also part and parcel of the development of a market economy.³² The commercialization of the Chinese media, however, goes far beyond conventional advertising. Since the economic reforms, media organizations have gradually developed into an information industry serving government and business

³¹ Herbert, p.151.

³² Zhao, p52.

clients.

Introduction of a market mechanism to media was not a focus of media reform until 1992. The most important turning point was the publication of Deng Xiaoping's talks during his inspection tour of south China in early 1992. In a typical pragmatic fashion, Deng overcame ideological barriers to commercialization by arguing that the market is only a mechanism for economic development that does not determine whether a system is capitalist or socialist. In 1992, the newspaper and publication bureau under the state council announced a new policy, generally branded as a policy to stop breast-feeding, which amounted to a declaration of severing press subsidies. The policy called for all but a handful of newspapers and news organizations (such as the People's Daily, the Economic Daily, the Party's leading theoretical magazine Qiushi and Xinhua etc.) to achieve financial independence.

Amid media commercialization, Party-state organ newspapers and magazines continue to lose their readership. The circulation of the People's Daily, the principal mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, decreased significantly from 6.2 million in 1979 to about 2 million two decades later. To increase readership, many Party organ newspapers have to rely on their subordinating newspapers for financial support.³³ Two-thirds of Party organ newspapers run by provincial Party committees have evening newspapers (wanbao) or metropolitan newspapers (dushibao). The Guangming Daily, a national newspaper run by the Party, targeting intellectuals, has benefited from its subordinating Life Times. Even the official Xinhua News Agency

³³ For example, People's Daily has subordinating newspapers of Global Times (huanqiu shibao) and Beijing Times (Jinghua shibao), which are like those metropolitan papers and have more readable and more interesting stories.

carries some sensational stories related to entertainment and sex on its web site.

Advertising has become a major source of revenues for most Chinese media. The market for Internet advertising has a great prospect as China boasts over 100 million netizens³⁴. The revenue of China's Internet advertising rose to 1.08 billion yuan (130 million dollars) in 2003, over twice as much as the amount in 2002, according to the State Administration for Industry and Commerce.³⁵

The conventional advertising also achieved steady growth of over 10 percent in 2003. Statistics indicate most of the ad business still goes to TV and newspaper, which account for 23.64 percent and 22.53 percent respectively. In 2003, TV earned 25.5 billion yuan (3 billion dollars) and newspapers got 24.3 billion yuan (2.9 billion dollars) from advertising. Radio broadcast and magazines won 2.56 billion yuan (308 million dollars) and 2.44 billion yuan (294 million dollars). A total of 870,000 people are engaged in China's advertising business with a revenue reaching 107.9 billion yuan (13 billion dollars), which is around 0.92 percent of the nation's GDP.

Take the CCTV as an example. From the mid-1990s, CCTV has become almost totally dependent on commercial revenues. In 2000, CCTV was able to raise 5.5 billion yuan (662.65 million US dollars) from private sources while the government contribution was mere 30 million yuan (3.61 million US dollars). In 2001, government sources supply only 0.5 percent of total CCTV funds.³⁶ In a related development, staff employment at CCTV has been dramatically transformed from the "iron rice bowl" system to a performance-based system. Their income is

³⁴ According to statistics by June 30, 2004, China has 103 million Internet users. <http://www.cnnic.cn>

³⁵ Xinhua. July 4, 2004.

³⁶ Li Xiaoping.

primarily pegged to the quantity and quality of their output.

As a result, the development of Chinese media in a market-oriented economy has given rise to a new breed of journalist. Newspaper circulation and audience ratings have become the dominant factor for news selection and TV programming decisions. The amount of political, partisan and ideological bias in news coverage has been considerably reduced since the media marketization. Objective content, in the western theoretical sense at least, has also improved. There are more breaking news, soft news, human-interest news and economic and financial news appearing in the media. Hu Shuli, Manager Editor of *Caijing Magazine* said the Chinese media had undergone significant changes as market-driven papers, magazines and TV stations had become the country's fastest-growing information sources. "We try to write stories that reflect the truth, and the market requires objective coverage of news events."

The pace of change is striking. As the Beijing bureau chief for *Time* magazine, Jamie A. Florcruz has commented:

Continual market reform over the past decade has eroded the dominant position of the official media, as they have become increasingly open and responsive to public demand. To the people in China, the press and broadcasts are now a real source of information and food for thought, rather than a skimpy compendium of sterile polemic and abstruse dogma. The vibrancy, diversity and enterprise of newspapers, magazines and television shows reflect growing pluralism -- and Beijing's inability to control it.³⁷

One of the latest big steps of media reform is the central government's decision to weck out some media that can yield no social or economic profit. As of

³⁷ James A. Florcruz. "Chinese Media in Flux." *Media Studies Journal*, Winter 1999, pp.42-46, cited by Li Xiongping.

late February in 2003, the government has to date stopped funding about 1,500 “sponsored” magazines. According to Mr. Ai Limin, Vice Chief of the General Administration of Press and Publications, Newspaper and Periodical Department (GAPP), it is unfair to force consumers to purchase magazines they have not requested. The organization wants to restructure the magazine market from within, making it more competitive and responsive to market forces.

The government seems quite serious about pulling subsidies from sponsored magazines. According to Ai, the government “is no longer willing to support failing companies.” Up to now, almost 400 hundred magazines have closed down because of the policy, and by some estimates the 9,000 or so magazines could be reduced by 40% if the government continues to deny subsidies to so many sponsored publications.

Conceivably, the number could be reduced even more. Based on official reports, the Party plans to end its direct financial support to and mandatory subscription requirement of most Party-government newspapers and magazines. At the national level, only three newspapers and one magazine are the exceptions, namely the People’ Daily, Guangming Daily, Economy Daily and Seeking Truth (Qiushi) magazine, which will still be run by the Party’s central leadership. The central government will allow each provincial-level³⁸ Party committee to continue operating one newspaper and one journal. Each municipal-level³⁹ Party committee will be allowed to operate only one newspaper, and county-level Party committees

³⁸ On China’s mainland, the provincial-level areas include 23 provinces and five autonomous regions.

³⁹ China has four direct municipalities, namely Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing.

and government can no longer operate media publications.⁴⁰

Although the plan has already met with resistance from government departments fearing job loss and loss of influence, Zhao Xiaobing, President of Global China Media Consulting (Beijing), noted that “Without the deaths of numerous media, there cannot be new life for reformed media. That is the reality of the market economy.”

Recent government statements acknowledge the need for more openness and transparency regarding investment in the media sector. Though the state will retain “an absolute controlling stake” in any media business, the operations of newspapers, magazines, radio and TV “can be split off and absorb capital from society.”

In principle, this position is consistent with that voiced by Li Changchun, politburo member in charge of the publicity work. Li said editorial and business operations of media were to be considered separate. The government seems to be moving toward the position of encouraging more foreign media investment. However, the government remains opposed to foreign media reporting in Chinese on sensitive local political and business matters.

In short, the market has come to gain greater acceptance as the proper adjudicator of what was offered to the public and that it, in turn, chose to consume. The media responded to increased competition for audience ratings and advertising revenue by downplaying their dull propaganda face. The proliferation of TV channels, newspaper, and magazines resulting from deregulation has enabled viewers

⁴⁰ Liu Gang. *Voices of the Small Handful: 1989 Student Movement Leaders Assess Human Rights in Today's China*. Testimony before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Roundtable on June 2, 2003. Aerie Networks, Denver Colorado, <http://www.cecc.gov>.

to select more interesting and more informative programs, or entertainment-oriented programs.

The political concept of “the people” is being transformed into “the audience”—indeed into fragmented audiences as radio and television channels become increasingly specialized. “The people” as the “masters” of the society in the rhetoric of Party journalism is being fused with the audience as “a god” with consumer sovereignty.

Challenges From the New Media⁴¹: Internet and Mobile Phones

New technologies challenge boundaries of many kinds—between news, information, entertainment, and advertising; between media, with the arrival of the World Wide Web; and even between nations, with CNN, MYV, and the like being broadcast to every continent.

THE GREATER THE EXTENT TO WHICH CITIZENS DEPEND ON ONE PARTICULAR MEDIUM, THE GREATER THE ABILITY OF THAT MEDIUM TO MOLD PUBLIC OPINION; BY CONTRAST, WHEN CITIZENS HAVE A NUMBER OF INFORMATION SOURCES AVAILABLE, THEY ARE LESS SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE POTENTIAL INFLUENCE OF ANY ONE OF THEM.⁴² AS CHINESE MEDIA PROLIFERATE, THE AUDIENCE HAVE MANY ACCESS TO ALL KINDS OF SOURCES, AND THEY KNOW WHAT TO BELIEVE OR NOT, AND THEY HAVE ACCESS TO CROSS-EXAMINE THE FACTS AND TRUTH, INSTEAD OF JUST HAVE CCTV AND THE PEOPLE’S DAILY TO RELY ON.

These new communication systems have great political and social impacts.

The introduction of the market mechanism helps press the changes of China’s media by forcing the media to meet the demand of readers and audience. New technology advancing with the economic growth has impact on the political communication and

⁴¹ “New media” is a relative concept in contrast with the so-called old media, such as television and radio. In the 1980s, television in China was regarded as a new media, but now owning a television has become commonplace, and mobile phone and Internet could be called the current new media in China.

⁴² Gunther, Richard. and Mughan, Anthony. ed., *Democracy and the Media: a Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. p.19.

on the society as a whole. With the rapid economic growth, advance of technology, and increase of income, more and more Chinese could afford to purchase mobile phones and have access to the Internet.

The number of people using mobile telephones has also dramatically increased. Statistics showed, by the end of 2003, China had almost 270 million mobile phone users and the number is growing rapidly. In 1999, there were only 43.3 million.⁴³ China has become the country with the largest number of mobile phone users in the world.⁴⁴

In the case of SARS epidemic, message through mobile phones played a role in disseminating the news in Guangzhou, when the government was still imposing a ban on news media reporting about the disease. According to Southern Weekend (Nanfang Zhoumo), a brief text message-- "there is a fatal flu in Guangzhou", sent to mobile phones at about noon on February 8, swept through Guangzhou. This same message was resent 40 million times that day, 41 million times the next day and 45 million times on Feb. 10. The Washington Post called the messages "an unprecedented challenge to the state's monopoly on information."⁴⁵

The usage of short message via mobile phones is astonishing. For example, in the New Year's eve and week-long holiday from Jan.22 to 28, 2004 Chinese people sent 9.8 billion Lunar New Year greeting messages through their mobile phones, 3 billion more than the year before. Low price and high efficiency make short

⁴³ Chinese Statistical Yearbook 2004.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Zeitlin. Arnold. SARS and the Chinese Media: A brief Opening. www.jamestown.org. China Brief: Vol. 3. Issue 13. July 1, 2003.

messages popular.

As mobile phones are having more and more functions, the users have also learned to make use of it to share information and news. It is not rare that a person sent the picture of a street strike in Guangzhou to another person in Beijing, who could not have known it because Beijing intentionally banned the information. A phone call and a short message shorten, or sometimes even annul, the geological concept. There are no more so-called top-secret, because anything could be leaked and shared among mobile phone users and the Internet users.

In the absence of an institutionalized free flow of information and effective media supervision of the government's work, the Internet has also played an active and positive role.

The Internet has been developing with unprecedented speed in China over the last decade. According to the 15th Statistical Survey of Report on the Internet Development in China conducted by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the number of Internet users, or netizens⁴⁶, on the Chinese mainland reached 94 million by the end of 2004, with a year-on-year growth of 18.2%. Among them, the number of broadband users was 42.8 million, an increase of 146% over 2003. The numbers of domain names and websites registered under .CN were 432077 and 668900. Averagely, netizens were on the Internet for 13.2 hours or 4.1 days per week.

The Internet has brought the country into the age of global communications as

⁴⁶ People who use the Internet for more than one hour each week are defined as netizens.

well as into the global village. With such extraordinary changes, undoubtedly, people will have greater access to the information they need rather than solely rely on the print media, radio or TV.

The rapidly developing Internet in China has posed new challenges to the country's press system and media policy.⁴⁷ Professor Li Xiguang called the Internet "the best combination of Ms. Science and Mr. Democracy." (Li, 1999)

In the SARS case, many Netizens flooded websites with comments and opinions on the control of SARS and with criticisms of some officials who shunned the epidemic that could not normally be aired in the mainstream media.

PUBLIC OPINION CERTAINLY HELPED SPUR THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA TO BOLDER AND BRAVER ACTION. DURING THE LIVE TELEVISED PRESS CONFERENCES HELD AFTER APRIL 20, 2003, CCTV VIEWERS WERE NO DOUBT AMAZED TO SEE CHINESE OFFICIALS BEING BOMBARDED WITH POINTED QUESTIONS AND THE USUALLY POLITE AND RESERVED CHINESE JOURNALISTS COURAGEOUSLY INTERRUPTING ONE OFFICIAL TO DEMAND CLARIFICATION OF SOME EVASIVE REPLIES.⁴⁸

"Such a conference would never have been televised before," says Yin Hong, professor of communication with Qinghua University. "It will really help promote government transparency and enhance the media's watchdog role."

With the flourishing of satellite and cable TV, and the Internet, a new media environment has taken shape in China. Official news outlets are being outnumbered by their non-governmental, commercial and overseas counterparts. The Internet is becoming a public medium for people with different ideas and viewpoints.

For decades, Chinese media consisted of newspapers, magazines, publishing

⁴⁷ Li Xiguang.

⁴⁸ Breaking News Ground.

houses, broadcasting stations and TV stations under the control of propaganda authorities at all levels. Today, besides more than 2,000 daily newspapers and 900 TV stations catering to more than 90 million cable TV users in China, there are also hundreds of thousands websites, including news sites, professional information sites, corporate sites, institutional sites and personal home pages. These news outlets do not need to be approved by the Party's propaganda departments.

In the past, the government easily controlled and even manipulated public opinion by limiting the public to only official information sources. Watching the evening news on state-run CCTV used to be a national evening routine; besides the coverage of daily news, the Party and the government depended on the new program to put across their major propaganda campaigns. But today, it is losing audience share quickly, particularly among young viewers.

In the days of single-source news, people had no way to verify the information they were passively received; for a long time, the propaganda authorities effectively controlled the flow of information, news sources, and information outlets. But in the Internet age, this system faces the challenge of news from multiple sources.

People no longer rely on official information sources to form their opinions. Instead, when a big news event happens, people compare, analyze, and balance the information they get from different sources. They form their own opinions after discounting what they consider to be biased information.

Until a few years ago, Chinese authorities controlled the flow of news and information by jamming short-wave radio broadcasts and banning individuals from

installing a satellite TV antenna. But with the advent of the Internet, the telecommunications ministry now finds the controls outdated. Even the government could control radio broadcasts through a frequency licensing system, people are no longer constrained by the frequencies and can choose to listen to Web casts via the Internet or start a Web cast of their own. Very often, a funny song or a piece of poem-like satirical writing about government top leaders and corruptive bureaucrats produced by individuals could spread immediately nationwide through the Internet---not to mention those popular articles and writings of the increasing number of bloggers.

China only has one wire service Xinhua, but tens of thousands of news sites on the Web are operating like “mini-Xinhuas.”⁴⁹ They post a wide variety of stories, either gathered by their own Internet reporters or based on clippings from Chinese and foreign media. The Internet has technically eliminated the last obstruction to a free flow of information. It is really impossible for the government to control tens of millions of computer users.

Meanwhile, newspapers, radio and TV are converging in the Internet world. They have become one on the Internet and in other multimedia platforms. Readers of the Internet edition of the People’s Daily can download audiovisual material. So in this sense, newspapers have entered the broadcast market. If you visit the CCTV home page, you will find detailed text news and other materials usually provided by newspapers. Propaganda officials and media policy-makers in China could hardly

⁴⁹ Li Xiguang.

imagine that mass media would develop at such a fast pace. Undoubtedly, this convergence and the growing number of Internet users affect traditional Chinese media concepts and official media policy.

For decades, both for political and technological reasons, the Chinese media had never been a forum for public discussion and debate. In the past, the letter-to-editor is a way to express views through newspaper outlets, but there is no interaction among readers, and publication of those letters is a one-way channel by just putting it on the newspaper to warn others or set examples. But the advent of chat rooms and BBS on the Internet has provided the Chinese people with a new information channel. Participants can provide information anonymously, they have equal opportunities to speak their minds, topics for discussion are unlimited and cannot be preset, and users are both readers and publishers.

In China, there are tens of thousands of Chinese-language chatting websites and online columns for BBS, discussion, postings and forums, all favorite places for the netizens to speak their minds. A survey showed that online chatting accounts for about one quarter of netizens' daily communication and online discussion, and expressing their opinions commenting have become a regular habit for them.

The government has attempted to regulate discussions in these chat rooms through filtering and other means, but these censors are unable to keep pace with the development of this online medium. As a result, chat rooms have aired ideas and debates that simply are not accessible through state-sponsored media. The reader-interest based content makes agenda-setting more consumer-driven than

government-driven, and people's attitudes and public opinion, which the government believes the central media are supposed to mold, are now being shaped by information from chat rooms rather than from the official media.

Internet chat rooms have provided Chinese people with an unlimited space to exchange information freely and anonymously. They have been described as the electronic versions of the big-character posters (dazibao), which were the most efficient means of mobilizing public opinion during the Cultural Revolution in China.

As a popular part of Chinese online media, chat rooms are posing a big threat to the government-controlled press by revising and reconstructing its agenda. Agenda-setting theory holds that the mass media determines what is important by leading news shows with a particular story or printing it on page one. When news gatekeepers no longer consider an item of importance, they allow it to slip off the public agenda. For decades, China's mass media effectively set agendas for propaganda purposes. But with so many news outlets now available, people's media behavior is now influenced by selective processes. They have developed many ways of revising and reconstructing the agenda set by the official press.

For example, the People's Daily launched the Strong Nation Forum chat room to give its readers a chance to react to the news and vent their emotions. But most Chinese have also used the system to post news stories unreported in the official media.

The people and public opinion are important elements in a society and in a political system. The official press has always wanted the Chinese people to have

the “right” information and perspective. But the authorities are losing the battle to control information and free expression on the Internet, and cannot expect its chosen topics will also be the chief concerns of the public. Chat rooms have changed the fundamental flow of news in China. Chinese websites have displayed a liveliness not found in the traditional media.

Currently, there is great competition among media for readers and advertising revenue. The Internet, a growing force in China, has a major impact on the way state media reports the news. It has been the driving force behind a number of breaking stories in China, and in some instances, failure to report certain stories has been met with angrier debate on the country’s bulletin boards.

“If there is some big news, you can see it immediately on the Internet,” said a senior Chinese reporter who works for a major state newspaper. “If the newspapers don’t report this, they will lose credibility. This has forced them to change the way they do things.” In fact, the Internet was one of the major reasons that forced the government to be more open about SARS.

Despite government Internet censorship, including blocking access to certain websites, censor discussion groups and hijacking domain names, research shows the efforts have not substantially restricted access to online information. Gene Wang, an assistant professor at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, who has been studying the Internet in China, said Chinese Internet users are often able to access politically sensitive information despite the best efforts of Chinese censors.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Lemon, Sumner. Finding Freedom Behind China’s Great Firewall: Country’s first decade online has seen changes in restrictions, access, <http://www.pcworld.com/news>. May 27, 2004.

In many cases, users were often aware of information contained on Web sites blocked by censors, reducing the significance of the government's censorship efforts. They have many different sources on the Internet. There is no way the government can control 100 percent of the information.

In addition to satellite television, telephone and fax lines, access to the Internet is expanding rapidly and the Party's Publicity Department is again falling behind government departments that have technological and commercial interests in promoting it. With the growing popularity of telephones and home computers, many more institutions and urban households will soon access the Internet. Unlike satellite television, where a receiving dish is easy to see, the Publicity Department cannot simply ban computer and telephone use without crippling the economy.

Social Stratification: "Middle Strata"⁵¹ Expansion

Statistics proved that China has witnessed rapid economic growth. The yearly average growth rate of China's GDP in more than twenty years from 1978 till 2003 surpassed 9 %. In 2003 China's GDP reached 13651.5 billion Yuan while it was merely 362.4 billion Yuan in 1978. The rapid economic growth resulted in an enormous rise in the standard of living of the Chinese people. The average per capita income of peasants increased from 133.6 Yuan in 1978 to 2622.2 Yuan in 2003, 5.5 times as much as the 1978 figure. The average per capita income of urban residents in cities amounted to 8472.2 Yuan in 2003, 5.1 times as much as the figure

⁵¹ The concept of "middle strata" refers to the strata that are in the middle among the ten strata. It includes several different strata. Its connotation is, to some extent, similar, though not the same, to people with "moderate level of income." According to Lu Xueyi, the middle strata include private enterprise owners, self-employed businessmen, and professionals in various fields.

in 1978.⁵²

As China is transforming from a planned economy to a market economy, a much more complex stratified social structure is also taking shape. According to Lu Xueyi, senior researcher in the Social Science Academy, China's social structure has changed from "two classes, one stratum" to a ten-stratum structure.⁵³ The old notion of two classes refers to the workers and peasants, and one stratum is the intellectual. The proportion of the middle strata, which accounted for 15 percent of the whole society in 1999, increased to 18 percent in 2002, and is expected to expand rapidly in the near future. Though its proportion is still relatively small, its 1 percent growth rate every year is not a slow pace.

This group of people, which has benefited from the fruits of economic reform, own their own houses and cars; travel outside China more often; and are able to afford better education for their children by sending them abroad. The new middle strata are becoming prosperous, well educated and more powerful. The number of graduates of higher education reached 1.877 million in 2003, three times of the number in 1990. Statistics show the number of students studying abroad in 2003 was 117,307, while in 1990, there were only 2950.⁵⁴ It has become clear that the new middle class, although not a capitalist middle class, has come to carry the values that support legal democracy.⁵⁵

The educated new middle strata, many of them even study abroad, have

⁵² Chinese Statistical Yearbook 2004.

⁵³ Lu Xueyi. *Social Stratification and Flow in the Contemporary China*, 2003.

⁵⁴ Chinese Statistical Yearbook 2004

⁵⁵ Glassman, Ronald M.. *China in Transition: Communism, Capitalism, and Democracy*. New York: Praeger Publisher, 1991. p.60.

become imbued not only with Western science and management techniques, but also with Western economic and democratic ideas as well. They have become more aware of the notion of democracy and their rights and could find access to vent their anger and express dissatisfaction and no longer buy the slogan-like stories from the official media.

Accordingly, the government, that regards social stability as its top priority, would have to adjust its policy and concede, to some extent, to the demands of the middle strata, who is calling for more freedom of press and freedom of speech, emphasizing their right to know, demanding a transparent and clean government, and would not be willing to be “directed and educated” by the government, since they think they are smarter than those bureaucrats.

Jiao Guobiao, a journalism professor at Beijing University, used vitriol to describe China’s still all-powerful department of censors and standard-setters, the Publicity Department.

“Their censorship orders are totally groundless, absolutely arbitrary, at odds with the basic standards of civilization, and as counter to scientific common sense as witches and wizardry,” Jiao wrote in an article ---- which had been widely circulated via the Internet in Beijing despite being banned by the Party’s Publicity department.

In 2003, China’s average GDP per capital surpassed 1000 dollars for the first time, and the total foreign currency savings of Chinese residents topped 90 billion dollars. The government’s easier control and increased income stimulated outbound travels by Chinese, which inevitably has impact on the people who then influence the

media.

Until a few years ago, very few destinations were approved for such trips, but the controls on the outflow of tourists are slowly being lifted as China seeks reciprocal agreements with foreign countries allowing foreign tourists into China. As of Sept 1 2004, a total of 53 foreign countries are on the list for Chinese tourists to visit. According to the World Tourism Organization, China is among the top 10 nations in terms of outbound tourism consumption. As the Chinese economy continues to grow, the number of Chinese tourists heading overseas each year is expected to grow to around 100 million by 2020 in a major shot in the arm for not just China but the world's travel industry. From 1994 to 2003, the total number of outbound Chinese tourists reached nearly 100 million, up 13.87 percent year-on-year. Statistics showed that 20.2 million Chinese tourists traveled abroad in 2003, up 21 percent from the previous year and surpassing Japanese counterparts for the first time.⁵⁶

Undoubtedly, such trips will have an impact on the attitudes of those who come from a country where access to information is still restricted in certain areas. "It will be a positive element in the progress towards China becoming a more democratic, liberal and civilized place," according to Shi Yinhong, a professor of international relations at the People's University in Beijing.

Already, many of the Chinese tourists who were allowed into Hong Kong in 2003 under a similar agreement showed their interest in political freedoms in the city,

⁵⁶ Xinhua. July 3, 2004.

buying books and magazines on sensitive political topics banned in China. Some even joined political demonstrations.

Apart from the increasing overseas trips, nowadays, more exposure to foreign media is another factor influencing the middle strata. Many kinds of foreign newspaper and magazines, including Newsweek and Times, could be found in most of colleges and universities' libraries, especially in big cities; one could easily find western foreigners to have conversations; and many English learners tune in to the BBC and VOA news and log on the foreign websites. Although these are just the means of learning English, as people do it, they could also read and hear many news stories unreported in China's mainland, including issues such as human rights, freedom of the press, rampant corruption, and the like. Most of these reports just work as an Opposition of the Communist Party, and could never have been on Chinese media still controlled by the Party.

In addition, the power of the media to influence individual-level behavior and attitudes has been changing over the past years. The potential impact of media messages is complex and contingent: some factors may enhance reception but at the same time impede acceptance. According to McGuire's (1968) "two-factor theory," persuasion is dependent first on people being exposed to the message and second on their accepting it.⁵⁷

ATTEMPTS BY GOVERNING ELITES TO MANIPULATE OR RESHAPE PUBLIC OPINION CAN BE AFFECTED BY THEIR LARGER SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT. WHEN A REGIME'S MESSAGES ARE AT ODDS WITH CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL REALITY, THEIR IMPACT MAY BE VERY DIFFERENT FROM THAT INTENDED BUT POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT

⁵⁷ Gunther and Mughan. p.18.

NONETHELESS.⁵⁸ THE OLD PROPAGANDA WAY OF REPORTING CAN NO LONGER HAS THE INTENDED EFFECT ON THE MID-CLASS PEOPLE IN CHINA, ALSO BECAUSE OF "CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN BEINGS THAT ENABLE THEM TO RESIST EFFORTS AT MANIPULATION AND MAINTAIN THEIR INITIAL ATTITUDINAL PREDISPOSITIONS."⁵⁹

UNLIKE THOSE OF A GENERATION OR TWO AGO, CONTEMPORARY VIEWERS TEND TO BE LESS DEEPLY BOUND TO THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND ARE MORE VULNERABLE TO WESTERN MEDIA PERSUASION. BY LATE 1990S, LOYALTIES TO THE PARTY HAD WEAKENED CONSIDERABLY. MOST OF PEOPLE AND COLLEGE STUDENTS JOIN THE PARTY NOT FOR THE NOBLE CAUSE AND THE COMMUNIST BELIEF AS THEIR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS DID, BUT FOR THEIR OWN SELF-INTERESTS. IF THEY ARE PARTY MEMBERS, COLLEGE STUDENTS WILL HAVE MORE OPPORTUNITIES ON ANY OCCASIONS, AND GRADUATES WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO WORK IN THE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS. MEANWHILE, IN ALL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS, PARTY MEMBERS WILL HAVE MORE CHANCES OF GETTING PROMOTED.

Individual's attitude towards campaigns, which used to be a main effective way for mobilization, is a reflection of how ineffective the old propaganda way is in China's current social context. In 2004, the Publicity Department launched a "three studies" (Sanxiang Xuexi) campaign, which called on all the Chinese journalists to study "Three Represents", Marxist journalism, and journalistic ethnics. Liu Yunshan, head of the Publicity Department, said central news organizations form the "national team" on the journalistic front and assume special responsibility in guiding public opinion and setting up good images of journalists. The publicity officials intended that this campaign strengthen the Party principle and improve journalistic ethnic among central media. However, they must be very disappointed to know that even the campaign lasted for more than a year, many journalists in Xinhua, some of them even senior journalists, still didn't know what the "three studies" were referred to.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE IS ABOUT THE COVERAGE OF THE ROLE

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.19.

⁵⁹ Roberts and Maccoby, 1985, 541; Neuman 1991, 87. Cited by Gunther and Mughan. p. 16.

MODEL REN CHANGXIA, WHICH I MENTIONED EARLIER. COVERAGE ABOUT THE LATE EXTRAORDINARY POLICEWOMAN WAS LAVISHLY REPORTED FOR A COUPLE OF MONTHS IN ALMOST ALL THE MEDIA ACROSS CHINA. HOWEVER, ONE JOURNALIST, WHO HERSELF WAS TASKED WITH THE REPORTING, SAID THE CONSECUTIVE COVERAGE REALLY MADE HER FEEL "SICK". SHE ADMITTED THAT REN WAS A REAL HEROIN, BUT THE WAY THE MEDIA PORTRAIT HER DID "NOT MAKE ANY SENSE." HOW AND TO WHAT DEGREE THE MEDIA PORTRAYED REN HAD BEEN PRE-DETERMINED BY THE PUBLICITY DEPARTMENT.

Government Reform: A Return to the Mass line, Rule of Law

Media are more than simple mechanisms for disseminating information: They are complex organizations and an important social institution of society.⁶⁰ The basic linear idea of Marxism, the base-superstructure relationship says the economy is the base of all social structure.⁶¹ If we conclude that the above-mentioned causal factors resulting in the media changes all originate from China's economic reform, then we are neglecting a most important party in the all process -- the government.

It is important to note that without the approval, close supervision and tolerance to a certain degree from China's high-level authorities, media commercialization would not have develop to today's degree, and CCTV would not have tested the line to launch the investigative programs that exposes official corruption and social problems. The new coverage style of reducing the exposure of leaders' activities in the media and to give more coverage to ordinary people just resulted from the authorities' campaign calling for the Party's media to be close to the mass, close to the realities, and close to life (San Tiejin). The establishment of the government spokesman system and regular press briefings in many localities, including Beijing, the Supreme People's Court's announcement that courts at all levels need to put themselves under the scrutiny of the media and the media should be permitted to report trials, and top leaders' visits to the

⁶⁰ Littlejohn, Stephen W. *Theories of Human Communication*. 7th edition. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2002. p.308.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.210.

studios of the Focus program and their support for the program known for its watchdog role, are all part of the government reform, which in turn, impacts on the media.

For Chinese society, among the three fundamental variables of politics, economy and culture, politics is always the most important and decisive one in the final analysis. In China, we can say there would be no social reform including an economic one without a political reform.⁶² Yu Keping pointed out that the Third Plenary Session of the XI Party Central Committee in December 1978, which is usually regarded as a milestone of China's reform and opening up, could be considered as a political reform to stimulate the economic transformation. In view of China's reform in the last two decades, political reform is both an independent variable and a dependent one. The political reform initiated the process of economic pluralization that, in turn, accelerated the political changes and brought about a process of relative political pluralization.⁶³

The media can never separated from the overall political environment in China's any political era. Many of media policies beginning from "top-down reforms"⁶⁴ can be regarded as part of political reform. Therefore, no one should belittle the political reform along with the economic one carried out by the Chinese government and the ruling Communist Party, which have impacted on the content and the way the media operate.

In light of the relationship between media and politics in the Chinese context, media changes also result from the government's overall economic and political policies. Therefore, it is important to examine the characteristics and the political reform momentum of the Party and the government, which not only impact the current media policies but will to some degree decide the

⁶² Yu Keping. *Toward an Incremental Democracy and Governance: Chinese Theories and Assessment Criteria*, July, 2000.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Zhao. p.159.

future development of China's media as well.

Any political discourse is bound by the respective political era.⁶⁵ The political terms that prevailed before are currently replaced by the new ones as the old political era gives way to the new one. Among the most popular political terms from 1949 to 1978 were "revolution", "dictatorship," and "class struggle", but they have disappeared in the list of popular terms since 1978. Instead, new terms like "reform", "rule of law", "stability", "three represents", "human-based", and "scientific and democratic policy-making" are well known to people since then.

Since a smooth leadership transition from Jiang Zemin to the so-called Fourth Generation leadership, President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao have shown their ability to, in Hu's words, "grasp new opportunities, meet new challenges and attain new developments" with an old art of governance – returning to the masses.

A serious gap in the traditional Chinese social system was an almost total lack of institutionalized channels for upward communication. This was epitomized by the popular saying, "the emperor is as remote as the heaven"—that is, totally unreachable. These structural weaknesses—the lack of institutionalized channels for upward communications—were most seriously manifested in the absence of institutionalized mechanisms for either the articulation of interest or the resolution of conflict on a national scale.⁶⁶ Effective use of the communication channels can minimize the perils of internal discord and promote stability and integration as China

⁶⁵ Yu Keping.

⁶⁶ Chu, Godwin C. and Hsu, Francis L.K. ed.. *Societal Integration and Communication in China, China's New Social Fabric*. London: Kegan Paul International, 1983. p.10.

proceeds toward its goals of sustainable development.

Since the Communist Party came to power, every generation of the Chinese leadership has been well aware of the importance in soliciting mass support and creating a decision-making system that is responsive and attentive to the needs of the people. In the mass-line model, only when Party leaders have a clear grasp of popular attitudes, and a sense of the sources and intensity of opposition and support, can policy be adjusted to deflect opposition and maximize support. Although the mass line in its local implementation was considered “a creative and potentially powerful approach to revolutionary leadership”,⁶⁷ there has been a disparity between the mass line ideals and political practices. The Party employed the communication strategies that move primarily from the top leadership to the citizenry, and the bottom-up flow of communication has failed to reach the mark. Acknowledging that the feedback flow is essential to articulating demands from the grassroots and reconciling contradictions between party goals and the aspirations of the citizenry, the current Chinese leadership, which emerged at the 16th Chinese Communist Party Congress in late 2002, has been taking steps to institutionalize the bottom-up communication and encourage the mass participation in the decision-making process in a belief that such moves will help to solve social conflict and divert people’s attention to the greater goal of sustainable development.

With most of the leadership members having received higher education, including post-graduate studies, in engineering and natural sciences, with some in

⁶⁷ Ibid. p.24.

economics and law, the fourth generation finalized the transition from revolutionary veterans to a leadership of technocrats characterized by professionalism and hands-on leadership experiences. While as is natural for a complex nation of 1.3 billion people, the top priority of the leadership will still be maintaining stability, the current Chinese leadership, headed by Hu and Wen, has signaled its preference for a style of governance that is more responsive to public needs as well as the fast-paced demands of the 21st Century.

In nearly three years in office, the Hu-Wen team has forged an image of a close-to-the-masses administration, and vowed to be a government for the people by protecting interests of general public and stressing on the congruence between its policy and mass interests.

Hu and Wen, both of whom earned their first spurs in hard-scrabble western provinces such as Gansu and Guizhou, have imbued a modern meaning to Chairman Mao Zedong's "serve the people" credo. One of President Hu's most frequently cited dicta is the so-called New Three Principles of the People: "Power must be used for the sake of the people; [cadres'] sentiments must be tied to those of the people; and material benefits must be sought in the interest of the people." Specifically, Hu ruled that all party and government units "must base their decision-making and work on considerations of whether the broad masses agree with [official policies] and whether the masses will derive benefits from them." He added that "officials must take a firm grip on questions that are of most relevance, of most concern and have the

most direct bearing on the masses.”⁶⁸

The Hu-Wen team has sought to be closer to the masses by pushing transparency in governance, “a kind of 21st Century glasnost with Chinese characteristics”.⁶⁹ Top leaders make periodic trips to poor hamlets in hilly regions as well as coastal metropolises. They have curtailed the trappings of bureaucracy. In the spring of 2003, Hu made news by abolishing elaborate send-off and welcome-back ceremonies for senior officials going abroad and coming home. He also did away with the annual series of super-secret top-level meetings at the cordoned-off section of the famous Beidaihe summer retreat. For the first time since 1949, meetings of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo -- and fairly detailed summaries of their agendas and contents -- are reported in the media in good time.

More significantly, plans are afoot to afford non-party members and ordinary citizens more chances to participate in politics and governance. Many municipal administrations have set up advisory committees that have recruited experts and professionals, including foreign businessmen. Beijing is also institutionalizing the system of public hearing before decisions are made on issues ranging from the price levels of essential services to bills on traffic regulation.

Equally significant, the Hu-Wen leadership has asked Chinese to exercise “popular supervision” of the government via the media. Official mouthpieces, such as CCTV, have been told to devote less airtime to the routine activities of party and

⁶⁸ Lam, Willy Wo-Lap. *The Chinese Leadership: Blazing New Trails in Reform*. <http://www.weforum.org>, 2003.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

state leaders -- and more publicity to issues that are of concern to the masses.

“There should be less coverage about officials – and more about the people,” Hu said.

“The camera should be after the grassroots; newspaper pages should be reserved for the masses.”

A good example of the leadership’s new responsiveness to the public interest is how they dealt with the SARS epidemics. The initial denial and cover up of the deadly disease posed a serious threat to the well being of people throughout Asia and in parts of North America as well. Jiang Yanyong, a retired army doctor, and Zhong Nanshan, a prestigious expert on contagious diseases, talked with the media, exposing the truth about the extent of the SARS crisis in China and this was in essence a criticism of the central government, and caused a political earthquake in China.

Hu-Wen responded decisively by removing several officials from their leadership positions. They adopted experts’ views on how to handle the epidemic and made sure that Zhong Nanshan was free from persecution from the Guangdong provincial government. Their actions at this critical junction won the support of the general public.

Another example of how Hu and Wen drew on expert advice to effectively handle a crisis is the Sun Zhigang case. Sun was a university graduate and former employee of a large clothing company in China’s southern city of Guangzhou. On March 17, 2003, he was detained by the public security bureau on Guangzhou’s Huangshi Street on the grounds that he failed to show his residential card. On March 20, he was beaten to death during detention. After the case was reported, Ai

Xiaoming, a well-known Chinese scholar, wrote an article on the Internet strongly condemning those who caused his death. Subsequently, more Internet users joined the chorus in support for Ai's article, condemning police brutality. On May 14, three legal scholars in China wrote an open letter to the National People's Congress, calling on the legislature to investigate Sun's death, and to abolish, based on the Chinese constitution, the system of detention for investigation. On May 23, another five scholars wrote to the National People's Congress, calling for a constitutional review of detention for investigation regulations.⁷⁰

Once again, Hu-Wen responded to these requests promptly and positively. As a result of the timely intervention of Hu and Wen, those who were involved in Sun's death were arrested. On June 9, at the first trial, 12 were sentenced to prison, and 23 government and Communist Party officials received different levels of disciplinary action. On June 20, Premier Wen announced the abolition of detention for investigation regulations, and replaced it with "Measures on the Administration of Aiding Vagrants and Beggars Without Means of Livelihood in the City." At the moment, the debate over this issue is still going strong. Many legal scholars continue to argue about the possibilities of a systematic constitutional review, revising the residential registration as well as the deportation/temporary residential card systems.

These developments seem to point to a new beginning in Chinese politics. Even the most cautious analysts have begun to conclude that Hu and Wen are skillful

⁷⁰ Ding Daju. The Role of Chinese Intellectuals in the Hu/Wen Era. A paper in a newsletter published by the CSIS International Security Program and Chinese Media Net, Inc. Vol.1. January 30, 2004.

politicians, trying to seize opportunities to steadily push for their agenda of political reform.⁷¹

The cases of SARS and Sun Zhigang are two of many cases reflecting that the Chinese leadership has accelerated the process of the political reform and focused its efforts on establishment of a scientific decision-making network. Only when a scientific policy-making regime is formed, could the exchange and interaction be guaranteed between the ordinary people and experts and the governments and could democracy be really realized, says Dr. Yang Xuedong, deputy director of the China Research Institute of Government Innovation.⁷²

Through its ongoing political reform, China is trying to provide channels for people to have their say in the nation's political life. A consultative system for policy-making and a public evaluation and supervision system are coming into being, with the participation of both the masses of people and specialists. The system involves the introduction of high-ranking think tanks, creation of independent non-government organizations in policy examination and inspection of national conditions, and encouragement in internal disputes and public discussions on public policies that concern different interests.

Earlier April of 2004, the Counselors' Office of the State Council⁷³ ended its low-profile posture and staged its first press conference in 55 years, unveiling its mysterious image to the public. The office, praised as "China's top think tank",

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² China bringing new vitality into development of political civilization, Xinhua. April 21, 2004.

⁷³ China has 41 government counselors' office one for the State Council, one for the people's Bank and the remaining 39 for local governments, the counselors of which are appointed respectively by the Premier, governors of provinces, chairmen of autonomous regions and mayors of municipalities. The on-going rural tax reform was originally proposed by a counselor in East China's Anhui Province.

mainly consists of representative and influential experts and scholars or those who enjoy prestige in society. Xinhua specially pointed out that “most of them are not members of the Communist Party of China.”⁷⁴

In 2003, China for the first time invited public bidding for research topics on the new five-year plan for the nation’s social and economic development. The foreign Ministry established a public relations section to solicit views from netizens. Xindu District of Chengdu, capital of southwestern Sichuan province, launched an assessment of local officials’ performances, with the participation of some local residents and made public the result via mass media. Plenty of cases have signaled a change in the government, which are pushing forward transparent administration, opening more channels for intellectuals to participate in the decision-making process, and resolving to put itself under public supervision.

In an unprecedented move to build a government for the people, Premier Wen spent 11 minutes, in his annual government work report to the parliament in March 2004, speaking of the government improvement: “We will further transform government functions...adhere to scientific and democratic policy-making...perform all our duties in accordance with the law...consciously accept the oversight of the general public...improve the government’s style of work and improve the overall quality of public servants.” Wen also stressed the idea of human-based development in government building, a concept put forward by the CPC in 2003 calling on the government to care the life of the people, know the condition of the people, and

⁷⁴ Zhao Xiaohui and Wei Wu, Low-key Government Counselors’ Office Makes High Profile Public Debut, Xinhua, April 8 2004.

respect the opinions of the people.

The Wen cabinet also spelled out new deals particularly for the 70% or so of the population that lives in rural areas, including the rescinding of agricultural taxes in five years from March 2004.

Meanwhile, Hu has also been anxious to reinvigorate long-neglected procedures and institutions within the 68-million strong Communist Party. After 13 years of drafting process, in February 2004 the Party published its first ever intra-Party supervision regulations since 1949 in an apparent bid to improve intra-Party democracy and as part of its efforts to fight corruption. The 47-article, 10,000-word Regulations of Internal Supervision of the CPC established 10 kinds of punishing mechanisms for acts of Party members that violate political, personnel and financial regulations and involve in bribery, malfeasance and infringement of others' rights could also invite Party internal penalties. Under the regulations, the Political Bureau, the party's policy-making organ with 25 full and alternate members, must regularly "report its work" to the 198-person Central Committee. Earlier, the Party Constitution only required the Party Central Committee to report its work to the Party's National Congress held once every five years, while the Political Bureau was not obliged to submit any work report. This symbolic gesture was meant to demonstrate that Politburo members, Party leaders at the highest level, would also be subject to necessary supervision.

The regulations, which make detailed stipulations on "collective leadership" and "power division", are also aimed to tighten supervision over the Party's leading officials at all

levels across the country to fill up the existing supervision loopholes. Corruption is seen as a major threat to Party leadership as well as the country's stability and development. The regulations are a signal that china has shifted its anti-corruption supervision style from political reliance to mechanism based, a stride forward in moving the CPC's anti-corruption move efforts toward a legal system.

In 2003, at least 13 Chinese ministers or ministerial-level officials were prosecuted for corruption, including former Minister of Land and Resources Tian Fengshan and former Party chief of north China's Hebei Province Cheng Weigao. According to an on-line survey by Xinhuanet.com, China's largest news website, anti-corruption is the number one concern for respondents.⁷⁵

Analysts see the intra-Party supervision regulations as an important step for the country's democratic progress. The CPC's internal supervision not only includes top-to-bottom supervision, but also bottom-to-top and peer supervision. The regulations resulted from the realization that only by vigorously improving the CPC's internal democracy can the ruling party be full of vitality and halt any possible declines. Han Jiugen, a research fellow with the Party Construction Institute of the Organization Department under the CPC Central Committee, said "As the CPC is the ruling party of China, many party members are officials in government bodies, if their democratic awareness is enhanced, the democratic atmosphere of their departments will be improved."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Che Yuming and Meng Na, China Sentences 6 Corrupt Senior Officials, More Efforts Pledged, Xinhua, March 10, 2004.

⁷⁶ Xinhua. Feb. 19, 2004.

A lot rides on the success or otherwise of the Hu administration's bid to strengthen the rule of law and intra-party democracy. Analysts say while it is far-fetched to expect the Fourth Generation leadership to introduce Western-style democracy in the near term, efforts by the Hu-Wen team to nurture democratic procedures within the party and to promote legal reforms could at least ensure the much-cherished goal of "rendering decision-making more democratic and scientific."

Meanwhile, having realized the country's flimsy legal framework and insufficient respect for established procedures and institutions within the Party and government, the leadership has launched a campaign to promote the authority of the constitution and the law.

In a memorable address marking the 20th anniversary of the promulgation of the 1982 Constitution, President Hu warned that "no organization or individual has special privileges to override the constitution and the law." "We must uphold the basic strategy of ruling the country according to law...We must further consolidate in the entire society consciousness about authority of the Constitution." Premier Wen in his first press conference after becoming Head of the State Council in late 2002 also said that "government departments and civil servants must carry out their duties according to the constitution and the law".

China has done away with a series of statutes deemed incompatible with tenets in the Constitution that protect civil rights and liberties. The above-mentioned Sun Zhigang case is a telling example. In the March of 2004, a Constitutional amendment was passed with addition of the clauses highlighting the protection of

private property, human rights and a comprehensive social security system, a milestone for the human-based efforts. The amendment also established the “three represents”⁷⁷ as the guidance in the state’s political and social life.

It is worth noting that the “three represents” put forward by former president Jiang Zemin is a significant political reform. According to most sources, Jiang Zemin first couched his ideas about Party reform in the catchphrase “three represents” during an inspection tour in Guangdong province in February 2000. He later said, “to scientifically evaluate the Party’s historical status, we proposed the important *thinking* of the ‘three represents’.”⁷⁸ In his vision, the Party of the future would represent the demand for development of “advanced productive forces, China’s advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the largest majority of the Chinese people.”

Few Chinese took Jiang’s remarks seriously at first, assuming it to be just another Party slogan. However, according to a senior Chinese official, Jiang’s “three represents” is actually his initiatives for changing the character of the Chinese Communist Party”. Another official said, “what Jiang was proposing with the ‘three represents’ was a total reform of the Party”, and this interpretation was made explicit in internal documents to its tens of millions of members at that time. He continued: “what these members were told was that the Party would no longer represent just the working classes. Jiang was challenging the historic ‘vanguard’ role of the Party and

⁷⁷ See footnote #16.

⁷⁸ Lewis, John W. and Xue Litai, *Social Change and Political Reform in China: Meeting the Challenge of Success*. The China Quarterly, 2003.

the special place of the proletariat in it.”⁷⁹

In 2001, Jiang’s speech celebrating the 80th anniversary of the Party’s founding devoted more than an hour to the “three represents” and made them the centerpiece of his political strategy. He said:

“The composition of China’s social strata has changed to some extent, since China adopted policy of reform and opening itself to the outside world. There are entrepreneurs and technical personnel employed by scientific and technical enterprises of the non-public sector, managerial and technical staff employed by foreign-funded firms, the self-employed, private entrepreneurs, employed in intermediaries and freelance professionals...Under the guidance of the Party’s principles and policies, most of these people in the new social strata have contributed to the development of productive forces and other undertakings in a socialist society through honest labor and work or lawful business. They work hard with workers, farmers, intellectuals, cadres, and the officers and men of the PLA. They are also working to build socialism with Chinese characteristics.”⁸⁰

In line with the spirit of Jiang’s speech, the Party Constitution was later amended, making it easier for private entrepreneurs to join the Party, an effort to broaden the mass support for the Party

One senior intellectual said: “by making intellectuals, scientists, engineers, managers, and other ‘advanced productive elements’ the representatives of the working class, Jiang is signaling a sharp right turn. He also had to emphasize his commitment to Marxism-Leninism and his adherence to revolutionary ideals. The slogan in Deng’s time in the early 1990s was to ‘make a right turn with a left-hand signal’.”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Meng Na. China’s Private Entrepreneurs Joining Communist Party. Xinhua. Nov. 13, 2003.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Party leaders appear to believe that increasing the nation's pool of creative and entrepreneurial elements can help ensure effective governance and continued stability and economic growth over the long term. The Party must represent the so-called advanced productive forces so that experts, skilled entrepreneurs and intellectuals, and the requisite institutional "political reforms" would thereby more effectively promote the next era of modernization.

The logic behind Beijing's strategic calculus mostly remains in place: the perpetuation of Party rule needs domestic political stability, prolonged political stability requires sustained economic development, and that development depends on a peaceful international environment. Underlying the formulation of the political reform policies has been the still controversial assumption that those policies must be congruent with that bedrock strategic calculus.⁸²

⁸² Lewis and Xue.

Conclusion

Political elites widely, if not universally, believe that the media are of paramount importance in shaping the attitudinal and behavioral orientations which citizens structure towards politics. For this reason, political elites have been very sensitive to the power of information and have developed media policies to suit their economic, social, and political purposes.⁸³

As China calls itself a socialist country with Chinese characteristics, its media and journalism have also been with strong Chinese characteristics, ranging from its media structure and ownership to journalistic convention and the notions that shape Chinese media.

In China, the government-initiated economic reform has resulted in remarkable GDP growth and enormous rise in the standard of living of the Chinese people. In such a context, media have also been put into the market and undergone a great amount of changes. China's media landscape no longer consists of staid newspapers and television broadcasts that once proudly carried the Party's message of increasing production and social stability throughout the country. In fact, most people familiar with China's media would say it represents a market increasingly similar to that of the West, while daily newspapers jostle for circulation and television networks imitate CNN and Fox.

The current features of the Chinese journalistic practice are the result of interactions between various macro- and micro-level factors, including media

⁸³ Gunther and Mughan. ed., P.3.

technology, the nature of basic political institutions, and the characteristics of individual citizens. In today's China, the Internet has become a powerful and popular channel for both the government and ordinary Chinese to hear each other and to be heard. As part of a wider attempt to create a closer identity between the people and the Party, the central Party leadership has promoted a watchdog role for the media. Meanwhile, the increasing number of the educated from the social middle strata, while calling for a transparent government and democratic society, are eager play a role in the decision-making process.

Against today's economic-social-political backdrop, the Party simply cannot pretend that nothing has happened and that it can resort to old forms of control by simply reiterating the Party line. Many signs showed that the government has been making adjustment and changes on the media policy, but with moderate and gradual steps and clearly with a bottom line.

Scott Kronick of Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide (Beijing) describes the Chinese media this way: "Media freedom is a question of utmost sensitivity in China. The leadership wants a critical press to help check official malfeasance, and yet it dreads the idea of inflaming public opinion."⁸⁴

Media commercialization does not change the fundamental conceptualization of Chinese journalism, such as the "Party principle" and the "mouthpiece role". The media regarded by the Party as a bridge between the government and the people have to operate in a dilemma between the Party principle and the market principle. While

⁸⁴ McCullagh, Charles. Chinese Media Market. March 11, 2004.

making efforts to satisfy the demand from the audience, the media also have to listen to the directions issued from by the Publicity Department.

The Iraq war case demonstrated the ability and ambition of the Chinese media and journalists in competing with their international counterparts. However, the whole process of the SARS coverage, from the initial blackout to the later full exposure, reflected the conflicts between the longtime Party principle to the people principle, a relatively new concept initiated by the current administration.

What gives us hope is the case of Sun Zhigang. In addressing this case, the government has shown its ability to face the challenges and outcry from the masses and the intellectuals and willingness to accept their advice and opinions, instead of muzzling them. But of course, this only happened at least on one condition -- the "social stability" would not be imperiled.

LIBERALIZATION OF THE MEDIA COULD ALSO BE REGARDED AS PART OF AN INTENTIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF OTHER MORE HIGHLY VALUED POLITICAL OBJECTIVES.⁸⁵ CHINESE AUTHORITIES RELAXED THE STATE'S CONTROL ON THE MEDIA AS A WAY TO DIVERGE THE PENT-UP DISSATISFACTION AND TO MOBILIZED PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THEIR ASSAULT ON THE BUREAUCRATIC MALPRACTICE AND UNPRECEDENTED RAMPANT CORRUPTION THAT ARE STULTIFYING SOCIETY AND IGNITING THE ANGER OF MASS PUBLIC. MEDIA LIBERALIZATION IS ALSO AN UNINTENDED BY-PRODUCT OF THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO FREE-MARKET ECONOMICS AND THE CONSEQUENT COMMERCIAL PRESSURES TO PROVIDE MORE OPEN AND ENTERTAINMENT-ORIENTED CONTENT VALUED BY CONSUMERS IN AN ESSENTIALLY DEMAND-BASED ECONOMY.

Media reform reflects a gradualist approach to social and political reform in China. Although there are still boundaries and constraints, the political environment of the media has become much more open and freer than before.

⁸⁵ Gunther and Mughan, p. 14.

ON THE PART OF THE GOVERNMENT, IT SHOULD CORRECTLY UNDERSTAND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MUCKRAKING REPORTING OF THE MEDIA AND THE GOVERNMENT. IT IS "NOT TO STIR UP TROUBLES AND TO CAUSE MORE TURBULENCE IN THE SOCIETY, BUT TO ELIMINATE SOCIAL CONFLICTS AND FACILITATE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND STABILITY," SAID ZHAN JIANG, PROFESSOR OF THE CHINA YOUTH UNIVERSITY FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE. CONSERVATIVE BUREAUCRATS BEAR A BELIEF THAT MASS PARTICIPATION WILL ONLY LEAD TO CHAOS. HOWEVER, MASS PARTICIPATION HAS A NUMBER OF OTHER FUNCTIONS. IT CAN ENHANCE AN INDIVIDUAL CITIZEN'S SENSE OF EFFICACY, OFFER VALVES FOR PENT-UP DISSATISFACTION, CHECK CADRE ABUSES OF POWER, AND PROMOTE THE INTERNALIZATION OF PARTY NORMS.⁸⁶ IN THE FAST-CHANGING SOCIETY, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS SHOULD ADJUST TO THE CHANGING SOCIAL-ECONOMIC-POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT, REPLACE THE BUREAUCRACY-ORIENTED MEDIA POLICY WITH PEOPLE-ORIENTED ONE, AND THINK MORE OF "PEOPLE PRINCIPLE" INSTEAD OF "PARTY PRINCIPLE. ANYTHING THAT IS TO THE INTEREST OF THE PEOPLE SHOULD NOT BE THE OFF LIMITS. THUS, THE MEDIA REFORM WOULD BE ABLE TO PROGRESS SUCCESSFULLY AND INDEED WORK AS A STABILIZER IN THE SOCIETY.

IN SHORT, WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR THE CHANGES IN THE MEDIA IS THE CHANGING SOCIAL-ECONOMIC-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA. IN THE COMPLEX SYSTEM, MANY FACTORS INTERACT AND AFFECT EACH OTHER. IT IS NATURAL THAT THE PROCESS OF OPENING UP CHINA'S MEDIA WILL BE UNEVEN AND FULL OF FLUCTUATIONS.

THERE WILL SURELY BE MORE TEMPORARY RESTRICTIONS AS JOURNALISTS TEST THE LIMITS OF WHAT IS NOW ACCEPTABLE. BUT EVEN WITH OCCASIONAL SETBACKS, CHINA'S MEDIA SECTOR IS SURE TO SEE EVEN GREATER CHANGES AND TO HEAR A PLURALITY OF VOICES. THE MASS COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA ARE THE CONNECTIVE TISSUE OF DEMOCRACY,⁸⁷ BUT DEMOCRACY WILL HAVE TO BE BROUGHT ABOUT BY REFORMERS WITHIN THE PARTY, JOURNALISTS, AND DEMOCRATIC FORCES THROUGHOUT THE SOCIETY. AS ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF 'ORIENTAL HORIZON', CHEN MENG, SAYS:

Carrying out reform in China is a process of groping your way and testing what is possible by trying what you had not dared to do before. No one ever tells you that there is a field you can now report which was not allowed previously. The unique possibility is to fumble your way into new fields and let everybody recognize that your experiment is good. Consequently your practice is successful

⁸⁶ Chu, Godwin C. and Hsu, Francis L.K. ed. p.50.

⁸⁷ Gunther and Mughan ed. p.1.

and accepted by the government and the public.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Chen Meng. *The rise of Chinese Documentary Filmmaking and its Engagement with Ordinary People*, 2001. cited in Li Xiaoping.