

**Mass Media as Instruments for Political and Social Control in China:**

**Media Role in Chinese Politics**

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(ABSTRACT)

Under the influence of Soviet media theory, Chinese media have been held under the control of the Communist Party of China ever since the Party was established in 1921. However, this practice of control was subject to change as a result of rapid economic development and many social changes brought about by economic reform after 1978. This thesis explores the current situation of media control in China. Although the mass media in China began to enjoy more autonomy and diversity after the nation adopted its policies of reform and opening up to the outside world, given that political reform did not keep pace with economic reform, this study hypothesizes that the degree of government control varied according to the nature of the issues involved. It is expected that there would be tighter government control over the media in reporting political issues than reporting economic and social issues. The result of these case studies confirmed the original hypothesis. This study demonstrates that the relaxation of media control only happened in the non-political sphere. For those issues with political implications, there remained tight government control. In other words, the media are still used as instruments for political and social control in current day China. This study also explores the detailed approaches adopted by the government in controlling media content, management and operation. Furthermore, based on the study of both the historical development and the current situation of media control in China, this research points out the possible future developments for media control in China.

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# Chapter One: Overview

## Introduction

Under the influence of Leninism, Chinese media have been held under the control of the Communist Party of China (CPC) ever since the establishment of the party in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the practices of political control exerted over the mass media have been subject to many changes as a result of economic reform and opening-up to the outside world.

In view of the fact that little systematic research has been conducted to explore the current situation of media control in China, the purpose of this study is to map out the dynamics of Chinese media control in the reform era. Given that political reform has not kept pace with economic reform in China, I argue that the degree of government control over the media is issue-based rather than ideology-based. To be more specific, I expect that there will be tighter government control over media in reporting issues related to politics rather than issues related to economic and social life.

## Importance of This Study

The mass media have exerted, and are still exerting great influence on a wide range of political and social issues as powerful communication tools. On the one hand, media can be used as political instruments for building a nation and promoting the legitimacy of a regime by shaping the nation's political culture and influencing its public opinion. On the other hand, media can function as watchdogs of government performance. Realizing that mass media can play very important roles in influencing politics, scholars in both political science and communication studies have conducted considerable research to explore the interaction between media and politics. Black's *Politics and News* (1982), Horowitz's *Power, Politics and People* (1963), Seymour-Ure's *The Political Impact of Mass Media*, Well's *Mass Media and Society* (1972), Collins and Murrioni's *New Media New Politics* (1996), Wheeler's *Politics and the Mass Media* (1997), Sproule's *Propaganda and Democracy* (1997) and Patriack and Scheufele's *Media Effects on Political and Social Trust* (2000) are examples in this regard. In the specific case of the United States, and after long-term study of media effects, researchers have formulated

various theories to explain media's role in politics. Among them, Lasswell's propaganda theory (1938), McComb and Shaw's agenda-setting theory (1972) and Tuchman's framing analysis theory (1978) are the most relevant ones in the study of media effects on politics. They all directly study the interaction between media and politics, and each study assumes that media can play a powerful role in influencing politics both within one nation and between nations. Besides, there are also other theories that can be used in the study of the interaction between media and politics, such as cultivation theory and integrated theory. Although they touch upon the topic indirectly, they could be very useful in analyzing the formation of public opinion and the political behavior of politicians under various circumstances as well.

No media are completely free from government control. In this sense, the media can be considered as windows through which we can view the landscape of politics within one nation. In other words, the media can be used as explanatory factors for politics. Unlike many of the liberal-democratic societies, where great attention has been given to the roles of mass media in affecting the nations' political life, the media's roles have been marginalized, if not ignored completely, in the study of Chinese politics and society at large. Although there are a number of available studies on the media's role in Chinese politics, few of them provide systematic and updated analysis of the dynamics of the media in reformed China for most of them are either chapters of certain books or journal articles. Due to lack of access to updated information on Chinese politics as well as to cultural and ideological reasons, Chinese politics has proven to be relatively uninterpretable to most Western people. Most of them know China is a communist country, but their knowledge of the nation's politics stops almost right there. Instead of taking the specific cultural background of the nation into consideration, they tend to develop their understanding about the nation solely around communist ideology. Few of them know the historical development of the Chinese socialist regime, let alone subtlety of the political behavior of Chinese politicians. This explains why there is no difference in American students' impression of China and other communist nations. This situation can be greatly improved if one could figure out the variables to more effectively explain it. When we examine things from a different perspective, we are more likely to achieve a better understanding of it. Mass media are excellent examples in this regard. By probing

the roles of the mass media in Chinese politics, hopefully I can develop a perspective for interpreting Chinese politics that differs from the conventional studies of China, which usually focus on the nation's culture, economy and philosophy.

Due to the specific historical background of China, the mass media have been held under the control of the government ever since the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The imprisonment of authors for writing something considered offensive by the imperial court (also known as literary inquisition) in the late Qing Dynasty was an extreme example of this. Later, after the rule of the Qing dynasty was overthrown by the Nationalist Party of China (also known as the Kuomintang, or KMT), under the influence of Leninism, Chinese media were also used instrumentally in spreading revolutionary ideas. Although there were moments of relaxation of media control during the rule of the Nationalist Party of China, the period was both brief and transitory. The control practices of the Qing government and the KMT obviously differ from each other; however, one shared characteristic of the two regimes is that mass media have been constantly under the thumb of the government. In this sense, media control in China has both traditional and Leninist roots. The instrumental use of media reached a peak during the Civil Wars Period both in KMT and CPC practices. As an important channel to expand their influence, various media campaigns had been launched in both the base area of the CPC and the KMT with an aim of achieving their respective political goals. Realizing the important role of the mass media in both revolution and state-building, the CPC practiced nationwide control over mass media right after the PRC was established in 1949. Consequently, instead of actively playing a watchdog role that exposes injustice in the system like in most liberal-democratic societies; Chinese media have been mainly used by both the Chinese government and the CPC as instruments for controlling public opinion and maintaining the legitimacy of the system.

Historically, the CPC has successfully used the communication system to mobilize and control the population, and to raise the level of political consciousness of even the most apathetic. This function of the media as propaganda tools has been studied by scholars from different perspectives. Bishop's *Qilai! Mobilizing One Billion Chinese: Chinese Communication System* (1989), Liu's *Problems in Communication in China's Modernization* (1982), Goldman's *The Role of the Press in Post-Mao Political Struggles*

(1994), Dittmer's *The Politics of Publicity in Reform China* (1994), Polumbaum's *Striving for Predictability: The Bureaucratization of Media Management in China* (1994) and Fang's *Riots and Demonstrations in Chinese Press: A Case Study of Language and Ideology* (1994)) are some of the examples in this regard. The scholarly interest in the propaganda role of the Chinese media definitely provides important clues for understanding Chinese politics.

However, I think the over-emphasis of this ideology-driven role made the other roles played by the media in the reform era marginalized and sometimes even invisible. When serious efforts are made to update the study of the Chinese media in certain rare cases, analysis of the changes in mass media functions during the reform era is either oversimplified or outdated. These apparent weaknesses leave ample room for improvement in the study of the interaction between Chinese media and politics. Take Deanna Campbell Robinson's *Changing Functions of Mass Media in the People's Republic of China* (1981) as an example. Although she realized the changes in the media role in reformed China, her analysis of the reasons behind this is too simplified. She has exaggerated the role of commercialization both in the changes of media role in the reform era and in the future democratization of mass media in China by suggesting media commercialization eventually will bring democracy to China. Overwhelmed by various changes in the media's role in the reform era, she became so optimistic about the prospect of the media development in China that she claimed that "the *People's Daily* and other Chinese media may one day be indistinguishable from their western counterparts---promoting consumer goods, fostering viewing of (individually owned) TV sets, dampening group discussion and active political interest, and presenting a conception of the worked as an arena for unresolvable social conflict and drama." (1981, 72)

*Media, Market and Democracy in China* by Yuezhi Zhao (1998) is another example. Zhao has developed many insights into Chinese media in the reform era based on a good deal of research; however, there is still room for further improvement in certain areas. She has generalized the characteristics of mass media in current day China as a combination of market logic and party logic. Generally speaking this appears accurate, for there is evidence that economic reform has brought about partial media autonomy and diversity to Chinese media. However, the problems with her research lie in an



overemphasis on the ideological control of the media in the reform era. Despite the diversified role of media in contemporary China, she claimed that mass media are still tightly controlled by party ideology. In reality, with the introduction of economic reform, there has been a weakening of party ideology in Chinese society. This means party ideology is no longer as relevant as before.

During the reform era, the media started to play multiple roles in Chinese society rather than being solely propaganda tools of the government. The changes in media role are a combined result of several factors. No single reason alone can provide a satisfactory explanation. In view of the problems of existing research on Chinese media, I decided to conduct my own research, which is aimed at addressing the above-mentioned problems and providing answers to the following questions: What is the theoretical basis for media control in China? What is the current situation of media control in China? What are the implications of media control for contemporary Chinese politics? And what is the future development of these practices of control?

## **Methodology**

I rely on several case studies to illustrate the recent situation of media control in China. The cases selected are the 1989 Beijing Student Movement, the Three Gorges Dam Project and the Falun Gong Movement. These cases were used in an exploratory way, for by studying these cases I was aimed to further understand actions by the Chinese government and the CPC to control the media. One important reason for selecting these three cases is that the three cases are all important in their right in that they have revealed important information about political, economic and social dynamics in reformed China respectively.

Besides, since the time order of the three cases is chronological, review of the media coverage of these three events can reveal some rules of change in the development of Chinese media control. This, in turn, may also provide some indications about the future development of media control in China.

Third, although all of the cases selected for analysis here had some political impact, their political implications vary in degree: the 1989 Student Movement was a political movement that aimed to change the government; the Three Gorges Dam was mainly an

economic project with political implications; Falun Gong is a social movement that threatens the rule of the CPC and Chinese government. By comparing and contrasting these cases, I hope to figure out the differences in the government control on media reports of different kinds of issues.

In short, the variety of cases selected and the time order of them make it possible to develop a relatively complete picture of media control in China. Besides, the comparison and contrast among the cases also make it possible to develop some understanding about the future development of media control in China. To conduct the case studies, I will rely on textual analysis to examine media reports of the three issues. That means I will study a variety of things including the choice of words, the tone and the layout of the newspaper. The major media outlet used in this study is the *People's Daily*.

As I mentioned before, the major media outlet used for conducting the case studies is the most authoritative official medium in China---the *People's Daily*. The reason why I chose to focus my study on this newspaper is that as an organ of the central committee of the CPC, the *People's Daily* not only has an official duty to be the voice of the party, that is, to propagate the party's line, directive and policies but it also plays a role of the liaison officer between the party and the people, telling the people what the party expects them to do and reporting their views and wishes to the party leadership.

Given the position of the *People's Daily* in China, all the local and provincial newspapers will rely on the *People's Daily* to gather important information about the possible patterns in government control. On one hand, if there is any indication of tight control in the *People's Daily*, all the local media outlets will become extremely cautious about their reports and there would be serious self-censorship among different media. On the other hand, if there is a wide range of viewpoints in the *People's Daily*, the local media will be free from the fear of not following the directives of the government and the post-publication censorship and punishment incurred thereby, and will swiftly include far more diversified points of views in their reports. In either case, any minor change in the *People's Daily* is likely to bring about great if not tremendous changes in the local media.

Textual analysis is an essential way for research on the media to be carried out successfully. I rely on newspaper articles, most of which are from the *People's Daily* to conduct textual analysis for the three cases selected for this study. Given the differences

in the nature of these events, the durations of the reports on the selected cases also vary from case to case. The general rule for deciding the time period of the coverage of the three case studies is to focus on the peak period of media reports on the three events. For example, the 1989 Student Movement started to attract wide media attention on April 15, 1989 and became marginalized in domestic media shortly after the movement ended on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1989. Therefore, the time period for studying this case will be between April 15, 1989 and the end of June 1989. For the Three Gorges Dam, since the most heated discussion of the project happened right before the National People's Congress approved the construction of the project on April 3, 1992, the time period for studying this case will be from early 1992 to the end of April 1992. Although there are still on-going struggles between the government and Falun Gong disciples, the most valuable period for studying the media coverage of the issue is from the point when the movement aroused great concerns among the government officials in 1999 by demonstrating in front of Zhongnanhai to the point when the government officially denounced Falun Gong as illegal and launched a media campaign to crack down on Falun Gong.

Due to the spatial distance between China and the United States, I have limited access to certain materials. However, thanks to the development of electronic media, I am able to obtain a reasonable amount of materials needed to complete the study. To fulfill the task of doing textual analysis for the three cases, I have also taken advantage of my background as an international student from China by asking relatives and friends back in China to collect some relevant materials for me. I also contacted some of my former classmates at the Foreign Affairs College who are working in relevant departments of Foreign Ministry or media outlets for information on the detailed practices of news framing in China either by email or telephone.

### **Outline of Thesis**

In the second chapter of the thesis, I will explore the theoretical basis for the practices of control over media in China. Media control is not a practice invented by the government of the PRC; rather it was borrowed from Soviet media theory, which is based on Marxism and Leninism in particular. According to Soviet media theory, media are political instruments for unity as well as instruments of the agitator, propagandist and

organizer. *Prosva*, *Vperyod* and *Novaya Zhisn* were all launched to spread communist ideas and aid the revolutionary cause. This concept of communication was closely integrated with the concept of the Soviet State. To thoroughly understand the theoretical basis for media control in China, the chapter provides a detailed description of Soviet media theory. Moreover, to help readers to better understand Soviet media theory, it also includes some background information about the Soviet State. Although Soviet media theory served as the theoretical basis for media control in China, it could in no way be replicated in the Chinese system without considering Chinese reality.

Chapter Three focuses on the historical development of media control in China. Media control has both traditional and Leninist roots in China. Although this chapter will explore both the control practice in late Qing dynasty and during the Republic of China, the focus of the chapter is the dynamics of media control in the People's Republic of China. The practices of control over mass media in the PRC were borrowed from the Soviet system; however, there have been both changes and continuities since it was introduced into China. The history of government control of mass media in the PRC is actually the history of the CPC's control over the media. To trace the historical development of media control in China, Chapter Three mainly explores the media roles in Chinese politics since the CPC was founded. Media control in China has experienced great changes over the past several decades; details of these changes will be touched upon in this chapter as well.

Throughout the history of the People's Republic of China, there has been control over the media for various purposes. Right after the CPC was established in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, media were used as propaganda tools for spreading revolutionary ideas. Later in the early days of the People's Republic of China, the government and the party also used media as tools for legitimizing and consolidating communist rule in China. To allow media to best serve the political interests of the nation, the Chinese government adopted various approaches in practicing control.

In terms of media management, there was a strong hierarchical system that brought the control of the Party directly down to the journalists. In China, the Politburo leaders oversaw the activities of the Party's propaganda department, which has the job of monitoring China's many newspapers. In addition, all newspapers in China were required

to be registered and attached to a government ministry, institute, research facility, labor union or other state-sanctioned organization. This means all of them were subject to the supervision of the government and the party committees at various levels. As to the control of content, the government formulated various guidelines and directives for the media outlets to follow. The Party's committees would provide detailed instructions for reporting important issues. They not only defined topics to be given attention for specific period that became the focus of campaigns but also gave directions about the layout of newspapers. Moreover, a post-publication punishment mechanism also was employed to keep journalists under government supervision. The news in the official papers was thus a product of both pre-publication censorship and post-publication punishment in Mao's era. Media control was evident and pervasive before the reform era. Part of the chapter will be devoted to various approaches adopted by both the government and the CPC to control the media in China.

The role of the mass media as a mouthpiece of the government and the tools for ideological control were subject to change in the reform era. Guided by the principle of “seeking truth from facts and emancipating the mind” put forward by Deng Xiaoping in his Southern tour in 1992, the nation ceased to emphasize the empty propaganda of party ideology, rather it began to value pragmatic ideas and work styles. This change of the party line finally has brought about unprecedented prosperity and many social changes to China. As a result of these changes, the media began to enjoy unprecedented diversity and autonomy. Radio and television stations, which were mostly limited to central and provincial levels in the 1970s, were expanded to the municipal/prefecture and county levels; the network of party organs was extended, and pre-publication censorship was also cancelled. Moreover, a variety of special interest newspapers began to be published by party departments, business enterprises and other organizations. In terms of media content, as a result of increased media autonomy and diversity, politics and party ideology have ceased to be the only topics of coverage by major media outlets; mass media began to include paid advertisements and increased coverage of entertainments and social news, sometimes even stories about crime and corruption in government. In short, this trend towards more diversity and autonomy allows the media to enjoy more freedom in the reform era.

However, does this mean that the media have become free from government control? As a result of economic reform and social changes, mass media in China today are definitely developing towards more autonomy in management and greater diversity in their content. However, given the fact that the reform in China only happened in the field of economy, and political reform has not kept pace with the economic reform, it is logical to hypothesize that although the government allowed media freedom in reporting economic and social issues, it never loosened its control over media reporting on politics. In other words, I expect the degree of media control will vary according to the nature of the issues involved. I am going to conduct several case studies in Chapter Four to test this hypothesis.

As mentioned before, the cases selected for this study include media coverage of the 1989 Student Movement, the Three Gorges Dam Project, and the Falun Gong movement. One of the reasons for choosing these cases is that all three happened after the nation adopted the policy of reform and opening-up to the outside world. Among these cases, the 1989 student movement is the focus of my study. This specific case will be further explored by comparing and contrasting it with the other two cases. Since chapter three mentioned that media began to enjoy more autonomy and diversity during the reform era, one might expect that the coverage of all of these issues would provide a full range of views. However, given the specific reform policy adopted by Chinese government in late 1970s, I expect that there would be much tighter government control over media reports of the 1989 student movement than over reports on the Three Gorges Dam project and Falun Gong.

Chapter Five builds on the findings of the case studies discussed in Chapter Four. Based on the results, I will generalize about the current situation of media control in China and make my own predictions about the future development of the practice in China. I will also reflect on the research I have done for this study and suggest some possible means of improving upon the current research.

### **Limitations of the Research**

As mentioned above, I mainly rely on case studies to test the hypothesis I have formulated. However, it is always dangerous to generalize from such result. First, no

matter how typical the selected cases are, there is always something special in each case, which might limit the generalizability of the research result and eventually reduce the external validity of the research. Second, given the small number of cases selected for this study, it is possible that the hypothesis might have been rejected if we included more cases with a wider dimension to this study. Besides I mainly confined my research to one of the official media--- the *People's Daily* in most of the cases. This will weaken external validity as well as reliability of the research result. Given that the purpose of the research is to study government control on Chinese mass media as a whole, my focus on one official medium will definitely result in a loss of much other important information. If this research had included a variety of official media reports on the three cases, the research results would have been far richer. Furthermore, the current research is limited to the examination of recorded communications. Although they could be oral, written, or graphic, still they must be recorded in some fashion to permit analysis. This excludes a lot of unrecorded information, which might play a very important role in controlling media reports in the three cases.

Moreover, the research is also restricted by possible selection bias. The news reports of the three cases were collected by my parents in China. Given that it is impossible for them to send me the complete version of all the relevant newspapers, I just asked them to send all the relevant reports on the three issues during a specific period of time me either by email or hard copies. Since everyone has her/his own definition for the word “ relevant”, there were inevitably selection biases in this regard. What they considered relevant might not be that useful to me; while what I might take as important may possibly ignored by them as irrelevant.

Finally, another possible limitation of the study is that my reading and interpretation of the media text may have an influence on what I find. This means my interpretation of certain media content might be influenced by my preconception, which was shaped by the available literature as well as my personal experiences with Chinese media. Although I have tried not just to find materials that supported the overall hypothesis, still much of the materials I used for this research emphasized the tight government control on Chinese media.

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Background**

As one of the earliest civilizations in the world with a recorded history of nearly 4,000 years, the mass media have had a long history in China. Although there was no developed media system until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese government started to implement forms of control over the media right after their development gained momentum in the country. The imprisonments or executions used to punish authors for writing something considered offensive by the imperial court in late Qing Dynasty was an example of this. The traditional roots of government control on media were definitely there. However, given the focus of the thesis, which is on the method of media control in the socialist People's Republic of China, this discussion will examine those control practices that were borrowed mostly from the Soviet Union. This chapter, then, will explore Soviet media theory as the theoretical basis for party and government control of mass media in China.

No media is completely free from government control. Still, the practice of using media to propagate government policies and directives is something that is more characteristic of the nonliberal-democratic societies. Due to the close relationship between the Soviet Union and China in the 20<sup>th</sup> century history, media control practices in China have been greatly influenced by the Soviet system. This chapter explores both the background and the characteristics of Soviet media theory. Based on these facts, I will explain the reasons that the CPC applied Soviet media theory in China. In other words, I will answer the following question: how was and how can the Soviet media theory still be successfully implemented in China.

### **The Political and Historical Background for Soviet Media Theory**

To understand Soviet media theory, first of all, we have to look at the larger backdrop behind it. As Siebert mentioned in his *Four Theories of Mass Media*, the basic Soviet understanding of the media was that media were “collective propagandist, collective agitator, instruments to be controlled by the state, instruments of social change and social control, and instruments of serious purpose”. (Siebert 1972, 116) Based on this theory, Lenin and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) had invested large



sum of money and immense effort in organizing a propaganda machine in the nation. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lenin launched *Iskra* (the Spark), which served as the most important propaganda newspaper ever to be printed in Soviet history to spread communist ideas. Later under his organization, several other newspapers such as *Vperyod* (Forward), *Novaya Zhisn* (new life) and *Pravda* (Truth) were also launched one after the other to aid the revolutionary cause. (Oliver Thomson 1977) Moreover, the Party used radio, cinema and television as its propaganda tools. In short, all available media outlets were employed as instruments for spreading the communist party's revolutionary ideas, propagating party lines and directives, exciting the masses and promoting party images.

This Soviet or Leninist concept of media was not directly borrowed from Marxism, even though, many of its ideas evolved from Marxist ideas. First, it conceived of the media as a branch of government that was designed to shoulder the responsibilities for interpreting party doctrine for the CPSU and implementing government's policies and directives. This was closely connected with the Marxist concept of party/state unity, which would not permit the press to function as a fourth estate, independently criticizing government or serving as a forum for free discussion like in most liberal-democratic societies. Moreover, Soviet media theory also insisted that the government owned the facilities of mass media. This idea was derived from the Marxist notion of material determinism, which suggested that control of the press can only be achieved by owning the facilities and the broadcasting stations since the media, like other institutions of the state, were the result of the party acting as the class for itself in the era of revolutionary contention prior to the attainment of communism. So long as the working class controlled these physical means and facilities of mass communication, part of their real access to the channels of communication would be ensured. (Siebert 1972) Based on such Marxist ideas, mass communication was thus conceived instrumentally as a tool of political power from the beginning of the proletarian revolution.

The Marxist origin of Soviet media theory obscured the distinction between media theory and state theory in the Soviet Union. "The Soviet media have grown so as to reflect the Soviet official ideology, the Soviet state, and the Soviet 'ideal personality' ". (Siebert 1972, 116) In other words, the concept of communication became integrated

with the articulation of the larger concept of the Soviet state, which was the central source of power, the basis of leadership and the root of a socialist nature for the state.

The Soviet theory of state held that the source of power was social, resident in people, latent in social institutions and generated in through greater modes of action. And this power could be maximized when it was jointed with natural resources, new facilities of production and distribution and then organized and directed effectively by the CPSU. (Siebert 1972) This emphasis on the combination of both intellectual and material unity explains why the Soviet maintained tight control over media content, media resources and facilities.

As for the source of leadership, Soviet leaders believed that the communist party must serve as the leader of the revolution, for Lenin had pointed out that truly engage radical social consciousness could not emerge spontaneously from the working class (Su, 1994). Thus as organizer, the vanguard party had the responsibility of guiding and administering the masses by acting as what Siebert called the “custodian of basic doctrine, eyes and ears for the mass” (Siebert 1972, 117). As a vanguard for the proletariat, which was meant for only establishing the working classes’ control structure, the CPSU was intended to successfully mobilize and direct the energy of the toiling masses and transform the diffuse population in Soviet Union into a source of power. This gave the party leaders unlimited power in practicing control over the mass.

In line with this theory of state, it was assumed that the truth was arrived at through collective deliberation of the party members in the practice of “democratic socialism”. This meant that party members had full freedom of discussion before a final decision was made by the party congress. However after the civil war between the reds and whites after the October revolution, the party leaders began to doubt the efficiency of the system later. After the party’s 10<sup>th</sup> congress, and increasingly during the 1920s, broad discussion was abolished and it was replaced by a much smaller group discussion only among the top party leaders. Before the end of the 1930s, the CPSU’s party congresses were called chiefly to approve decisions already made by the political elites. These political changes allowed a small number of leaders to make political decisions on all key state issues. Because of a lack of criteria for judging truth, this inevitably created highly unstable and quite changeable lines for party policies and directives. What was considered true

yesterday may be condemned tomorrow. This was also the reason why Siebert claimed truth is irrelevant in the editing of a Soviet newspaper. (1972)

The theory of the Soviet state and the decision making processes in the USSR allowed a small group of top party leaders to legitimize their unlimited power and tight control over the society as well. As a result, the central party leadership became the only and the most authoritative source for mass communication in the Soviet Union. The mass media in the Soviet Union became speaking trumpets for the leaders of the state.

### **Instrumental Use of Mass Media in the Soviet State**

Mass communication clearly was used as an instrument of party control in the Soviet Union. As the tool of the state and the party, the media were integrated with other instruments of state power and party influence. Mass media in Soviet Union were not only used as instruments of creating unity within the state and the party, but they also were used exclusively as instruments of propaganda and agitation by the politburo of the CPSU.

First, as an instrument of the state and the party in the Soviet Union, the communication system, like every other instrument in the state, was used strategically to contribute to the advancement of what the CPSU's leadership imagined to be "the great cause of the working class" as well as to "maintain and advance the power of Soviets". Therefore, instead of being a clear and independent mirror of events, media were used as agitators to incite revolutionary fervor and propagate both the party line and state directives.

Second, the integration of mass communications with other instruments of Soviet state power and party influence made it relatively impossible for much of the media to play a forth estate role in the Soviet. Unlike in liberal societies where forces such as interpersonal discussion within primary groups, organizations, media reporting and the actions of the government worked together to influence public opinion, many of these forces were united as one in the Soviet Union. As a result, there were rarely divergent points of views expressed among forces such as schools, unions, newspapers and the governments. Issues of local, environmental, municipal or regional concern occasionally

were discussed with openness, especially after 1956. Still, for the most part, there was little critical debate until after 1985 and the Gorbachev reforms.

Third, media were also used as instruments for enforcing unity in the Soviet Union. Realizing the importance and efficiency of mass media in fostering unity of knowledge in the nation, Soviet leaders had made painstaking efforts to establish controls and censorship over their own publications, broadcasts and films and to silence rival ideologies and kick most reporters of the foreign media out of the country.

Finally, mass communication was also used as the main mode for propaganda in support of government policy to organize the masses. To achieve unity of the people, there was always need for such a propagandist and organizer, whose words and deeds fit into the organizing activities of the party. The mass communication system as well as the offices of the CPSU's party apparatus shouldered this responsibility in Soviet Union. They were used to both raise the consciousness of the masses and inform the lesser leaders of thoughts and practices to contribute to the smooth functioning of the party and the organization of the workers.

The communist party definitely made great efforts in organizing a powerful propaganda machine in the USSR. Take one of the leading newspapers in Soviet Union, *Pravda*, as an example: as one of the first newspapers launched by the party, *Pravda* not only represented the party's voice but also functioned as an authoritative public source on almost every issue. The arrangement of the newspaper's layout well reflected the Soviet idea of the mass media as collective propagandists, collective agitators, and instruments to be controlled by the state, instruments of social change and social control, and instruments of serious purpose. The paper was mainly composed of three parts. The first and foremost part of the paper was party directives in various forms, including the leaders' words in editorials, speeches, articles and official announcements. This part served as the source of authority, inspiration and explanation of party policy. According to Jeffery Brooks, this part accounted for roughly half the space devoted to domestic affairs in *Pravda* from 1918 to 1928 and comments by revolutionary leader and editorials alone constituted 10 to 20 percent of the space on domestic affairs in the period. (1995). In order to fulfill the role of media as the collective organizer, there was also one portion of the paper reserved for lower-level supporters such as workers, peasants, soldiers and

other participants in the construction of Soviet society. Columns such as “Worker’s Life” or “Party life” were included in this part of the paper. Moreover, there was also a relatively informal part of the paper, which made up roughly a fifth of the total space on the domestic affairs. This part was less ideological and directive but more informational in that it was mainly about the actual events taking place in the country. As the party organ, *Pravda* was obviously ideologically driven, for no space was left for human-interest stories and reports of diverse happenings. All of the content in the newspaper served the political goals of the party and conformed to the Soviet media concept.

These practices of control over the mass media were justified by Leninist ideology. It has been attacked by liberal democratic societies for its apparent lack of freedom and integrity. (Siebert 1972) In response to outside criticism, Soviet leaders argued that their mass media system was a responsible one compared to the so-called free media system of the west, for the Soviets used media mainly for serious purposes rather than unworthy topics such as entertainment. Moreover, according to them, all citizens enjoyed freedom of speech, the press, assembly, meeting, street parades and demonstration in the Soviet state. However, it was also made clear that these freedoms were guaranteed with one condition: they must be utilized in accord with what the CPSU leadership saw as the interests of the toiling masses and to serve as what the politburo regarded as the end of strengthening the socialist social order. Soviet leaders believed their state was a positive good, a great co-operative enterprise that alone made possible a fuller life for the individual rather than a necessary evil against which the individual must be protected. Therefore, it was the CPSU’s duty to protect Soviet citizens from all influences, which would interfere with their new ways of living or the true doctrine as set forth by party leaders. In addition, they also argued that the liberal media in the west were subject to the controls of special interests, which were corrupt and irresponsible. (Siebert 1972) Thus, what seemed to liberal democratic nations an enforced and negative conformity that permitted almost no deviation from political, social and cultural viewpoints closely controlled by a few men in the Kremlin seemed to be a positive freedom in Soviet Union.

### **The Application of Soviet Media Theory in China**

As an integral part of Soviet state theory, Soviet media theory not only was implemented within the nation, but also extended its influence across the border to China. Given the close relationship between the two nations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century during the time of the Comintern, the Soviet notion that media should be the party's collective propagandist, agitator and organizer was "instrumental in shaping the Chinese communist party's journalist policy". (Zhao 1998, 19) It was based on Soviet media theory that the Chinese Communist Party developed its system of media control in China for the purpose of both revolution and state-building.

But why did the CPC choose to apply Soviet media theory in China? There were both internal and external reasons. First of all, in terms of external influence, given that most of the political elites of the CPC in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century received their education and training in the Soviet Union, most of the revolutionary ideas originated from the Soviet Union. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with an aim to promote the worldwide spread of communism and consolidate a long-term inculcation of a system of communist ideas, the Soviet Union invited leaders and revolutionaries from foreign countries to Moscow for study. They even set up a propaganda school to inform these political elites about Soviet media theory. The pioneer communist party members and scholars of China who were determined to change the old regime in the nation were among those invited to Moscow. This partly explains why the CPC adopted the Soviet model of media control in China.

Besides this external influence, there were also internal reasons for adopting Soviet media theory in China. One of reasons was that the political reality in China in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century forced the CPC to use its mass media to achieve the goal of revolution. Due to the long-term feudal rule in China, Chinese people generally speaking were accustomed to the role of being subjects of the authority of the emperor. They had neither the burning desire to change this old and traditional role nor enough access to new and revolutionary ideas that would have made them psychologically prepared for the overthrowing of the old regime. Given this reality, the CPC had to find a channel to mobilize support for its socialism goal so as to improve the political environment for the forthcoming revolution. The instrumental use of media for this purpose reached its height around the year 1919, which has been called the "Chinese Enlightenment Period" (Mackincim 1995, 174) before the CPC was established in 1921, the Chinese Socialist

Youth League (the predecessor of the Chinese Communist Youth League) has developed some publications to make ideological and organizational preparations for the founding of the CPC. Its official newspaper, *Xiangdao*, played an active role in promoting Marxism and the views of the communist party then. Realizing the powerful role of mass media, soon after the founding of the CPC, the Party set up several newspapers in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai. *Labor Weekly* in Shanghai and *Workers' Weekly* in Beijing were known as the most influential ones at the time. (Chang 1989) Although during the two Civil War periods, the CPC was subject to Chiang Kai-shek's suppression, still it managed to use media to expand its influence and win support among the people. In 1931, the Party established its news agency, The Red China News Press, which is the predecessor of the of today's Xinhua News Agency. In the same year, it also set up *Red China News*, which was considered as "the combined organ of the Chinese Communist Party, the central government, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and the communist youth league of China". (Chang 1989, 17) The desire of the CPC to win more support from the masses made it imperative that they not only sought support from the farmers but also from the petty bourgeoisie. Mao once expressed this goal explicitly: we all have an acute sense of loneliness. To transform revolution into a seething, surging tide all over the country, it is necessary to launch a political and economic struggle for democracy involving also the urban petty bourgeoisie." (Bishop 1989, 58) Given that the CPC was not established until 1921, another internal reason for adopting the Soviet instrumental use of media lies in the CPC's felt the necessity to consolidate its party ideology while striving to win support from the people. The CPC had launched various political campaigns to weed out rival ideologies in its early years. The ideology remolding campaign of 1942 was one of a series of campaigns launched by the Party. This campaign not only established Russian model of central control under Mao's leadership but also developed principles of mass manipulation and party control over thought and culture. (Bishop 1989) During this campaign, the CPC used every conceivable form of persuasion, including newspapers, magazines, wall posters and "struggle" sessions, to consolidate its control. In addition, the Party also established several publications such as *Communist*, *Chinese Workers* and *New China Daily* to "purify" the party and strengthen unity within the party,

In sum, the political reality of early 20<sup>th</sup> century China and the rise of the nationalist and socialist ideology made the application of Soviet media theory in China possible. The CPC borrowed key ideas of the media control theory from the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, it in no way copied it directly in China without considering Chinese reality. Plainly, there have been both continuities and changes to the original Soviet theory ever since the CPC adopted the Soviet model in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The following chapter will explore the historical development of media control in China in greater detail.



## **Chapter Three: The Historical Development of Media Control in China**

As was mentioned in Chapter one, government control over the mass media in China has both traditional roots and a theoretical inspiration from Soviet media theory. Given that the earliest media control practices can be traced back to the late Qing dynasty, this chapter will explore briefly the development of media control from the late Qing dynasty to the reform era. Ever since China developed a media system during the late Qing dynasty, the media had been used instrumentally. Various political forces in the nation and the imperial court all vied to use the media, while being subjected to controls from both political parties and the government for various purposes. In the Qing dynasty, media control mainly was exercised from the imperial courtiers whose purpose was to suppress various transformative programs for reform ideas proposed by progressive reformers. During the time of the Republic of China, which was founded by Sun Yet-san, the control agenda for the mass media mainly was employed by Chiang Kai-Shek to weaken the power and influence of its political rival—the Communist Party of China during the civil war period. Given that the CPC has appeared during 1921, it had to counteract these Nationalist party practices as well as mobilize the Chinese people in an anti-imperialist struggle against Japan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to expand its mass basis and consolidate its power. So the party started to exert control over the mass media well before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Comparing this approach to the Kuomintang’s media control practice, the CPC’s control over media was more systematic, well organized, and well embedded in the political system. This chapter will be divided into three parts to explore the detailed dynamics of media control in China: part one will center on media development and practices of control in late Qing dynasty, part two will focus on media development during the bourgeois revolution and the practices of control employed by Chiang Kai-Shek’s KMT in the Republic, and part three will focus on media development and the practices of control under the CPC’s regime.

## **Media Development and Control Practices in the late Qing Dynasty**

Although China was one of the earliest countries to have invented printing, it did not have a developed mass media system until the late Qing Dynasty, when the Opium War forced the Qing government to open its trade ports to the colonial powers. At the very beginning, most of the available newspapers were founded by foreign businessmen and missionaries. In response to the inability of the corrupt Qing government, a number of intellectuals who were influenced by the ideas prevalent among the western bourgeoisie began to set up their own newspapers to promote their own ideas for reform in the 1890s. These intellectuals, with Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Tan Citong as the representatives, believed that the salvation of the country depended on reform and China must gain from the west both the scientific technologies and the structures from making political reforms in China's institutions. The principal goal of the reform was to adopt a constitutional monarchy in China. (Chang 1989, 8) To urge the government to adopt the reform ideas, these intellectuals employed newspapers. Among the newspapers during the period, the *Human Daily* by Tan Citong and *Chinese Prepress* by Liang Qichao were the most well known for their role in criticizing the government and proposing to abolish the old mandarin examination system. (Chang 1989) The reform ideas won support from the boy emperor who was reigning at the time. However, these notions were strongly resisted by the empress dowager for such changes aimed at abolishing the traditional way of ruling by limiting the power of the emperor and the empress as well. Finally, because of the lack of organization and the betrayal of Yuan Shikai, who had an army behind him then, these reforms ended with the boy emperor imprisoned by his mother, the dowager empress. Consequently, the pro-reform progressive newspapers founded by the intellectuals also became the target of government suppression. These reformers that proposed to put an end to the traditional way of governing in China, along with the authors of key newspapers who had written things considered to be offensive by the imperial court were sanctioned severely. Tan Citong, and several others were beheaded and Liang Qichao was sent into exile. This was an extreme example of the well-known "Literary Inquisition", which led to the imprisonment or execution of authors for writing pieces that were considered offensive by the imperial court.

## **Media Development in the Bourgeois Revolution and the Practices of Control of KMT in the Republic of China**

Although these 1898 reform movements failed in the end, the flame of the reform did not die out because of suppression from the Qing government. Despite strict prohibitions imposed by the government, the reformers kept publishing newspapers and periodicals to spread their modernizing ideas. The mass media in general had played a very active role in promoting such reformist ideas among the masses. In the case of Liang Qichao, after fleeing to Japan, he continued to work on disseminating reform ideas by publishing magazines there. The magazines he published such as *New People's Periodical* and *New Works of Fiction* were considered as the most powerful literary force in China. (Chang 1989)

The reformers that were for introducing constitutional monarchy to China such as Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei definitely knew the power of media in getting support from the masses. However, the bourgeois revolutionaries, with Sun Yet-san as their leader, were more skillful in employing the media in achieving their revolutionary goals. During the course of the revolution, they had spread their ideas by running various newspapers and journals. The first party paper for Sun was *Zhongguo Ribao* established in Hong Kong in 1900. *Minbao*, which was founded in Tokyo in 1905 with a view to promote revolutionary ideas among Chinese students, was known as the most influential paper under Sun's leadership. Moreover, another important newspaper of the time—*Chugui Nu Bao* was known for its active role in promoting the integration of women's liberation with the liberation of the entire society. The editor of this newspaper, Qiu Jin, wrote that "to overthrow Qing ruler, save the country from its crisis and achieve national liberation were not merely the responsibility of the men but also of women". (Bishop 1984, 46) This newspaper attracted strong support from women for the revolution. Other important newspapers and periodicals in this period also included *China National Gazette*, the *Eastern Times* and *Wushih Pai-hua Bao*, *New Women's World* and *Nu Bao*.

Between the late 1800s and 1911, Sun made many revolutionary attempts to overthrow the Qing government. However, none of them was successful. After many failed attempts, Sun finally led the military uprising at Wuhang on October 10, 1911, which put an end to the five thousand years of imperial rule in China. After the 1911

revolution, the China Revolutionary League led by Sun was renamed Kuomintang (KMT) and the establishment of the Republic of China was formally announced.

During the bourgeois revolution led by Sun, mass media were mainly used as an instrument for revolution. Although the development of these mass media paved the way for the rise of the CPC in 1921, the CPC and the KMT were allies rather than rivals under Sun Yat-sen's leadership. However, this alliance collapsed after the death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925. The period from 1925 to 1949 witnessed both two civil wars and the anti-Japanese war in China. It was during the two civil wars, which were conflicts between the Kuomintang led by Chiang Kai-Shek and the Communist Party of China led by Mao Zedong, that the KMT started to practice severe state control over the media.

After Chiang seized power in the KMT with the death of Sun Yat-sen, he tried to unite China under his own leadership. In order to weaken and finally eliminate the power of the CPC, the KMT kept close watch over pro-communist expressions in all of the mass media during the civil war period. The control practices of the KMT included closing down newspapers that spread ideas that threatened the regime, punishing journalists who disclosed information that might severely harm the image of the KMT, and sending pro-communist journalists to jail. Despite these above-mentioned control practices, the KMT's control over the media was neither systematic nor organized, for generally speaking, instead, the KMT only practiced control over mass media when certain threatening issues arose. In terms of managing the mass media, multiple ownerships were allowed because of the factionalism in the Nationalist party. In terms of content, there were also a variety of media available. Take newspapers as an example; besides the party newspapers, the KMT also allowed some politically nonaffiliated periodicals such as the *Dagong Bao* and the *New People's Paper* to exist. That was also why Lu Keng said KMT for most of the time "was fairly tolerant towards the media." (Lee Chin-chuan 1994, 148) Lu Keng has argued that the KMT was more tolerant with regard to media freedom than the CPC. For a certain period, this was definitely true. However, the story was totally different in the civil war period. According to the figures provided by Lin Yutang, "there were 110 cases of suspension or suppression of publications in North China alone in 1934. Reportedly, 2,500 political prisoners lay in just one northern prison." (Bishop 1989, 53) Therefore, instead of claiming that the CPC's control was far stricter than the

KMT's, as Lu Keng argued in his "Press Control in 'New China' and 'Old China'" (1994), it would be more accurate to say that compared to the KMT, the CPC's control over the media was far more thorough and better-organized in that the CPC had made media control an integral part of its political system. In other words, its control over media was highly centralized.

### **Media Development and Control Practices under the CPC's Regime:**

Ever since the Opium War of 1840, the Chinese people have been looking to the West for ways to save China. And, after the Meiji restoration in Japan, some also looked to Japan. Despite all of the efforts made by the nationalists under Sun Yet-san to reform China, it was still a half feudal and half colonial society then. Although Sun Yet-san founded the KMT after the 1911 revolution, the Party itself had proved to be insufficient to achieve the goal of democratic revolution. The success of the October Revolution in Russia in 1917 soon brought Marxist-Leninism to China, and with the May 4 movement in 1919, the CPC quickly used nationalist/anti-imperialist sentiments as a spiritual weapon for the progressive revolutionaries in all of China's classes to educate the people and organize the revolution.

Realizing the important role of media in making a revolution in the Soviet Union, the CPC started to pay much more attention to the role of newspapers in its revolutionary cause after 1925. Between early 1911 and 1949, China remained a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society as well as the victim of European and Japanese imperialism. To overthrow the forces described by the CPC as imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism that mainly refer to the four big families in old China, which had both accumulated a lot of political power and capital by exploiting the people, and promote a new democratic revolution in the country, the CPC founded many progressive newspapers and periodicals to spread the ideas of Marxism and voice its opposition to the old regime soon after its founding in July 1921. In 1922, the Party published its first party organ, "Guide" (Xiangdao). Later, during its first united front with the Nationalist Party (or KMT) in fighting the Japanese between 1924 and 1927, the Party established a range of non-party publications under its leadership. Among them, the most influential included *Labor Weekly* in Shanghai, *Worker's Weekly* in Beijing, *Vanguard Weekly* and *New*

*Youth*.(Chang, 1989) These newspapers and periodicals helped make ideological preparations for the founding of the new China by promoting Marxism and the ideology of the Communist Party.

Later, in the 1920s and 1930s, once the KMT counterrevolution crushed the CPC uprising against its rule in Guangdong and Shanghai in 1927, the Party conducted hostilities with the Nationalists during the Anti-Japanese war after Tokyo's open invasion of Chinese territories during 1931. During and after the Long March, the CPC also developed its Soviet style journalistic institutions both in the Party's liberated base areas above ground and in the other parts of the country underground to promote anti-imperialist and pro-communist morale. By the end of 1933, there were 34 newspapers and journals in the Jiangxi base of the central government of the Chinese Soviet Republics established in 1931. The *Red China News Press*, the forerunner of the *Xinhua News Agency*, was the most influential one at the time. The mass media in China not only greatly facilitated the Party's war efforts but also played an important role in promoting political and economic construction of the revolutionary bases. The Long March put an end to most of the party press, but the Red Army continued to publish journals and pamphlets with a view to uphold the morale of the soldiers. The *Red China* resumed publication in 1936. In January 1937, in deference to the newly formed united front with the Nationalist Party against the Japanese, the *Red China News Press* changed its name to the *Xinhua News Agency* ("*Xinhua*" means "new China" in Chinese). (Chang 1989, 20) Together with other newspapers that emerged during the Anti-Japanese war such as *Liberation Daily*, *Popular Daily*, *Resistance Daily* and *Central China Daily* and the radio broadcasting stations developed during this period, the Xinhua News Agency effectively spread anti-Japanese ideas, aroused patriotism and toughened the fighting will of the people.

With this rich experience at using the media to promulgate the Party's guidelines and arousing the people's political awareness in accord with Soviet style media theory, the CPC gradually developed its own theory of journalism, which emphasized that the media should serve solely as an organ of the party, the government and the people. According to this Party Journalism, the press should take a clear stand and uphold the

basic views of Marxism and the Party's politics. (Zhao 1998, 57) These ideas have been emphasized throughout the history of the Party after 1927.

Under the influence of this school of Party Journalism, when the People's Republic of China was established in 1949 under the leadership of Mao Zedong (the so-called "first generation of Chinese leadership"), the Chinese media developed into a propaganda tool for communicating government policies and viewpoints. Although during this time Mao stressed the importance of giving non-communists limited opportunities to express their viewpoints in the Party's press organs and also urged big news agencies like the *Xinhua Daily* to invite many non-communists to take part in some editorial boards, he also emphasized strengthening the Party spirit in newspapers. According to Mao, news agencies and newspapers were extremely important institutions of propaganda, and the role and power of the newspapers lay in "their ability to bring the Party program, the Party line, the Party's general and specific policies, its tasks and methods of work before the masses in the quickest and most extensive way." (Chang 1989, 29)

This attitude towards the media resulted in a mixed picture of press freedom in the mass media during the early years of the People's Republic. On the one hand, to satisfy the diverse needs of people, the government allowed certain special interest newspapers to exist; on the other hand, it attempted to transform these special interest media to the party-dominated system by imposing various restrictions on them. Although the government did not totally monopolize the mass media in its early days, it still considered the media as instruments for promoting stability, uniting the people for the nation's modernization drive, and contributing to the advancement of socialism in China. As instruments of the state and the Party, the media were forced to shoulder the responsibility of improving the image of the Party and arousing the enthusiasm of the masses by responding positively to the policies and guidelines of both the party and the government. Consequently, no information about political, social or cultural problems such as the failure of the utopian movement the Great Leap Forward (1958), widespread famine (1960-1962), or the disastrous earthquake in the Tangshan area (1976) can be found in the Chinese media. The era of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was another extreme case of using the media as political instruments to create and control public

opinion. This instrumental use of media was nothing but a reproduction of Soviet media practice, only now in the hands of warring factions within the Party.

By using the media as instruments for social and political control in China, the CPC and the Chinese government developed many new policies of control. First, unlike the KMT's practice, the CPC tried to retain its control over media by monopolizing management. Before economic reforms were adopted in China, all newspapers were required to be registered and attached to a government ministry, institute, research facility, labor group, or other state-sanctioned organization. (Todd Hazelbath 1997) General guidelines and parameters for news operations can be found in Party resolutions, directives, announcements, editorial bulletins, and speeches and informal messages of leading Party figures. This meant that all were subject to the supervision of both government and Party committees at various levels. The Xinhua News Agency, for example, was under the dual leadership of both the Party and the government and was therefore regarded as a link between the government, the Communist Party, and the people. As a department under the State Council, its daily operations relied heavily on instructions from various levels of the Party bureaucracy.

China's journalism was an organ of the Party, and its political orientation and fundamental policies largely depended on those of the Party. According to the Party, the basic requirements for the Chinese party press was to take a clear stand, to uphold the basic viewpoints of Marxism and the Party's politics, and to adopt pragmatic methods of seeking truth from facts. In accord with Leninist thought, the Party proclaimed itself to be the vanguard of the proletariat representing the interests of the people. In this ideological construct, newspapers served as the mouthpiece of the Party and by definition served as the mouthpiece of the people too. "Party Journalism" or the "mouthpiece" theory was constantly emphasized and reinforced by the Party when it struggled to maintain the monopoly of power. One result of practicing this theory was that "news ceased to be the latest report of an event, but rather was pre-determined or pre-selected information that helped to promote socialist ideology in China." (Bishop 1989, 93)

The government also exploited a longstanding hierarchical relationship among Chinese print and broadcasting entities in seeking to maintain some control over the media. It appointed the leaders of the most powerful media institutions based on their



political views and then used these organizations to dominate the rest of the media countrywide. The chiefs of the national newspapers were usually appointed by the propaganda department, while the chiefs of provincial newspapers were appointed by local communist party leaders. The chiefs of trade newspapers were appointed by the industrial ministries associated with that particular trade. These chiefs, often called publishers, were mainly chosen for their organizational skill and ideological reliability rather than any professional capability. The standards for appointing chiefs of various media outlets was described clearly by an instruction made by Mao Zedong on the eve of taking power in 1948. According to him,

...A method to improve (communication) work is that the central bureau and the provincial party committees have to assign a comrade who thoroughly understands the right line and right policies of the party to oversee the newspaper, which is led by the committee itself, before its publication. The newspaper may not publish until this comrade review it. (Wu 1994, 204)

Here, no requirements for professional skills were mentioned, whereas there was an emphasis on thorough understanding of the “right line and right policies of the Party”. The emphasis on ideological reliability in assignment of personnel can be seen in various media outlets in China. One prerequisite for employment by the *Xinhua News Agency* was that the future employee had to be a Party member or hold a status of candidate of a Party member. This rule is still in use now. Two years ago, when I was waiting for the responses to my applications from US graduate schools after graduating from the Foreign Affairs College, my classmates were busy hunting for jobs in various government ministries. Given the good relationship between the *Xinhua News Agency* and the Foreign Affairs College, many of my classmates sought positions there. They all submitted resumes at the same time. But it turned out that one of my classmates who had maintained a fairly good academic standing among the applicants, was rejected even for taking the written test, which was the first step of entering the agency, simply because he was neither a Party member nor an officially acknowledged candidate member who had actively participated in Party activities. On the one hand, this practice kept many excellent talented people out of the agency; on the other hand, it facilitated the Party’s

ideological control over the media. In the time of Mao, there was only one ministry of propaganda, which reached from the central government all the way to the lower political divisions of the country. This situation changed later in the late 1970s because of the economic reforms adopted by the Party. As a result, several ministries were established to effectively control the management of media.

To control the electronic broadcast networks, the government established the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television. Unlike any other government department, this ministry was considered both to be a news organization and a broadcasting administrative bureaucracy. This meant that it was also subject to the leadership of both the Party and the government. Two national broadcast networks, the CPR (the Central People's Radio) and the CCTV (China Central Television), were under the direct control of this ministry. The editorial board of the ministry, under the leadership of the Party committee, was composed of responsible deputy ministers; heads of the three radio and television networks; and leaders of other departments, such as the Film Bureau, the Broadcast Publishing House, and the Television Arts Committee. It was directly

... In charge of the news, features and programming of the three stations and the detailed duties of it includes delivering Party and government directives to the news outlets, drafting strategies for carrying out these directives, organizing and coordinating large-scale media campaigns, approving major media activities, propaganda plans and program change initiated by the broadcast network, and exercising editorial control of important news items and programs.(Zhao 1998, 23)

The ministry was also a "huge government bureaucracy in charge of every aspect of the country's broadcast operations---issuing regulations, setting technical standards, training personnel, and coordinating research". (Zhao 1998, 23)

For the print media, the government also established a bureaucracy---the State Press and Publications Administration under the supervision of the Party's Propaganda Department to draft and enforce press regulations, license publications, and monitor text. This government agency had no authority over central Party newspapers, but it was in charge of all the publication agencies at the provincial and county levels.

The administrative structure of media at the local level was very similar to the structure at the state level. Each province and municipality had its own broadcast bureau, which was under the dual leadership of the government and the Party. This strict government control made it almost impossible for the media to be the watchdog of the government and provided very little flexibility for the media to operate independently from the government.

Second, by setting specific guidelines for news reporting and practicing censorship, the government also continued to control media content. The Party's Central Committee usually provided detailed instructions for reporting important domestic issues. These instructions not only defined topics to be given attention for a specific period in a way that reflected the Party's priorities but also gave directions about the arrangement of news in the newspapers.

Moreover, before being published, news in China had to undergo a long process of invisible censorship. The first decision made by the higher authorities of the Party was whether to cover certain topics or not. It was often the Party's propaganda departments at various levels that were responsible for selecting the topics for attention. These departments, however, were not necessarily the highest media authority. On crucial issues or at critical moments, the Party secretary at each level directly supervised media work. Once coverage was allowed, certain reporters were assigned to cover the situation strictly in line with the spirit of the original Party's decision. The assigned reporters were chosen more according to their political viewpoints than to their professional competence. The news had to be covered in line with the general guidelines and writing style determined by the Xinhua New Agency. Once the reports were completed, they had to be evaluated by the reporter's department head or the editor-in-chief, who were usually veteran party ideological workers. After the article was published, it was up to the Propaganda Department to closely monitor its content. Any failure in adhering to the guidelines of the government on the editors' side would result in punishments ranging from writing self-criticism reports to demotion or even dismissal.

Third, in addition to the control of media management and content, the government employed a punishment mechanism to check the overflow of various democratic ideas other than the socialist democracy it advocated within the nation. As in the Soviet Union,

the mass media in China on the whole were expected to carry favorable reporting about the Party and the government. The government has reiterated on different occasions that criticism of the Party, views opposing the Party's major decisions and open discussion of policy issues that the Party had already decided were not allowed. (Zhao 1989, 20) In cases where certain unfavorable comments had appeared in some influential newspapers or publications without government approval or some criticism of government policies had gone too far, the journalists were fired or even put in jail, and the publishing houses were shut down for allowing this kind of reports to appear in their publications.

There was also a system run by the Department of Propaganda for monthly criticism of the media. The department prepared reports for all media outlets on a monthly basis, informing them of the wrongdoings of certain media and the measures taken to address the problem. These reports played a very important role in promoting censorship of different media outlets. By informing all of the media outlets of the wrongdoings of other media, the department actually sent out a warning signal telling the journalists if they behaved in similar ways, they would be punished as well. This practice also was known as "execute one as a warning to a hundred." The strict censorship and this post-punishment mechanism produced another kind of media control, that is, self-censorship by the journalists. For fear of being punished by either the Party or the government, the journalist made a judgment about the appropriateness of both the topics and the language before writing or publishing anything. As a common practice among Chinese journalists, it had proven to be very effective in controlling public opinion.

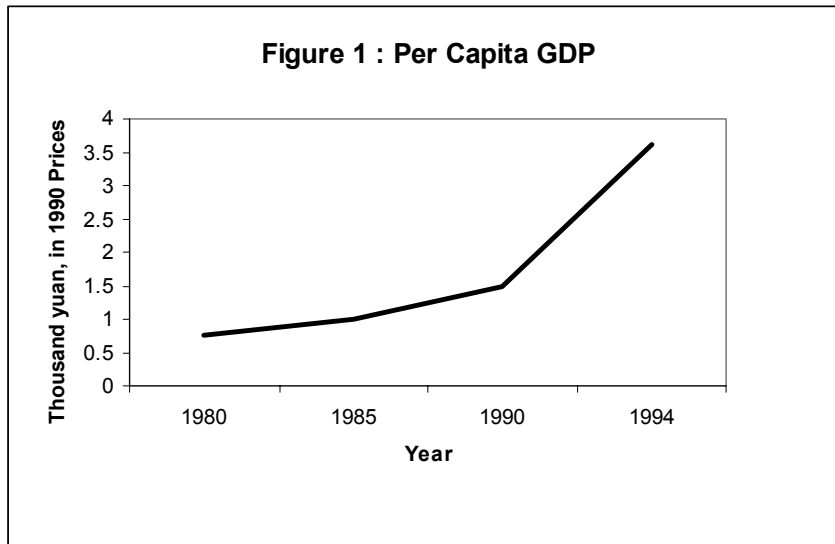
Fourth, the government also set up numerous official journalists' associations to practice ideological control. Among them, the All-China Journalist Federation, which had more than 400,000 members, was the largest association established to control journalist behavior. (Hazelbath 1997, 14)

During Mao's leadership, myriad associations were in charge of the ideological indoctrination and control of the Chinese population. The network of ideological control was very complex and penetrating, and it touched every social cell, ranging from the professional propaganda system of the CPC, the military system, the CPC school system, the educational system, the scientific research system and mass organizations to the mass media and publication systems. All citizens were affiliated with certain associations

according to their job or occupation. Associations existed for students at each school and university, for employees of each factory and for workers in various professions. These associations were responsible for everything in the lives of the members, including housing, education, and family planning. Members were required to attend regular meetings where party campaigns were launched and the ideological orthodoxy of the members was checked. One example of this kind of association for ideological control and supervision was the journalist associations.

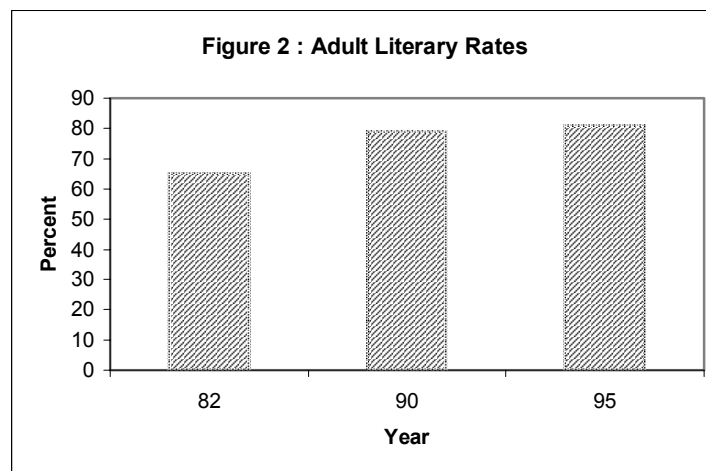
As tools of ideological control, there are many local journalist associations in China. They were not only used by local governments to keep an eye on journalists but also used by journalists to keep an eye on each other. Since an entire paper could be shut down for one or two critical articles, resulting in journalists losing their jobs, this reciprocal control had proved to be very effective in upholding the socialist ideology and the government's standpoints. Among the journalists' associations, the All China Journalists' Association was the most important one. This association was supervised directly by the Propaganda Department. It was of great importance for the journalists in that every practicing journalist had to join this organization in order to obtain an official press card. The association also ranked individual journalists based on their seniority, achievements, and political consciousness and behavior. Therefore any journalist wishing to win recognition of the people would have to win recognition within the All-China Journalists' Association. The All China Journalists' Association functioned as an effective supervision system for political views among journalists.

This use of the mass media as instruments for political control changed in the reform era under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. Guided by the principle of "seeking truth from facts and emancipating the minds," China undertook dramatic economic reforms while following the policy of reform and opening-up to the outside world in its foreign relations in the late 1970s. This ushered in a new era of development in all aspects of China. The Chinese economy achieved an unprecedented growth rate on all kinds of economic indicators. Figure 1 well illustrates the rapid development of the Chinese economy between 1980 to 1994.



NOTE: The figure is from Todd Hazelbarth's *The Chinese Media: More Autonomous and Diverse---Within Limits*(1997). The original Source of it is International Financial Statistics

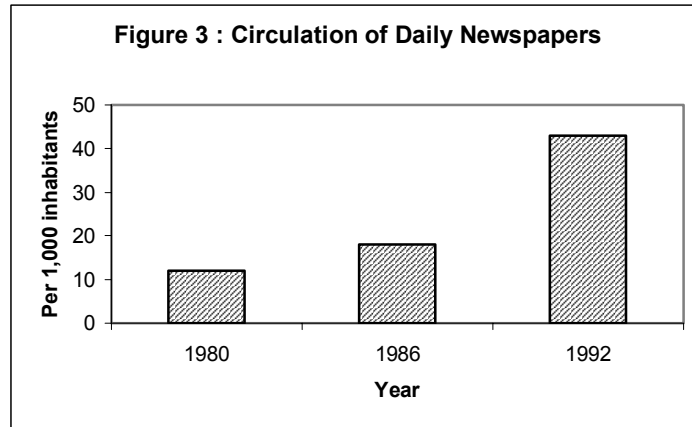
Economic reform also resulted in changes in other aspects of Chinese society, such as an increase in the literacy rate as shown in Figure 2 as well as a de-emphasis of party ideology, which led to decentralization, commercialization and socialization.



Note: the figure is from Todd Hazelbarth's *The Chinese Media: More Autonomous and Diverse---Within Limits*. And its original source is UNESCO statistical yearbooks.)

Under the combined influence of these changes, China experienced an unprecedented media boom. Radio and television stations, which were mostly limited to

central and provincial levels in the 1970s, were expanded to the municipal/ prefecture and county levels. The network of party organs was also extended. Moreover, a variety of special interest newspapers were also published both by Party departments, and business enterprises and organizations. Moreover, the circulation of newspapers also increased dramatically as shown in Figure 3:



Note: The figure is from Todd Hazelbarth's *The Chinese Media: More Autonomous and Diverse--- Within Limits*. Its original source is UNESCO Statistical Yearbook)

In terms of media content, as a result of increased media autonomy and diversity, politics and socialist ideology ceased to be the only topics of various media outlets. The mass media began to include paid advertisements and increased coverage of entertainment and social news and sometimes even stories about crime and corruption in government. An example was the Party's flagship newspaper and the counterpart of *Pravda* in the Soviet Union, the *People's Daily*, which had functioned as the primary vehicle for the government to publish government propaganda; it was used against the nation's enemies, the Western capitalist countries. This leading daily was reformed and enlivened in the late 1970s and early to middle 1980s. After the reform of the newspaper, it was expanded both in size and coverage.

The newspapers also began to carry criticism from the readers. One example was in 1980, when the *People's Daily* exposed a 1979 oil rig accident, leading to the decision of the State Council to punish a vice-premier and remove the petroleum minister. Reports on the issue started to appear on July 22, 1980. Starting then, there were follow-ups,

articles and letters to editors about the serious nature of the accident. Because of the great pressure created by the *People's Daily*, the government finally decided to severely punish the officials involved. (Chang 1989)

Since the late 1970s, Chinese media in general have frequently criticized Party members and have published debates on such fundamental issues as the rule of law, freedom of the press, and universal human rights. They have also reported on some previously untouched social subjects, such as sex, divorce and legal disputes; Moreover, in 1982, the freedom of rights and the freedom of speech of all citizens were formally endorsed by the Chinese constitution. Relevant articles here include article 35 and article 47, which state ---“citizens of the P.R. of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration” and “citizens of the P.R. of China have the freedom to engage in scientific research, literary and artistic creation and other cultural pursuits. The state encourages and assists creative endeavors conducive to the interests of the people that are made by citizens engaged in education, science, technology, literature, art and other cultural work” respectively. (The United States Constitution on-line, <http://www.usconstitution.net/china.html>, accessed 07/19/2003)

Along with changes in news coverage, the structure of the Chinese media has also undergone great changes since late 1970s. By the end of the 1980s, China had developed a rather elaborate media network. The *Xinhua News Agency* was the largest news organization with “three major departments: domestic with bureaus in all provinces; international with more than ninety foreign bureaus; and translation, providing reports from foreign countries for restricted distribution among Party and government bureaucracies”. (Zhao 1998, 18) The *People's Daily* is the organ of the Party central committee; *Central People's Radio* (CPR) and *China Central Television* (CCTV) are monopolies. CPR's morning news and CCTV's evening news are transmitted nationwide everyday, making them the most important news programs and news sources in the country. These four outlets are at the very top of the Chinese news hierarchy. In addition, a number of important special interest national newspapers such as *Guangming Daily*, *Reference News*, *People's Liberation Army*, *China Juvenile News*, *Farmers News* and *China Woman's News* were also developed. This media structure was more or less replicated at the provincial and municipal levels.



As a result of further developments in China's economic and political systems, the Chinese media have expanded even more in the 1990s. According to Todd Hazelbarth, during the past two decades, the number of newspapers has increased from 332 to 2200; there were now more than 7000 magazines and journals in the country by 1997. It was also estimated that there were approximately 700 conventional television stations, plus about 3000 cable channels and 1000 radio stations. (Hazelbarth 1997)

Economic prosperity brought about by the reform contributed to the diversity and autonomy of the Chinese media in that it made it possible for the nation to both increase its individual output in the industry and promote the expansion of the advanced technology. Development in other aspects of society in the reform era also enabled the media to expand their organizations. First, improvement in education has led to greater literacy throughout the country and resulted in the rise of a group of well-to do, more discerning, and better-educated citizens, which has created markets for a much greater range of information and points of view. Second, improved professional training for journalists and newly developed information technologies made the expansion of media networks possible. Third, with the open door policy, people had more chances to make contact with the west in the reform era. As a result, people became better informed about various points of views and values. This exposure to a broader range of information enabled people to become critical readers rather than passive receivers of the information available to them. Consequently, they became more skeptical about authority and more reluctant to accept government propaganda, which made the demand for more autonomy and diversity more pressing.

Finally, political reform aimed at decentralizing power within the CPC played an important role in spurring greater media autonomy, for one of the consequences of political reform was that it allowed local governments to manage local media according to the specific situations in each area. This actually made it possible for the local media to enjoy more autonomy in both management and content. Take Guangdong province as an example. In order to promote the economic development of the area, the local government allowed various media outlets more freedom in covering topics that proved to be of great market value ever since the government adopted the policy of reform and opening up to the outside world. To cater to readers' interests, media outlets began to

cover news on business issues, political corruption, and social problems, which all proved to be of great interest to the readers. Some newspapers such as *Southern Weekend* even began to specialize in exposing political corruption and social problems in China in 1990s. Although the local government knew very well the effects of these reports on the image of the Party and the government, it did not bother to ask the newspaper to make any changes as long as the paper helped to increase the revenue of the local government. *Southern Weekend* was forced to stop the presses in March of 2002 for its publicity about the scandal in the Hope Project (*Media Freedom in China*, 2002), but that was an order from the central government rather than a voluntary decision made by the local government. Thus, the political reform aimed at decentralizing power allowed more autonomy to local governments and consequently promoted media freedom in the local media.

As a result of economic reform and various social changes brought about by it, the media in China today definitely enjoy more freedom in reporting economic and social issues. Given the special reform model adopted in China, which can be characterized as economic liberation without political democratization, it is still hard for one to tell whether government control over media has been fundamentally relaxed. The Chinese government has obviously given great priority to economic development, for the two basic components of the reform are the transformation of a controlled economy to a market economy and integration with international trade and investment. While the economy of the nation is developing towards greater prosperity, changes in the political system have lagged far behind.

Since political reform did not keep pace with economic reform, it is logical to hypothesize that although the government allowed media freedom in reporting economic and social issues in the reform era, it would not allow media freedom in voicing a full range of political views. To be more specific, I expect there would be more control over media coverage of political issues than over coverage of economic and social issues. To informally test the hypothesis, I conducted several case studies. Chapter Four reports the findings.

## Chapter Four: Case Studies

As Chapter One indicated, the key research technique for this analysis will be the case study approach, which is defined by Robert K. Yin as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. (Yin 1984, 23) As a well-established approach in the qualitative research tradition, case studies have been used for many years across a variety of disciplines. This technique provides a flexible yet integrated framework for the holistic examination of a phenomenon in its natural state. Since the goals of this study are to investigate the current practices of media control in China, I choose to use the case study approach to explore the hypothesis presented in the previous chapter. The cases selected for this study include the 1989 Beijing Student Movement, the Three Gorges Dam Project and the Falun Gong Movement. These cases were selected because of the importance of the issues involved, the time ordering of the cases and the different issues involved.

The variety of cases selected and their time order make it possible to develop a more complete picture of media control in contemporary China. I mainly rely on newspaper reports of the key party press organ in China, the *People's Daily*, as the basis of a textual analysis of coverage of these three cases. To increase the external validity of the current study and to achieve a better understanding of the current situation of mass media control in China, I have conducted research on three selected cases.

### Case One: 1989 Beijing Student Movement

Historical Background:

In the spring of 1989 the world witnessed the well-known “Student Democracy Movement” in Beijing. The year 1989 brought the overlap of several significant anniversaries. It was the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the French Revolution, a revolution that many Chinese in both the KMT and the CPC looked to historically as a model of “freedom, equality and fraternity,” it was the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, and it was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China. All these anniversaries set the stage for the 1989 student movement.

The movement really began on April 15, 1989, with the death of Hu Yaobang, who was very close to Deng Xiaoping. Hu became CPC general secretary in 1980, effectively replacing Hua Guoeng and then served as Party chair after 1981. During his tenure, he was sympathetic to the ideas and ideals of students, and this contributed to his removal from power in 1987. Consequently, he had been very highly regarded by university students, especially in Beijing. Although posters had been prohibited since 1979, posters commemorating and mourning Hu began to appear immediately following his death. On April 17, a group of students marched to the National People's Congress with several demands: restore Hu Yaobang's reputation; end the anti-bourgeois liberalism campaign; guarantee the freedoms of speech, press, and the right to peaceful demonstrations; increase the budget for education; and end official corruption. April 22, the date of Hu's memorial ceremony, also became a significant moment of protest. While the official memorial ceremony was held in the People's Hall, university students in Beijing also paid tribute to Hu Yaobang in Tiananmen Square. Over the next few days, there were demonstrations and daily activities through which the students expressed their demands. One of these demonstrations, a sit-in at Xinhua Gate, ended in conflict between the police and the students. Students in Beijing organized a citywide class boycott in protest of the government suppression of the student activities. On April 27, thousands of students walked to Tiananmen Square, with many Beijing residents lining the streets. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, students were joined by journalists from several Beijing publications, calling for freedom of the press. Again, the residents of Beijing lined the street by the thousands, cheering, handing food and drinks to the students, and offering general support. Coinciding with the demonstration on May 4<sup>th</sup>, intellectuals from several universities submitted a written proposal in support of the student movement. The students' occupation of Tiananmen Square extended from this point onward. On May 13, some 3000 students went on a hunger strike in Tiananmen Square, resolving to fast until the government met them in equal dialogue. The government had held several dialogues with the students before this hunger strike, but all of these ended either in chaos or with disagreements on both sides.

Since no major compromises had been reached with the government, the students began to openly calling for the resignation of government leaders such as Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping. By May 17, people in and around Tiananmen Square numbered greater

than one million; protest marches were also estimated at more than one million; workers, professionals and cadres were participating in the cause in great numbers. A dialogue between student leaders and Li Peng occurred on May 18 and was broadcast nationally on the same day. On May 20<sup>th</sup>, on behalf of the government, Li Peng declared martial law. This aroused the indignation of the general public. Journalists and intellectuals began to demonstrate in the Square, calling for Li Peng to step down from the office. On May 26<sup>th</sup>, Zhao Ziyang was labeled an instigator of the movement, and he was dismissed from his Party positions. On May 29<sup>th</sup> the students brought a statue called “The Goddess of Democracy” into the Square. The government issued an official statement on May 30, condemning the statue and the movement as a whole. On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, the government decided to clear Tiananmen Square by issuing an ultimatum, saying that if Beijing residents did not leave, they would suffer serious consequences. A general warning was also broadcast for people to stay off the streets during the night of June 3<sup>rd</sup>. The government carried out a military crackdown on June 4<sup>th</sup>. (Dorrance Smith 1989)

This mass democratic movement was a result of many economic, political and ideological problems, which had appeared rapidly in Chinese society during the 1980s. It also revealed various contradictions and conflicts that were embedded in the reform process of the 1980s. It has been generally acknowledged that a basic cause of the crisis of 1989 was that reform of the political structure did not keep pace with that of the economic structure. In other words, political behavior and institutions did not change in accordance with the rapid economic development and the fundamental changes of economic structure of the previous ten years. The lack of an independent legal system and codes of managerial supervision in the workplace were the sources of official corruption in China. Although Chinese economic reforms had made great headway since 1979, its political system, court structures and economic management remained what they were before the government adopted its policy of reform and opening-up. This usual disruption in China’s most fundamental structures not only violated Marxist theory about the relationships between the economic base and the political superstructure, but it also contradicted Western conceptualizations about the relationship between economic development and political democracy. Economic development and social progress can bring about a divergence of political orientations. If the political institutions stagnate

while there is rapid economic transformation, then there definitely could be instability in society. This situation would, in turn, most likely bring about other profound crises and intense political conflicts in a society. This is, indeed, how the crisis of 1989 in China originated.

As a dramatic political upheaval, the 1989 student movement was widely covered by both the Western and Chinese media. Moreover, the Chinese media, if only briefly, experienced an unprecedented degree of freedom in reporting this movement. For a certain period, journalists from official news organizations became active participants in the protest movement, not only joining students in their demonstrations but also bolstering the movement through the content and conduct of their work. Although China had experienced certain media freedoms during the movement, a close examination will demonstrate that this freedom was not granted by the government; rather, it was the result of journalists' fighting and circumventing government suppression. The following part of the thesis will be a detailed analysis of the interaction between government control and media's efforts in telling the public the truth, or at least the journalists' version of "truth" during the movement.

Analysis focuses on two months of news coverage in the *People's Daily*, the official organ of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, from the inception of the protests in mid-April to the weeks following their suppression by armed force on June 4<sup>th</sup>.

### Media Coverage

Due to the political development of the movement, media coverage of the movement can be divided into three stages: stage one, non-involvement; stage two, active participation; stage three, circumvention of government control.

#### *Stage One (from April 15 to April 27): Non-Involvement*

In this stage, students organized several small-scale demonstrations to voice their request for more democracy in Beijing. The *People's Daily* largely neglected or negatively depicted the movement because of the unclear stand of the government during this period. Although some journalists tried to publish some articles based on their own

first-hand information, editors of the newspapers chose to be cautious before the government set out any directions on covering this issue. (Zhao 2001) Therefore, instead of carrying news directly about the demonstrations, journalists chose to get the information out, and support the student movements through some disguised ways. That is, when they felt that the students' request was justified, they chose to incorporate these ideas in some seemingly irrelevant reports.

As the old saying goes, policy issued by the political center will be met with counter-measures in the local workplace. Because of its long history of government control over the mass media, the Chinese media have adopted various ways to circumvent government censorship in their reporting of political issues. As a result, Chinese journalists know how to convey their ideas in disguised ways, and Chinese readers in general know how to read between the lines. The main tactics the *People's Daily* used in this stage was rooted in historical allusion. The article commemorating Hu Yaobang was an example. (PD April 22, 1989) The report highlighted the exemplary qualities of an ideal CPC cadre with Hu's simple lifestyle, which was free from corruption. By implication, journalists were criticizing those officials who lived luxuriously and allowed family members special privileges.

Official media were definitely under the thumb of both the CPC and the government during this period. On April 27<sup>th</sup>, the paper carried an editorial condemning the movement as "anti-revolutionary turmoil." This caused stronger protest among students. On the same day, the paper also reported the closing down of the *World Economic Herald*, which was known as one of the most liberal and forthright newspapers in the reform era that had become an authoritative source on both the world and national economy. Sponsored by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and the China World Economic Society, the *World Economic Herald* was one of the most famous of a handful of unofficial publications that had emerged in China since the introduction of economic reform. (Chang 1989, 131) According to the report in the *People's Daily* on April 27, the local government of Shanghai decided to reorganize the newspaper, since this newspaper had published something unfavorable to the government during the national mourning of Hu Yaobang. As a result, the chief editor of the newspaper, Qin Benli, was removed and the newspaper was closed down for government restructuring.

Given the tight control of information in this stage, people could hardly get any reliable information about the student movement from the official media. Therefore, they began to turn to other informal means of communication for information. The main sources of information at this stage were big-character posters, student-controlled broadcasting stations, and word of mouth. (Zhao 2001)

*Stage Two: Active Involvement and Push for Government Concession (April 28th to May 19th)*

This was a period of transition from a cautious media reaction to active participation in support of the movement. After the April 27<sup>th</sup> student demonstration, the government adopted a strategy of limited compromise. Government officials started to hold more dialogues with students, and censorship of the media was relaxed as a result of political compromise.

Balanced and objective accounts of the movement began to appear in the *People's Daily* from April 28<sup>th</sup>. The newspaper published two reports on the student parade on April 28<sup>th</sup>. One was a detailed clarification of the so-called April 20<sup>th</sup> massacre, which referred to the conflict between the student demonstrators and the policemen at Xinhua Gate; the other was an objective account of the student demonstration on April 27<sup>th</sup> and the official perspective on that event. According to the latter report, the students' slogan included supporting the leadership of the CPC, supporting the constitution, supporting the Four Cardinal Principles (i.e. keeping to the socialist road, and upholding the people's democratic dictatorship, leadership by the communist Party and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought) and eliminating official corruption. In terms of official attitudes about the event, the newspaper published responses from both the local and central governments, using the following titles: "The local government pointed out that the student demonstration did not ask for permission beforehand" and "The spokesman of the State Council, however, expressed the willingness of the government to hold dialogue with the students." This implied the government's willingness to make some compromise. The government was definitely eager to put a peaceful end to the movement at this stage before things grew out of control. On April 29<sup>th</sup>, the *People's Daily* published an editorial urging the people to treasure and maintain the hard-won stability in



the nation. On the same day, the newspaper also published a comprehensive report on the dialogue between the students and some local government officials in Beijing.

From early May on, coverage of the protests grew more open, even sympathetic towards the protestors. The official views correspondingly diminished. Journalists began to actively circumvent government control and sought to openly express their support for the students. Between May 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>, there were altogether five reports that highlighted the movement: one was the transcript of the press conference held by the spokesman of the State Council; one was a copy of the petition drafted by the students; one was an excerpt of the speech by Zhao Ziyang, which expressed his understanding of the student movement; and two were about the students' positive response to the speech. During the hunger strike period, the official media reported on the movement in an extremely positive manner. Between May 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, all of the movement-related news reports that appeared in the *People's Daily* were positive about the movement. For example, on May 15<sup>th</sup>, the *People's Daily* carried a report on the dialogue between government officials and the students, emphasizing that the patriotic feelings of the student had once again been recognized by the government. On the following day, a report titled "millions of citizens gathered in Tiananmen to voice their support for the students" was published in the *Daily*. On May 17<sup>th</sup>, media support for the student movement reached its peak. On that single day, the *People's Daily* featured 12 articles urging the government to make a quick and positive response. Among them, nine reports were written by journalists of the *Daily* itself, and three were from the Xinhua News Agency. The title of the reports reflected the paper's support for the students on that day. Three titles highlighted by boldface type in that day's paper, for example, were phrased as follows: "University teachers and students are holding nationwide demonstrations and parades to voice their support to the Beijing students", "hundreds of citizens from all walks of work parade to support the student and urge the government to save both the life of the students and the nation by arranging an earlier dialogue with the students", and "various democratic parties urging both the CPC and the central government to dialogue with students as soon as possible". The three days from May 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> were known as the "three days media freedom." (Frank Tan 1990, 153)

Reporting of foreign news at this stage also became an important channel for voicing opposition to the government. Both innuendo and allusion were used several times to support student demands. Examples include a story about anti-corruption measures in Egypt (PD, May 14, 1989) and a report on the public disclosure of U.S. President Bush's personal assets and gifts. (PD, May 18, 1989)

Moreover, the placement of news evidently also reflected the journalists' support for the movement. Gorbachev's state visit to Beijing on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1989 was an extremely important event for Chinese leaders since it was the first state visit between the former Soviet Union and China in thirty years, and it marked the end of hostile relationship between the two countries. Yet, the *People's Daily* put the news in a lower corner of the first page of the paper. By doing so, it was obviously downplaying the summit so as to give more attention to the student movement.

In short, the official media delivered a uniform message during this period: the movement was patriotic and democratic; the students reasonable and orderly; the government uncompromising, indecisive and unreasonable; and the people supportive of and sympathetic toward the movement.

As Kielbowicz and Scherer (1986) proposed, media coverage is crucial to public awareness, support and development of a social movement. During this period of time, government censorship had broken down; all that existed was self-censorship in terms of what should and should not be reported. Although the media went to the other extreme during the period in that they began to carry solely their side of the story, which violated the rules of Western media professionalism, the mass media experienced unprecedented freedom and journalists showed great courage at this stage.

The *People's Daily* played a very important role in winning support from the public for the students. So did other official media such as CCTV. I remember clearly that during the hunger strike period, CCTV carried a lot of pictures of fainted students, sympathizing citizens and ambulances. As a 14-year-old girl, I did not really understand what happened then. However, I sensed the changes in the news reports of CCTV. Trained for the purpose of socialist propaganda performances, the news announcers in China were usually supposed to have inspiring voices and wear bright colors. When they read news, they were so involved and enthusiastic that you thought they were moved by

the slogans they shouted every time they read them. I was quite accustomed to this practice at that time. During the hunger strike, however, I recall for several days both the male and female announcers wore dark colors, and their voices also signaled a kind of sorrow. Moreover, the pictures shown on CCTV at the time were so touching and overwhelming that I felt the government officials were really inhumane in allowing the students to die in front of their eyes. Even if the students' behavior could not be justified, the government should not have allowed them to die. I believe that many people shared this attitude at the time.

The media together had played a very important role in escalating the movement. For example, when the hunger strike began on May 13, most Beijing students and residents neither understood nor supported the action. By May 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> however, millions of supporters jammed inside Tiananmen Square. Many factors contributed to this quick change of public opinion, but the way that the official media reported on the movement was certainly an important factor. A rather frequent response has been: “even the *People's Daily* supported the students. We had nothing to worry about.”

### *Stage Three: May 20<sup>th</sup> to June 6, Circumventing Government Control*

Chinese premier Li Peng declared martial law on May 20th. Starting then, the government tried to take back control over the mass media. Major newspapers and TV stations were asked to cover the government's side of the story about martial law. All of a sudden, positive reports on the student movement were replaced by official voices. On that day in the *People's Daily*, there were altogether five articles on the movement. All of them were expressing government voices: one was the government announcement about the decision on martial law, one was an editorial by the Xinhua News Agency, and two were texts of the speeches by both the Chairman of the CPPCC Li Xiannian and the Premier Li Peng. In addition, there was one letter by Deng Yingchao, the wife of former premier Zhou Enlai.

While negative accounts of the movement skyrocketing beginning on May 20th, more neutral accounts disappeared after June 4th. On June 4<sup>th</sup>, there was even an article in the form of a “letter to the editors” criticizing the *People's daily* for inflaming the student movement. According to this letter, the newspaper had failed to be loyal to the

Party, the government and the people during the movement in that it had tried various ways to ignore the government's position and thereby inflame the movement. By publishing this kind of piece in the *People's Daily*, the government was actually warming up for the forthcoming campaign against enhanced or expanded media freedom witnessed in China during the reform era.

Although China's official mass media were eventually forced into silence after the military repression, this does not mean journalists started to cooperate with the regime. As early as May 21<sup>st</sup>, the *People's Daily* started to use innuendo, allegory and other methods of indirect communication to express its objection to martial law. After the military suppression of the movement, foreign news once again became a vital channel in the *People's Daily* for venting dissatisfaction with and opposition to the regime. Often, the resistance was distilled in the headlines as in the unusually prominent one placed over a Xinhua story, reporting "Khomeini aged and in poor health, who will succeed him" (PD, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1989) --- a clear reference to Deng Xiaoping and other aged Chinese leaders still in power. Another headline over a Xinhua story quoted Hungary's prime minister as saying, "use of military to resolve internal problems not permissible" (PD, May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1989) --- an obvious reference to the imposition of martial law in Beijing. Such use of innuendo peaked again on June 4<sup>th</sup>, the day after the military repression. For example, in the domestic news section that day, there was a story about a handicapped person winning an athletics medal. Yet, the story was accompanied by the incongruous headline: "the people's heart will never be conquered". The title was clearly irrelevant to the story. By adding such a title, editors could have been voicing their opposition to the government. The implied meaning here was that, although the student movement has been put down by the government, their pursuit of democracy could in no way be stopped by the military action. For the international news column, the editors selected a cluster of three stories with the following titles: "Students in Seoul staging a hunger strike to protest the government's killing of students"; "Israeli army invades south Lebanon: again they use airplanes and tanks to deal with civilians"; and "The leader of Poland says that election is a great try-out for conflict resolution: one must not play with fire." Here, the title of the last story was printed in a small font, but its subtitle "one must not play with fire" was in big and bold characters and was not particularly related to the news. An old

proverb in China says that those who play with fire will eventually burn themselves; the implication was that the government would definitely be in trouble by playing with fire.

Moreover, the *People's Daily* also used attribution to voice its support for the students and opposition to government control. Unlike in most liberal media, attribution is not a given in Chinese journalism, for the Chinese media often assert things as if they were facts without citing the authority for such "facts." During this period, the *People's Daily* used attribution in several cases so as to disassociate itself from what was being said. For instance, in the June 4<sup>th</sup>'s *People's Daily*, the front page box reporting the troops' entrance into Tiananmen Square started off by quoting an editorial from the *People's Liberation Army Daily* that was reprinted in its entirety at the bottom of the same page, thus attributing the judgment that "a serious counter-revolutionary rebellion had occurred in the capital" to the PLA paper. One noticeable arrangement here was that this editorial from PLAD was published in exceptionally small font.

In the same day's paper, the journalists also included information about the fire opened by the army and the injuries and deaths reported by the local hospitals without any comment under the title of "This night of Beijing," which used enlarged and bold font. On the surface, the *People's Daily* was doing what the government forced it to do, but to give the reports a second thought, it can be easily seen that the information the journalists tried to convey was far richer than it appeared in the paper. As what the journalists shouted during the demonstration---"do not force us to lie" and "we want to tell the truth"--- when they were faced with government suppression during the movement, they chose to write nothing rather than making up lies.

In addition to expressing their indignation directly, the editors of the *People's Daily* also used various other techniques for editorial emphasis. One of the examples was the use of borders to highlight some news. The newspaper opened a small flower-framed box on the front page in which a neutral matter-of-fact style of writing was used to provide updates on the movement and martial law. "Being on day N of Martial law" ran ten days during the period from May 21 to May 31. After the government put a stop to this, the *People's Daily* still managed to publish basically the same type of story in roughly the same size flower-framed box on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. This practice was severely censured by a letter to the editors in June 4<sup>th</sup> *People's Daily* as the application of the Spring and Autumn

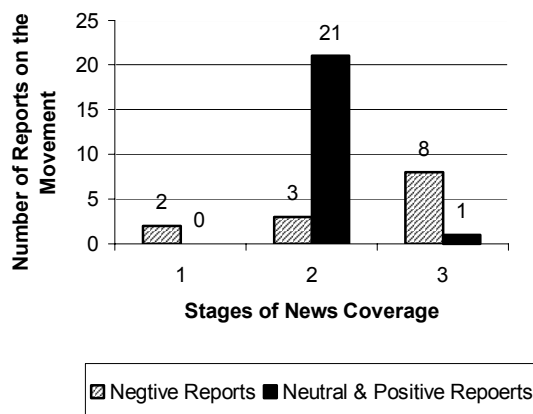
style, which was aimed to confuse black and white, openly oppose the party and inflame the student movement. (June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1989, *People's Daily*)

Journalists of the *People's Daily* demonstrated great courage in circumventing government control during the movement; however, once the government finally regained its control of the mass media in the third stage of the movement, some of the journalists were either arrested or removed from their positions after the military suppression of the movement. The fortune of Hu Jiwei, former senior editor of the *People's Daily*, was an example. As a highly respected editor and a member of the National People's Congress in China, Hu Jiwei had written articles about press freedom and press reform in China during the movement, which were widely read by both students and journalists and served as the motive power for journalists' requests for media freedom and relinquishment of government control over the Chinese media. After the military crackdown, Hu was both stripped of the position of member of the National People's Congress and expelled from the Party for spreading liberal ideas. Another example was the removal of Du Xian, the news announcer on CCTV, from her post. As a popular news announcer in China, Du had taken a supportive position on the student movement. On June 4<sup>th</sup>, although she read the official news word by word, the black color of her blouse and her sorrowful voice clearly told her audience that she sympathized with the students. The Party took this as evidence of her silent protest. Consequently, she was removed from her post and disappeared from the screen of CCTV. About one year ago, I heard some news about her again, which indicated that she was working at a TV station in Hong Kong.

## Conclusion

The 1989 student movement was definitely an important political event. Although media freedom did exist for a period of time in the second stage during the movement, a comprehensive review of media activities throughout the movement shows that it was more of a result of journalists' struggle to circumvent government control than a result of voluntary relaxation of control by the Chinese government. Figure 4 summarized media coverage during different stages of the movement.

**Figure 4 : The *People's Daily's* Reports on the 1989 Beijing Student Movement**



In the first stage, although some journalists at the *People's Daily* apparently wanted to carry reports on the student movement, no report on the events was published because of lack of authorization from the government. The sources that people mainly relied upon were informal channels to gather information about the movement at this stage. This reality also indirectly reflected government control over media content at the time.

The Chinese media enjoyed unprecedented freedom during the second stage, but this was mainly a result of temporary government compromise. In this stage, to reverse the situation, the government adopted a lot of strategies of compromise, including holding dialogues with student leaders and allowing more media freedom. As a result, more neutral and even favorable reports on the student movements in various locales increased dramatically during this stage. But this media freedom lasted for only a brief period. Government control was once again tightened after martial law was introduced to Tiananmen Square.

Under martial law, journalists and editors in the official media still tried to voice their dissatisfaction to the government by carrying various articles that might be seen as unfavorable to the government. However, they never did this directly because of the tight

government control. What they did then was to voice their dissent in more disguised ways, such as using rhetorical devices, like innuendo, allusion or allegory. After June 4<sup>th</sup>, in order to consolidate its control over media, the government not only re-imposed the party principle but also applied severe post-publication punishment to journalists who were active during the movement. As a result, many journalists were subject to inquiry, interrogation and even imprisonment.

The above research on media reporting of the 1989 Beijing Student Movement showed that there was certainly a brief period of media diversity and autonomy during the movement. This media freedom appeared to be more a of the journalists' struggle for professionalism and temporary government compromise than a result of the voluntary efforts of the government to improve democracy and freedom of speech in the nation. Throughout the student movement, the Chinese government had intended to adopt various approaches to control the mass media, including controlling media content by setting guidelines and censorship for media reporting, controlling management by appointing and removing chief editors from their position, applying post-publication retribution, and even using military to force the media to obey party orders. Although there were occasional deviations, generally speaking the media were under the control of the Party during the movement.

Within one month after the suppression of the movement, the government made even greater efforts at tightening control over media. Between June 20<sup>th</sup> and July 1<sup>st</sup>, four articles related to the "problem" of media freedom were published in the *People's Daily*. The first was published on June 20<sup>th</sup>, criticizing the efforts of Western and Hong Kong media in inflaming and exaggerating the situation on June 4<sup>th</sup>. On the following day, the Daily published an article censuring the American media for making up stories about June 4<sup>th</sup>. Two days later, the *People's Daily* featured an article about Deng Xiaoping's direction for establishing law of association, parade and demonstration, law of martial law, and press law etc. The article carried by the newspaper on July 1<sup>st</sup>, titled "central propaganda department urges mass media to reflect on their performance," formally initiated the government's serious efforts at tightening its control over media. According to the article, news cannot be free from political orientation, only when the media adhere to the position of the government, the people and the Party, can it develop healthily. The



article also pointed out the “correct” direction for media reform to follow, that is, to adhere to the Four Cardinal Principles, which referred to “the principle of keeping to the socialist road, and upholding the people’s democratic dictatorship, leadership by the communist party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.” This once again confirmed the role of the media as the mouthpiece of the government and a tool for political and social control.

### **Case two—Three Gorges Dam Project**

#### **Background Information**

The name Sanxia or Three Gorges comes from the three separate gorges that extend for 100 km and are considered the three segments of Sanxia. Their names from west to east are Qiantangxia, Wuxia and Xilingxia. The idea of building a gigantic dam in the three gorges to harness the Yangtze River was not new. It was first raised by Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Republic of China, more than seventy years ago. (Edmonds 1991, P106) Since the 1930s the Sanxia area had been surveyed by Chinese, Soviet and American engineers, and arguments about whether or not to develop the dam had been continuous. However, because of historical reasons and lack of resources, the project remained only a dream before the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

Once the PRC was established in 1949, the project was back on the agenda. The central government ordered research on the dam to begin in 1951. After the 1954 flood, the pace of research was accelerated, and the government decided to devise a comprehensive plan. The project was accepted as a long-term planning goal in the mid-1950s, and it was subsequently debated when each five-year plan was formulated. From 1960 onwards, efforts to begin construction of the Sanxia dam were halted by economic collapse in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. With the return to an emphasis on economic development after 1978, the Three Gorges Dam Project again came into prominence after languishing for about two decades in relative obscurity. During the summer of 1980, Deng Xiaoping visited the site and encouraged the State Council and others to continue research on Sanxia. Meanwhile, a lot more feasibility research had been done by both domestic and international experts. After years

of meticulous feasibility studies by experts, it was finally concluded that the merits of the projects outweighed its demerits.

Due to the economic and political implications of this massive project, however, it was subjected to heated debates ever since the government took serious steps to begin developing the project. Public arguments over the decades as to whether the dam should be constructed concentrated on several key technical questions: flood control, energy supply, navigation and water supply. However, after the government finally decided to develop the dam, there also arose debates on some problems of the project, which might have great social and political implications, such as relocation of the population and impact on the environment. Although the debate on the projects never stopped, on April 3, 1992, the National People's Congress approved the construction of the project by a vote of 1767 to 177 with 664 abstentions. (Edmond 1991, 105) Given that the decision was made in April 1992 to construct the dam, the period between late 1991 to mid-1992 witnessed the most heated debates about the dam project. Diverse viewpoints from within and outside China continued to appear in Chinese media during this period.

### Media Coverage

Starting in the early 1990s, the Chinese government began to make serious efforts to launch the dam project. In July 1990, the State Council set up a special committee, which was composed of top government officials, experts and scientists, to study the feasibility of the immense hydroelectric, flood control and irrigation project. (Edmond 1991, 109) Government officials at different levels began to visit the Sanxia site continuously. The 1991 flood brought the issue to the fore and made the government reconsider the project. The political climate since Tiananmen had become very grim in that government had re-imposed tight controls over the mass media. As a result, experts and reporters inside China had been quite reticent about voicing their dissents on both political and nonpolitical issues. However, given the potential economic and social implications of the giant project, the government unexpectedly encouraged open discussion to make sure that every aspect of the project would be carefully considered.

The government made various efforts to consult the masses. It invited experts from various fields to discuss the project and also allowed media a lot more freedom in

covering the issue. CCTV broadcast a series of interviews with government officials, scientists and professors to inform people of the different opinions of experts. This format was replicated by local TV stations. In Jinan, the capital city of Shandong province at that time, both the TV stations at the provincial and municipal levels imitated the “Focus Interview” initiated by CCTV and conducted interviews with local government officials, scientists and university professors. In these interviews, various points of views were voiced. Although all of the interviewees agreed that the construction of the Three Gorges Dam would bring a lot of benefit to the nation’s economy, they still explicitly expressed some uncertainties about the project.

During the same period, the *People’s Daily* even set up a special column called “the Three Gorges Dam Project Forum” in a prominent position on the first page to allow different opinions to be voiced there. The column was set up in mid- December 1991, which was right after both the CPPCC (Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference) and the NPC (National People’s Congress) sent delegations to conduct field research on the project in the Sichuan, Hunan and Hubei provinces. Between December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1991 and April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1992, the forum altogether carried 11 articles by experts and governments officials, discussing possible benefits and problems of the project. In initiating the new forum, the editor of the *People’s Daily* invited a hydraulic expert, Zhang Guangdou, to make a comprehensive introduction of the project. (December 18, 1992, *People’s Daily*) The topics addressed in this report included the project’s benefits, technological requirements, and social and economic implications, which had long been the focus of discussion about the project. As a scientist, Zhang’s introduction was quite objective, for he both mentioned the benefits of the projects and expressed his concerns about some potential problems.

The publication of this article served as a good start of the forum, for the exposure of some potential problems of the project in this official medium reassured the public that the government was sincere about soliciting opinions from the public. In other words, the establishment of the forum was a reflection of serious government efforts to listen to different opinions rather than a gesture of openness and democracy. Among the eleven articles published in the forum, four were written by experts in electric and hydraulic power, one by a famous economist, two by governors of Hunan and Hubei provinces, two

by members of the CPPCC, one by the members of the NPC's special development committee for the Three Gorges Dam Project and one by the Minister of the Ministry of Geology and Mineral Resources. These eleven articles together provided a wide range of viewpoints regarding both the benefits and the potential problems of the Three Gorges Dam Project. Although there was no real opposition to the project in the forum (for all eleven articles agreed that the benefits far outweighed the disadvantages), still this forum provided room for a relatively open discussion of national policies. As a result, the people of the nation were fairly well informed about the project before any policy was formulated regarding it.

For the first time in the history of the PRC, the people were allowed to participate in the discussion of state affairs before the government decided on a policy. According to common practice, it was usually the responsibility of the political elites of the country to make important decisions about the nation's political and economic policies with the discussion concerning the policies only open to these government officials. The general public could never get access to any of the information before the elites reached any consensus. The only thing the government expected from the people after the policy was passed in the National People's Congress was unconditional support for the implementation of the policy. Three Gorges Dam Project was an exception in this regard; the government not only encouraged open discussion about the project before making any decision but also evidently took public opinion seriously.

The bill for constructing the project was narrowly passed by the National People's Congress, with slightly over two thirds of the delegates voting for the project on April 3, 1992. Given that 177 delegates voted against the project and 664 abstained, there must have been much dissent and opposition to the project. However, there was a different picture in media reporting of the project after the project appeared on the agenda of the government. In an effort to foster consensus among the public about the government decision to construct the project, media reports on discussion of the project diminished after the bill was passed. There were still occasional CCTV specials on the project, but the focus of the news was totally different from that during the open discussion period. In most cases, the news was about the efforts and preparation made by the government in initiating the project. This also happened in the *People's Daily*. The Three Gorges Dam

Forum was canceled immediately after the bill was passed; after April 3, 1992, all of the articles about the project in the *People's Daily* showed a kind of consensus: the decision was a great and wise one, and the government was committed to the construction of a new wonder of the world.

On April 6<sup>th</sup>, the *People's Daily* carried the complete version of Vice-premier Zou Jiahua's explanation of the bill on constructing the Three Gorges Dam. In the same day's newspaper, there was also an editorial with the title, "congratulating the inclusion of the Three Gorges Dam Projects in the 10-Year National Plan." All of a sudden, the concerns about the project disappeared from the official media. If one never knew about the discussion of the project before coming across the official media after the bill was passed, one would definitely have thought that the project had been passed unanimously by the NPC and that there was no concern about the project at all.

This was obviously not true. After the project was under construction, many raised various problems concerning the relocation of the population. In certain cases, government subsidies cannot reach the villagers who had no savings to sustain life at all. In other cases, the walls of the new houses for the migrants cracked shortly after they moved in. Because of the substantial geographical differences between the Sanxia area and their new homes, a great number of the migrants who had been farmers had to learn skills of growing new crops. For children who were attending school, they had to say goodbye to both of their friends and their hometowns, which had witnessed so much of their laughter and happy tears. Moreover, there were also various other physical and psychological problems among the migrants due to the change of environment. Problems of population relocation were only a drop in the ocean. However, none of these problems had been covered by official media at the time as a result of media control.

Since the project is under construction now, after conducting research into the media reports during late 1991 to mid 1992, I also searched on websites for the latest reports on the project. Among the search results I got from sina.com.cn, very few problems have been reported concerning the dam's construction. Most of the articles included basic figures about the project and its progress. Even when covering negative stories about the project, the reports actually emphasized the quick response of the

government in dealing with those problems such as shoddy work or embezzlement of public funds.

## Conclusion

Media reports about the Three Gorges Dam Project in the early stage (that is, before the National People's Congress passed the bill for constructing the dam) certainly demonstrated a kind of media diversity and autonomy. A degree of freedom had been allowed in discussing a wide range of issues in the official media, and various points of views had been tolerated and voiced on the air and in newspapers. In my view, this was mainly because the Three Gorges Dam Project was more an economic policy than a political policy. The reform launched in the late 1970s gave great priority to economic development. To achieve that goal, the government had introduced various preferential policies and mechanisms to develop the national economy. One of the guiding principles for carrying out the reform was to shift the government emphasis from ideology to pragmatism. The emphasis on performance allowed the government to decentralize its power and tolerate more freedom and autonomy in various sectors of the nation, including the mass media. In addition, given the significance and the huge investment in the project, the government simply could not afford to make arbitrary decisions.

However, it should also be noted that in the later stage of the reporting on the project, the government once again imposed control over the media, for unanimous consensus became the key tone of the official media. After the bill on the project was passed by the National People's Congress, instead of continuing to encourage open discussion of the problems of the project and allowing the media to act on their own, the government obviously set certain guidelines for the official media; the reports in the *People's Daily* after April 6, 1992 showed that the media returned to its normal role and was once again used to foster consensus of public opinion and protect the image of the government. This reminded one of the control practices of the Party, which emphasized that no open discussion and criticism of a government decision were allowed after it was passed as a policy. Given that nearly half of the members of the NPC opposed the construction of the dam, there must have been great concerns about the project. By neglecting and omitting these opinions from the official media after the bill was passed,

the government actually intended to put the best face on it. It also sought to convince the public that all of the delegates of the Congress supported the Party's decision to construct the project and all Chinese people welcomed the bill as a wise decision of the Party. This was nothing new: it simply constituted a repetition of the instrumental use of the media as a tool for propagating government policies and directives.

### **Case Three: Falun Gong Movement**

#### Background Information

As a set of physical exercises and meditation that are based on a variant of traditional Chinese qigong, Falun Gong (FLG) became very popular among middle-aged and retired Chinese in the early 1990s because of their perceived physical and mental well being after the practice. However, FLG was claimed by Li Hongzhi to be more profound than mere physical exercise as it also embodied Chinese metaphysical and religious elements of the Taoist yin-yang and the Buddha's Dharma-wheel (the Falun). Although the government promised freedom of religion, tight ideological control in Mao's China and the overemphasis on economic development in the reform era made it hard for people to pursue whatever religion they believed in. As a result, there has been a long-term belief vacuum in China. Since FLG has elements of both Taoism and Buddhism, which once were the most popular religions in China, the combined philosophical mysticism of the two religions together with the spiritual promises made by Li Hongzhi, the master of FLG, rendered it both appealing to the middle-aged, retirees, and better-educated Chinese intellectuals.

Although Li Hongzhi and his followers had consistently argued that FLG was not an organization and they had no hidden political agenda, the behaviors of Li and many of his followers, both inside and outside China, became increasingly political and even provocative in the late 1990s. The sect appeared on the surface as a loose and informal group based on voluntary participation. But this belied the sect's effective organizational structure comprising one central organization (the Falun Dafa Society), 39 teaching centers, 1,900 instruction centers and 28,000 practice sites throughout China. (Wong and Lan 1999)

In April 1999, over 10,000 FLG followers in Beijing staged a peaceful sit-in outside the Chinese leadership compound, Zhongnanhai. The audacity of this demonstration, which caught the Chinese security services by surprise, shocked China's top leaders. Furthermore, FLG followers continued to hold demonstrations in various cities, at a time when the government was obsessed with maintaining social stability, which it saw as vital for the deepening of economic reform. Soon after the Beijing demonstration, the Chinese leadership awakened to the fact that the sect had grown into a huge organization with tens of millions of followers. Worse still, among the followers were millions of Party cadres, sitting government officials, senior PLA commanders and police officers. Realizing the seriousness of the potential problems of Falun Gong, the government organized a campaign to crack down on it. To maximize the effect, the government has employed various media available during the campaign. Official media such as CCTV and the *People's Daily* became the main battlefield for this. More detailed information will be included in the following section.

Although there are still on-going struggles between the government and Falun Gong disciples, the most meaningful period for studying media coverage of the issue is from the point when the movement aroused great concern among government officials in 1999 by demonstrating in front of Zhongnanhai. At this point the government officially denounced Falun Gong as illegal and launched a media campaign to crack down on Falun Gong.

### Media Coverage

Falun Gong did not show any sign of threatening the rule of the government in its early stages. As far as I can recall, Falun Gong was considered as a kind of Qigong in the early 1990s, and many people practiced it simply for the purpose of health. As already mentioned, the movement started to attract government attention when it organized a demonstration in front of Zhongnanhai in April 1999. However, coverage of the event could hardly be seen in the official media before the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs declared the Falun Dafa Society and Falun Gong organizations under its control illegal in mid-July.



Media coverage of Falun Gong was completely a political campaign in that all the reports on the topic were aimed to expose Li and discredit the sect, highlighting its many negative aspects related to Li's superstitious and supernatural claims. The campaign reached its peak on July 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, which was right after the government declared the organization illegal. CCTV and the *People's Daily* become the major instruments for the campaign. As part of the efforts to crack down on Falun Gong, CCTV not only spent a lot of time in exposing the adverse effects of Falun Gong in its 30 minutes-long daily news. It also devoted several special time slots to reinforce these points. This practice was replicated by the local TV stations. Every day, there were several instances on TV with family members of Falun Gong disciples moaning over the disaster to their family caused by Falun Gong. They then expressed their determination to break away from the organization and their gratitude for government efforts to put an end to the wide spread of the "evil organization." As I recall, CCTV broadcast relevant stories every day during the period

The *People's Daily* began the campaign in mid-July. On July 20, the paper published the announcement of the central government that forbade Party members to practice Falun Dafa. On the following day, the campaign reached its peak: the *People's Daily* included five reports on Falun Gong. Two of them were government announcements, and three were reports from the Xinhua News Agency and journalists. With these two announcements, the state set out its line. One was made by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, charging that the Falun Dafa Society and its organizations were illegal; the other was by the Public Security Bureau, declaring all activities related to Falun Gong to be illegal. Together with these two official government announcements, the *People's Daily* also carried several reports exposing the outrageous aspects of Falun Gong and people's positive responses to the government decision to ban the movement to articulate the views of the CPC. One of the reports was about the general public's response to the government's decision to crack down on the movement; one was about the several cases illustrating the superstitious nature of the evil organization by Xinhua News Agency. There was also one with the personal information about Li Hongzhi by the Public Security Bureau.

Similar reports continued to appear in the *People's Daily*; the newspaper carried two reports on Falun Gong on July 23<sup>rd</sup>. One was a condemnation of Falun Gong by the Xinhua News Agency; the other was a follow-up report on the positive responses of people of all walks of life. The reports on the campaign against Falun Gong diminished gradually in the *People's Daily* but not on CCTV. This change in the paper happened partly because of the intention of the government to downplay the seriousness of the situation and partly because the government considered TV to be a more effective and powerful tool than newspapers in exposing the adverse effects of Falun Gong since its visual and audio aspects allowed it to more easily win people's hearts. The government attached so much importance to the campaign that the issue even became the center of political studies in universities after schools resumed in early September. I recalled that as college students at the time, we were not only required to read the *People's Daily* and watch the daily news on CCTV but also asked to be supportive of the government's stand on the issue. Because of the importance attached to the issue, most student activities were centered on the topic. Student leaders were organized together to study government documents on the issue and write reflections on them as well. General student were required at least not to practice and get involved with FLG in any way. Otherwise they would be dismissed no matter how excellent their academic performance was.

## Conclusion

In the campaign against Falun Gong, the government effectively controlled the content of the official media with the aim of cracking down on the movement. In the early stage of the movement, probably because of the lack of authorization from the central government, no report on the organization was carried by official media. Later, when the government called the organization illegal, various efforts were made in the official media to expose the negative aspects of Falun Gong. The government's explanation for cracking down on the organization was that the Falun Gong association was an illegal organization without formal registration, and it had severely threatened social stability by spreading superstitious ideas, deceiving the public, and plotting and inflaming some violent activities. According to Wang Zhaoguo, the vice president of CPPCC, Falun Gong was the most important political event ever since the 1989 student

movement. (PD, July 23, 199). This official definition of Falun Gong as a serious political problem justified the government's tight control over media coverage of the issue.

The campaign against Falun Gong is still going on in China today, and although it has ceased to be the first thing on the agenda, there are still official stories on the topic. A search for information on Falun Gong on a Chinese news website ([www.sina.com.cn](http://www.sina.com.cn)) confirmed this. To look for information about Falun Gong, I typed "Falun Gong" and then clicked the "search" key; surprisingly, I got no results. I tried this several times, but the result was always the same. Knowing that it was impossible the website carried no information, I modified the keyword by adding "Anti" before Falun Gong in Chinese and searched again; this time, I got a bunch of search results, all of them denouncing Falun Gong as an evil organization and singing praises of the government decision to crack down on it.

The ongoing efforts of government control over the coverage of the issue were also confirmed by part of my research experience. To gather some first-hand material about Falun Gong from China, I have asked my father to scan relevant news reports on the topic and send them to me via email. However, all my father's emails were lost. They were neither returned to his mailbox nor reached mine. We were quite confused by this. After asking my father to try several times, I suddenly realized that maybe the emails have been filtered by the government network censorship because of their subjects, which were related to Falun Gong. As soon as my father tried again after changing both the mail subject and filenames, I received all the materials that had been lost before. This confirmed the government has employed various means including the Internet in dealing with Falun Gong, although its control technique of filtering email headers is pretty crude.

From all appearances, it seems that the FLG either as a quasi-religious sect or as a social movement has been effectively curbed. It would be extremely difficult for it to continue operating in China except as an underground movement. The sect therefore seems set to decline, either evolving back into a traditional form of qigong exercise or metamorphosing into a politically innocuous, quasi-religious group without formal links with foreign FLG elements. With the FLG banned in the homeland, it will also be difficult for it to flourish overseas, for it will not be easy for the largely culture-specific

FLG to convert those who are not deeply grounded in Chinese philosophy and traditional Chinese mysticism.

The media definitely played a very important role in cracking down on the movement. To prevent movements like FLG from rising in the future, however, the government has to realize the deep-rooted problems behind the movement's emergence and come up with strategies to deal with them. Otherwise, excessive use of the media in fighting against the movement can bring nothing but negative social effects, which might be contrary to the initial intention of the government. For example, in the campaign against the movement, the government tried its best to convince people that this organization was nothing but a swindle. At the very beginning, most of the evening news on CCTV was about the "disaster" caused by *Falun Gong*. The subjects of the report showed a kind of diversity. Sometimes it was a story about an ordinary family that had been broken by the Falun Gong that possessed one of the family member's spirits; sometimes it was about college students who were Ph.D. candidates, but then gave up their studies to follow the *Falun Dafa* (the scripture of FLG); there were also some scenes of violence caused by the disciples of FLG. These stories did prove to be very effective in influencing public opinion at the very beginning. Before FLG became a major issue in the nation, due to people's personal experiences, they had already sensed that there was something wrong with FLG. The reports of CCTV and other major media outlets promptly reinforced this impression. But this temporary effect does not mean that such propaganda will always work. If people were interested in the news reports about the issue at the beginning, this was mainly because they were amazed by the great influence of FLG and the apparent magic power of Li Hongzhi. They believed neither the religion nor the government claim that it was attempting to overthrow the socialist regime of the nation. To minimize the adverse influences of FLG on society while mobilizing people to resist it, the government made every effort to expose the evil deeds done by the disciples of Li Hongzhi. People finally got fed up with this kind of information, and they began to suspect that the government was exaggerating the situation by misleading the public for certain political purposes. This obviously was not the result the government expected from its efforts.

The fact that FLG was able to attract such a large number of followers can be explained in part by the nature of a cult that can satisfy the psychological needs of disfranchised and expendable segments of the populations in troubled times. FLG was successful in attracting the elderly, the unemployed, retirees and those laid-off from state-owned enterprises. At the societal level, the socio-economic and demographic changes in China have created unprecedented mass leisure, with people hungry for activities and longing for fulfillment. Moreover, during a period of economic transition, disruption of social norms and values has also created a void in moral and spiritual guidance, a fertile circumstance that can attract cult-like believers.

The FLG either as a quasi-religious sect or as a social movement can be possibly cracked down on by orchestrating large-scale propaganda. However, the problems exposed by such efforts cannot be easily eliminated with the crackdown on the movement. To address the problems, instead of waging a media campaign, the government needs to take serious efforts to fill the spiritual vacuum that has been created by the decline of ideological communism after the reform and find ways to strengthen important and traditional social values to supplement a well-engineered mental framework of nationalism. Otherwise, the problems may manifest themselves in different and alternative forms in the future.

### **Conclusion**

The separate analysis of the three cases definitely yielded some interesting results, but comparison and contrast among them can produce even more insights that would allow one to get some indication about the patterns in government control over media during the reform era.

First, although the degree of government control varied from case to case, there was evidence of government control over the media for various purposes in all three cases. Media control over content happened in the first and third stages of the 1989 movement. In the Three Gorges Dam project, media control came after the bill was passed by the People's Congress in April 1992. In reporting on Falun Gong, media control started right

after the government declared the Falun Dafa society and its organization to be illegal on July 22, 1999.

Despite the brief periods of media freedom in cases one and two, the overall study of the three cases showed that there was little evidence that the government was willing to allow media to act on their own in reporting on issues with political impact during the past two decades. Contrary to what some scholars believed, economic reform did not automatically bring about media freedom in China. As mentioned in Chapter One, scholars such as Robinson were very optimistic about media freedom in China because of the changes in media roles in the reform era. She indicated that media commercialization would eventually bring political democracy to China. (Robinson 1981) Although the economy of the nation has continued to grow ever since the government adopted the reform policy, the three cases showed no sign of gradual relaxation of control over media coverage of political issues in China. The government still tried to hold the media under its control either for the purpose of keeping its power as in the cases of the 1989 Student Movement and Falun Gong or for the purpose of maintaining a good image of government as in the case of the Three Gorges Dam. In view of this, it can be concluded that economic reform will not automatically bring media freedom to China; the relinquishment of tight government control over media requires something more than economic reform.

Second, media control varies according to the nature of the issue involved. As can be seen from the case studies, media control during the 1989 Student Movement and the campaign against Falun Gong was far tighter and stricter than in the coverage of the Three Gorges Dam project. Given that the government defined the 1989 Student Movement and the Falun Gong as involving “anti-revolutionary turmoil” and “serious political issues” respectively, the results also confirmed my original hypothesis that the degree of control will depend on the nature of the issues involved. There appeared to be tighter control over coverage of political issues than economic ones

The government tried to withhold information at the very beginning of the 1989 student movement by threatening severe punishment of those causing the turmoil in the *People's Daily* and firing Qin Benli from his editorial position in Shanghai. Although later the so-called “three days of media freedom” (May 16, 17, 18) offered in stage two, it

seemed to be more a result of journalists struggling for freedom of expression and a temporary government compromise than a result of voluntary government efforts to relax control and promote media freedom. Apparent government control over media reached unprecedented heights in the third stage. After all the major media outlets were occupied by troops by May 25<sup>th</sup>, the *People's Daily* returned to the line of stability. All positive reports on the movement disappeared after martial law was introduced in Tiananmen Square. After June 4<sup>th</sup>, all the articles in the *People's Daily* began to denounce the student movement as “anti-revolutionary turmoil.” The media were relegated to political instruments of the government at this stage.

In the case of the Three Gorges Dam, although the media were used to foster a kind of consensus of public opinion after the National People's Congress passed the bill, the government actually encouraged discussion of the project at the very beginning, allowing some people to voice their concerns about the potential problems of the project. This was unprecedented in the history of the PRC. According to the common practice, the CPC would make decisions on government policies without consulting the general public, for the Party claimed to be the representative of interests of the people. Therefore, the decision it made would be the decision of the people.

Control of the media coverage of Falun Gong started right after the government declared the Falun Dafa Society and its organizations to be illegal in July 1998. Mass media proved to be an effective tool in the crackdown on Falun Gong; by launching a large-scale media campaign against Falun Gong, the government successfully cracked down on the movement and won back many people's hearts. Although a small group of Falun Gong disciples still fight for survival, they have already lost the strength to rise again in Mainland China.

Falun Gong was considered to be more a social than a political movement in the west, but its political intention and potential as a threat to both social stability and the CPC's rule in China made the government saw it as a political movement that was aimed to overthrow the government. This explains why the government launched the nationwide media campaign against it.

Government control of the media appeared to be tighter in the political sphere than in the economic realm confirmed that there has always been a bottom line for media

freedom in China. That is, if the media do not publicize information that might hurt the image of the Party and threaten the rule of the government, they can enjoy much freedom in deciding both format and content. But if there were any violation of this principle, there would be government interference.

Third, comparison of the three cases also indicates that media control has tended to adopt more disguised and unseen approaches in the past decade. In the cases of the 1989 student movement and the government campaign against Falun Gong, the government tried various means to control the content of media; however, different approaches were adopted in each case. During the 1989 student movement, the government tried to control the content of official media by applying pre-publication censorship, post-publication punishment and even military threats. To downplay the movement, the government actually wanted no information about the student demonstration to appear in the media at the very beginning. Those who finally published reports unfavorable to the government were either removed from their posts or the newspapers were shut down. The *World Economic Herald* was an example in this regard. In stage three, the government forced the media to solely carry government opinions by sending troops to major media outlets. It was under military threat that the major media outlets returned to the line of stability.

In covering Falun Gong, however, the government adopted a quite different approach. First, instead of withholding information, the government chose to overexpose the movement by launching a media campaign against Falun Gong. During that period, reports about Falun Gong were almost everywhere; second, in cracking down on Falun Gong, instead of repeating the official attitude towards the movement and directly telling the public that Falun Gong was evil, the official media adopted some mild, more human and emotional ways of reporting the issues. For example, CCTV had orchestrated various stories to allow readers to make their own judgments. On the surface, the government was sending a message to the public that the government was not imposing its judgment on the people; in reality it tried to use a more disguised way to effect propaganda. Although changes in the control approaches cannot change the reality that the Chinese media were still held under the control of the government, it still allowed some gradual changes in the direction of less overt and direct control.



Generally speaking, the research results here confirmed my original hypothesis that degrees of media control vary according to the nature of the issues involved. However, due to possible bias in the selection of cases, the hypothesis might be rejected if more cases were examined. Due to the lack of access to certain information, I also mainly confined my research to one of the official media---the *People's Daily*; this will weaken the validity of the result as well, for there are actually many official media in China working at the same time; my focus on one official medium definitely resulted in a loss of much important information. If the study could have included a variety of reports on the three cases from different media, the comparison and contrast among them would have produced far richer and more reliable results. Finally, the current research is limited to the examination of recorded materials. Although they could be oral, written, or graphic, still they must be recorded in some fashion to permit analysis. This excluded a lot of unrecorded information, which might have played a very important role in controlling media reports in the three cases. The current research mainly explored evidence of media control in China through analyzing media coverage of the three cases. However, given that media control takes various forms in China, a better understanding of the practice would be developed if I had had an opportunity to observe other channels of media control such as phone calls and official visits in a field study.

## **Chapter Five: Prospects for Media Control in China**

Comparing the present to Mao's era, China's economic reform and the various subsequent social changes have brought about structural alterations that undoubtedly will weaken greatly the mass media's role as a government mouthpiece in China. Nonetheless, things are still restrictive. It is true that the mass media enjoy more freedom in reporting social and economic issues now that their operations have become more profit-driven, but they are still under the thumb of the Party. This condition leaves them to serve as tools for political and social control rather than independent sources of information or a countervailing center of power against the Party's political monopoly.

The three case studies reported in Chapter Four have confirmed this conclusion. In addition, there are many other examples of mass media control in China, such as the national reports on Hong Kong's return to the Motherland, the media campaigns on Beijing's bid for the 2008 Olympics, controls on reports about the Hope Project corruption, mass media reports on the U.S. war with Iraq, and, most distressingly, the recent example of inept management of vital health information about SARS. In reporting all of these events, the Chinese government and the CPC either used the mass media to carry exclusively the official side of the story to create a more favorable environment for certain political events, as in the case of Hong Kong's return to the Motherland and Beijing's bid for the 2008 Olympics, or put restrictions on the media in reporting news that might tarnish the image of the government, as in the case of the Hope Project scandal and the SARS epidemic.

The efforts of the Chinese government to control the mass media can also be found in its attitudes towards new information technologies. The past decade has witnessed the widespread and rapid development of new information technologies. These transformative changes in information technology have both greatly sped up the worldwide information flow and posed certain threat to the existing governance of many nation states.

However, will these new information technologies eventually overhaul the existing governance of nation-state? There are no available answers to these questions yet. On the one hand, the new information technologies can threaten governmental management by

curtailing national control over certain information; on the other hand however, it is also possible for them to become a new instrument for the governments to practice even tighter control over the society.

Take the Internet as an example, given the large volume of information transmitted by it, the Internet has been celebrated as a revolutionary media that will threaten the authoritarian rule and promote democracy upon its arrival in China. However, there is always distance between reality and expectations. Realizing the potential threat of the Internet, while most liberal-democratic governments are considering various questions related to the practices of “e-governance”, which would improve both the efficiency and the transparency of government institutions by adopting standard practices and signifying procedures, the Chinese government is trying its best to turn the Internet to another instrument for social and political control in China.

Being aware of the potential threat of the Internet to the Party’s monopoly over both domestic and international news, the Chinese government has developed various measures to minimize its impact on public opinion ever since it was introduced to China. The relevant regulations that are applied to the Internet management include requiring website operators and Internet service providers to keep detailed records of content and user identities, which must be turned over to authorities as demanded. Knowing that Singapore has successfully controlled the Internet, China is working hard to improve its current supervisory and surveillance systems by following Singapore’s example. The project “Golden Shield”, which is a special development to control access into and out of the Internet, is part of these efforts. (Media Freedom in China 2002) Projects like this would allow government to practice even stricter control over the Internet in China. Therefore, the technology itself will not bring about fundamental changes; it is the way that a specific government uses it that could make real differences.

Despite the fact that government control over the media’s coverage of political issues violates the right to speech protected by the Chinese Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, there is no sign that the Chinese government will voluntarily relinquish its control over the mass media in reporting on political issues. However, all too often things go against one’s expectations. The rapid changes in state-society relationships and China’s

integration into the international community make it increasingly difficult for the Chinese government to continue to practice tight control over the mass media as part of its efforts to monopolize power.

Changes in state and society relationships in the reform era pose big challenge for the government's efforts to control the media in China. During Mao's era, China was a highly homogeneous society, with people wearing similar blue or grey Mao jackets, having similar lifestyles and even hair styles, and earning similar salaries and consuming similar foods and goods. Because of various restrictions, there was almost no social mobility between the rural and urban populations. The conformity of the nation made it fairly easy for the government to impose certain regulations on the people. However, economic reform has almost totally changed the social and economic lives of Chinese people. As a result, the nation experienced great changes in its state-society relationships. First, economic reform allowed different values in Chinese society; rather than adhering solely to the Party and socialist ideology, people were provided the sources for acquiring non-state values. This resulted in a decline of old ideology. Second, economic reform allowed more social mobility between rural and urban populations. Because of the lack of labor for city construction, various strict controls over population flows set down during Mao's regime have broken down. Relaxation of migration and employment controls was officially recognized in 1983 in pilot provinces and later extended nationwide in 1985. (Liou 2003) This made the boundary between rural and urban areas less distinct, but at the same time it also increased social instability. Moreover, economic reform has increased social and economic inequality. This resulted in many more crimes in Chinese society. Such changes as decline of ideology, increased social mobility, increased social inequality and unrest have destroyed the basis for social control from Mao's era which was rooted in ideological conformity and tight population regulations. This has made it impossible for the government to maintain control over the whole society as tightly as it had before. When government control over society becomes less possible, it will become inevitable for it to further relax its control over mass media, at least in the long run.

In addition, China's integration into international organizations will also make future government control over the media difficult. Take China's entry into the WTO as an example. As a member of the WTO, China has had to accept the strong settlement

system, which gives the power to the WTO to adjudicate disputes among member countries and, more significantly, to enforce its decisions. Since China has never accepted adjudication by an international body before, its acceptance of this system showed a huge commitment to relaxing certain controls. The WTO agreement also emphasized the principle of transparency in article 10, which requires the member states to publish in a timely manner and maintain transparency in its trade-related laws, regulations, judicial decisions and administrative rulings. This will have a direct and positive impact on mass media freedoms in China. The legal principles of international institutions such as the WTO will speed up the democratization process in China, and it could frustrate the government's efforts at practicing tight controls over the mass media.

The technological innovations, changes in state-society relations and China's integration into the international community definitely will create a more favorable environment for increasing media autonomy and diversity. However, as the case studies have shown, economic reform will not automatically bring about media autonomy. The final relinquishment of tight government control over the mass media calls for new joint efforts by the Chinese government, journalists and the international community.

First of all, the government needs to provide constitutional protections for journalists in China by both making serious efforts to implement the relevant articles of the constitution and working out a separate code of media law to protect journalists.

Currently, the Chinese Constitution has in no way provided the mass media with meaningful legal protection from the state. Although Article 35 of the Constitution guarantees Chinese citizens the rights of free speech, press and assembly, and article 47 guarantees Chinese citizens the rights of creative endeavors conducive to the interests of the people that are made by citizens engaged in education, science, technology, literature, art and other culture work, citizens do not always have such rights in reality. These rights have been overridden in practice by other clauses relating to national security, interests of the state and the primacy of the communist party. Three other articles in the Constitution are more often referred to by the state when dealing with the media. Article 51: "citizens of the People's Republic of China, in exercising their freedoms and rights, may not infringe upon the interests of the state, of society or of the collective, or upon the lawful freedoms and rights of their citizens"; Article 53: "citizens of the P.R. China must abide

by the Constitution and the law, keep state secrets, protect public property, observe labor discipline and public order and respect social ethics”; Article 54: “ it is the duty of citizens of the P.R. China to safeguard the security, honor and interests of the motherland; they must not commit acts detrimental to the security, honor and interests of the Motherland.” Since the mass media are a branch of the government, media law in China only plays a very marginal role in protecting the media from the state. To give full play to the role of the media in promoting democracy within the nation, the government needs to set up a separate media law, so as to prevent both the government and the Party from dictating what the media should do without consulting any body of law. This should also put an end to the practice of using the media to promulgate policies in China.

This practice of using the media to implement law began with the earliest activities of the Chinese Communist Party, which were aimed at overthrowing the rule of imperialism, feudalism and capitalism. After the nation’s liberation, and even after the reform and opening up of the economy, however, the central government’s program for using the mass media to communicate official policy and discourse about law to the masses has shown no signs of abating.

Today, the news on CCTV is still mainly about the Party’s optimistic viewpoints of previously promulgated policies, the Party’s achievements in carrying out reform and its attainments in opening up to the outside world. Every year during the annual meeting held by the Party, all of the major mass media are enlisted to disseminate the Party’s decisions in certain policy areas as well as to tout its achievements in implementing various resolutions. At such times, CCTV is usually dominated by these topics.

Under the guidance of the government and the Party, the content of the official media outlets is still mainly selected on the basis of its relevance to the central tasks of the Party. Thus, subjects of reports remain very narrow and sometimes are quite technical. More media autonomy will definitely improve the situation.

Second, the government needs to conduct an overhaul of the judiciary system. Instead of being an independent system, the judiciary in China now is intertwined with the government bureaucracies. Since the Party appoints the judges, the position of the courts is not equal to the government; in fact, the courts are essentially subservient to the regime. To allow a genuinely independent mass media sector to emerge in China, there

is still a need for fundamental changes in the relationship between the judicial system and the government. Once the judiciary is reestablished as a real independent system, there would be much less bureaucratic interference with the journalists' work.

Currently, the biggest barrier in reporting problems like corruption and social problems is the unending interference exerted by both the local and central government bureaucracies, which can lead to potential physical harassment from these agencies as well. Under these conditions, the Chinese mass media simply cannot risk playing the watchdog role without some protection from an independent judiciary. Take the anti-corruption campaign as an example. Given that the campaign was aimed at fighting corrupt practices in order to purify the image of the Party and the government, the mass media needed to be given more autonomy to expose corrupt dealings within the government and the Party. However, the mass media have met unprecedented resistance in fulfilling this task. When dealing with some cases that have involved senior government officials, the mass media had to wait for government guidelines before they reported on the case. Usually, the government will give detailed instructions on how to cover the news. Generally speaking, the coverage was supposed to reduce major issues to smaller ones with a view to safeguarding the image and prestige of the Party. Since the public can in no way know the whole story of corrupt officials, their reactions will be less strong. Thus, the stability of the nation, to which the government has attached great significance, allegedly will be surely guaranteed. But the problem is that by preventing the public from knowing the real facts of the matter, the government actually made the situation even worse. Knowing that the government will not take the risk of ruining their reputations by exposing certain corrupt practices, corrupt officials have become all the more unbridled in their behavior. Thus, a vicious circle of professional misconduct and excessive restraint has made the problem even worse. An overhaul of the judicial system would allow journalists to avoid all the government interference and enjoy more freedoms and legal protections in exposing various kinds of corruption. By allowing the mass media to report promptly on corrupt practices, the government will not only prevent things from getting worse but also improve both efficiency and transparency within the government.

Third, increased professionalism among journalists in China should also help to promote media freedom in China. Due to the lack of professional training, journalists tend to become interest-driven in reporting news. Instead of providing objective accounts of things happening around them, they began to involve themselves in various corrupt practices, such as making up favorable reports for those clients that might bring more profit to them. (Zhao 1998) With more professional training, Chinese journalists would develop a stronger sense of responsibility to voice different opinions in a more challenging manner. Such professionalism would also bolster journalists' integrity, which may, in turn, work as another motivation power for journalists to push for more media freedom in China. Consequently, all of these changes could help to create a healthier and sounder environment for different political voices to be heard in the mass media's monitoring of the government.

Finally, the efforts of the international community are also needed to improve media freedom in China. Since nowadays many foreign investors, including mass media companies, are lining up to enter the big Chinese market, they sometimes agree to censorship or other restrictions on content as conditions for entry. This unintentionally has hurt the promotion of mass media freedom in China. I myself witnessed this kind of thing happening in China before I came to the United States. On behalf of a media company in Beijing, I participated in business negotiations with an Australian media company over the establishment of a joint venture. We touched upon government censorship of this business; however, the negotiation's outcome was that the cooperation process will circumvent the censorship either by not doing business on sensitive issues or simply accepting the censorship if the potential profit will outweigh the possible loss. This case shows that when seeking entry to the Chinese market, foreign companies seldom think about their responsibilities in promoting mass media freedom; those larger missions are typically overshadowed by their business ambitions. In view of such a situation, international investors must cultivate a sense of broader civic responsibility when investing in China. Otherwise, it would be really ridiculous for them to criticize China for having strict mass media controls, while they actually contribute to government efforts to enforce the same restrictions. The example of the Western media's entry into the Chinese market confirmed that no media are free from control. The differences



between Chinese media and western media are that the former are more controlled by the government, while the latter are more controlled by markets, commercial interests and the like. The ultimate purpose of the current study was not to explore possibilities for achieving absolute media freedom in China; rather it sought ways to improve democracy in China. Although the case studies has confirmed that the government still do not want to relax its control on media in reporting on political issues, a number of factors including China's entry into international organizations such as WTO, the rapid development of new information technologies and the deepening of the nation's economic and political reform bring opportunities for the mass media to enjoy more diversity and autonomy in the future.

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#### **On-Line Resources:**

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[www.duoweinews.com](http://www.duoweinews.com)

[www.China.org.cn](http://www.China.org.cn)

[www.cctv.com.cn](http://www.cctv.com.cn)

[www.xinhua.org](http://www.xinhua.org)

[www.sina.com.cn](http://www.sina.com.cn)

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[www.bjreview.com.cn](http://www.bjreview.com.cn)

[www.Chinatoday.com.cn](http://www.Chinatoday.com.cn)

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<http://www.mypcera.com/book/e/h/sx5000/259.htm>

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Master of Arts, English for Special Purposes and International Studies, July 2001, Foreign Affairs College, Beijing, P.R. China.

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## **Position Held**

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Virginia Tech, Fall 2001 to present

Program Support Technician, Virginia Tech, Summer 2003

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Assistant to CEO, China ChengXin International (CCXI), January 2001 to July 2001

Liaison officer, APEC Business Advisory Council Meetings, Beijing, May 2000

## **Research Interests**

International Relations Theory

Media and Cultural Studies

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## **Publications**

Translation Work: Chapter Three, *Public Administration*, Sichuan People's Publishing House, 1999.