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OF THE PARTY, BY THE PARTY, FOR THE PARTY AND PEOPLE
Chinese News Media in An Era of Reform

by

Huanwen Zhang

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Journalism

School of Journalism and Communication

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
30 April 1993

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OF THE PARTY, BY THE PARTY, FOR THE PARTY AND PEOPLE
Chinese News Media in An Era of Reform

Submitted by Huanwen Zhang
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Journalism

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, School of Journalism and Communication

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ABSTRACT

In early 1979 China initiated economic and political reforms and implemented various new policies, including policies that have affected China's news media to a degree unprecedented in her media history.

Drawing on a variety of primary sources, including 16 years of experience of the author at the official news agency, Xinhua, this thesis starts with the examination of the dynamic role the news media played in the 1989 pro-democracy movement. It studies the Chinese journalism theory and its impact on journalism practice. It examines the relationship between press reform and economic and political reforms by means of analyzing the factors generating the changes, problems caused by and facing the changes, and trends of changes in the 1990s.

The thesis concludes that China's news media reform will continue in the 1990s, but in a more cautious way, and the news media will remain socialist and authoritarian.

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, for their love and care.

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INTRODUCTION

More than a decade has passed since China embarked on a course of reform masterminded by Deng Xiaoping who, at 88, is still the most powerful person in China. These reforms, begun early in 1979, have introduced many remarkable changes in China's economy, politics, ideology and society, as well as in China's news media practice. The changes have attracted international attention. This is because China's problems are not unique; similar problems have been occurring in other communist and non-communist countries. China's changes may affect not only more than one-fifth of the world's population, but may also provide some other socialist and Third World countries with a model.

Political reform has initiated reform in China's news media because they are part of the political structure; a principal task of China's mass media is to serve the Party line. It is generally believed in China that the political reform cannot be carried out successfully unless it is accompanied by the news media reform. To promote democracy and to improve the legal system -- two of the important goals of the political reform -- it is important for the news media

to perform their function of criticism and supervision of public opinion. Since the late 1970s, along with vigorous economic and political reforms, the Chinese news media have also undergone drastic changes and transformation in practice.

These drastic changes in the nation's news media practice occurred in press policy, content, and effect. Obviously, they are very much related to the changes in the nation's politics, economy, ideology and society. Drawing on a variety of primary sources, including 16 years of my own working experience in the official Xinhua (New China) News Agency, this paper examines the relationship between press reform and economic and political reforms. It analyzes the factors generating the changes, problems caused by and facing the changes, and the trends of the changes in the 1990s. It also examines the question of China's Party journalism in an era of economic reform and opening to the outside world.

The press in China has played an important role in the country's political life over the last 60 years or so, including during the pro-democracy movement in the spring of 1989. For about two weeks that May, China appeared to have a "free press." The Chinese press gave full and open coverage of the student demonstrations and the general public who took to the streets supporting the students in Beijing and other cities. But not too many people realized that the actions of

the Chinese press constituted an essential part of the drama at Tiananmen Square.

As the press in China has been controlled by the Party and government at all levels since the founding of the People's Republic, it is designated by the Party, and regarded by the general public, as the "eyes, ears and mouthpiece of the Party" (Hu, 1985). News coverage is intended not so much to open minds as to shape them, or to educate the audience. People have been taught that whatever the newspapers print, and whatever the evening news broadcasters say, is in accordance with the "Party line." When journalists took to the streets to show their support for the students, and when the state-run media started to openly report on the student demonstrations in the spring of 1989, it was interpreted by ordinary Chinese to signify that the students had the authorities' approval.

In order to understand the immense impact that the journalists had on the events during the spring of 1989, it is useful to study Party policy on journalism and Party journalism theory, which eventually become editorial policy and guiding principles, or the "official line," for all the news media.

By official definition of the Party, the Chinese press

serves the interests of two masters, the Party and people. Charged with serving the two masters, Chinese journalists have faced many problems during a period of economic reform and accelerating social changes: the mechanism of Party and government press control and problematic genres -- societal news, critical reporting and news diversity. In this respect, the paper also attempts to locate what role the Chinese journalists have played in the reform era.

Since the reform efforts began in early 1979, changes have taken place at an unprecedented pace. Most of the changes have come about through wide-ranging economic reforms. Open markets have encouraged private enterprises. Individual initiative is no longer a curse. Joint-ventures with foreign firms have enabled the government to import new technology and know-how. The economic changes are widespread and affect the lives of many of the inhabitants of the world's most populous nation. While material changes due to the economic reforms are well documented, questions have arisen about changes elsewhere in the society, such as the political and journalistic worlds. The thesis also examines journalistic issues being discussed in the context of change for China's press system, and the nature and tenor of the press reform during 1979-89. The Chinese journalistic discontents, major issues of debate, and the fundamental concern -- the drafting of a press law -- also are discussed.

Chapter I examines the actions of Chinese journalists in the pro-democracy student movement in the spring of 1989. It argues that news coverage of and journalists' participation in the events constituted an essential part of the drama at Tiananmen Square. This chapter also attempts to examine what had made it possible that the Chinese press rid itself of government control during that period.

The Chinese journalists' role during the spring of 1989 was two-fold. First, they became participants in the movement when they joined the demonstrations as the first non-student group on 4 May. By taking part in the demonstrations the journalists encouraged other educated groups to become active. If the journalists had not taken to the streets, it was highly unlikely that so many prominent intellectuals would have dared to step forward and show their support for the students' demands. Second, the Chinese news media published stories about the demonstrations and activities related to the events. The media helped to mobilize the urban population in a way that would not have been possible if the students' actions were not reported.

The authorities seemed to lose control of the entire Chinese press and uncensored coverage all over China reached its peak in the days prior to 20 May, when martial law was imposed in parts of Beijing. For a few days, foreigners and

Chinese viewers were surprised to see uncensored Chinese television coverage of the pro-democracy students occupying Tiananmen Square, demanding the punishment of bureaucratic profiteering and calling for press freedom. They were equally surprised to read the news stories from the official wire service or carried by Chinese newspapers during this period.

Chapter II looks into Party policy on journalism and Party journalism theory. It reviews the major historical developments of Party journalism in an attempt to locate what their consequent impacts are on modern Chinese journalism.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has always attached great importance to propaganda and it has, therefore, in the course of long years' practice, also gradually developed its own theory of Party journalism. The current official theory of the Chinese press has remained unchanged amid unprecedented wide-ranging reforms in the Chinese political economy. The function and purpose of the Chinese press today, officially, is to serve the nation's "four modernizations" (in agriculture, industry, science and technology and national defence), and simultaneously to uphold the CCP's four cardinal principles (namely the socialist road, people's democratic dictatorship, the leadership of the CCP, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought). The Chinese press, in short, is still the instrument of the Communist Party and a vital cog in

the machinery of government.

Nevertheless, Chinese journalists have never been entirely happy with the realities requiring them to act primarily as publicists for public officials and promoters of official policy, and only secondarily and intermittently as voices of the public. However, from 1979 on, against the backdrop of the country's economic reform program and the many changes those reforms brought to the mass media, journalists began to question their own purpose and practices as well as the strictures and structures that circumscribed the selection, coverage, and presentation of news.

Thus, Chapter III focuses on exploring the notion and concepts of the economic reform and what this has meant to the structure and organization of the Chinese press. It explains how the political and organizational transformations of the CCP leadership have changed the media. These changes include ideological deradicalization, criticism of Maoism and the promotion of limited democracy. This political movement was mandated by the reform leadership, carried out by the media and finally spread out into society. This chapter also discusses what the reform and opening to the outside world policy has meant to working journalists.

Chapter IV addresses the efforts of the Chinese press

corps to push for press reform and the drafting of a press law and how that campaign played out in the events leading up to the spring of 1989. The debate on freedom of the press, supervision by public opinion, and news value are discussed.

Years of complaints about poor press practices had fuelled discussions about the press and stimulated new thinking. There were debates among journalists, professionals, intellectuals and within the Party over the years with regard to the role of Chinese journalism: Should propaganda continue to be "educational" or should it move toward a freer "informational" role? So the press reform efforts have sparked debates over several important journalistic concepts. The debate itself reflects both growing concern over the need for press reform and possible directions. To a certain extent, the debate cultivated a theoretical rationale for press reform.

The press reform efforts were pushed aside and the drafting of the press law was shelved after the 1989 Beijing Spring. However, there have been official talks about continuing press reform. A few months after the Tiananmen crackdown, Politburo member Li Ruihuan (in charge of propaganda) in a speech to journalists called for further and "profound" press reform while stressing the news media's role as the mouthpiece of the Party (Li, 1989: p. 33). Party

General Secretary Jiang Zemin also emphasized the need for press reform, calling on journalists to "do a good job of press reform" (Jiang, 1989: p. 15). In February 1993, the Party's new propaganda director Ding Guangen, in a speech to the editorial staff of Renmin Ribao (People's Daily), stressed the necessity of "giving impetus to the implementation of press reform."¹

There has been a renewed call for press reform in China. On 10 August 1992, Qian Bocheng, a deputy to the National People's Congress, published a bold appeal for greater press freedom, saying the time had come for the Chinese public to "have the right to know."² Here Qian is too optimistic about press reform in China, ignoring the fact that even in the West there is no such "right." Qian also called for laws guaranteeing China's right to "have a free press" and a press law guaranteeing journalists' right to cover news.

¹ Xinhua, "Ding Guangen on Press," 22 February 1993. All files from Xinhua's English wire service from 1977 on are available in the Lexis/Nexis Information Service. All quotes in the thesis from Xinhua stories were retrieved from this data bank, if not otherwise indicated. Available in this service are also articles from the world's major newspapers and periodicals, as well as news items from major wire services and news organizations (such as AP, UPI, Reuters, AFP, Tass, BBC, etc). This service provided the author with much easier access to research materials than inside China and with the possibility of following closely the developments in China.

² Jiefang Ribao (Shanghai), 10 August 1992.

There were also reports on the lifting of bans on some films. Reports from China said government controls on publication were loosened as well. And for the first time since the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, Politburo member Li Ruihuan, who also oversees arts and literature, declared on 7 August 1992 that arts and literature can be more than tools of political education. He said the arts also can be appreciated for aesthetic qualities and as entertainment.³ His statement marks a major policy shift and signals that senior leader Deng Xiaoping's calls in January 1992 for greater reforms are finally moving beyond the economy.

If this trend of reform and openness continues, the paper concludes, the future of the Chinese press is bright although some major obstacles are inevitable. Roughly, four trends of change in China's news media in the 1990s can be expected: 1) Press reform will continue, but at a slower pace. In other words, the changes that have been occurring in China's different domains, including the news media, will not stop in the 1990s, but the pace will be slow; 2) Press reform will be implemented in a strictly disciplined manner and pursue definitely planned goals. That is, the authorities will not want to see a kind of "free press" that emerged in 1989 reappearing again; 3) Press reform will focus more on improving professional standards of reporting on a greater

³ Renmin Ribao (Overseas Edition), 7 August 1992, p. 1.

diversity of grass roots social news. But the overall direction and control of the press will remain exclusively in the hands of the government and the Party. That is, future changes will centre on "technology" rather than "ideology"; and 4) As the country continues to open commercial interests, the Chinese news media will necessarily evolve into what we might call "a socialist commercial press." Such a commercial press will take advertisements from businesses, as it has already been doing so, for profits. Although it will continue to be politically controlled by the Party, it will gain more editorial autonomy as it achieves more financial independence from the Party.

Overall, China and her news media system must and will change, but China and her news media system will remain socialist and authoritarian.

CHAPTER I

Journalists as Participants, Journalists as Reporters:

Chinese News Media in the 1989 Student Movement

Remember 3rd June 1989. A most tragic event happened in the Chinese capital, Beijing. Thousands of people, most of them innocent civilians, were killed by fully armed soldiers when they forced their way into the city. Among the killed are our colleagues at Radio Beijing.

The soldiers were riding on armoured vehicles and used machine guns against thousands of local residents and students who tried to block their way. When the army convoys made a breakthrough, soldiers continued to spray their bullets indiscriminately at crowds in the street. Eyewitnesses say some armoured vehicles even crushed foot soldiers who hesitated in front of the resting civilians.

Radio Beijing English Department deeply mourns those [who] died in the tragic incident and appeals to all its listeners to join our protest for this gross violation of human rights and the most barbarous suppression of the people.

Because of the abnormal situation here in Beijing, there is no other news [of the incident] we could bring you. We sincerely ask for your understanding and thank you for joining us at this most tragic moment.⁴

Thus ended China's short-lived experiment in freedom of

⁴ BBC, "Peking (Beijing) Radio: 'Barbarous Suppression of the People'." The British Broadcasting Corporation Summary of World Broadcasts and Monitoring Reports, 5 June 1989, p. FE/0474/B2/1.

the press. This transmission was broadcast at 04:00 GMT, 4 June 1989, a few hours after the military crackdown on pro-democracy students and their supporters. It earned Wu Xiaoyong, deputy director of the English Department who wrote and read the news story, a four-year prison sentence.⁵

In the spring of 1989, the Chinese news media itself became a symbol of the movement, serving as a marker of the limits of the authorities' tolerance. For the Chinese press, there was a brief period of virtually unfettered coverage and commentary on politics and reform.

This chapter will discuss the two roles of the Chinese news media in the 1989 Beijing student movement -- journalists as participants and journalists as reporters. It will first show how the Chinese press became part of the chemistry of the student movement. This is important because the commonly accepted ideal for the press is that it should be more of an observer of events than a catalyst. Second, since the news media's main function is to inform the people, this chapter will also offer some observations on the Chinese news media's

⁵ Wu Xiaoyong, son of State Counsellor and former Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian, was released in 1991 for "health reasons." There were contradictory reports that this story was announced on Radio Beijing by newscaster Li Dan or another journalist. According to Xing Xilin, a senior official from China's Ministry of Radio, Film and Television and a visiting scholar at Carleton University in 1992, this story was written and announced by Wu Xiaoyong himself alone.

coverage of the events. Finally, this chapter also will explore how it was possible that the Chinese press rid itself of Party and government control.

In this way, this chapter hopes to address some aspects of the pro-democracy movement that might have been overshadowed or misinterpreted in the excitement and tragedy of 4 June.

Background to 1989 Beijing Spring

The spontaneous demonstrations that started three days after the death of former Party general secretary Hu Yaobang on 15 April 1989 and filled Beijing's streets for more than six weeks were unprecedented in the history of the People's Republic. They revealed a high level of frustration with the reform program initiated in the late 1970s and exposed deep divisions within the Party leadership about China's future development.

The 1989 pro-democracy movement has to be understood in the context of problems with the urban reforms that became increasingly apparent from the mid-1980s onwards. While white- and blue-collar workers were disturbed by the rising inflation that was eroding their economic gains, intellectuals and students became frustrated with the postponement of thorough-going political reform. The frustration of these key

groups with the reforms explains why the student-launched movement was able to spread its influence to other sectors of society and thus present the authorities with such a major challenge.

Since 1978, the leadership under Deng Xiaoping has tied its legitimacy more closely to its ability to deliver the economic goods than has any leadership since the founding of the People's Republic. Urban workers were offered the vision of a more rationally functioning economy that would put more goods on the shelves and that would lead to a consistent rise in living standards. Key groups of technicians and intellectuals were allowed greater freedom in return for their input into the pursuit of economic growth. Since the end of 1979, moreover, measures were introduced to improve both the prestige and material conditions of the intellectuals. However, as the 1980s progressed, most intellectuals and students began to fall behind in terms of material conditions. This left greater intellectual freedom as the most tangible benefit of the reforms. Once this became threatened there remained little to support.

The forced resignation of Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang in January 1987 as a result of student demonstrations was a major turning-point for many of these intellectuals. Hu was seen by many as supporting further experimentation with

political reform and as the most important patron of intellectuals within the top leadership.

One aspect of the reform from which the intellectuals had benefitted was the policy of "opening up" to the outside world. From the perspective of the regime, it could be said that this policy was too successful. Not only did China's intellectuals pick up ideas from the West but also, more importantly, reformers formed strong links with critical intellectuals in Eastern Europe, especially Hungary. As a result, China's intellectuals became more cosmopolitan in their outlook and more aware of alternatives to the policies offered by their own Party leaders. Reformist ideas from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were much more difficult for the Party leadership to reject out of hand than were Western notions of democracy and divisions of powers, which could be dismissed as "bourgeois" in nature.⁶

Hu's "resignation" also came as a shock for the students. After all, their demonstrations had been used as the pretext to dismiss him. Chinese students had been offered a place of prestige in the country's future in return for acquiescence to the Party's overriding goals. But what the Party did not realize was that the students themselves wanted to play a

⁶ See Andrew G. Walder, "The Political Sociology of the Beijing Upheaval of 1989" in Problems of Communism, September-October 1989, pp. 30-40.

major part in defining what that future would be. A great number of them wanted China to move determinedly in the direction of reform; and it is noticeable that the two major rounds of student demonstrations -- December 1986-January 1987 and April-June 1989 -- erupted after a perceived set-back for the reformers. In particular, these movements have to be seen in light of the unfulfilled promises for political reform that had been presented by Deng Xiaoping himself as an important part of the reform program.

The December 1986 demonstrations followed a summer of extraordinary debate in the official press on the need for a major shake-up of the political system. When China's top leaders withdrew to their summer retreat of Beidaihe, it was expected that they would draft a document on political reform. Instead, the resolution adopted by the 6th Plenum of the 12th Party Central Committee on 28 September 1986 stressed the need to improve work in ideological and cultural spheres, issues identified with those who wish to limit the political reforms. For reasons of Party unity and political stability, pragmatic reformers reached compromise with the orthodox hardliners by adopting the Party's resolution on culture and ideology.⁷ This resolution produced intense debate within the Party hierarchy, so much so that the original text went through eight or nine different drafts. The key points of the

⁷ See Beijing Review, no. 40, 6 October 1986, pp. I-VIII.

resolution are as follows:

First, the resolution admits that the economic reforms had produced changes in people's outlook and orientation toward ideology. It asks the key question: "Will we be able to resist the decadent bourgeois and feudal ideologies and avoid the danger of deviating from the right direction?"⁸ Evidently, as a concession to the reformers, the resolution then states that China must keep its door open and continue the reforms, as long as the "Four Cardinal Principles" (namely the socialist road, people's democratic dictatorship, the leadership of the CCP, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought) are to be upheld.

Second, the resolution condemns the "capitalist ideology and social system ... and the ugly and decadent aspects of capitalism" but, on the other hand, encourages learning from "developed capitalist countries the advanced science, technology, and applicable expertise and economic management."⁹ In other words, the Party resolution wants to have the best of both worlds.

Third, as a concession to the hardliners who had criticized the reformers and those intellectuals who openly

⁸ Ibid., p. II.

⁹ Ibid., p. III.

questioned the validity of Marxism, the 1986 Party document reiterates that "Marxism is the theoretical basis of socialism" and that "we have to depend on Marxism as our guiding theory.... It is wrong to regard Marxism as a rigid dogma."¹⁰ Although it condemns bourgeois liberalization as "negating the socialist system in favour of capitalism," the resolution cautiously mentions academic freedom, freedom of "creative writing," and freedom of discussion -- all these could be permitted if "Marxism is to serve as a guide in academic work and arts."¹¹

The year 1986 saw the reform efforts being marred by the criticism and challenge mounted by the orthodox hardliners that culminated by year's end with a massive student protest movement. The immediate cause of the student protests seemed to be the lack of democratic procedures in local direct elections, but the main cause was the slow pace of political reform.

On 9 December, the anniversary of the 1935 nationwide protest against Japanese aggression against China, students at China University of Science and Technology in Hefei (the Anhui provincial capital) and those in Wuhan (the Hubei provincial capital) took to the streets simultaneously chanting slogans

¹⁰ Ibid., p. VII.

¹¹ Ibid.

for democracy and political reform. At the beginning, the size of these protests was small. But by 12 December, the demonstrators in Hefei were estimated at 17,000. That same day the first of a series of big-character wall posters appeared on the campus of Peking University in the nation's capital, but without any street demonstration by students. However, student demonstrations occurred on the university campuses in six different provinces following the 9 December protests in Hefei and Wuhan.¹² On 18 December, some 2,000 students marched in the streets of Kunming in the southwest. This demonstration was followed by a much larger student protest in Shanghai. The estimated number of demonstrators ranged from an official low count of 10,000 to more than 35,000 by Western media. On 21 December, the protest in Shanghai involved students from 50 campuses in and around the largest city in China, and was joined by industrial workers, a significant development feared by the authorities. At this point, student protests had spread to cities in 11 provinces.¹³ On 20 December, the Beijing municipal government issued a set of regulations which made demonstrations and parades illegal unless permits were obtained five days prior to the event.¹⁴ Despite the ban, several thousand students from Qinghua University in Beijing

¹² Christian Science Monitor, 18 December 1986, p. 1.

¹³ The New York Times, 24 December 1986, p. 3.

¹⁴ Beijing Review, no. 8, 8 February 1987, p. 20.

took to the street in freezing weather on 23 December, and 3,000 students from Beijing University and some 5,000 more students from China People's University in Beijing staged their protests on Tiananmen Square on New Year's Day, 1987. About 24 students were arrested on the square, but released shortly after. The march signalled a direct challenge to the authorities who had banned such activity in the capital. On university campuses the next day, students burned copies of Beijing Ribao (Beijing Daily) for its inaccurate and distorted reporting on their demonstrations. The authorities attempted to minimize the magnitude of these student protests by claiming that no more than a total of 40,000 had participated in the demonstrations.¹⁵

Through a variety of means, including appeals from student families, official warnings, propaganda in the media, rebuke from workers and peasants on television, and deliberate isolation of students from the press, the wave of student demonstrations was finally terminated. The events ended with the dismissal of Hu Yaobang, the expulsion from the Party of three prominent intellectuals, and a short-lived campaign against "bourgeois liberalization."

Thus when the students took to the streets in December 1986, they did so with the intention of supporting a perceived

¹⁵ Beijing Review, no. 1, 5 January 1987, p. 5.

Deng Xiaoping faction by giving renewed impetus to the need for greater political reform. Their belief in the capacity of the Party to reform itself and to revise regime practice was significantly undermined by Deng's harsh measures on student demonstrations and the dismissal of Hu. This opened the way for more radical actions subsequently.

To compound the problem, the urban working-class and state employees had lost faith in the economic reform program.¹⁶ Essentially, urban workers were being offered a deal that involved giving up their secure subsidy-supported low-wage lifestyle for a risky contract-based system that might entail higher wages at the possible price of rising costs and unemployment. Many urban workers decided to reserve their judgment.¹⁷ As a result of the "over-heated" economy (with the national growth rate of 23 per cent) and price decontrol, urban households immediately experienced the effect of rising inflation: food prices rose by as much as 37 per cent in 1985. The official inflation rate was put at 6 per cent in 1985, but the actual inflation rate was at least 20 per cent for retail goods in urban areas.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Tony Saich, "The Rise and Fall of the Beijing People's Movement" in The Pro-Democracy Protests in China, p. 11.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See James C.F. Wang, 1992. "The Politics of Modernization: Rural and Urban Economic Reforms" in Contemporary Chinese Politics, p. 267.

The urban workers' reservations were intensified by the leadership's indecisiveness about urban reform that resulted in a stop-go pattern throughout the 1980s. The insecurity mounted when the reforms after 1986 resulted in spiralling inflation without consequent improvements in material living standards. The urban retail price reform, initiated by Zhao Ziyang, had generated seemingly uncontrolled inflation of more than 30 per cent in 1988.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, talk of further price reforms in mid-1988 and reductions in subsidies created a sense of panic. Zhao Ziyang's attempts, with Deng's support, to produce rapid economic results created the inflations that threatened those on fixed incomes. Their declining living standards added to the reservoir of urban discontent.

To this extent the rise in tension in the urban areas was a result of the failure of Zhao's economic reform program. Zhao had consistently applied macro-economic policy. He appeared to be trying to expand the economy rapidly to win his own political legitimacy as a way of justifying further reforms. Instead he found himself politically sidelined by the end of 1988.

Urban anger was increased by the higher visibility of

¹⁹ Ibid., "Democracy, Dissent, and the Tiananmen Mass Movement" in Contemporary Chinese Politics, p. 233.

official corruption. Abuse of public positions and public function for personal financial gains had reached extreme proportions by the late 1980s.²⁰ The sight of high-level officials' children joy-riding in imported cars was a moral affront to many ordinary citizens. It was not surprising that the student slogan of "Down with Official Profiteering" found a large, enthusiastic audience, including journalists from official and Party news organizations. Once the dams were breached by the students, a flood of supporters was waiting to defend the students and attack the authorities.

Journalists as Participants

The Chinese journalists became participants in the movement when they joined the student demonstrators as the first-non-student group. On 4 May, about 200 young journalists, having been embarrassed by the government and criticized by the students for not reporting the "actual state of affairs," marched to express their support for the students. They also made known their own demand, carrying banners with texts saying: "Don't force us to spread rumours" and "News must report the truth" (Liaowang Zhoukan, p. 3). The decision on the part of the journalists to take to the streets and demonstrate on their own behalf for "freedom of the press" was made at a meeting on 3 May attended by

²⁰ See Tony Saich, "The Rise and Fall of the Beijing People's Movement" in The Pro-Democracy Protests in China, p. 12.

journalists from various national news organizations (Jakobson, p. 13).

After that march, the columns of protesting journalists became a common sight whenever the students were on the move, Jules Nadeau, Coordinator of the (Concordia University-Université du Québec à Montréal) Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Communication Research in Montreal, recalled in an interview. Journalists from different media organizations demonstrated under their own banners, and even senior editors could be seen marching with their younger colleagues. Some of their banners and signs were written in English for the consumption of foreigners, such as "We are tired of not telling the truth, now we want to tell the truth" (Nadeau, interview).

From the beginning of the student demonstrations, there had been another force that pushed the media toward the students' side: the students' call for freedom of speech and the press. Student leaders realized the importance of getting the journalists involved in their movement. As Shen Tong, one of the student leaders, explained: "All of us knew that without freedom of the press we would not be able to arouse interest and support for our ideas. That's why it was one of our major demands from the beginning" (Jakobson, p. 13). These demands, while they sometimes went to the point of ridiculing the media -- such as when slogans like "Renmin

Ribao lies to the people!" were shouted -- formed a perfect counterpoint to the journalists' complaints.

The journalists' actions constituted an essential part of the drama at Tiananmen Square. As a participant in the protest march and from my own observation as a journalist, I have found that not only the students were elated when they discovered that they were no longer alone, but other intellectuals also felt inspired and encouraged to speak out about their frustrations. Once the journalists, even editors and reporters of the Party's mouthpiece Renmin Ribao and the official wire service Xinhua, took to the streets to voice their discontent, the most determined members of other intellectual groups -- officials from government ministries,²¹ officials and instructors from the Central Party School, scientists and researchers from China Academy of Sciences, presidents and professors from prominent universities -- stepped forward to join in and show their support for the students.

In addition, the simple fact that the official journalists took to the streets wanted to give an impression

²¹ One of the senior government officials taking part in the march was Xie Wenqing. For his participation in the protest and his public statement against marshal law, he was forced to resign as vice minister of the Ministry of Broadcasting and Television. He was a veteran journalist and served as director of Xinhua's International News Department in the late 1970s.

that the authorities had given a kind of go-ahead approval. Canadian journalist Allen Abel said in an interview that the presence of the journalists also had an effect on other groups of society. Ordinary people took part in the demonstrations, not because they believed in Jefferson and democracy, but because "they sensed that the line had changed," he said. Seeing the students marching in the streets and occupying Tiananmen square with the support of journalists and other educated groups, "they sensed that the students had the authorities' approval." People out of the factories, soldiers and officers from the Army, everybody was there marching, "not out of commitment but out of a feeling that this had become the correct line and that the students were taking the correct line. These students couldn't all be in the Square unless the faction in the government wanted them there.... If the government hasn't stopped this on day one, there must have been somebody in the government who approves of it." The journalists played a role to reinforce the people's opinion that this was the correct line, and the demonstrations snowballed (Abel, interview).

As Canadian journalists Scott Simmie and Bob Nixon write, "in early May, the media and the students thrived on a symbiotic relationship. Little wonder, then, that students would spend the next week emphasizing the need for a free press. Reporters would do their share from the inside"

(Simmie and Nixon, p. 75).

From the very beginning, when students began marching in sympathy for the death of former Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, the government ignored their pleas and concentrated its efforts on finding a way to stop the demonstrations. In keeping with the view that the news media should serve the state, the authorities decided to have the press downplay the story and to try to discredit the students, in hopes that they would go away. This appears to have been the government's only significant strategy through the first week of demonstrations; no other significant response from the government has been noted.

The strategy took shape a few days after Hu Yaobang died, when Politburo member Hu Qili ordered editors of major newspapers not to cover the demonstrations, warning that publicizing them would inflame the situation.²² However, he apparently did not realize that his order might inflame Chinese journalists; furthermore, his order might not have been necessary. Up until that time, television news appeared to be setting the pace for coverage in giving only passing

²² Hu Qili was appointed to the Politburo to oversee propaganda at the 13th Party Congress in 1987, when Zhao Ziyang officially took over the post of Party general secretary from Hu Yaobang. He was removed together with Zhao after the crackdown of the 1989 student movement. Two years later in 1991, Hu was assigned to the Ministry of Electronics and Machine-Building Industry as a deputy minister.

mention of the demonstrations and describing them in a negative tone. But, in spite of Hu's order, or perhaps because of it, a local newspaper, Keji Ribao (Science and Technology Daily), published a reasonably complete account of a 22 April protest in which 6,000 students marched. The article was the first in a Chinese publication to give full coverage to the demonstrations and was promptly copied and circulated throughout Beijing campuses.²³

Soon, another incident in Shanghai angered journalists. It involved the World Economic Herald, a 300,000-circulation weekly that frequently challenged the government on a number of political issues. On 19 April, the paper held a forum in which some participants, such as political scientist Yan Jiaqi, a member of then Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang's think-tank and former director of the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, and journalist Dai Qing of Guangming Ribao (Enlightenment Daily), called for reassessing the merits and mistakes of Hu Yaobang and negating the Party's campaign against "bourgeois liberalization." Yan Jiaqi asked the Party Central Committee to "admit its mistakes," saying that "otherwise, it will face the same path of setback." Dai Qing spoke against "non-procedural change of power," hinting the

²³ This suggests in part that Hu Qili was correct in assessing the influence of news media coverage. However, had reasonable coverage of the protest been allowed at the first place, the impact of the Keji Ribao article might have been softened.

removal of Hu Yaobang from his post of Party general secretary in 1987 was illegal and against the Party's constitution.²⁴ "China is at a dangerous moment and if the reforms, especially political reforms, do not go forward, the nation will face a disaster of historical proportions," she was quoted as saying at the meeting.²⁵ The paper then printed a six-page special section on the forum. But before it could be distributed, the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee headed by Jiang Zemin (now the country's Party General Secretary) stopped it and fired the Herald's editor, Qin Benli (Banyuetan: p. 54).

This action touched on a sensitive area for Chinese journalists. The Herald was a semiprivate journal linked to the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. Many journalists, even those who worked for government publications, thought it improper for government policy to be extended to what was essentially a private publication.

Qin's dismissal came on 26 April, the day of the infamous Renmin Ribao (People's Daily) editorial, "Resolutely Oppose Turmoil." Published after one week of peaceful student demonstrations, this editorial was the key to the entire course of events at Tiananmen Square. It had the personal

²⁴ Xinhua, "Role of Shanghai Journal in Social Unrest Revealed," 19 August, 1989.

²⁵ Christian Science Monitor, "China Tightens Press Control," 25 April 1989, p. 3.

approval of Deng Xiaoping, the nation's paramount leader, who was largely responsible for its harsh tone.

During the [memorial] services [for Hu Yaobang], there were also some unusual events. A small minority of people, taking advantage of the opportunity, circulated rumours and singled out several Party and national leaders for attack....

... After the service, a small minority of people with ulterior motives continued to take advantage of the students' sympathies for Comrade Hu Yaobang.... They openly defied the Constitution, encouraging opposition to the Communist Party leadership and socialism.

... It was raising the banners of democracy to destroy democracy and rule by law. Its purpose was to distract the people's attention, to throw the whole nation into disorder, and to destroy the stability and unity of the political situation. This is a planned conspiracy. It is a turmoil designed to negate socialism....

If the government is lenient, passes over this turmoil lightly, and lets them do as they say, then in the future an even more chaotic situation will occur....

The Party and the entire nation must fully recognize the seriousness of this struggle. We must unify, take a clear-cut stand against the turmoil....²⁶

The editorial reflects Deng's hardline policy in dealing with critics of the Party, and student movements in particular. It tries to intimidate them into submission, threatening the demonstrators with severe political consequences. It also attempts to sow division within the movement by making students wary of "a small minority of people," who, it alleges, "are taking advantage" of them.

²⁶ Renmin Ribao, 26 April 1989, p. 1.

Contrary to its originally designed outcome and against Deng's wish, this editorial escalated tensions more than any other event during the protests, and would be a focal point for the demonstrations for the next six weeks. The editorial galvanized opposition to the government and prompted a huge demonstration on 27 April, the largest to date with more than 100,000 students marching to the cheers of Beijing citizens.

With the government's worst fears being realized, it abruptly switched its strategy. That day, in a sudden reversal of the previous ban on coverage of the movement, Hu Qili again met with editors from nine major newspapers and Xinhua, and said that they could report the "actual state of affairs" in Beijing.²⁷ This act of "media diplomacy" can be viewed as an attempt to counteract the Renmin Ribao editorial and to placate the media's anger over Qin Benli's dismissal.

Hu's action also was an attempt to redefine the significance of the demonstrations and to give them a direction that could be used by the government. He told the editors that the Party, like the students, also wanted to eradicate corruption. In later public statements, and even after 4 June, party leaders spoke repeatedly about the need to curb corruption. It is apparent that the Party wanted to

²⁷ Hu Qili's 27 April "directive" was relayed to Xinhua's editors and reporters the following day.

focus attention on the corruption issue, in hopes of skirting other key issues, namely, the legitimacy of the leadership.

The dismissal of Qin Benli, the censorship of the press, the brazen lies about it, and the appeal of the students did more than arouse the national news media's antipathy for the government. They gave substance to the issue of freedom of the press and created a cause for the Chinese media (Mark, p. 265). In the offices and on the notice boards in the compound of Xinhua, unpublished articles about the protests were pinned up by reporters who could not get them published. Petitions circulated among journalists in the capital and eventually were combined into one signed by 1,013 journalists representing 30 top news organizations. The petition demanded a meeting with Hu Qili and the right to cover the student demonstrations (Liaowang Zhoukan: p. 3).²⁸

Therefore, former Xinhua editor Zhao Zijian has argued in an interview, that the role of the Chinese news media during the democracy movement "should be seen as a paradigm shift, from a hegemonic role in which they have served more as mouthpieces of the Party and government to a petitionary role that they transmit the voices of the people to the government

²⁸ This issue of the Liaowang Zhoukan (Overseas Edition) was banned from circulation because it carried a seven-page article, "Notes on Beijing Student Hunger Strike," that gives detailed accounts of the student actions.

and the Party" (Zhao, interview).

Yet, this petition demonstrated the degree to which the government had alienated its own media. Journalists had won concessions from the government in the 27 April meeting with Hu Qili and had been reporting on the student movement. A demonstration commemorating the 70th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement²⁹ -- in which the 200 journalists marched with students -- received reasonable coverage. For good measure, the government on 6 May again assured newspaper editors that coverage of demonstrations was permitted. According to a Xinhua story, from 11 to 13 May Hu Qili, along with Rui Xingwen and Yan Mingfu, both members of the Party Central Committee's Secretariat, and Wang Renzhi, head of the Central Committee's Propaganda Department, conducted "dialogues" with editors and journalists from "a dozen

²⁹ At the Peace Conference held in Paris in January 1919, the United States, Britain, France and Japan refused to abandon their privileges in China (in the case of Japan, its territorial occupation of parts of Shandong province). Under heavy pressures from these powers, the Chinese government was about to sign a peace treaty. When this news broke out, the whole nation became indignant. On 4 May 1919, several thousand students in Beijing staged an anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism rally at Tiananmen Square, followed by demonstrations along the city's main streets. About 3,000 students were arrested by the military and police. In protest, students in Beijing staged a general strike and students at campuses nationwide took to the street to express their support. The protests soon spread all over the country and in early June, industrial workers in major cities joined in when about 1,000 more students were arrested in Beijing. As a result, the students were released and the peace treaty was not signed. These events have been commemorated in China ever since as the May Fourth Movement.

Beijing-based press units," including Xinhua, Renmin Ribao, Guangming Ribao and Zhongguo Qingnian Bao (China Youth News).³⁰ Xinhua did not give any quotes of the "dialogue," but said the journalists "aired their opinions on the recent student demonstrations and relevant news reports." The senior officials said "it is high time to carry out press reform, which is an important part of political reform.... Journalistic work should be made more public with real openness in order to let people know the major items of news and discuss the major problems."³¹ But the journalists' petition was delivered on 9 May to the All-China Federation of Journalists as an indication of their disenchantment with the government and their growing desire of independence.

The petition was crucial in another way. It represented the first organized effort in support of the students and gave a degree of momentum for them to continue demonstrating. At the same time, Chinese journalists, through their petitioning, had secured the right to cover the student movement.

In addition, by taking part in the demonstrations, the journalists encouraged other educated groups of society to become active. Columns after columns of officials, even

³⁰ Xinhua, "Senior Officials Conduct Dialogue with Pressmen," 13 May 1989.

³¹ Ibid.

senior officials, from Party organizations and government ministries, university professors and school teachers, writers, artists and film workers, medical doctors and nurses, were seen in the sea of demonstrators that flooded Beijing's streets and filled Tiananmen Square for a few weeks. The journalists' participation in the movement served as a catalyst. If the journalists had not taken to the streets, it is highly unlikely that so many prominent intellectuals would have dared to step forward and show their support for the students' demands. If these educated groups had not shown up, there wouldn't have been the mass demonstrations in the following weeks across the country.

Journalists as Reporters

While the journalists' participation in the demonstrations with the students had an effect on the educated group in society, media coverage mobilized other groups. As former Xinhua editor Bao Guangren pointed out in an interview, "the movement pushed the press to report such an event, and, in return, the reports of the events further pushed the movement to a new high" (Bao, interview).

When a few thousand students, mostly from the prominent Beijing University, marched to Tiananmen Square in the early hours of 18 April and laid their wreaths under the Monument to the People's Heroes to mourn the death of Hu Yaobang, it was

neither surprising nor unusual that the newspapers and television broadcasts made no mention of either the march or the protest sit-in thereafter. Obviously, the authorities were very cautious of this event. Hu Yaobang had, after all, lost his job and his chances to become Deng Xiaoping's successor following the student demonstrations of 1986-87.

Hu was not particularly liked, except by intellectuals and reformist technocrats. As head of the Party's Organization Department in 1977-1978, he rehabilitated millions of Party and non-Party members who had been unjustly persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. As vice-president of the Central Party School and later head of the CCP Central Committee's Propaganda Department, he authorized publications and meetings to dismantle Maoist ideology and thus started the process of liberalization which went out of control from time to time. As Party General Secretary, he sponsored the personnel change from the central government to provincial governments, replacing the Maoists and elderly with young technocrats. He restrained CCP control on arts and literature and halted the "anti-spiritual pollution" campaign in 1984, which was initially approved by Deng Xiaoping. Hu Yaobang was also the largest protector of a group of political dissidents whom he appointed to various posts in the organs in charge of ideology and advisory bodies.

Hu's policies basically benefitted intellectuals and technocrats and all the other "winners" in the economic reform. The ordinary people's knowledge of him was limited to his public image which showed a restless, outspoken and caricatural leader. Many people were embarrassed by his awkward or inappropriate manner on diplomatic occasions. However, to many intellectuals, his personal characteristics, and even his flaws, made him stand in sharp contrast with the other leaders. To use the mourning of his death as a vehicle for protest demonstrated that the major agenda of this protest was led by intellectuals.

It was no secret that the government did not want to encourage or support any actions of dissent. After the news of Hu Yaobang's death spread through Beijing, the university campuses became abuzz with activities which had the air of protest and defiance to them. "The one who shouldn't die died, while those who should die still live on," proclaimed one of the many hundred daizibaos, or Chinese large-character posters, which ordinary citizens have traditionally used to voice their concerns.

The Chinese Communist Party and government, following a practice from traditional China in which the leader was considered to have the first and the last word, took control of all journalistic publications and broadcast stations when

it gained control over China, and has not allowed the news media much freedom since. News coverage is intended not so much to open minds as to shape them. People have been taught that whatever the newspapers print, and whatever the evening news broadcasters say, is in accordance with the "official Party line."

As a result, the Chinese news media has come to serve as a kind of political barometer for the people, a way to gauge Party tolerance. By reading between the lines of the official media, people can determine the extent to which dissent can be voiced. When the state-run media started to report openly on the student movement in the spring of 1989, ordinary Chinese people interpreted this as a sign that the students had the authorities' approval.

To everyone's great surprise the newspaper which was the first to break ranks was Keji Ribao. Its 19 April issue ran a news story with a factual account of the scene at Tiananmen Square, accompanied by a photo showing students, some with clenched fists. Though it had a limited circulation and had not previously covered politically related stories, Keji Ribao was a national newspaper and it set an example for others to have the courage to follow suit.

From the start, the media succeeded in discreetly

portraying the general respect which was felt for Hu Yaobang and disapproval about his ousting. Muted criticism of the present leadership was evident in headlines like "Hu Mourned as Great Man," and, in particular, in quotes run by Xinhua, that Hu Yaobang "did a lot for the country's reform and his respect of intellectuals and education set a good example to all Chinese leaders."

China Daily published a dynamic photo depicting solemn students, wearing dark head-bands and with their arms raised in front of a 6-metre high portrait of Hu Yaobang on the front page of its 20 April issue. Besides this eye-catching photo was Xinhua's official version of a clash between security guards and student demonstrators, which had occurred just after midnight on 19 April outside the south gate of Zhongnanhai, a sealed-off huge compound where most senior Chinese leaders live and work.³²

Many Chinese journalists were among the onlookers during

³² This official version was written by the Press Office of the State Council under Li Peng and was relayed to Xinhua by Zeng Jianhui, Deputy Director General of Xinhua and Deputy Director of the CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department. Zeng Jianhui himself put this piece on the wire, without notifying Mu Qing, Xinhua's Director General. There was bias against the students and factual errors in the story. As a result, Xinhua's reputation among the students and the general public was seriously damaged. Mu Qing telephoned Zeng Jianhui to express his complaints, saying "I am still the Director General and you should let me read it before putting it on the wire."

the night of 21 April, when more than 100,000 students marched in organized fashion through Beijing's Changan Boulevard in order to reach Tiananmen Square before it was closed off for the official services commemorating Hu Yaobang the following day. While the leaders of the country attended the memorial service inside the Great Hall of the People, three students -- in a scene rich with symbolism -- knelt on the steps outside with a scrolled petition listing their demands raised above their heads. Crowds of students standing in Tiananmen Square chanted: "Li Peng, Come Out!" He didn't. The students returned to their campuses in frustration.

The students' frustration turned to anger when they discovered that their protest and their demands were not reported by the Chinese media, with only one exception. Once again it was Keji Ribao which broke with tradition and published a factual account of the events, inside and outside the Great Hall of People.

As previously mentioned, the Shanghai-based weekly World Economic Herald refused to submit to silence. Bearing in mind the Herald's reputation as the nation's most liberal and forthright newspaper since its founding in 1980, its clash with the authorities was not a surprise. Editor-in-chief Qin Benli was a veteran journalist, who advocated publicly that without political reform China's economic reforms could not

succeed. He had managed to weather a series of storms and confrontations with propaganda officials because of his close ties with Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang. Survival in China's thunderous political climate is doomed without a highly placed ally. But Zhao Ziyang was away on an official visit to North Korea.

On 21 April, the head of the Shanghai Party propaganda department telephoned Qin Benli and asked to read the final proofs of the issue due out on 24 April, which had a six-page special section dedicated to a 19 April forum commemorating Hu Yaobang. Qin Benli was told to change a specific passage of a speech by the reform-minded political scientist Yan Jiaqi. In the controversial paragraphs, Yan Jiaqi referred directly to the students protests on 18 April and advised the Party to make a fair assessment of the late Hu Yaobang. Qin Benli at first refused to delete the requested text, assuring the propaganda head that he would take full responsibility. When Shanghai Party chief Jiang Zemin interfered, Qin Benli was forced to give in. But by this time some 160,000 copies of the original version had already been printed and several hundred copies hastily distributed. Following a few days of heated tug-of-war, Jiang Zemin announced on 26 April that Qin Benli had been dismissed and that a working group representing the city's Propaganda Department had been appointed to oversee the Herald's operations (Banyuetan: p. 54).

After Renmin Ribao published its harsh editorial on 26 April calling for a firm stand against disorder and accusing the students of creating "national turmoil," it was generally thought that the students would heed the authorities' warning and remain on campuses for a while. Instead, the students took to the streets again.

The students' historic 10-hour march on 27 April, just one day after the stern editorial, was finally covered by major Chinese media the following day. Xinhua reported: "Carrying streamers and shouting slogans, tens of thousands of striking students from a number of colleges and universities in Beijing staged a demonstration through the streets of the capital today." It also said the demonstration was "causing huge traffic tieups" and "a total of 39 bus and street-car lines used by 800 buses and street-cars were forced to suspend service." The news story later described the slogans as "Support the CCP, Support Socialism," "Eradicate Corruption," and "Down with Official Profiteers,"³³ to emphasize the students' loyalty to the Party and government.

Though the press coverage on the 27 April march referred to the students as disrupting normal social order, and echoed the authorities' demand that students resume classes, it was

³³ Xinhua, "Student Demonstration Causes Huge Beijing Traffic Jam," 27 April 1989.

apparent to some readers that a severe breakdown in public obedience had occurred. And this marked the starting point of the Chinese news media's open coverage of the pro-democracy protests, pushing the authorities' limits.

Chinese television became an especially powerful source of information in the 1989 Beijing Spring. On 30 April, the government gave in to the students' demands and ordered the Mayor of Beijing, Chen Xitong, to meet with student representatives in a televised session, during which the students demanded to know his income. They also challenged him about the mistakes made with regard to the education system. Never in the history of the People's Republic had government officials been publicly humiliated in such a way in front of millions of television viewers.

For approximately two weeks in May, Chinese newspapers, radio and television carried uncensored stories about the demonstrations and activities related to the pro-democracy movement. People in tens of cities across the country marched to show their support for the students because they perceived the movement to be officially sanctioned. The press helped to mobilize the urban population in a way that would not have been possible if the press had not reported on the student movement. Uncensored coverage all over the country reached its peak in the days prior to 20 May, when martial law was

imposed in parts of Beijing.

On 17 May, Chinese television news broadcast a report of the demonstrations on the Square, listing organizations and groups that supported the students. On 18 May, Chinese Television broadcast a scene that no one could have imagined seeing on state-run television one month earlier. The national news broadcast showed Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, and Premier Li Peng, accompanied by other leading officials, visiting defiant students at two local hospitals. The students were being treated after fainting as a result of their hunger strike at Tiananmen Square. After zooming in on the Party General Secretary and Premier hovering over a few patient-demonstrators, the broadcast jumped to a new scene showing Qiao Shi, Hu Qili and Rui Xingwen talking with a hospitalized student.³⁴ The student said: "We must re-establish the Party's prestige among the people. If the Communist Party has hope, China will have hope. Right now, some people think there is no hope. They all feel that the country has no hope. The Communist Party has no hope. Therefore, I think that, like the United States, we should restore the people's confidence that the state can do a good job. Do you agree?" Hu Qili and the other leaders nodded and

³⁴ Qiao Shi is a Politburo member in charge of the security service and Party affairs.

said: "We fully agree with you."³⁵ Though this was not the first time that the student demonstrators were on the air, what could Chinese viewers be thinking when they heard the country's leaders listening to a 20-year-old telling them that "the Communist Party has no hope"?

In offices, in press rooms, in factories and shops, on street corners, people were talking about the hunger strikers and about the sympathy and support that hundreds of thousands of citizens from all walks of life had expressed for them. Time and again, people spoke with admiration of the students, who were openly challenging the authorities. Ordinary people were quick to seize the chance to vent their frustration about the ills of society affecting their everyday lives, most noticeably inflation and official corruption.

That was followed by the angry confrontation between Premier Li Peng and several student leaders on 18 May, and Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang's tearful, last-ditch appeal to students in the early morning hours of the following day. Such scenes of spontaneity, save for one interview that Zhao Ziyang had given in 1987 right after the 13th Party Congress, had never been seen in the past.

³⁵ Text from Xinhua, "Zhao Ziyang, Li Peng Visit Hospitalized Students," 18 May 1989.

Also on 18 May, all of the major Beijing-based newspapers give prominent space to the deteriorating health conditions of the hunger-striking students and the appeal to end the strike. In Renmin Ribao, a report with details of the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's much awaited visit had been pushed down into the lower corner of the front page, while coverage of the hunger strike and demonstrations -- six page-one articles with photographs -- dominated the top part. "Save the Students, Save the Children," pleaded on headline. The day's official English-language newspaper China Daily printed such eye-catching front page bold text headline: "A Million March in Support of Students."

From this early stage of press coverage of the movement, one can see that the Chinese press apparently sided with the students. "They mistook the situation as the government's tolerance of reform voice, and saw it as an opportunity to correct their past image and be true (responsible) to the people" (Zhao, interview).

The Chinese Press Rids Itself of Control

Starting on 28 April, stories about the students' protest activities appeared in all major newspapers as well as TV and radio broadcasts. Step by step, the stories were based on factual reporting and listed the students' demands. A major breakthrough was the televised "dialogue" between student

representatives and State Council officials on 29 April, followed by a second one with Mayor Chen Xitong the following day.

On 2 May, Xinhua's wire service carried a story about the student demonstrations in Shanghai: "Several thousand university and college students took to the streets this afternoon. Students from Fudan University and Tongji University went to the People's Square in the centre of the city ..., where they joined students from the East China Teachers' University." The story made note of some of the banner texts, for example: "We Want Democracy and Freedom."³⁶ On the following day, Beijing TV aired the entire press conference which was held by State Council spokesman Yuan Mu for both Chinese and foreign journalists and focused on the students' demands. The momentum of the press surged in pace with the student demonstrations.

The student protests on 4 May drew hundreds of thousands of onlookers, who cheered and marvelled at the jubilant, but non-violent students. For the first time, more than 200 young journalists joined the marchers under their own banners demanding "News Must Be Objective and Fair," "Major News Let People Know," "News Must Report the Truth," and "Strengthen

³⁶ Xinhua, "Shanghai University Students Take to Streets," 2 May 1989.

Press Monitoring Role and Promote Political Reform" (Banyuetan, p. 56). Television and newspaper reports of the day's events consisted of straightforward coverage with pictures portraying the unbelievable scenes.

Another major news story of the day was a speech made that evening by General Secretary Zhao Ziyang at the annual meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The Xinhua story quoted Zhao as saying that "the recent student demonstrations do not indicate political instability in China and the demonstrators in no way oppose the fundamental communist system of the country." As to the questions raised by the students, he said, "We should solve them according to the rule of democracy and law. We should solve these problems through reform and in a reasonable and orderly way." In terms of how to deal with the student demonstrations, Zhao said: "They have to be solved according to the rule of democracy and law and in the atmosphere of reason and order.... What is most needed now, however, is soberness, reason, restraint and order. We must solve the problems according to the rule of democracy and law."³⁷

In these brief passages of his short speech, Zhao repeatedly used the term of solving problems "according to the

³⁷ Xinhua, "Students' Reasonable Demands to Be Met through Democratic, Legal Channels: Zhao," 4 May 1989.

rule of democracy and law" and emphasized on the need for "soberness, reason, restraint and order." Zhao's reformist tendencies were suggested in the speech, which the hardliner Chinese President Yang Shangkun later labelled "a turning point for the escalation of turmoil." Zhao Ziyang expressed sympathy with the students and referred to them as "patriotic." He reassured the governors of the ADB that "China will not sink into turmoil."³⁸ This is contrary to the tone of the 26 April Renmin Ribao editorial, which had accused the students of instigating turmoil. This was a clear sign that Zhao Ziyang wanted to distance himself from the hardliners' attitude as expressed in the editorial.

Immediately after the meeting, Zhao Ziyang found the Xinhua correspondent at the meeting, and told him to put the full text of his speech on the wire. The following day, newspapers all over China printed the full text of Zhao's speech picked up from Xinhua's wire service.

After that, for about a month, there was not just one "official line," but two. The journalists chose to abide by the one spelled out by Zhao Ziyang and sided with the students. The media throughout China acted as agitator and mobilizer of the movement and transformed the students demonstration into a massive nationwide protest.

³⁸ Ibid.

In the following week, newspapers and Xinhua ran favourable commentaries, quoting statements made by people from different walks of life, about Zhao Ziyang's speech and his attitude toward the student movement. By bringing the disagreements among the top leaders out into open, Zhao Ziyang provided the news media with a chance to show their support for the student movement by reporting on it and students' demands. The media were not merely attempting to do their job in the professional sense and cover the news, though this was their primary aim. They were also aware that the movement would benefit from publicity. The editors knew that if they were confronted by political leaders on their coverage, they could justify their actions on the grounds that they were only publicizing the words of the Party General Secretary.

The split in the top leadership affected all layers of the government, including the ones intended to control the press. This fragmentation of the leadership unleashed the media. For about two weeks, the CCP Propaganda Department received no single word of guidelines from the Central Committee, which in normal times routinely relayed the top authorities' instructions. And as a result, instructions were not passed down to the editors of press units in the standard, systematic way.

With the top leadership paralysed, the media were set

free to report on the events taking place not only in Beijing, but in cities across China. News reports from all corners of the country described demonstrations in support of the fasting and fainting students at the Square and activities related to the movement.

It was hard to ignore television shots showing wailing mothers begging their offspring at Tiananmen Square not to starve themselves to death, or small children carrying signs: "Don't let our big sisters and brothers die!" Even those who were not the slightest bit interested in politics felt touched. The public relations value of the hunger strike was enormous (Jakobson, p.14).

Television showed moving images of suffering students, stretched out on the ground in suffocating heat or in the pouring rain, determined not to give in. Xinhua ran scores of stories about the support from the most unexpected sectors of society during the week-long hunger strike. It also noted that workers had joined the ranks of marching supporters. Government officials, representatives from the People's Liberation Army, members of various CCP organizations, members of various democratic parties, medical workers, and editors and journalists from press and publishing agencies all joined the "more than one million people from all walks of life," who were trying to urge and pressure the government into

submitting to the students' demand for an "open and equal dialogue."³⁹

Open Chinese press coverage of the student movement reached its climax on 18 May, when Premier Li Peng met with representatives of student demonstrators in a "dialogue" televised nationwide. The government's decision to agree to such a meeting was surprising enough, but to give in to the students' demand that it be televised made the concession all the more astonishing. During the meeting, students set two conditions for ending the hunger strike. First, their movement should be officially acknowledged as a democratic, patriotic one which was not creating turmoil. Second, genuine dialogues should start as soon as possible and should be televised live. Premier Li Peng did not agree to either condition. On 20 May he declared martial law in parts of Beijing.

Even after martial law was declared, the government did not regain control of the press immediately. As late as 24 May newspapers published stories and photos of citizens setting up roadblocks along main streets to prevent the troops from entering the city.

³⁹ Xinhua, "One Million People Take to Street in Beijing," 23 May 1989.

Although the director and editor-in-chief of Renmin Ribao, Qian Liren and Tan Wenrui, were removed from their posts, and a "work team" took over, the staff managed to publicize the protests for a few more days. On 23 May, the front page carried two photos, one of the students continuing their sit-in at Tiananmen Square, and the other of a child offering an ice-cream bar to a soldier sitting in a blocked military truck. A day earlier, the paper printed a Xinhua wire story on the front page with the headline quoting Hungarian Premier Miklos Nemeth as saying that no military force should be used to suppress the people.⁴⁰

Also on 23 May, television audiences witnessed the mass demonstration with about one million people protesting against martial law. They could faintly hear the slogan "Down with Li Peng" in the background. Xinhua's English Service wire story

⁴⁰ See Renmin Ribao, 22 May 1989, p. 1., and Xinhua, "No Troops Should Be Used to Solve Internal Problems, Says Hungarian Premier," 20 May 1989. Though this was a foreign news story, it had political implications inside China when martial law was imposed in parts of Beijing. It is worthwhile to quote the Xinhua story: "Hungarian Premier Miklos Nemeth said Friday [19 May 1989] that no political forces will be allowed to use troops to solve internal problems. Nemeth, who is also a Politburo member of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, told senior military officials that the most hated characteristics of the former Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's style was to use the country's military forces to deal with its own people. He said such a practice has left a serious aftermath that till now people still fear and suspect the military forces. The Hungarian Premier called for a resolute departure from such practices. The Premier's remarks were made to quite the fears that military intervention by the country's own troops might hinder the development of the present political process."

noted that "the overwhelming majority of the slogans of the parade were directed against the chief leader of the State Council," referring to the premier without mentioning his name.⁴¹

At the same time, the Chinese press increased the number of reports and articles quoting prominent members of society, who praised or endorsed the decision to declare martial law and appealed to the students to return to their campuses to ensure the stability of the country. But the "peaceful situation" and "normal order" in all parts of Beijing were also getting a lot of media attention, which was clearly intended to undermine the government's attempts to create an image of disorder. Reports mentioning the continuing sit-in at Tiananmen Square were still being published as late as 30 May, even in Renmin Ribao.

Although Chinese media was pivotal in staging a national protest which was the most serious challenge to CCP ever since it took power, the media did not publish articles, for example, quoting people calling for the overthrow of the one-party communist system. They reported on the movement which basically was intent on reforming the CCP from within.

⁴¹ Xinhua, "One Million People Take to Street in Beijing," 23 May 1989.

Yet, Ying Qian, a senior Chinese journalist, argues that the Chinese press "did not live up to the people's expectations and failed to play a satisfying role" during the period. In his view, when the student demonstrations had become a focus of world attention, Chinese "press reports were far too little to keep the general public informed of what was actually happening, and that was one reason why many Chinese turned to foreign wire services and radios for more information." "The serious neglect of its duty is the number one lesson" for the Chinese press as a whole. From a professional point of view, Ying said, Chinese journalists should do their best to maintain "a neutral and objective stand" by not directly participating in such sensitive events (Ying, interview).

However, the press as mouthpiece of the Party has already been severely alienated from the central authority. Not only was this manifested by its behaviour when unleashed, but by the assessment of its professional attitude to the regime. From reviewing the press coverage during this whole period, one may find, as Bao Guangren put in his interview, that "there were biased reports, either against or for the government" (Bao, interview). And it is hard to judge whether biased reports were justified, because some of such reports did serve to "fan" the events (Ying, interview) and add fuel to the flames (Zheng, interview).

While reporting by the Chinese news media was, according to many sources, accurate and complete, there were some instances in which their coverage took on a distinct, anti-government bias. "Some of the stories went to the ... extreme of giving short shrift to the official line and distorting actions and statements to make the students look better," Steven Mark quoted Michael Berlin as saying. On one occasion, the Chinese press vastly exaggerated the number of participants in an anti-government protest (Mark, p. 259).

The bias was indirect but still clearly expressed once martial law was declared on 20 May. With the hardliners moving to consolidate control over the media, Chinese journalists turned to indirect means to express their sentiments. Newscasters on national television sent signals by reading headlines with downcast eyes and the news in gloomy tones;⁴² as mentioned above, Renmin Ribao featured an article from Xinhua's wire service quoting Hungarian leaders as saying they would never order troops to act against civilians. The article was placed conspicuously near articles about the declaration of martial law in Beijing.

This anti-government bias was understandable, considering

⁴² For this, the anchorpersons of China Central Television's national news program, Du Xian and Xue Fei, were replaced after the military crackdown and have not appeared on TV screens ever since.

the government's attempts to control and censor the press. But it also reflected the partisan mentality of the Chinese news media. In general, there is less emphasis on fair, objective, and accurate coverage in Chinese culture than in the west. The most famous Chinese journalist, Liu Binyan, is known for a style that blends fact and fiction (Hua, interview).

While bias in the news media is tolerated by most readers, in this instance it may have factored into the decision to crack down on the movement. The coverage clearly exacerbated tensions within the leadership and between the leadership and the people. The sympathetic portrayals of Zhao Ziyang and the students clearly irritated the hardliners, who, as part of the implementation of martial law, ordered troops into the headquarters of Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television, Renmin Ribao, and other official publications in Beijing.⁴³ They also ordered editors to publish news releases from the martial law press office and articles supporting the hardliners' position.⁴⁴

⁴³ The headquarters of Xinhua normally is guarded by Armed Police. When the martial law troops were sent in, the guards at Xinhua were disarmed. This indicates that even the forces of the Armed Police were not trusted at the time.

⁴⁴ Such news releases and articles from the martial law press office were put on Xinhua's wire service without date lines. By doing so, the editors wanted to distinguish such pieces from their own stories.

Freedom of the press was a major demand of the students, who considered it a means for developing "a democratic consciousness" among the people. They believed that a free press could expose even more official corruption than it had previously. The students apparently did not realize this would be destabilizing or particularly threatening to the government.

This is not to say that the students and journalists were wrong to demand freedom of the press, but it does suggest that it was unrealistic to think that press freedom alone would eradicate corruption, create a democratic consciousness in the people, and stabilize society. Unless the students wanted the people to have the right to vote freely, to oust corrupt or inadequate officials, freedom of the press could well destabilize society by emphasizing its problems and the inadequacies of the government in dealing with it.

For the Chinese press, the crackdown marked the complete return of government control, save for the one final transmission on Radio Beijing.⁴⁵ The crackdown left Chinese news organizations even more constrained than before the protests. After the crackdown, the propaganda mills were

⁴⁵ This transmission, although with anti-government bias, well represents journalists' anger over the harsh government measures and their sympathy for the wounded and dead. One journalist from Radio Beijing was shot dead by martial law troops.

ordered to devote unceasing energy to shoring up the Party line. Chinese newspapers and magazines showed little trace of the independence and pluralism that they displayed during the student movement. They devoted much space to Party propaganda and official accounts of the events during the protests. They reverted to a single voice, with little reliable domestic news, and if the reporters and editors were not satisfied, the only hint of it was the absence of bylines.

During the six weeks before the crackdown, readers found the front pages blanketed with national articles written by a newspaper's own correspondents, with perhaps a government news item or two picked up from Xinhua's wire service. But after the crackdown, as part of a chorus of government indoctrination, newspapers yielded the front page to the official propaganda. As a result, page 1 of each newspaper looked practically identical.⁴⁶

Journalists were aware of the risks and consequences when they joined in the pro-democracy movement. They all paid a price for that, although to various degrees. The World Economic Herald's editor-in-chief Qin Benli was fired along

⁴⁶ See Sheryl WuDunn, "China's Newspapers, After Crackdown by Beijing, Revert to a Single Voice," The New York Times, 22 June 1989, p. A10. Another detailed account of stricter government control and propaganda after the crackdown can be found in Richard Bernstein, "At China's Ministry of Truth, History Is Quickly Rewritten," The New York Times, 12 June 1989, pp. A1, A9.

with the permanent close-down of his paper; the director and the editor-in-chief of Renmin Ribao, Qian Liren and Tan Wenrui, and the editor-in-chief of Guangming Ribao, Yao Xihua, were removed from office. And editors-in-chief of Keji Ribao, Zhongguo Qingnian Bao, Hainan Ribao (Hainan Daily), and Zhongguo Jidian Bao (China Machinery and Electrical Gazette) were also replaced after the crackdown. A number of journalists were arrested for their direct involvement in the movement or for advocating democratic reforms in public speeches and articles, while the rest of their colleagues had to attend meetings and study sessions for re-education, self-criticism and ratification. Among these arrested were Dai Qing, writer and journalist of Guangming Ribao, Wu Xiaoyong, journalist and deputy director of Radio Beijing's English Department, and Zhang Weiguo, Beijing Bureau chief of the World Economic Herald.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the government has targeted the press as a source of its problems and criticized the media's misconduct of "guiding role" in the 1989 spring. In a campaign to weed out publications "running counter to state regulations or featuring pornography" after the crackdown, a total of 190 newspapers and magazines, including the World Economic Herald in Shanghai and China Film News in Beijing, were closed down or suspended.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Dai Qing and Wu Xiaoyong were released in 1991 and Zhang Weiguo was released in early 1992.

⁴⁸ Xinhua, 28 March 1990.

These tragic events concluded a trying period for the Chinese news media, whose performance and behaviour therefore left a mixed legacy at Tiananmen Square. For the Chinese press, it is now clear that it was never able to stray too far from government control. But in showing a willingness to organize in support of the students, the Chinese press made perhaps its most significant contribution to the cause of establishing a democratic society in China. This willingness to organize and rally may have greater impact over the long run than the student movement.

CHAPTER II

Serving Two Masters -- the Party and People: Party Journalism Theory, Its Impact on Practice, and Press Structure

As we can see from the previous chapter, the news media in China play an important political role, though primarily an instrumental one. The press is not considered a politically independent or neutral enterprise, nor is journalism regarded as an autonomous profession.

Journalism is of tremendous significance, and the CCP attaches much importance to it (Liu, p. 393). The purpose of the news media and of journalism in China, as former Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang put in his article on Party journalism work in 1985, is to serve as "the ears, eyes and mouthpiece" of the Party and government and "also the ears, eyes and mouthpiece of the people" (Hu, 1985). The Chinese press has one given role -- that is, to serve as official propaganda machine. It also has a perceived role -- that is, to contribute to the reconstruction and prosperity of the Chinese nation (Zhao, interview). Thus journalists in China have a difficult balancing act as intermediaries between the

nation's political authorities and the public, serving two masters.

It is also true, as Lu Dingyi⁴⁹ wrote back in 1943, that the media have the duty to be in constant and close contact with the people, serving not only their informational needs but also facilitating their political articulation (Lu, 1943). Since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 the public informational role of the media has been taken much more seriously.

In theory, these top-down and bottom-up functions are in harmony because the CCP serves the interests of the masses. In practice, the ambiguity translates into direct Party control of media and considerable journalistic vulnerability to changes in political wind (Womack, p. 6). In other words, as former Xinhua editor Zhao Zijian says, "the most difficult problem facing Chinese journalists has been how to serve the two roles, especially during radical political periods when the interests of the ruling and the ruled clashed, such as during the Anti-Rightist Campaign [in 1957], the Great Leap Forward [in 1958], the Cultural Revolution [1966-76], the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign [in 1983], etc." Another problem is the constant shift of the "required role" that the

⁴⁹ Lu Dingyi was involved in Party journalism from 1924. He was head of the CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department from 1945-66. He was purged together with other Party veterans during the Cultural Revolution.

Chinese news media play. "They have had to adjust and readjust" (Zhao, interview).

However, this does not necessarily mean that the Chinese press is a "propaganda machine" routinely spewing forth self-serving lies. Important news and communication functions are served, and a large amount of international news reports and international broadcasts are received. On the other hand, the function and structure of the Chinese news media are fundamentally different from those of the West.

To better understand the nature of the Chinese news media, it is necessary to look at Party journalism and journalism theory both in an historical and theoretical context. It is also useful to look at how these have shaped the structure of the Chinese press and journalism education.

Of course, the Chinese journalism theory does not completely determine its actual practice, no more than the Western journalism theory completely determines its actual practice. But it is a major influence on media practice. It is also basic to understanding the differences between the Chinese news media and more familiar systems.

Party Journalism Theory and Policy

The role of journalism in the Chinese revolution was

somewhat complex. Until 1927 it played a leading role in China's intellectual and political development. Radicals of all persuasions pursued their aims through mass publications, which at the beginning of the 20th century were still a relatively novel phenomenon in China, compared with their Western counterparts (Lin, p. 114). The beginning of mass political activity with the May Fourth Movement of 1919 led to a spurt of radical journalism. The two cofounders of the CCP, Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, were both well-known academic and media figures, and during the first period of cooperation between the CCP and Sun Yat-sen's nationalist Kuomintang (KMT), members of the CCP, including Mao Zedong, were particularly active in journalistic work. Mao Zedong founded his first newspaper Xiangjiang Pinglun (Xiangjiang River Review) in Changsha in July 1919 before he became a communist and was for his whole career intensely interested in Party journalism (Fang, p. 85). In 1949 alone, Mao wrote more than 10 commentaries for Xinhua's wire service (Ibid., pp. 264-65). After the CCP was established in 1921, the press was seen as a means to mobilize people for revolution. The first newspaper, Gongren Zhoukan (Workers' Weekly), was begun by the Party in 1921 with the intent of arousing public support to Marxism. In 1922 Xiangqdao (Guide) became the Party's first organ. Especially important during the period was the monthly La Jeunesse (Xin Qingnian), which promoted cultural and political renovation in a cosmopolitan manner (Ibid., pp. 89,

101).

When the KMT-CCP alliance broke up in 1927, the urban organization of the CCP was shattered by Chiang Kai-shek's KMT and only 10 per cent of the CCP's original strength survived (Ibid., pp. 137-38). Mao Zedong opted for survival in a remote rural area, and from his successes there he eventually developed a new strategy of rural revolution. Media could not play as important a role in rural revolution because of the relative isolation and illiteracy of peasants compared to intellectuals or to urban workers. However, as the rural base areas controlled by the communists grew larger, the Party needed to establish public channels of official communication, and so a new generation of Party newspapers and radio stations serving local Party and governments came into being. The major newspaper of the Jiangxi Soviet (1931-34) was Hongse Zhonghua (Red China) and Red China News Service, the predecessor of Xinhua, was part of the paper;⁵⁰ the major newspaper in Yanan in the 1940s was Jiefang Ribao (Liberation Daily) (Ibid., pp. 151, 197).

The years between the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966

⁵⁰ Red China News Service was inaugurated on 7 November 1931 in Ruijin, Jiangxi province. It was moved to Yanan after the Long March and was renamed Xinhua News Agency on 25 January 1937. Xinhua became the country's official news agency in 1949.

were a time of consolidation of media and tightening control by the Party. The press was completely owned and operated by the Party. The primary purpose was to publicize Party policies and direct people toward the socialist cause. It was during this period that the present structure of the news media was established.

In the course of long years' practice, the CCP gradually developed its own theories on Party journalism. At a symposium held in Changsha in 1983,⁵¹ the central doctrine of these theories was summarized as "a strong Party spirit" (dang xing). The symposium developed the following objectives for its theories: whole-hearted service for the people with the scientific approach of seeking truth from facts; truthfulness in news; journalism that follows the Party Central Committee and propagates the Party's guidelines and policies; newspapers run by the Party and the people; a serious attitude toward work; steadfast discipline; and obedience to Party leadership.⁵²

These theories on Party journalism formally emerged in Yanan in 1942-43 when the Communists carried out a campaign to rectify Party work style. The relationship of journalism to

⁵¹ The symposium was sponsored by the Journalism Institute of China Academy of Social Sciences and six other journalistic institutions.

⁵² Renmin Ribao, 12 December 1983, p. 3.

the Party and the people, which had seemed equivocal, was clearly defined during this campaign.

In January 1942, Mao Zedong declared that Jiefang Ribao should carry out the Party's line and policies through its editorials, monographs, news stories, and other contents, and that stereotyped Party writing style should be eliminated (Ibid., p. 204).

On 16 March the Propaganda Department of the Party Central Committee issued a circular on the transformation of Party newspapers, urging Party organizations in various places to investigate and correct the work of newspapers in accordance with Mao's call for "rectifying the 'three winds'," i.e. subjectivism, sectarianism, and stereotyped Party writing style. The circular described the newspaper as "the Party's most powerful instrument of propaganda and agitation." Proper management of newspapers was stressed as one of the Party's core tasks, since "every day they reach and influence several hundred thousands of the masses." Debate of all kinds of different opinion was allowed in Party newspapers, and criticism and suggestions by non-Communists were permitted, it said (Ibid., pp. 204-205).

As part of the campaign, Jiefang Ribao initiated a reform on 1 April 1942, giving greater prominence to events in

the liberated areas than to news in the Kuomintang areas and elsewhere in the world. Party policies and the life of the people were also matters of high priority for Xinhua (Ibid.).

Mao had already stressed the importance of giving non-Communists opportunities to express their viewpoints in the Party's organ. He said all non-communists willing to cooperate with the Communist Party had the right to criticize the Party as well as its members and cadres. Party members and organizations at various levels, he said, could disregard malicious attacks, but should listen attentively to all constructive criticism. The Party chairman urged Xinhua Ribao, Jiefang Ribao, and all other newspapers and publications in the base area to invite non-Communists to express their views in the Party's organ and to invite as many non-Communists as possible to take part in the editorial board.⁵³

Mao also emphasized strengthening the Party spirit (dang xing) in newspapers. In October 1942 he criticized high-level Party organizations for paying little attention to the fact that the news agency and newspapers lacked direction in their work. He called on these organizations to participate in, rather than avoid, discussion about news policies and to exert

⁵³ Renmin Ribao, 28 December 1983, p. 2.

leadership over news work.⁵⁴ In June 1948 Mao again called attention to the responsibility of high-level Party organizations to direct the news agency and newspapers, which he called "extremely important institutions of propaganda." Mao criticized Party organizations for relinquishing their responsibility for leadership, or at least for failing to take this leadership seriously, and for allowing erroneous ideas to spread unchecked. He urged the leaders of Party organizations to regard the work of propaganda as a serious scientific endeavour.⁵⁵

In a speech to the editorial staff of the daily Shanxi-Suiyuan Ribao on 2 April 1948, Mao summed up the Party's work in journalism. He said that a basic principle of Marxism-Leninism was to enable the masses to recognize their own interests and unite to fight for those interests. Once the masses know the truth and have a common aim, he argued, they will work together with one heart. When the masses are of one heart, everything becomes easy. "The role and power of the newspapers," Mao said, "consists in their ability to bring the Party program, the Party line, the Party's general and specific policies, its tasks and methods of work before the masses in the quickest and most extensive way" (Mao, 1948: p. 4:241).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Liu Shaoqi also emphasized the "tremendous significance" of journalism in his talk to the North China press corps in Xibaipo on 2 October 1948.⁵⁶ He said that a well-run newspaper can help people unite, progress, and move towards the truth. A poorly run paper is very dangerous to the people, he added, since it can spread backward and erroneous ideas, and create divisions among them (Liu, p. 293). Liu described journalism as one of the very important "channels and bridges linking the Party with the masses." But when a newspaper exerts a bad influence by spreading false ideas, thereby stirring up the people's destructive tendencies, it commits a grave error indeed, which can ultimately lead to dangerous situations and to the worst kind of alienation from the masses (Liu, pp. 294-95).

The talks of Mao and Liu, which explained how journalism should serve the people, trust the people, and rely on the people, were considered by Chinese journalists to be two great works on the principle of Party spirit as applied to their work. Seeking truth from facts has been the fundamental approach of journalists throughout the history of Party journalism. "Facts," according to Mao's own interpretation of this philosophy, are all the things that exist objectively,

⁵⁶ Liu was the President of the PRC and Vice Chairman of the CCP before the Cultural Revolution. He was purged along with other Party veterans and died from persecution in the Cultural Revolution.

"truth" means the internal relations or laws governing those facts, and "to seek" means "to study" (Mao, 1941: p. 3:22).

In June 1947 Shanxi-Suiyuan Ribao began a campaign to do away with the phenomenon of Krikun, a term taken from the name of a reporter, in the Soviet play The Front, who makes groundless accusations and fabricates lies. Krikun in Chinese press circles referred to a kind of news reporting divorced from facts and characterized by fabrication, boasting, exaggeration, and empty talk. Xinhua and Jiefang Ribao issued a number of editorials and articles around the time of the campaign to correct a tendency toward exaggeration, boasting, distorted facts, irresponsible remarks, and the reporting of only good news and not bad (Fang, pp. 256-57).

Liu Shaoqi argued in his 1948 talk that news reports must convey the truth without swagger, sensationalism, or prejudice. Whether the masses opposed, welcomed, or misunderstood the Party, journalists should report what the masses thought and be unafraid of stating the truth (Liu, p. 399). He encouraged reporters to examine Party policies and point out any errors or shortcomings. Reporters should not be afraid to report the dark side of things, he added. "The most essential thing in your writing is to be truthful and not to exaggerate, and the second is to be comprehensive and profound" (Ibid., p. 400).

He described journalists as the "eyes, ears, and voices of the Party and people." If they could truly, comprehensively, and profoundly report the thoughts and feelings of the people, Liu said, they would have great effect, for by doing so, "you will have voiced their appeals and given vent to what they dare not or can not say, or what they desire to say but find no way of expressing" (Ibid., p. 401). "With our newspapers," Mao Zedong said, "we must rely on everybody, on the masses of the people, on the whole Party to run them, not merely on a few persons working behind closed doors" (Mao, 1948: p. 4:242).

Hu Yaobang describes the "main task" of Party journalism as "using a great quantity of vivid facts and speeches promptly and accurately to spread to the whole country and the whole world the ideas of the Party and government and the opinions and activities of the people in various areas." Hu further elaborates the role of Party journalism as "a kind of tie and bridge linking the Party to the masses, and also an instrument for conveying information among the people, inside and outside the Party,... from the upper levels downward and from the lower levels upward" and "strengthening ties between the Party and the masses and reflecting the masses' cries, ...and satisfying in every respect the masses' requirements for information" (Hu, 1985). Especially in Lu Dingyi's article it is clear that the obligations of accuracy and of

close links to the people are serious matters for Party journalists. Indeed, he argues that it is "fascist" to use the excuse of the political character of news to distort reality. His description of how professional journalists should collaborate with and help amateur community correspondents is a concrete example of what it means to "serve the people" (Lu, 1943).

Chinese journalism is not an autonomous third Party to the CCP-citizen relationship. As Hu Yaobang forcefully argues in his 1985 speech, journalists must "faithfully and accurately" convey the direction of Party leadership to the masses, amplifying official documents by applying their spirit to ordinary life situation (Hu, 1985). This explains why the media are directly subordinate to the propaganda organs of the Party. The primary meaning of "responsible journalism" in a communist context is faithful transmission. However, the media's service is to the party's leadership of the masses, not to the party's interests as an elite. It is the media's responsibility to improve Party leadership by providing a communication channel from the population to the Party and by investigating and criticizing individual failures and weaknesses of CCP leadership (Li, 1989). According to Hu Yaobang, journalistic criticism should be restricted to 20 per cent of media's total coverage, but within that 20 per cent much excellent investigative reporting is done (Hu, 1985).

Such criticisms and investigations are justified because they are not criticisms of or challenges to the Party's right to govern, but rather criticisms of failures by individual Party members to live up to their responsibilities and exposures of problems for which current Party policy is not adequate (Jiang, 1989).

In general, however, journalism is Party journalism, rather than critical or for-profit journalism, but Party journalism that entails service to the communications needs of the citizenry. After the 4 June incident in 1989, both Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin and Politburo member Li Ruihuan (who took over the job of overseeing propaganda from Hu Qili) again emphasized the role of newspapers, radio and television as "mouthpiece" of the Party, government and people. The news media, "as part of the ideology field and the realm of superstructure...should serve the interests of socialism and the people" (Jiang, 1989). Jiang repeated Mao's theory put forth more than 40 years ago, saying that "journalistic work, as an important part in the whole cause of the Party, without saying, must uphold Party spirit" by faithfully keeping in line with the Party Central Committee and absolutely opposing bourgeois liberalism (Ibid.). Li Ruihuan elaborated that "since journalism is one of the Party and the socialist nation, its Party spirit (dang xing) and public spirit (renmin xing) are in unity and compatible with each other" (Li, 1989).

The problem with this journalistic theory is the assumption that the Party is always right and is always motivated strictly by public spirit. As former Xinhua editor Bao Guangren argues, "the Party might represent the interests of the people, but there have been, and there are, times that the Party's interests run counter to that of the people, like in the Cultural Revolution, the 1957 Anti-Rightist campaign, and most recently the 4 June incident" (Bao, interview). Even the CCP's official version of its own history makes this assumption untenable.⁵⁷ Control of the media was one of the strongholds of the leftists during the Cultural Revolution, and much of what was reported as fact then is dismissed as fabrication now. If the Party is in error -- and it has admittedly made serious errors for more than half of the PRC's history -- then whom does the media serve? The answer is clearly, "the Party, right or wrong," and this has given Chinese journalism its characteristically dogmatic demeanour. Journalists have suffered for resisting Party policies, and so there are only the most subtle and passive signs of editorial difference of opinion.

Now it is clear that, from the beginnings of journalism

⁵⁷ The official version of the history of the PRC period is "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China," adopted by the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP on 27 June 1981. Beijing: Beijing Review, 6 July 1981, pp. 10-39.

policy in 1942 to the latest pronouncement of 1989, the Chinese media's primary function is to serve as the mouthpiece of the Party. Nevertheless, especially in the post-Mao period the Party is aware of the damage that the excesses of its arbitrary power have caused. It is also cognizant of the informational demands of its modernization policies. One aspect of the current journalism theory is relatively straightforward. The purpose of the news media is to also serve the nation's "four modernizations" in agriculture, industry, science and technology and national defence. Therefore the journalistic enterprise in service to the Party includes emphasis on normal news-gathering and even investigative aspects.

Impact on Journalistic Practice

The most important determinant of the practical behaviour of Chinese journalism has been current Party policy, and so the phases of development of Chinese journalism correspond to major changes in CCP policy. This is of course in line with the Party journalism theory, but the risks created for journalists by policy swings have made Chinese journalism more authority-dependent and less committed to its news tasks than it should be in theory.

Mao Zedong, in one of his major statements concerning the style of literature and art, said: "What we demand is the

unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form" (Mao, 1942: p. 3:90). The literary style advocated by Mao was one that combined brilliancy with vividness. However, many broadcasting programs in the early years of the People's Republic did not measure up to these criteria. In some broadcasting programs many sentences were extraordinarily lengthy, unpolished, and unintelligible. They were partly literary and partly vernacular, with foreign accents and alien intonation, poor vocabulary, inappropriate terminology, excessive use of abbreviations, and generally incomprehensible literary style (Chang, 1989, p. 36).

The year 1956 was one of discussion and experimentation in media and Chinese politics generally, a policy encouraged by Mao Zedong's personal call to "let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend" (Mao, 1942: p. 3:90). It also supported freedom to criticize and to express, maintain, and reserve one's opinions on questions of art, literature, or scientific research. That year saw considerable intellectual activity in China. There was more open criticism then than at any time since 1949. In forum discussions, independent views were expressed and comprehensive criticism of the Party was heard. The wave of criticism did not stop at administrative deficiencies; day by

day it took on a more fundamental aspect. Criticism grew steadily sharper, finally concentrating in late May and early June on a number of substantial demands for changes in Party policies.

However, criticism of the Party led to an "Anti-Rightist Campaign," a crackdown that was particularly severe in education and journalism institutions. Thousands of professors and teachers, and hundreds of journalists were labelled as "anti-Communist, anti-socialist rightists." They were removed from their professions and sent to the countryside for re-education through hard labour. Some of them were even imprisoned. As a result, most of their families were broken up. The Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 was a powerful lesson concerning the risks of being too outspoken, and so few journalists made this mistake for the next 20 years (Womack, p. 13).

A 1981 Party resolution summed up this troubled period by arguing that initiating the Anti-Rightist Campaign throughout the Party and country in 1957 and inviting the masses to offer criticism and suggestions were necessary steps in developing socialist democracy; so too was the Party's resolute counter-attack justifiable and necessary.⁵⁸ But the scope of this

⁵⁸ See "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party" in Beijing Review, 6 July 1981, pp. 10-39.

counterattack was far too broad, and too huge a number of intellectuals and Party and government officials at various levels were politically abused and unfairly labelled "rightists," with unfortunate consequences. Not only did misfortunes lie ahead for many of these people, journalists among them, but the initial practice of socialist democracy, even within the Party, was destroyed (Chang, 1989, p. 39).

Before 1957 there had been brisk discussion in university journalism departments and in mass media journals about such journalistic issues as news value. But after the Anti-Rightist Campaign, a number of issues about journalistic theories and practice came under attack. The needs of readers and society as a whole, and the pursuit of knowledge and taste in news coverage were condemned as bourgeois. A discussion of news value was out of the question (Ibid.).

Then came the Great Leap Forward in 1958. Mao Zedong and many other leaders, both at the centre and in the localities, had become hot-headed and smug about their successes, were impatient for quick results, and overestimated the role of subjective will and effort. They made "leftist errors," characterized by excessive targets, the issuing of arbitrary directives, boastfulness, and the stirring up of a "communist wind."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Ibid.

As the Party's propaganda machine, the Chinese news media helped spread such "errors" throughout the country unchecked. Woh Ho Chang points out that from 1958 to 1961, newspapers and newscasts often, though not always, resorted to boasting and exaggeration, and were full of idealistic slogans and unbelievable reports of both industrial and agricultural production outputs. There were even fabricated news photos showing scenes of "bumper harvests" (Ibid.). Brantly Womack also takes notice of this phenomenon. During the Great Leap Forward, the news media amplified the Party's enthusiasm and exaggerations; during the years of economic crisis and famine that followed, the press did not criticize earlier mistakes and did not report truthfully the full extent of the disaster (Womack, p. 13).

The debate within the Party became more intense during these difficult years and came into the open in August 1959 during the Party's Eighth Plenum (known in China as Lushan meeting). At the Plenum, Peng Dehuai, a Politburo member and minister of defence, wrote a 10,000-character letter to Mao Zedong, warning him and the Party against being hot-headed in economic construction and calling for greater democracy within the Party. He was rebuked for his "right opportunism." Peng Dehuai and his supporters were removed from Party leadership. The 1981 Party resolution described this struggle as "gravely undermining inner-Party democracy from the central level down

to the grass-roots." The resolution concluded that "it was mainly due to the errors of the Great Leap Forward and of the struggle against 'right opportunism' together with a succession of natural calamities ... that our economy encountered serious difficulties between 1959 and 1961, which caused serious losses to our country and people."⁶⁰

Meanwhile, however, a group of highly placed intellectuals made an appearance as the vanguard of criticism of radical policies in 1958-59 (Chang, 1989, p. 40). Among these engaging in veiled criticism of Mao were the head of the Propaganda Department of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee, Deng Tuo, a veteran journalist; the vice mayor of Beijing, Wu Han; and the head of the United Front Department of the Beijing Party Committee, Liao Mosha.

In January 1962 the enlarged Central Work Conference attended by 7,000 people made a preliminary summary of the positive and negative experience of the Great Leap Forward. A majority of people who had been unjustly criticized during the campaign against "right opportunism" were rehabilitated before or after the conference. In addition, most of the rightists had their labels removed.⁶¹ The praise of the Great Leap Forward vanished in the print media and was

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

replaced by calls for working step by step, taking into consideration place, time, and the objective conditions systematically, coordinately, persistently, and patiently (Ibid., p. 41.)

At the Tenth Plenum of the Party Central Committee in September, Mao widened and escalated the class struggle, arguing that the bourgeoisie would continue to exist and would attempt a comeback to become the source of revisionism inside the Party. This theory later took the form of the contention that members in power were the most dangerous force within the Party and should be the main target of attack.⁶²

In the spring of 1965 publications began to upgrade the stature of Liu Shaoqi to such an extent that he frequently appeared to be in a position equal to Mao. Xinhua reported on 28 September that at the closing ceremony of the national games that day, the Beijing stadium was decorated with two equally large pictures of Mao and Liu placed side by side. At that time ordinary people could hardly expect that in less than two months' time a few articles written by Yao Wenyan,⁶³ a young Shanghai journalist, would be the signal

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Between November 1965 and January 1966, Yao Wenyan wrote five articles, directing attacks against Wu Han, Deng Tuo and Liao Mosha and describing their play and short stories as great poisonous weeds that must be eradicated and rooted out. Yao eventually became a member of the Gang of Four later

of a forthcoming "cultural revolution," which would cause the most severe setback and the heaviest losses to the Party, state, and the people since the founding of the People's Republic. For 10 years the country was thrown into confusion as much at the leadership level as at the base.⁶⁴

Control over communications, especially official communications, was a key bone of contention for factions at all levels (Womack, p. 13). And the media were in the middle of the political storm during the Cultural Revolution.

When the Chinese mass media fell into the hands of people like Yao Wenyuan and Chen Boda (later an important member of the Lin Biao Clique), the most unfortunate days came for journalism in China (Chang, 1989, p. 44). The publication media joined in chorus of deifying Mao Zedong, lauding ultrademocracy, repudiating the so-called revisionist clique headed by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, and humiliating intellectuals. During the decade of turmoil from 1966 to 1976, the theory that news must be truthful was discredited, and replaced by the notion that facts should follow the interest of political line. This fallacy became the guiding principle of journalism. Lies were praised. Facts were

in the Cultural Revolution.

⁶⁴ See "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party" in Beijing Review, 6 July 1981, pp. 10-39.

distorted. Evidence could be created out of nothing.

Many of Liu Shaoqi's statements were quoted out of context by the mass media and thus became "counterrevolutionary revisionist," "anti-Party, anti-socialist, and anti-Mao Zedong Thought." His assertions about journalism were severely condemned as "bourgeois" and "reactionary" and therefore "thrown into the garbage heap."

Under the control of the radicals, the mass media spread the idea that politics and ideology decided everything and denounced those who paid close attention to production. Any problems emerging in technical innovations would be described as "a new tendency of class struggle" and "a sabotage activity by the enemy." Any peasants who were better off than others would be labelled "capitalist roaders." The intellectuals were held in contempt because their "four limbs do not toil" and they "do not know the difference between the five grains."⁶⁵

News coverage, which, according to Party journalism theory, should serve the people, became an instrument with which the Lin Biao and Jiang Qing cliques tried to seize Party and state power. Ignoring or distorting facts, they fostered a kind of writing style characterized by falsification,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

exaggeration, and empty rhetoric. The newspapers were disliked by readers, who found them to be good material only for wrapping raw meat and fish when shopping. Radio audiences turned off their sets to save electricity (Chang, 1989, p. 45).

At the local levels unofficial "red guard newspapers" appeared and provided insights into popular attitudes during the period. Also dazibao, or "big character posters," became a common way for individuals to voice accusations, complaints, and suggestions publicly. In contrast to the wealth of uncontrolled expression at the local level, the number of official news outlets was reduced drastically, and content became very stereotyped. The number of magazine titles went from 790 in 1965 to 191 in 1966 to 27 in 1967. At least one-third of the books printed between 1966 and 1968 were copies of four volumes of Mao's selected works, including the "Little Red Book" of Mao quotations at two billion copies (Womack, p. 13). Because the risk of ideological deviation was so great, all news media simply repeated the items from Renmin Ribao -- "a thousand Buddhas with the same face." The leftists who rose to power as a result of the Cultural Revolution, spearheaded by the infamous Lin Biao and the "Gang of Four," were especially concerned with controlling media.

The Cultural Revolution, which was expected to end in one

or two years, dragged on. The Ninth National Party Congress in 1969, seemingly a conclusion of the "revolution," was followed by the disgrace of Chen Boda and, surprisingly, by the downfall of Lin Biao. After the Tenth National Party Congress in 1973, the Jiang Qing clique directed its spearhead at Zhou Enlai and then at Deng Xiaoping, who rose for the second time with the help of Zhou. But it did not take long before the Gang of Four was smashed. This action of 1976 brought the catastrophic Cultural Revolution to an end.

Press Control

The CCP and government have ultimate authority over all media organizations in China, not only over what are formally called "Party papers" (dang bao), the official organs of the Party at different levels, but also over "non-Party papers" such as those published by quasi-official organizations, educational institutions, or economic enterprises. This authority is exercised in a variety of ways, both obvious and subtle, including through regulatory, managerial, editorial, and self-imposed controls.

Regulatory Control. China's press regulations do not permit independent papers; newspapers must be licensed by the government in the name of organizational units such as government departments or industrial entities. At the very least, all papers are broadly answerable to Party policy and

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more directly supervised by the Party groups and committees both within and above the units that publish them.

But registration in itself is not security for newspapers: The state may "reorganize" or shut down any publications deemed to have committed political transgressions, to have violated pornography regulations, or to be inadequately equipped, staffed, or managed. These powers have become more formalized and routinized since the establishment of the State Press and Publications Administration (SPPA) in early 1987. By far the best-known recent example is the removal of editor-in-chief Qin Benli of Shanghai's World Economic Herald and the subsequent close-down of the paper in April 1989, as mentioned in the first chapter.

Personnel Control. No editor-in-chief could ignore the power of political authorities to appoint and remove leading personnel at news organizations. Party committees and governments at various levels have full power over the appointment and removal of directors and chief editors of relevant newspapers and other news media. The removal in 1989 of Renmin Ribao director Qian Liren and editor-in-chief Tan Wenrui, and the Herald's Qin Benli, a veteran Party member, made the Party's control of personnel, even at papers that technically are not Party organs, glaringly clear. Perhaps because Qin's firing was so bald an illustration of the

Party's power, and also because it occurred at a critical moment, it served as a catalyst for journalists' participation in the 1989 student movement.

Editorial Control. Although Chinese journalists work under what amounts to censorship boards in some periods, in some places, and at some publications (sometimes these take the form of "work teams," such as the team sent to the World Economic Herald), there is no formal, institutionalized, and universalized prepublication censorship apparatus in China. The Party, through a working group in conjunction with the Central Committee Propaganda Department,⁶⁶ sets the overall tone and direction for the press implicitly through general policy statements, and more directly by specifying instructions and priorities for the press via documents and bulletins transmitted from propaganda authorities to news organizations and their Party administrators, editors, and reporters.

How directives and guidelines are interpreted in practice is largely up to local Party committees and news organization

⁶⁶ This working group is composed of a politburo member in charge of propaganda, director of the Propaganda Department, directors or editors-in-chief of Renmin Ribao, Xinhua News Agency, Ministry of Radio and Television, and other major papers in Beijing. They meet weekly, usually on Monday mornings, to decide which issues should be touched upon during the week and on which themes the commentary pieces should focus. Sometimes, they even set the terminology (tifa) of a particular domestic or international issue.

themselves. Decisions about whether to submit articles for prepublication review by Party or propaganda authorities and government departments concerned could also turn on the audacity of a chief editor.

Generally speaking, Xinhua and Renmin Ribao set the tone in news coverage and editorials. By reporting on an issue, and by outlining the correct interpretation of policies, they give the green light to other media organizations to follow suit. Xinhua is the most prominent of all the media organizations, a notch above the others. Previously, Xinhua had exclusive rights to cover top-level political meetings, such as the National Party Congress and National People's Congress meetings. In the 1980s the leading newspapers managed gradually to introduce competition, thanks to the growing degree of professionalism. But Xinhua is still the flagship in news reporting. Though a newspaper carrying a Xinhua story might write its own headline or cut the story for lack of space, it would not add to or revise the text. While Xinhua is the authority when it comes to news, Renmin Ribao sets the editorial agenda. For example, whenever there is a major political campaign or a major Party policy change, Renmin Ribao would be instructed to print an editorial written by its own editorial staff or an editorial drafted by top Party theoreticians, reflecting the views and policies of the Party and government. Such editorials would be routinely

reprinted by newspapers across the country.

Self-Imposed Censorship. The system of controlling the press seems complex. Basically all journalists must bear in mind the Party's policies, though it is not always altogether clear what the policy on a certain issue is. The editor in charge of putting a news story on the wire or into the newspaper may overrule a story after it has been written. A serious mistake can mean the end of a career. Keeping this in mind, coupled with the lessons of past political campaigns in which bold journalists got into trouble, journalists themselves, editors in particular, have acted as the most effective censors of news, more often than not.

For the most part, however, journalists are chronically unhappy with news suppression, be it external censorship or the product of self-restraint. Some Xinhua reporters and staff writers have often complained about selective suppression by editors seeking to avoid contradicting current policies. This kind of feeling was well demonstrated when journalists marched in support of the students' demand for freedom of the press in the spring of 1989, carrying banners with their own demand: "News must tell the truth."

Legal Restraints. There is no press or newspaper law in China yet. The Chinese press during the last few decades has

shown the complications and confusions encountered by socialist freedom of the press in the course of its development. After the founding of the People's Republic, freedom of speech and publication were written down in the early Constitutions as a right of citizens. Originally, freedom of speech included freedom of the press. The current Constitution, in Article 35, stipulates that citizens enjoy freedom of speech and publication, and in Article 47, that: "Citizens of the PRC have the freedom to engage in scientific research, literary and artistic creation and other cultural pursuits." Article 22 of the Constitution defines that "press, broadcasting and television undertakings" as "cultural undertakings." In brief, freedom of the press is included in freedom of speech and publication, and it is a right to which citizens are entitled through the Constitution.

However, the constitutional provisions concerning freedom of speech and freedom of publication are very brief and lack clauses to expound their specific meaning. If the provisions are too simple or too general, the term "freedom" would be interpreted casually, and people would not know what to follow.

In addition, the Constitution, as the cardinal law for governing the state and the instrument for safeguarding socialist democracy, should have the utmost legal power.

However, in a country where rule by law had long been held in contempt, quoting constitutional articles was deemed to be pedantic. It seemed quite possible that the Constitution would fall in oblivion.

Therefore, there is no law to guarantee the right of the press to gather and publish news. In other words, freedom of the press has no legal protection. At the same time, there is no law to prevent the abuse of freedom of the press and to protect the right of citizens not to be slandered. So obstacles to socialist freedom of the press have not been removed and the right of journalists and the public to air their views, and criticism in the press, has not been protected. There have been some instances in which journalists or press organizations are charged with libel, quoting clauses from the Civil Code which sets out the basics without uncoded definition. In this case, the lawsuit would be a protracted process and end up in confusion, since there is no specific law to follow and there are not many similar cases to refer to.

With the reform in progress in the 1980s, these legal restraints have become more and more obvious both to the press and the public. There have been urgent calls for enacting a press law for the benefit of both. This will be addressed later in Chapter IV.

Press Structure

Journalism is an activity of great immediate concern to the Party, so the hierarchical structure of newspapers is one of fairly straightforward subordination of newspapers to the relevant Party committees, although administrative matters are the responsibility of state organs. At the national level, Renmin Ribao is the organ of the Party Central Committee and therefore is the most authoritative publication in China. Xinhua, the official wire service, is also directly under the central committee in editorial matters. A number of other national newspapers are under the control of their respective functional committees. For instance, Jiefangjun Bao (Liberation Army Daily) is the organ of the CCP Central Military Commission; Gongren Ribao (Worker's Daily) is the organ of the All China Federation of Trade Unions; Zhongguo Qingnian Bao (China Youth News) is run by the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, and so forth.

The same structure of control prevails at the provincial level. Each province has a major newspaper which is an organ of the provincial Party committee, and many provincial bureaus publish more specialized newsletters. The Party committees of some cities, prefectures and counties are also responsible for general newspapers. The evening newspapers of Beijing and Guangzhou have a national following because of the quality of their reporting. Apparently the return to publishing of the

municipal evening newspapers in 1980 has given them an advantage, because they seem to have a more liberal and reader-oriented mandate despite the fact that they are under their respective Party committees. The lower-level county newspapers began publishing in the late 1950s, were cut out in the early 1960s, and resumed publication in 1980.

The Chinese news media have undergone rapid development in the reform decade. For instance, the number of newspaper titles jumped from 186 in 1978 to 1,600 in 1990 (18 national, 30 provincial and municipal, and the rest regional or county newspapers),⁶⁷ while the number of magazine titles has risen from 930 to 6,005,⁶⁸ of which half are social science journals.⁶⁹

In 1990, the total number of nationwide distributed newspaper and magazine titles reached 3,944, with a total subscription of 157 million copies. The average subscription

⁶⁷ For the number of newspaper titles in 1978, please see China Statistics Yearbook (1986 Edition). Beijing: China Statistics Press, 1986, p. 782. For the number of 1990, please see Christian Science Monitor, "China Targets Dissident Literature," 19 January 1990, p. 3.

⁶⁸ For the number of magazine titles in 1978, please see China Statistics Yearbook (1986 Edition), Beijing: China Statistics Press, 1986, p. 781. For 1990, please see Xinhua, "China's First National Exhibition of Periodicals Opens," 2 September 1990.

⁶⁹ Xinhua, "China Targets Dissident Literature," 19 January 1990.

of newspapers and magazines was 17.7 copies for each 100 people: 56.1 copies for each 100 people among urban dwellers and 11.2 copies for each 100 among rural population.⁷⁰ Considering the fact that about 80 per cent of the Chinese population live in the rural areas, these figures, comparatively speaking, are not very low. Japan and Sweden print more than 50 copies per 100 people, while the United States turns out 30 copies per 100, Thailand 24, Pakistan 6 (Bishop, pp. 143-44). Besides, China may have more readers per copy.

There are no official figures available as for exactly how many journalists are in China. But according to a Xinhua wire story, China issued about 145,000 press I.D. cards in 1990 to replace (and therefore, invalidate) the old ones.⁷¹ But the total number of Chinese journalists may be much higher, because the issuing of press I.D. cards is now strictly controlled by the State Press and Publications Administration (SPPA). This measure is designed to prevent news organizations from issuing such cards irresponsibly so that their administrative officials and staff could enjoy the privileges that are reserved for journalists, such as having priority over travel tickets. For example, none of the more

⁷⁰ Xinhua, "Newspapers, Magazines in China Increase," 28 March 1990.

⁷¹ Xinhua, "China Issues New Press IDs to Journalists," 13 November 1990.

than 500 journalists of Xinhua's international news department, where I used to work, have ever been issued press I.D. cards. They are issued instead only to Xinhua editors and reporters who cover domestic news.

Besides the public media there are a large number of publications with restricted circulation. They are called neibu (internal) publications. Many of these publications, perhaps most of them, are in-house publications of various bureaus and departments. The publications are available to persons and work units who have a need to know about the subject of the publication. The internal communication system is used for "unofficial" information and views. Out of the public eye, tentative policy ideas can be floated and debate can be less guarded. The ironic result is that the freest press in China is the secret press.

One of the most interesting neibu publications is Cankao Xiaoxi (Reference News), published by Xinhua. Cankao Xiaoxi is a daily, four-page tabloid of world news consisting almost exclusively of unedited translations of articles and editorials from the world press and news stories from foreign wire services. It began in 1957 with a circulation of 4,000 and a highly selective group of recipients, but it has become the world's most popular "secret" newspaper -- in fact it is by far the most popular newspaper in China. It enjoys a

circulation of more than 8 million, in contrast to Renmin Ribao at about 5 million. Through Cankao Xiaoxi and the international section of Renmin Ribao, the ordinary Chinese citizen has access to a fairly impressive amount of high-quality international news.

The general public has access to all the open publications. People can subscribe to publications or buy them from newsstands, post offices, and newspaper and magazine stores. The neibu, or "internal," secret publications, are distributed to designated readers only, according to the policies of each individual publication. The regular distributions of both the open and neibu publications are conducted by the post office.

Journalism Education

Based on Party Journalism theory and constrained by Party press policy, journalism education in China, like the news media as a whole, is designed to serve the same two masters -- the Party and people -- in theory and is required to serve the interests of the Party in real sense. As journalism education is seen as an important part of the nation's media system, it is under the supervision of the Communist Party's Central Committee Propaganda Department.

There are 28 universities or higher-learning institutions

that have journalism courses in China. Programs leading to Master's degrees in journalism are offered by the Graduate School of China Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing), China People's University (Beijing), Beijing Broadcasting Institute, Fudan University (Shanghai), and Jinan University (Guangzhou). China People's University and Fudan University began enrolling doctoral candidates in journalism in 1984 for the first time in the history of the People's Republic. China had 5,346 graduate and undergraduate students of journalism as of the fall semester of 1984 (Chang, 1989, p. 229).

In general, the journalism departments at the 28 universities and institutions were fashioned after the Chinese literature departments. The majority of the faculty members are former teachers of Chinese literature, and the rest are former journalists with years of experience in the media. Most of the journalism departments have only a small faculty with a small number of students. They mainly offer print journalism courses because of limited equipment and funds.

The People's Republic started graduate education in 1950 with priority given to science and engineering. This was understandable, because the country needed scientists and technicians in national reconstruction. Thus in the 1950s only a small number of graduate students were enrolled to study the liberal arts, mainly political science, and only two

graduate students in journalism were enrolled between 1950 and 1978. However, along with the economic reform campaign, in 1978-83 China enrolled 377 graduate students in journalism, 80 per cent of whom entered the Graduate School of China Academy of Social Sciences (Ibid., p. 239). This means that the Graduate School is the major school in journalism graduate education. It is also the first graduate school in China combining education with research. Its journalism department in many ways is modeled after American graduate schools of journalism. Candidates for the three-year journalism program at the graduate school must have a bachelors degree and at least two years of work experience in the mass media or in journalism education. The school's journalism department has established its principles of education as follows:

1. Guarantee an all-round development of students in morality, intelligence, and health.⁷²
2. Create a positive academic environment in which students are free to explore academic democracy, previously "forbidden" areas.⁷³
3. Place emphasis on studies of basic journalism theory and encourage students to develop their abilities to report, edit, and research individually.
4. Invite veteran journalists to be part-time instructors.
5. Teach each student individually according to his

⁷² This is a slogan put forward by Mao in the 1960s, meaning that students should be loyal to the Party's leadership, show excellent academic performance, and enjoy good health.

⁷³ This is important because many older-generation journalists and journalism educators were criticized in the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Cultural Revolution for such ideas as reader interest, news value, and journalism free from politics.

or her talent and interest.

6. Pay close attention to ideological and political work, and have a strict examination and management system (Ibid., p. 241).

The journalism department's curriculum includes: history of world journalism, history of Chinese journalism, history of the Chinese Communist press, journalism theory, news reporting in Chinese, news writing in English, news reporting in English, international news reporting, and broadcast journalism (Ibid., p. 242). In the first three semesters, students take required and optional courses with enough credit hours. The fourth semester is devoted to professional practice in the mass media such as Xinhua, Renmin Ribao, China Daily, Beijing Ribao, and other national newspapers. Students are required to complete a thesis in their last two semesters.

The journalism department only has a full-time faculty of about 20. It has to invite, as part-time instructors, more than 100 senior editors and researchers from Xinhua, Renmin Ribao, China Daily, and the Journalism Research Institute of China Academy of Social Sciences. Some of the courses have been taught by professors from foreign countries, mainly the United States. The department has also invited foreign journalism educators and researchers to give short-term lectures.

A look at the courses offered by the journalism

department may help one understand the importance of politics in journalism education in China. The primarily compulsory course has been political science works by Karl Marx, Lenin and Mao Zedong, including the Chinese editions of Capital, State and Revolution, and On the Correct Handling of the Contradictions among the People. The texts also include new documents of the Party Central Committee and speeches by Chinese leaders such as Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang. Foreign journalism professors invited to lecture at the department and many Chinese instructors have expressed skepticism about the necessity of studying Marxist works throughout the three semesters. Some Chinese instructors argue that the century-old Marxist theory may not be able to solve the current problems facing China today, why the students should spend so many hours on those Marxist classics. But the Marxist theory is here to stay in the curriculum and is believed to guarantee a firm political orientation of the students (Ibid., p. 243).

Another course required for all students is a foreign language. In most classes English is taught, but the students may choose Japanese or Russian instead. Foreign language teachers are invited from Xinhua, Beijing Institute of International Studies, and some English-speaking countries. Other compulsory courses differ from year to year. Among them are basic journalism theory, history of the Chinese Communist press, history of Chinese press, history of foreign press,

news reporting and writing, editing, commentary writing, studies of major Chinese and foreign newspapers, broadcasting, newswriting in English, feature writing in English, and editing of English-language newspapers. Some of these courses may be required in one sequence and optional in another (Ibid.).

From the above sketches of one journalism department we can see that journalism education in China serves politics, although it may well serve the purpose of pursuing journalism education and research, as well as training competent reporters and editors. The Chinese authorities regard the news media as important tools to consolidate their right to govern, and success or failure in controlling the press in the future largely depends on what kind of journalists the universities produce.

One may also find that the purpose of journalism education in China is quite different from that in Western countries. The Western press is, at least in theory, an independent watchdog of the government. Journalism education in the West therefore encourages students to analyze the workings of government and government officials. They are taught to examine critically what the government does in relation to what it is expected to do. The Chinese media, however, are part of the political structure, owned and

controlled by the Party. Journalism education in China trains students in Communism, patriotism, and collectivism. They are taught to be loyal to the Party and government. Chinese journalism education is the product of the country's unique political, social, and cultural structures. It bears the marks of the traditional Chinese culture, shows the influence of Western media, and carries a strong socialist character.

In summary, the media in China have in fact been Party media, very close to Party currents and very vulnerable to changes in direction. In every sense the reality of the media is the Party's reality. This has led to a cautious journalistic style that is highly sensitive to the political weather and less consistently concerned about the public's informational needs and interests. Chinese journalism is also very careful about criticism of individuals or policies. However, the Party's policy and the Party's reality now stress the importance of modernization of diversification, expertise, and information -- all of which naturally promote a more important and autonomous role for news. With this in mind, this paper now examines how the Chinese press performs such a role, while restrained by the long-standing Party journalism theory and policy, in an era of economic reform and opening to the outside world.

CHAPTER III

Reform versus Political Ideology:

Chinese Press in An Era of Economic Reform and Openness

Since the death of Mao and the overthrow of the Gang of Four in 1976, journalism in China has enjoyed a period of freedom and experimentation the likes of which it had only tasted briefly in 1956 (Womack, p. 13). December 1978 marked a crucial turning point in Chinese press history. The Chinese Communist Party began to correct the "leftist errors" of the Cultural Revolution and earlier periods (Chang, 1989, p. 45). Deng clinched his victory, and modernization was declared to be the general line of the CCP for the foreseeable future. However, the post-Mao period has not been without its ups and downs in media policy. The years 1977-78 were transitional. It was clear that the ideological terrorism of the leftist phase had passed, but the new boundaries were not yet clear (Womack, p. 14).

This chapter will address the role of the Chinese news media in the reform era and explore the problems experienced by Chinese journalists charged with serving two masters during a period of economic reform, political liberalization, and

accelerating social change. It also will describe the journalistic discontents that rose to the surface in China in the early 1980s, which the Party had managed to contain in the past.

The Role of News Media in the Reform Era

In any social-political organization, the economic system is crucial. In Marxism, the economic system is the foundation upon which political and social institutions rest. As is often said in China, the economic base determines a society's superstructure while the latter serves and affects the former. Assuming the validity of this proposition, a question emerges in the midst of China's accelerating economic reforms: In what ways, if any, is the press being affected by the changes? In the absence of dramatic events, such as a proclamation that the press in China is no longer the mouthpiece of the Party, the temptation is to say that changes in the press are nonexistent or negligible. Yet the relationship between the economic system and communication system would dictate otherwise. Changes in one sector should produce changes in the other.

Beginning in 1978 there was nationwide discussion in the press on the issue that practice was the only basis for testing truth. The Party's revelations of major unjust verdicts against senior Party and government officials during

political campaigns since 1957, including the case of Liu Shaoqi in the Cultural Revolution, was widely covered by the newspapers and newscasts. The Tiananmen Square Incident of 5 April 1976, an incident of national significance during which the people mourned for the late Premier Zhou Enlai and opposed the Gang of Four, was given prominence in the press and praised as a "revolutionary movement." This incident indeed paved the way for the subsequent overthrow of the Jiang Qing clique and resurgence of Deng Xiaoping. Mao, who had been treated like a god, now was regarded as a man who could make mistakes.

China's new emphasis on economic modernization has had tremendous effects on all aspects of life in China, and the media have been no exception (Womack, p. 14). As discussed in the previous chapter, the variety and quantity of the print media have gone far beyond previous levels. Technical, specialty, and professional periodicals are mushrooming. Within the journalism profession a new emphasis has been given to quality news reporting, investigative reporting, and experimentation. International news is quite accessible, both directly through foreign radio broadcasts and indirectly through coverage in the Chinese press.

Since the economic reforms began in early 1979, the Chinese press has played an extremely important role in

promoting the country's modernization drive. China had been closed to the outside world for decades by that time, and better communication with the rest of the world was crucial. As China is a populous country with huge landmass, internal communication is also important, and the Chinese press has served to link the whole machine to a new gear (Zhao, interview). The news media also have played a vital informational role in the modernization process. Readers are demanding more local news, more technical news, more professional news and more entertainment. The function of newspapers as the authoritative voice of the Party is still important for readers, but other informational, educational, and entertainment functions are increasingly attracting their attention. The Party, recognizing the demand for more diversified media, has been encouraging a more critical and innovative attitude by newspapers and more autonomous and professional journalism from reporters and editors (Chang, interview).

Therefore, the media were charged with the task to help establish the new style of authority and reset the national agenda, emphasizing economic development over revolutionary ideology. They were also charged with the task of helping to purge the remaining Maoists from various levels of CCP and government posts. Since the media in China have always been under tight control by the CCP, changes of leadership and

shifts in the Party agenda have significant effects on media's performance.

There was, however, another side to media policy in the 1980s. Although the CCP supports modernization and liberalization in principle, it does not want to lose its media monopoly or to have heterodox opinions expressed publicly. Therefore the growth and diversification of the media since 1978 have been accompanied by assertions of Party control and occasional campaigns of ideological critique (Zheng, interview).

The first victims were the "Democracy Wall" activists who had supported Deng Xiaoping in 1978. They not only put up big-character wall posters, but also produced their own "underground" publications, which were not officially registered. They were driven from the public scene in 1979-81 because their publications were not controlled by the Party and their opinions were beyond the bounds of orthodoxy (Womack, p. 14). Deng Xiaoping attempted a basic definition of the new orthodoxy in early 1979. He insisted that "Four Cardinal Principles" must be upheld in public discourse: the socialist road, people's democratic dictatorship, the leadership of the CCP, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought (Deng, p. 172).

These principles allowed liberal interpretations, however, and a number of articles exploring such topics as socialist humanism and the possibility of alienation under socialism appeared in major national newspapers and periodicals until mid-1983. The ideas discussed were, however, seen as scandalous by Deng Xiaoping and other leaders, who despite their progressiveness in economic policy tend to be somewhat Stalinist in ideology (Womack, p. 15).

A campaign was launched in 1984 to "oppose spiritual pollution."⁷⁴ The vague guidelines for the campaign and the excess enthusiasm for criticizing such things as short hair and disco dancing led to the discrediting of the campaign, but the CCP remains serious about its role of ideological watchdog over media (Bao, interview). Wang Ruoshui, deputy chief editor of Renmin Ribao, was criticized and removed from his post because of his views on alienation under socialism. Although the campaign to oppose spiritual pollution has subsided, it is evident that the media remain directly subordinate to the Party and that individual journalists remain liable and vulnerable for their views. As Hu Yaobang's speech makes clear, the content of Chinese journalism is modernization because modernization is the Party's current

⁷⁴ An excellent analysis of the "oppose spiritual pollution" campaign is found in Stuart Schram, "Economics in Command? Ideology and Policy since the Third Plenum, 1978-84," in China Quarterly, September 1984, pp. 417-61.

policy. As far as the Party is concerned, the role of Chinese journalism remains the same: service to the Party (Hu, 1985).

Ideological Deradicalization

The most important aspect of media liberalization has been its ideological deradicalization. At the same time, the process of deradicalization had to be prevented from leading to a tendency of liberalism. Deradicalization refers to the reformers' goal of debunking the most radical elements of Maoist ideology and policy making. However, due to the division within the CCP as to how far this process could go and the political struggles surrounding the issue, there had appeared two sets of terminologies describing it. The positive set included "emancipating" or "liberating" minds, "openness" and "bold experimenting and developing Socialism." On the other hand, the negative set included connotations such as "bourgeois liberalization" and "liberalism." This was likened to the catchwords of U.S. secretary of state John F. Dulles (1953-57) in his proposed strategy to employ propaganda and psychological warfare to destroy socialism (Zheng, interview).

The battle on the ideological front raged, almost at the same time as the personnel purge, for the purpose of drawing new deradicalized political and perceptual guidelines to convince the public, legitimize internal reform of the CCP

leadership and organize the masses within and outside the Party. This proved to be a formidable task because of the extent to which radical ideology had been entrenched in the social institutions and political perceptions.

After the autumn of 1977, Chinese media began to expose the "excessive cohesion" and repression during the Cultural Revolution which was officially denounced by the Party in 1981. This placed those who had experienced upward mobility as a consequence of the Cultural Revolution in a rather tenuous position. The campaign against the Gang of Four, who had been toppled in the 1976 coup d'état staged by Mao's designated successor Hua Guofeng and Marshal Ye Jianying,⁷⁵ was intensified at the same time. The campaign served a number of political functions for Deng Xiaoping and his followers. Exposure of the abuse of human rights by the radicals justified rehabilitation of those who, like Deng himself, took "economics in command."⁷⁶ These rehabilitated officials began reappearing in prominent leadership positions by the hundreds of thousands in 1977 and 1978. They felt a strong resentment against those who had triumphed on the basis of the radical line during the Cultural Revolution.

⁷⁵ Marshal Ye Jianying later reinstated Deng Xiaoping as the de facto paramount leader in 1978.

⁷⁶ "Taking economics" rather than revolutionary politics as "command" was denounced by Mao and other leftists as distorting Marxism and prone to the revision of capitalism.

Repudiation of the cult of personality and the Cultural Revolution created a strong sense of solidarity among the new power centres and legitimized the large-scale purge of radicals.

The effort to minimize Mao's ideological influence necessarily became an important part of deradicalization; it was initiated with an obvious political motive, i.e., to topple Hua Guofeng and his "whateverists" clique.⁷⁷ On 11 May 1978, Guangming Daily carried an article written by Hu Fumin, director of the Philosophy Department of Nanjing University, entitled "Practice as a Sole Criterion of Truth." This article legitimized Deng's efforts to replace the Maoist orthodox line with pragmatism. It was argued that truth is flexible and could only be validated anew each time in the course of practice.

This was generally considered an inaugural piece leading to a debate in the media which resulted in the conclusion that Mao's writings were inconsistent, and should be viewed critically (Chang, 1985, p. 44). The criticism of Mao's perspective was necessary in order to attack those who derived

⁷⁷ Hua claimed that "We must resolutely uphold whatever policy directions Chairman Mao made, and consistently follow whatever directives Chairman Mao issued." Quoted in Deng Xiaoping, "Suggestions on the Drafting of the 'Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China,'" in Beijing Review, 25 July 1983, pp. 71-76.

their legitimacy from Mao. But the evaluation of Chairman Mao himself was more difficult for the new leadership. The attack on Mao could, and did, open the door to attacks on the Party. The Chinese media were authorized to recognize Mao's "mistakes" and his followers' crimes. Mao's leftist errors, it was said, were due to his reliance on Marxist-Leninist theory which was divorced from reality. Among Mao's errors were: broadening class struggle, despising mental work, creating the communes, overemphasizing heavy industry, ignoring the collective leadership, and promoting extreme egalitarianism. These errors were distinguished from "Mao thought" which is still one of the four cardinal principles mandated to be upheld as the product of "collective wisdom."⁷⁸

Effects towards the deradicalization and reduction of Mao's influence were not only used in the power struggle at the top echelon, they were also used to diminish the leftist influence and to shift to new imperatives of economic development. One article in Renmin Ribao (26 October 1979) in the early days of the economic reform gives a sense of the obstacles which the media were facing in achieving consensus on the new initiatives of the reform leadership. It complained:

⁷⁸ See "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party" in Beijing Review, 6 July 1981, pp. 10-39.

You attempt to turn the focus of work to "four modernizations" and they say: "We should not abandon the key link of class struggle." You want to readjust national economy and they demand to know: "Do you mean to throw out 'Take Steel as the Key Link'?" You want to increase the rights of enterprises and they accuse you of "doing harm to unified leadership." You want to increase profit, enlarge savings and abide by the principle of remuneration according to work and they say: "You are repeating the stuff of 'Profit in Command' and 'Material Incentives.'" You want to thoroughly carry out the policy of respect for intellectuals so that those with professional education and skill shall be employed and they label you "class traitor." You want to import advanced technology from foreign nations and they hit you with the club "Turning Capitalist!" They sound very revolutionary. In actuality they are obstructors.

From 1978 till today, the media have been used to remove obstacles on the way to reform. The new official line has been gradually established. "Class struggle," previously the "key link" in cultural and social life, has disappeared from the media and people's attention (Chang, interview). The Party's new priority is economic development.

In summary, the Chinese media in this period took on their traditional function as an ideological and propaganda machine to serve the new regime. The press deradicalized the old ideology which had controlled the thinking of the people and the officials, and helped redefine the political and economic institutions and goals.

The Democracy Movement and Liberalization of the Media

The liberalization of the media designed by the new leaders to support their reforms led to unintended consequences and thus a dynamic of its own. It did serve the justification for the purge of the Maoists and for the shift of Party agenda, but it did not stop there. The movement went on to question both the system of socialism and the Party leadership itself. The CCP faced a dilemma: it needed the media to clear obstacles out of the way to economic reform, but it could not tolerate its own authority to be questioned or challenged (Zheng, interview). What made things more complicated was that the Party began to split over how quickly and how soon economic reform should move. Different factions had different levels of tolerance and benefitted differently from media liberalism, thus causing the uncertainty and ups and downs of media liberalism, depending on which faction had more power.

Deng's ideological offensive in 1978 resulted, apparently unintentionally, in the first wave of the democracy movement. A group of former Cultural Revolution Red Guards who had been victimized because they were accused of sympathizing with "capitalist despots" demanded rehabilitation like the former cadres and intellectuals who had been humiliated. Deng's denunciation of human rights violations were eagerly embraced and extended to include demands for freedom of assembly,

freedom of the press and so on. Hundreds of underground publications were printed and circulated in China's major cities and posted on what became known as the "Democracy Wall" in Beijing. The content ranged from documentations of torture in prison to theoretical arguments on issues of the subordination of people in a proletarian dictatorship, the abuse of the judiciary by the CCP and the repression of free speech (Chang, 1985, p. 47).

During 1978 the movement escalated beyond the Party's control. Articles urged people not to place too much trust in the reforms so long as they were based on the will of one man. The political dissident Wei Jingsheng wrote in an article "Democracy or Despotism?" in his journal Tansuo (Exploration): "It is clear to everybody that the social system in China is undemocratic and that during the past 30 years this lack of democracy has impeded development of the society as a whole." While more and more publications sprang up, new and ever more sensitive issues were seized upon.

After his faction became the mainstream within the power apparatus, Deng became more cautious. In January 1979, he issued a major internal speech against the movement and ordered the "Democracy Wall" abolished. He outlawed the human rights organizations and put them on trial. Wei Jingsheng was convicted of selling military secrets to a British

correspondent and of agitating for the overthrow of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He received a 15-year sentence. Another dissident, Ren Wanding, was condemned to four years in prison.

Though the democracy movement was crushed, the more fundamental social and political transformation continued as the Party began to dismantle the planned economy, opened up to the outside world and reshuffled the bureaucratic system. All these efforts needed the continued support of media propaganda. Hence the officially sanctioned "emancipation of minds" was never revoked. However, the pragmatists have been almost permanently caught in the classic dilemma of reformers: reaffirming the four principles would encourage the traditional forces to ignore the reform programs, but neglecting them might entice others to unwarranted liberalism.

Some degree of liberalism and of intellectual freedom have always been needed by reformists to battle against the more conservative faction. At the same time, the Party has always suppressed those who have gone too far. The result has been considerable uncertainty, frequent readjustments in policy and, sometimes, political recriminations such as the "anti-spiritual pollution" campaign in 1984, the "anti-bourgeoisie liberalism" campaign in 1987 and the "anti-peaceful evolution" after the Tiananmen crackdown.

The media reform as part of the political reform designed by the new leadership has not gone exactly as hoped. It has not stopped at deradicalization but has gone on calling for liberalizing, and articulating and questioning many fundamental issues of socialism and its Chinese experience. This situation reflects the confidence crisis inside the core of the Party even after the democracy movement in the streets had been crushed. The struggle over the future course for China continued after 4 June 1989, because it originated and was conducted within the Party at the highest levels, often using the media to publicize issues or simply to indicate which side had temporarily gained the upper hand.

Journalistic Discontent

Chinese journalists' dissatisfactions surfaced dramatically during the 1989 student movement, as discussed in the first chapter. How had Chinese journalists come to the point of marching in the streets? Their actions, much like the students' actions, may be partly understood as an outcome of mounting frustration (Abel, interview). The growing discontent among journalists during the reform era was no secret; from 1986 on, proposals for press reform dominated the considerable array of trade and academic publications put out by news organizations and journalism research institutions around the country, and by late 1987 dissatisfaction with the status quo was their main theme. Journalists felt frustrated

by pressures to publish what they considered irrelevant and boring reports and documents, with official meddling in what they saw as judgments better left to news practitioners, with the obstacles they faced in trying to report controversial affairs they considered of concern to the public, and with the lack of certainty about what was permissible and what was not (Bao, interview).

These discontents and their expression were, ironically and probably inevitably, outgrowths of the Party's own initiatives. As with all spheres of social activity in China, developments in journalism during the 1980s pivoted on the redirection of the nation's development strategy following the Party's Third Plenum in December 1978. The shift away from class struggle to modernization, the new acceptance of intellectuals into the ranks of the "working class," the adoption of market-oriented economic reforms and the commitment to greater democracy in political life were reflected in journalism in many ways.

One immediate and dramatic change after the launching of the economic reforms was simply the increased volume of information available through the officially sanctioned mass media. Disbanded publications were revived and new ones mushroomed.

The tone and content of the press changed markedly after 1978, with new prominence accorded readers' letters, investigative reports, and human interest stories.

The dissatisfactions perceived by practising editors and reporters at Chinese news organizations as well as journalism educators and researchers more than a decade into the reform era, though intertwined, can be categorized into three areas of concern: 1) the dilemmas of serving two masters; 2) the various formal and informal mechanisms of press control constraining newswork; and 3) obstacles to coverage and publication of several genres of news -- specifically, what Western journalists would classify as human interest news and what in China is called "social news," investigative and "criticism reporting," and reports reflecting diversity of opinion or interpretation.

Serving Two Masters. As discussed in Chapter II, Chinese journalists have been assigned a difficult balancing act as intermediaries between the nation's political authorities and the public. In theory, service to political authorities and service to the public deserve equal attention from Chinese journalists. In theory, the two aspects of the dual mission are two sides of the same coin, recited in the same breath. In practice, however, China's press corps has almost always served the Party authorities' interests over public ones.

Like China's intellectuals generally, Chinese journalists have defined their interests and performed their work according to the requirements of those in power. Coercion certainly is a factor -- the price of intellectual dissent has always been high -- but other factors have been no less important. Journalists in China are integrated into the political system as junior partners of the political elite, and the occupation keeps itself in line largely through "internalized, implicit and self-perpetuating" constraints (Polumbaum, p. 34).

Nevertheless, Chinese journalists have never been entirely happy with the realities requiring them to act primarily as publicists for public officials and promoters of Party policy, and only secondarily and intermittently as voices of the public.

As part of modern China's intellectual stratum, journalists also carry the legacy of iconoclasm and rebellion that crystallized in the 4 May Movement of 1919, which gave rise to China's communist movement itself.

In periods of political liberalization in China, journalistic partisanship tilts away from the Party and state and toward public interests and demands. The identity of Chinese journalists is complicated by a questioning of the

advocacy role implied by both aspects of their prescribed mission. In periods of political relaxation there emerges the notion of a more professional model of journalism emphasizing occupational independence and the transmission of neutral information.

From 1978 on, against the backdrop of China's economic reform program and the many changes those reforms brought to the mass media, journalists once again began to question their own purposes and practices as well as the strictures and structures that circumscribed the selection, coverage, and presentation of news. Editors and reporters at newspapers published by Party and government organs, and also those at other state-funded papers published by quasi-governmental organizations, are acutely conscious of their dual mission and its difficulties. The sense of being pulled in two directions is a salient concern everywhere -- at national, provincial, and municipal papers, at conventional dailies and at the less-restrained evening papers, at papers aimed at youth, workers, and intellectuals, as well as at general-circulation papers.

Almost universally, journalists see the officials overseeing their papers and the readers of their papers as having differing preferences in news content. They are aware that leaders typically want newspapers to publish official documents, reports of official meetings, reports on the words

and activities of officials, and instructions intended to guide work units in carrying out official policies and programs. Research surveys of newspaper audience show that readers are not particularly interested in the above; they want practical information and entertainment. They like to read about issues such as inflation and housing, human interest stories, breaking news of accidents and disasters, and criticism of wrongdoing (Folumbaum, p. 45).

Many journalists complain about the Party's penchant for using the press as a conduit for "guidance," meaning instructions to readers about how to carry out their work in line with current policy -- a desire for propaganda. Others call for greater attention and responsiveness to the public as a desirable goal and consider it the most important aspect of journalistic reform. Still others take varying perspectives on whether the imbalance between service to the Party and service to the public (readers) could be redressed under the existing press system. Some people emphasize an underlying harmony of interests between political authorities and the public, while others acknowledge that contradictions between the two might arise (Zheng, interview).

However, some journalists maintain that there is no fundamental difference between the interest of leaders and the interest of readers. In this view, the primary challenge

facing the press corps is how to convey the correct policies of the leadership and inculcate desired values more effectively; in other words, how to make propaganda more palatable and win over the readership. Those expressing this perspective tend to be older and in leading editorial positions. Some even argue that there is no real problem uniting readers' and leaders' interests, but great attention should be paid to things like readability. Others likewise suggest that entertainment and information functions can complement and reinforce propaganda functions.

Press control. Although Party control of media, which was first asserted in the Yanan base area in 1942, has remained the basis of media policy, that policy has also evolved since 1949. The first trend was one of consolidation and tightening of Party control. The trend lasted until the Cultural Revolution, when the mass critique of Party leadership and ensuing factionalism led first to a disorientation of the media and then to a hyperideological narrowness. After the death of Mao in 1976, a new media policy began to emerge which stressed the contribution of media to economic modernization. Because modernization is now the fundamental policy of the Party and an efficient information system is seen as important for modernization, the role of media has expanded and journalism is given more leeway.

The greater encouragement and freedom given to journalism led to suggestions that control over the media be further relaxed and decentralized, but this pressure was decisively rejected by former Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang in early 1985. Stricter press control was imposed after the 1989 student movement, in which the Chinese media played an important role as discussed in the first chapter.

In the view of a senior journalist from Xinhua, the major problem experienced by Chinese journalists during the reform years "has been one of too much control and restraint, which seriously hampers the initiative and creativeness of media organizations and journalists." Ying Qian, director of Xinhua Washington bureau, says that he supports the Party leadership over journalism, "but this should not be taken to mean that the duty of media organizations and journalists is simply to repeat, like a parrot, exactly what they are told to utter."

We have experienced too much of reporting good news to the neglect of bad news. Things have been improving steadily since China started economic reform and opened its door to the outside world. And yet, compared with the outstanding changes in the economic field, progress in the area of journalism is far from enough. The kind of "glasnost" advocated by [former Soviet president] Gorbachev is definitely not a solution suitable to China, nor should the type of free press practised in the West be transplanted there in disregard of different traditions and cultures. What China needs most now is to let journalism to a better job in accelerating economic reform by providing more information and supplying it faster and more objectively (Ying, interview).

Apart from editorial and personnel control, as discussed in the previous chapter, Chinese journalists also face financial control by Party and government organs at different levels. They are well aware of the importance of financial control. The saying "He who pays the piper calls the tune" was as applicable to media as anything else. All the official news organizations in China receive government money, or at least get subsidies.

In the market-oriented climate of the reform years, the government's desire to reduce subsidies has put newspapers under pressure to find new sources of income. Meanwhile, newspapers are squeezed by rising newsprint prices and postal costs. For government-funded papers, this was coupled with caps on their newsstand and subscription prices. Some local papers claimed self-sufficiency through advertising and money-making sideline endeavours, such as outside printing jobs; some undertook their own delivery to bypass the post office (Chang, interview). Nonetheless, most papers continue to depend on handouts. According to figures presented at a conference of the Institute of Journalism of the China Academy of Social Science in 1988, state subsidies to newspapers at the provincial level and above totalled nearly US\$1.4 billion annually.

Newspaper editors are enthusiastic about the idea of

becoming more responsive and responsible to the market, and in areas where the economic reforms were most advanced it was fashionable to refer to the newspaper as a commodity. Likewise, journalists advocate embracing market opportunities, often on the premise that shifting financial dependence from the state to consumers would liberate news organizations from Party control, while compelling them to become more accountable to their audience (Chang, interview).

But such expectations are too optimistic. The financially independent newspapers still have to do things in the same mode: Obey the Party committees overseeing them. Even profitable papers commonly depend on the government for any new capital investment,⁷⁹ and directors and editors are reluctant to offend any official who controls such money.

Coverage issues. In discussing the difficulties of their work, Chinese journalists inevitably bring up problems associated with three types of news coverage: "social news," a term that encompasses human interest stories, news of crime and other forms of deviance, and breaking news of accidents or disasters; "criticism reporting," ranging from coverage of everyday problems faced by average people to investigative

⁷⁹ Such capital investment includes the building of living quarters for a news organization's staff. In China, all government departments, news organizations and universities build their own apartment buildings. Usually, this money comes from the government, at least most of it does.

exposure of bureaucratic bundling, malfeasance, or official corruption; and stories reflecting diverse perspectives or opinions. These areas are seen as common prey of the control system discussed in the previous chapter and above in this chapter.

▲ Crimes, disasters, and other topics of mass interest have gained legitimacy in Chinese journalism since the economic reforms started more than a decade ago. Such coverage has emerged as part of the move toward greater informational openness and responsiveness to the market, while also livening up conventional propaganda efforts: Human interest and breaking news stories may provide the reader with needed information or welcomed enjoyment, and also may be used to convey political direction or moral advice.

The newsroom setup in China is very similar to that in North America. In Xinhua's domestic news department, for example, there are "beat" reporters assigned to specific areas, such as political and foreign affairs, cinema and theatre, industry, science and technology, and legal affairs, including courts and crimes. There are also general news reporters whose job is to cover the unexpected, or whatever happens on fairly short notice, such as natural disasters, accidents, or the hijacking of an airplane.

Yet, crimes, accidents, natural and man-made calamities, and other human interest stories are not covered as a matter of routine in China. Rather, stories that impinge on political matters may be routinely suppressed. This is partly because the Chinese authorities are used to see "good" news get in print, and the news media are required to consider the consequent "social effects" of reporting these events. The authorities regard these stories as "bad" news and believe that such news reports would paint a negative image of the socialist country. Crimes committed by children of senior Party or government officials often don't see print. This kind of news story could only get in print if the editor has got the approval from relevant Party authorities. Reporting of such crimes, the authorities would argue, infringes the officials' image, thus harming their ability to perform public functions. Although these offspring of senior official would appear in court and face the law, but such cases rarely are reported. Therefore, coverage of other human interest stories remains largely a matter of chance and circumstance.

Journalists complain that officials put roadblocks in the way of societal news using old arguments against "blackening the image of socialism" that no longer hold water. Some are skeptical of the officially stated concerns about the presumed "societal effects" of reporting about negative phenomena, feeling instead that the true motive was to hide incompetence

or mistakes. Others believe that officials take a simplistic attitude toward audience reception of news. Few journalists accept the suggestions that reporting on crime would lead to more crime, or that reporting on disasters would make readers lose faith in socialism and the nation's future.

In fact, there is no uniform policy about publishing societal news. In reporting police and court news, for example, journalists in Beijing are perceived as being more cautious than those in Shanghai or Guangzhou (Zheng, interview). In Beijing, newspapers tend to wait out the judicial process, with occasional exceptions that may hinge on a sympathetic public security official giving the go-ahead; whereas in the more open southern cities, journalists more readily report unsolved crimes of investigations that are still in progress.

▲ Critical reports, seldom seen since 1957, began to reappear in the Chinese press in 1980. Exposure and criticism of harmful phenomena are supposed to be a valued element of reporting in China, but journalists complain that such reports are "hard to cover, hard to get into print, and hard on one afterwards" (Chang, interview).

The actual reporting process is difficult because it requires much painstaking investigation, often in the face of

resistance from the subjects of the story or their protectors. Getting an exposé into print is not easy either. First, under a Propaganda Department rule giving the target of criticism, or supervisory units above the target, the right to see the article and respond, all sorts of objections may be raised that the reporter and news organization are obliged to consider. Second, the target commonly uses personal connections to get officials to block the story's release.

Trouble could ensue after publication as well. The individuals or units involved may refuse to talk to reporters in the future. They may cause mischief for the journalists and news organizations, the most alarming trend being a propensity to sue for libel.

An obstacle to criticizing the Party or government bureaucracy is ambiguity over what is permissible. Journalists were pleased that Zhao Ziyang, in his speech to the 13th Party Congress, called on the press to exercise "supervision by public opinion," officially reviving a mission abandoned in the 1950s. But Party policy does not define who is to be supervised, and up to what level, or whether papers that are not technically Party organs can criticize the Party. There is widespread support for the position that newspapers should be able to criticize "all errors in work" as well as corruption or nepotism at any level, but there is no explicit

sanction for this position. Yet, in 1985 Hu Yaobang put a restriction on journalistic criticism to 20 per cent of the media's total coverage and within that 20 per cent much excellent investigative reporting should be done (Hu, 1985).

Some national newspapers have developed a track record in exposing abuse of office, misconduct of duty, and bureaucratic evils. Well-acclaimed stories of the early 1980s include the exposure of official negligence in the capsizing of an oil rig in the South China Sea, aggressively reported by Gongren Ribao and Renmin Ribao (Polumbaum, p. 59). On 22 July 1980 Renmin Ribao exposed and criticized the capsizing of the offshore oil rig Bohai No. 2, which caused many casualties and great material damage. Starting on the day the breaking news was carried in the paper, Renmin Ribao published a series of follow-ups, commentaries, editorials, and letters to the editor, all dealing with the serious nature of the accident. In due course, the State Council made a decision about the accident: to punish Vice Premier Kang Shi'en by giving him a serious demerit, and to punish Petroleum Minister Zhou Zhenmin by removing him from office. Other people who were directly responsible for the accident were given either prison terms according to law or administrative disciplinary punishment according to government regulations (Chang, p. 102).⁸⁰ The

⁸⁰ The emergence of critical reporting is well observed and discussed in detail in Chang, Mass Media in China, pp. 47-52 and pp. 101-106.

coverage of the accident exerted great influence on the readers and received very positive reaction.

However, even for large and influential national newspapers, accomplishing such crusading journalism required either political backing or situations of benign neglect that tend to be transitory (Polumbaum, p. 59), and political risks are too high for reporters and editors. Despite encouraging political rhetoric brought on by the 13th Party Congress, the prospects for developing the press's supervisory role remain uncertain. Provincial and municipal papers describe criticism of local officials as nearly impossible. For instance, the mayor of Wuwei, a city in Gansu Province, confiscated the entire press run of the local newspaper for carrying a front-page letter criticizing his work. Given the difficulties of criticism directed upward, reporters tend to aim low. To borrow a common Chinese saying, they "swat flies, but don't beat tigers" and they have a lot of criticism of small things, but little criticism of big things, especially leaders (Ibid., pp. 59, 61).

▲ During the cultural revolution, because the risk of ideological deviation was so great, all news media simply repeated the items from Renmin Ribao. The result was "a thousand Buddhas with the same face" (Womack, p. 13). During the reform years, diversity in news coverage and diversity of

public opinion have gradually caught the attention of the Chinese press in response to readers' demands and in a bid to attract newspaper audience.

Chinese journalists complain that officials persist in delivering commandments to the public because they do not trust people to make up their own minds and judgements on the basis of available information. But journalists themselves seem to hold a similarly paternalistic view of the media audience. Many believe that readers are not ready to accept diversity of opinion in the press, and that publishing varying viewpoints would only make them confused. Some journalists assert that readers are too accustomed to regarding newspapers as official organs presenting a single "correct" view.

Nonetheless, others advocate that readers are growing more sophisticated and indeed have the ability to think independently, at least among the younger generation of readers. Therefore, the news media have to improve and expand objective and multifaceted reporting, let facts provide proof, let readers themselves decide. They call for diversity in news reporting and diversity in presenting public opinion.

The Shanghai World Economic Herald was regarded as a pacesetter in press pluralism. Yet, it was exactly the pluralism in its editorial policy and practice that led to the

Shanghai Party committee's decision to close it down in 1989. The Party and government have never been in a position to let the press present different points of view, except briefly during the 1956 campaign of "letting a hundred flowers blossom, letting a hundred schools of thought contend," which ended up in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, a crackdown particularly severe in education and journalism.

In response to journalists' call for diversity in press coverage and different voices, former Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, in his 1985 speech, explicitly denied such an possibility:

We have already improved our leadership over journalism and respected the decision-making rights that the journalism units should have. ... However, the Party's journalism has to speak on behalf of the Party and government and voice opinions and provide guidance for work in accordance with the Party's line and policies. ... The main pronouncements of the Party's journalism organs ... should represent the Party and government, not just the editors or the reporters themselves.

... Then, can the Party's journalism work be placed on a par with reform of the economic structure, by saying that since the enterprises should become relatively independent commodity producers, the Party's journalism units can also be run like that? ... It is very imprecise to put it that way. ... As far as operations are concerned, the Party's journalism organs are a kind of enterprise, but they are first of all organs of public opinion.

... As for the question of different voices, it depends on the issues on which there are different voices. As regards the country's political orientation and basic policies, ... since our people have identical fundamental interests, the political orientation and basic policies of the CCP Central Committee and the State Council represent the people's interests. Thus, everybody will

naturally and necessarily hold the same opinions on these basic issues and it would be unnatural to obstinately express "different" voices (Hu, 1985).

Hu's speech was delivered and published in 1985 in response to the debates in the ongoing press reform efforts that were initiated in late 1979 by the Party itself along with the start of economic reform. His statement was originally intended to calm the voices, some of which were challenging Party control and press policy.

However, Hu's remarks prompted more questions and debates than they answered them. Meanwhile, press reform was gaining new momentum as the economic reform pushed ahead in the country.

CHAPTER IV

Struggling in A Bitter Sea:

Press Reform in the Decade of Economic Reform

The CCP has never considered that the press might enjoy the freedom other cultural and art institutions have gained. The reason is that the press has always been one of the fundamental governing tools of the CCP. (The other tool is the army.) In the process of democratization and liberalization over the last dozen years, the Party's authority and legitimacy were weakened rather than strengthened. It is feared that without the control of the press, the Party could be facing the danger of being overthrown (Zheng, interview). In addition, the control has been constantly challenged and there have been attempts to abolish or lessen this control because press professionals do not live in a vacuum, but are influenced by the rest of society.

During the decade of reform, economic changes have been difficult yet may be relatively easy compared to changes in the political system. One constant theme of the Party leadership is the need to maintain stability, particularly after the 1989 student movement. Generally speaking, changes

in the Chinese press occur in response to and are reinforced by the new economic and political priorities. In other words, China's economic and political reforms have generated press reform and brought about many significant changes in news media practice.

Journalists, professionals, intellectuals and Party leaders have debated over the years with regard to the role of Chinese journalism. The key question is: should propaganda continue to be "educational" or should it move toward a freer "informational" role?

This chapter will discuss the perception of press reform on the part of journalists and bureaucrats. It will also address the evolution of the press reform, major issues in the press reform debate, and the fundamental concern -- the drafting of a press law.

Freedom of the Press

During the years of economic reform and relative political liberalization, the CCP has permitted more freedom to society and encouraged a certain liberalism in the press. It has nevertheless insisted that the media remain under Party control. However, as society at large has changed, the ordinary journalists have also been under similar influences and they want more autonomy than permitted.

The press reform, especially in the sense of deradicalization and criticism of Maoism, was intended to serve the agenda of the CCP political reform. Ever since this reform process started, the CCP has had to struggle to maintain a balance between a certain liberalism in the press to support the overall reform programs and the necessary control to safeguard against the challenge to its own authority.

In the liberalizing process which touched every aspect of Chinese political and cultural life, the media seemed to lag behind. For example, the Party formally gave up control over literature and art with an announcement at the 4th National Writers' Congress held during December 1984-January 1985:

The writers must have the freedom to choose subjects, themes and artistic methods, and the full freedom to express their own feelings and thoughts, so that they could produce touching and inspiring works. The Party, government, cultural organizations and the whole of society should firmly guarantee that writers have such freedom. The Party and state should create the necessary conditions, environment and atmosphere for true freedom in writing.

A similar freedom should exist in literary criticism. Mistakes and faults should be solved through literary criticism, discussions and debates only among artists and critics, as long as those mistakes and faults do not infringe the law. The writers who are criticized must not be discriminated against politically, and must not be punished organizationally.⁸¹

⁸¹ Xinhua, "Writers Must Be Free, Says Hu Qili," 29 December 1984. This is a news story on Hu's speech at the opening session of the 4th National Writers' Congress, which

Only a few months later, however, Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang refused to give Chinese journalists similar freedom in news reporting. As discussed earlier, Hu warned the press against placing too much attention on societal ills or controversy (with the admonition that no more than 20 per cent of news should be negative). He also decreed that those who gathered and wrote the news were not entitled to the same latitude granted to writers of literary works:

Recently, through discussion, everyone has held that there must be complete freedom of creation in literature and art. Can journalism copy this slogan? I think it should not simply copy it. Of course, our journalism and our literature and art should both enjoy the rights of freedom granted by the socialist system and the Constitution (Hu, 1985).

Journalists have been envious of the freedom the writers enjoy. During this period of alternating freedom and repression and constant testing of the tolerance of the authority, Chinese journalists, like the cultural, artistic and intellectual communities, were very susceptible to Western influence. Western influence had been growing since the start of economic reform and opening to the outside world. Young Chinese journalists were increasingly influenced by Western values and notions of press freedom. The presence of foreign media in China also played a significant role. Western media accessible to the Chinese people, such as the

was attended by 800 writers from all over the country.

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Voice of America (VOA), presented Chinese audiences with a new journalistic language and format that seemed free of the overt political or ideological messages which Chinese audience were so accustomed to. The Chinese journalists, resentful of rigid political control, were eager to embrace the new concepts about journalism and demanded that similar values should guide their profession in their own country.

Yet less than a year later after Hu's speech, the Party leadership was tolerating and even encouraging discussion of ideas that Hu Yaobang's speech had explicitly discouraged -- ideas such as diversity in media content, informational openness, and editorial autonomy. In August 1986, a national forum of editors-in-chief of provincial newspapers made their desire for greater editorial independence unmistakably clear. Teng Teng, deputy head of the Propaganda Department who was also a participant, said that while Party committees should "strengthen and improve leadership" over journalism, they should refrain from "monopolizing the newspapers" and must allow news organizations "free hand in news reform."⁸² The

⁸² Xinhua, "Press Should Have Right to Decide What to Be Published," 21 August 1986. This was the second news story about the conference that Xinhua put on the wire. But this one was released six days after the meeting ended on 15 August. Probably this news item was on the wire because, after reading the first one, Teng Teng himself complained that his speech was not quoted in full context, missing an important point.

editors said newspaper reports about meetings were "too many and too monotonous, hardly meaning anything to the general readership." Teng agreed and expressed support for more informative news, saying, "Newspapers should not carry stories without news value." Between January and June that year, the meeting was told, Guizhou Daily carried a monthly average of 79 pieces of meeting news on its front page. The figure was 63 for Liaoning Daily, 54 for Zhejiang Daily and 53 for Sichuan Daily. All these papers are four-page folios, operating under their respective provincial Party central committees. The editors attributed the monotonous meeting reports to Party and government officials insisting on having their meetings publicized, although they knew that the public wouldn't care about them.⁸³

The new Party line on journalism invigorated discussion along with practice, and critics turned their sights to structural and institutional confines on the press that had not been examined before. Journalists attending the meeting urged that efforts underway in economic and government units to separate Party affairs from administrative affairs be applied to press institutions, and advocated that the Party should oversee only the general orientation of the press, not

⁸³ Xinhua, "Meeting Reports Too Many, Monotonous," 15 August 1986.

its day-to-day operations.⁸⁴

A shift in the Party's stance regarding the news media occurred in late 1988, in line with a retrenchment in the economic reform program. Prompted by popular discontent over spiralling inflation and other problems, China's leaders backtracked on some reform measures, curtailing domestic investment and credit, and postponing planned wage and price reforms. Now, instead of encouraging openness and criticism in the media, propaganda officials exhorted the press to play up the positive side of things and take greater care with the negative in order to boost people's confidence and foster "stability and unity." In a December 1988 speech, Hu Qili, then the Politburo member in charge of propaganda, said the media's efforts to act as a national watchdog "must be standardized, systematic and conducted within the limits permitted by law." Journalists needed to "publicize national prospects and hopes and publicize the tremendous achievements of our construction and reform convincingly and with perfect assurance." He no longer echoed the 13th Party Congress call for "supervision by public opinion," but instead called on the press to "correctly guide public opinion."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Xinhua, "Hu Qili Stresses Watchdog Role of Press," 23 December 1988.

By this time, however, the momentum of journalism reform efforts, like the larger currents of political change, was not easily stemmed. Journalists were openly critical of their work and working environment. Reporters and editors, along with educators in journalism departments and scholars at research institutes, talked casually about "freedom of the press," a phrase used only by a few bold pathbreakers earlier in the decade. Editors acknowledged that the tension between financial control and editorial control affected even the Party press, and reporters confessed to self-censorship. Most expressed perplexity, if not ambivalence, about the task of trying to serve as official mouthpiece and mouthpiece of the people at the same time.

Still, after years that had seen impressive strides in economic reform and progressive relaxation in political life as well as the proliferation and diversification of news channels and content, no common program existed for Chinese journalism reform. Even scholars lacked a definition for the term. The press reform campaign could be defined as press restructuring: less Party and government control, more autonomy in editorial matters, diversity in news content, and freer expression of public opinion.

Journalistic reformers were also sensitive to the fragility of any progress that might be achieved. For many,

however, the apparent erosion in 1988 from the top leadership for more aggressive journalism only exacerbated frustrations. In addition, policy fluctuations made it all the harder to achieve consensus on just what a realistic program for journalism reform might be.

The most common point of agreement in journalism circles seemed to be that reform was necessary because nobody was happy with existing principles and practices.

Supervision by Public Opinion

In October 1987, journalistic reformers got an added moral boost from then Premier Zhao Ziyang's report on the work of the government to the 13th Party Congress. This report lent a new cast to the enterprise of gathering and reporting the news. It highlighted three principles for newswork: that the press should exercise oversight over the work and conduct of public officials, expressed in the term "supervision by public opinion" (yulun jian du); that the press should inform the public of important events (zhongda shijian rang renmin zhidao); and that it should reflect public debate on important issues (zhongda wenti rang renmin taolun).⁸⁶ Significantly and deliberately, the report made no mention of the central

⁸⁶ Xinhua, "Zhao Ziyang on Socialist Democracy" (an excerpt of "Advance Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," report to the 13th Party Congress by Acting Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang), 25 October 1987.

emphasis of Hu Yaobang's speech, namely, the news media's role as official mouthpiece.

To journalists, Zhao's remarks represented rhetorical ammunition that sanctioned more aggressive reporting. The Party Congress itself and the subsequent National People's Congress provided testing grounds, and reporting of these sessions was bolder, more authentic, and less uniform than previously. Subsequent months brought mixed progress in the coverage of political unrest, accidents, and natural disasters. In addition, the press gave greater attention to sensitive issues such as inflation, official profiteering, and other adverse byproducts of the reforms.

The debates on media reform had always been monitored by the authorities, and journalists feared to publish their bold opinions. So they found an alternative and seemingly practical and safe way to express them. Media professionals launched various Gallup-poll-type social surveys including some assessing their own attitudes and demands with regard to media reform. Beyond the findings, these surveys were significant in two regards. First, they signified that a barrier in reporting public opinion had finally been broken after years of persistence. In addition, they represented the clever employment of an "objective" method instead of the outright demands of greater autonomy by journalists themselves.

"Public opinion" and "public opinion polls" were taboo words only several years ago. Orthodox Party leaders and theoreticians denounced such things as bourgeois and they deemed opinion poll questionnaires to be manipulated by poll organizers to serve the interests of a few. However, by conducting public opinion polls and by reporting poll results, Chinese poll organizers and journalists wanted to influence Party policy makers and support the reform faction within the Party. At the same time, by reporting such survey results journalists also tried to legitimate, in an "objective" way, their press reform efforts and collect support from the Party leadership, legislators and society at large.

A 1987 opinion poll assessing the attitudes of Chinese journalists toward media reform indicated that 78.7 per cent of the journalists considered the credibility of the Chinese media to be very low or low and 87.7 per cent were very unsatisfied with the Party's leadership style in controlling the media. The majority of the journalists considered the major flaws in the media system to be: 1) tight restrictions on negative reporting; 2) restrictions on sensitive issues; 3) a low degree of "transparency" covering policy making; and 4) lack of representation of the demands of the masses (Media Research Institute of People's University, February 1988).

Journalists indicated that their "short term intentions"

(two to three years) in the order of priority were: 1) to increase the autonomy of the media; 2) to enact a press law and move from "rule by people" to the "rule by law"; 3) to work toward separation of Party and media administration; and 4) to get rid of outdated concepts of journalism. Perceived "long-term goals" (over a period of ten years) were: 1) to establish a multi-ownership media system and allow privately run media, 2) to replace the current Party control with high degree of autonomy in the Party-owned media, and 3) to run all the news media like businesses (Ibid.).

This was not surprising since the authorities were reluctant to sanction more freedom to the mainstream media. They feared that autonomy of the media would threaten the regime although the majority of the media professionals saw a transition to a "multi-ownership system" as necessary; they only demanded the improvement of leadership and relaxed control.

Chinese scholars also noted this discrepancy in regard to other aspects of media reform. They argued that an economically open system such as the one created by China's reform cannot co-exist with a closed media system. They agreed that the debate in the press about press reform only indicated the deeply-felt urge to change. "But the direction and nature of the reforms are still at a fragmentary

conceptual stage" (Starck & Xu, p. 21). Thus, the situation of press reform before the Tiananmen crackdown could best be described as "loud thunder, small raindrops" (ibid., p. 3).

A 1988 survey of 2,000 delegates to the National People's Congress (NPC) and members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) indicated that 90 per cent of them believed that the Chinese news media had become more open since the 13th Party congress in 1987. The same number held that the press should become a forum for readers to express their ideas so that they could be involved in political affairs. About 70 per cent said that the press was not doing well in "reflecting people's opinions." The survey, co-conducted by the Journalism Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Capital Press Society, showed that almost 60 per cent of the delegates to the NPC were dissatisfied with the state of critical reporting, arguing that too few such stories appeared in print and that most of those criticised were low-ranking officials. And 90 per cent of those surveyed urged the press to expose malpractice in the Party's working style so that wrongdoers would come under "public scrutiny." Only in this way, they argued, could people's sense of democracy be awakened. Meanwhile more than 80 per cent called for the early enactment of a press law, that should be aimed at protecting "press freedom under

socialist conditions."⁸⁷

In a separate opinion poll conducted by the same group in early 1989, more than 90 per cent of deputies to the NPC and members of the CPPCC said the Chinese mass media should become the forum for ordinary people to discuss national politics. They said they wanted the mass media to be more open in order to "strengthen press supervision and reflect the opinions of the average Chinese." The poll, which covered 1,542 NPC deputies and 510 CPPCC members, showed that 48 per cent of the NPC deputies and 33 per cent of the CPPCC members said news reports in newspapers, on radio or on television were "not enough for the needs," while 93 per cent of NPC delegates and 89 per cent of the CPPCC members favoured exposing important cases of government and Party irregularities in the press to enhance people's "consciousness of democracy." Half of those surveyed stood for open reporting of natural disasters, negative social events, government reshuffles, major faults of top leaders and the making of important national policies. Most of them favoured more reporting social problems and less reporting the work of the Party and government. As to press supervision, 61 per cent of the deputies and 75 per cent of the members agreed that "the mass media have not done enough to reflect the opinions of ordinary Chinese." They also hoped

⁸⁷ Xinhua, "Media More Open, Survey Shows," 19 December 1988.

to see the early enactment of a press law. The purpose of formulating such a law, they said, should be to protect freedom of speech in a socialist society. Some respondents criticized the phenomenon of reports which were too optimistic, one-sided and unfaithful to the facts.⁸⁸

The results of these surveys, and dozens of similar polls conducted in the three years before 4 June 1989, were published by the organizers and reported by the news media. In doing so, survey organizers and the media were trying to win over public support and press the Party and government for more political openness, more press freedom, and a diversified mass media. It is also very clear the questionnaires were designed to serve such political implications.

Selected Issues of Debate

During the press reform debates of 1979-89, the theory of "facts serving politics" came under fierce attack because it provided excuses for distortion, exaggeration and fabrication. The practice of reporting primarily "good" news became a sensitive target of criticism. The traditional view that journalism is a tool of propaganda was also subject to increasing attack.

⁸⁸ Xinhua, "Legislators in Favour of Open Mass Media," 17 March 1989.

One of the major issues in the debate was the role of Party journalism, specifically whether propaganda should continue to be "educational" or whether it should move toward a freer "informational" role. In the past decade, the Chinese government seemed to have adopted a more tolerant attitude toward journalists, and propaganda seemed to be playing both an "educational" and "informational" role.

There are powerful roots for educational journalism in Chinese popular and elite society and weak roots for "critical" or "pluralistic" journalism. "Educational journalism seeks to guide, lead, and transform an uncritical audience which must be protected from alternative and presumably erroneous ideas and information" (Cheek, p. 420). China's official propaganda has built on this cultural base and in the 1970s took educational or transformational journalism ad absurdum. "It was precisely this extreme abuse of traditional-style educational journalism in the Cultural Revolution which 'broke the spell,' and now some journalists and publications are experimenting with critical or informational journalism" (Ibid.). Informational journalism seeks to equip a critical audience with the data necessary to make informed decisions about public affairs. However, among the aging CCP leaders and in the society at large, strong forces resist the production of informational journalism.

This tension presents itself in socialist journalism as the dual and contradictory requirement of journalism in China to be both educational and informational, to be both a mouthpiece for the Party and to speak for the common people sharing information they need.

The question in journalism circles in China today is: What will the role of journalism be -- to "educate" or to "inform"? A complete rejection of the press's role as propagandist for Party policies seems both unlikely and unrealistic. However, there has been serious debate over what kind of propaganda various Chinese press organs should produce. The focus of debate these days is the possibility of drafting a press law; what such a press law should do -- control or protect independent journalism and the free flow of ideas and information (Cheek, p. 421).

The second question raised during the press reform debate was the definition and function of propaganda. Mao Zedong, in 1948, made clear the institutional function of a propaganda press: "The role and power of newspapers consists in their ability to bring the Party program, the Party line, and Party's general and specific policies, its tasks and methods of work before the masses in the quickest and most extensive way" (Mao, 1948, p. 241).

As for what the Chinese now think of "propaganda," the 1982 Beijing media audience survey said: "Only when readers believe that what the newspapers carry are real people, true stories, and facts can newspapers be acceptable and raise the effectiveness of propaganda."⁸⁹ This suggests that the survey team clearly sees truthfulness and credibility as keys to good propaganda.

As for the question of whether "propaganda" equals "the news," the major textbook used at People's University journalism department says: the role of the press and of journalists is to educate the public, uphold Party policy, help the masses (under Party guidance), and provide "social research" and public criticism to improve the Party.⁹⁰ A textbook from another major journalism department at Fudan University gives a slightly more complex picture. An Introduction to Journalism (1985), while upholding a fairly orthodox line on the class nature of journalism and unreality of "absolute" freedom of the press, does distinguish between "propaganda" and "news":

The purpose of propaganda is to persuade people, to make [them] accept the view of the propagandist and thereby to make the object of propaganda consciously act in accord with the intentions of the propagandist.

⁸⁹ From China Journalism Yearbook 1983 (Beijing) in its analysis of Beijing newspaper readers, translated in Womack, Media and the Chinese Public, p. 113.

⁹⁰ Cited in Cheek, "Redefining Propaganda," p. 425.

But, news only gives people one kind of information, [and] what people decide to do after receiving such information is up to the individual.⁹¹

During the debates of 1986-1988, Chinese journalists did not consider rejecting propaganda altogether; rather they implicitly debated how to redefine propaganda and thus to change the role of journalism in China.

The third issue in the press reform debate concerns news value. For a long time people in China have complained about the lack of news in Chinese newspapers and on radio or television. Especially, during the Cultural Revolution, news content bore little relation to reality. The belief was first that news should serve politics and, second, that news stories should grasp the essence of events. This rationale came under increasing criticism, though vestiges of "big talk, empty talk and falsehood" still appear in the Chinese press today (Zheng, interview). So it is no wonder that the concept of news became a popular topic in the press reform debate.

In the debate about news value, two opposing views have dominated.⁹² One holds that news value refers to the professionally-oriented values of reporting events. Thus,

⁹¹ Cited in Cheek, "Redefining Propaganda," p. 425.

⁹² For a detailed discussion of the debate of news value, please see Starck and Xu, "Loud Thunder, Small Raindrops."

criteria for the relative importance of news become proximity, timeliness, prominence and consequence. Journalists thus become the primary news determiners. The other approach to news value considers audience receptivity and possible social effects. Opponents of the former label the approach "mechanical materialism," while the opponents of the latter call it "subjective idealism" (Starck and Xu, p. 14).

However, both approaches are simplistic. News is seen in China as a multi-dimensional, multi-tier concept rooted in facts but superseding the boundary of facts (Hu, 1986, p. 30). According to Hu Jilu, news cannot be separated from facts, but the two are not identical (Ibid., p. 31). News reflects the changing status of things and events with emphasis on any new situation, new fluctuations and new tendencies. News is something which the audience does not know but wants to know. Thus, newsworthiness of events is determined by the degree of importance, interest and timeliness. But news values also reflect the relationship between facts and other events. For example, the visit of the United States table tennis team to China in 1971 was much more than a routine sports story at the time. It was a significant diplomatic event. A similar visit today would hold little news value.

What is identified as news will vary with time and environment (Ibid.). In the process, news is influenced

greatly by journalists -- their political sensitivity, knowledge, interview technique, expressive ability, intellect and judgement. At the same time, they argue that news values exist in the relations between facts and the audience, political parties and society as a whole. Thus, in judging news, reporters must weigh the interests of the audience, society and the Party.

Still others believe that news values can be subdivided into six areas: political, policy-making, timeliness, educational, appreciative and social. They argue that at present too much emphasis is placed on economic values while timely and social values receive insufficient attention (Starck and Xu, p. 15). The press reform, they say, should permit the possibility of striking a balance among the six values.

Drafting of Press Law

Perhaps the most widely-agreed-upon issue in the press debate is the need for a press law. Without effective press legislation, it is argued, the rights of journalists cannot be protected and they cannot fulfil their obligations. At the same time, administrative interference can not be prevented and supervision by public opinion through mass media cannot be achieved. However, progress toward the enactment of a press law did not catch up with the rhetoric.

The struggle for a press law can now be seen in the context of a long Chinese tradition for educational journalism and a continuous CCP tradition to combine educational and informational journalism. The drafting of a press law was first mooted in 1980, but work did not begin until 1984, when former Renmin Ribao editor-in-chief Hu Jiwei⁹³ was put in charge of drafting the law. The conservative backlash of January 1987 saw the creation of the State Press and Publications Administration (SPPA), with Du Daozheng as its director. The responsibility for drafting the press law was taken away from Hu Jiwei and the NPC group and given to the SPPA, under the State Council. The principal responsibility for drafting the law was later shared by Du Daozheng; and Hu Jiwei.

While Du stresses control and order, Hu stresses press freedom and further reform. Speaking of the guiding principles for a media law, Hu Jiwei held that a socialist media law should be one of protecting freedom of the press instead of restricting such freedom. The purpose of drafting such a law, he said, is to protect the people's freedom of expression and promote the development of freedom of the

⁹³ Hu Jiwei was Vice-Chairman of the NPC's Education, Science, Culture and Health Work Committee when he threw his weight behind the student demonstrators in 1989. He was removed and retired from his post for attempting to convene an emergency session of the NPC Standing Committee to overturn martial law in Beijing.

socialist press.⁹⁴

Hu stressed that the media law should protect not only the freedom of journalists but also freedom of the press for all the people. The rights of journalists in reporting as well as in commenting and exercising supervision are an expression of the people's freedom of speech and publication. Ensuring such rights of the people aims at enabling people to fully exercise their rights of being informed, airing their views and opinions, participating in political affairs and exercising supervision, he said.⁹⁵

"By the formulation of the press law, we hope the work of journalism will be done according to the objective law of press, making everyone equal before the media law," he said. In fact, he added, press freedom is the exercising and practice of freedoms prescribed in the Constitution, such as freedom of speech, freedom of publication and freedom in political affairs, social activities as well as in scientific research, literature creation and other literary work. He called for a press law, press reforms and in particular an improved Party's guidance over news work.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Xinhua, "Veteran Journalist on Media Law and Freedom of Press, 2 April 1988.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

A recurring theme among those arguing for a relaxation of Party control is the need to replace Party supervision of the press with public opinion (Beijing Review, p. 5). For a long time the Chinese press has served as a tool for certain power groups. Whenever the press intended to publish something counter to the power groups' interests, administrative interference and censorship occurred. Noting that "traditionally China has been a nation governed by people instead of laws" and that this applies to journalism, Stark and Xu recommended that a press law for China should be enacted and it should "protest socialist freedom, combining protection and limitations, rights and obligations" (Starck and Xu, p. 12).

A 30 August 1986 article by Sun Xupei in Shanghai's Wen Hui Bao stressed the necessity and urgency for enacting press legislation. He argued that through such a legislation, China can establish a basic system for the press, enact the socialist freedom of the press into law and gradually pave the way for the development of and monitoring by public opinion. He warns that, on the one hand, such a law must be prevented from suppressing freedom of the press and it must protect the rights of reporters in gathering news, the rights of newspapers in reporting news and conducting criticism, and the rights of the public in expressing their views and in reflecting their problems in the press. On the other hand, he

adds, the proposed press law should oppose the abuse of freedom of the press, allow no one to slander the "four cardinal principles, betray state secrets, peddle philistine or even pornographic works; and prevent citizens from being falsely accused or slandered."⁹⁷

Some Chinese journalists are cautious about the possible content of the proposed press law. There have been concerns among journalists that the press law might put more restraint on them rather than more freedom. One senior Xinhua journalist said in an interview that a press law is necessary to China and there is no doubt about that. "The problem is that an unsatisfactory law is even worse than none. In drafting this law, one should not take into consideration of the present need only. It should be sustainable at least for one decade or two. I am afraid that conditions for such a law is not quite ripe" (Ying, interview).

SPPA director Du Daozheng announced in December 1987 that the drafting of China's first press law would be completed and submitted to the NPC for deliberation in the first half of 1988. He said opinions of journalists regarding this law

⁹⁷ Sun Xupei, "Socialist Press Law Is a Law for the Protection of Freedom of the Press," originally published in Shanghai's Wen Hui Bao, 30 August 1986. Translated and published by BBC in British Broadcasting Corporation Summary of World Broadcasts and Monitoring Reports, 11 September 1986, p. FE/8361/BII/1.

would be solicited. According to Du, the draft would specify the mass media's rights and obligations, such as reporters' right to interview others and responsibility for accurate reporting.⁹⁸

Yet, more than a year later no draft had appeared. In February 1989, Du Daozheng announced that the formal draft of the press law would be submitted to the NPC for examination towards the end of that year. He said his office was still soliciting opinions from experts and news media organizations on the draft. However, considering the importance of the law and the need for full discussion on the part of the public, it would take some time before it could actually be promulgated.⁹⁹

Du Daozheng said rumours that the draft of the press law was suspended for a time because of marked differences of opinions among the drafters on what constitutes "freedom of the press" were "untrue." He said that since his office took charge of the drafting in the spring of 1987, the work had never stopped. He admitted, however, that "there were some twists and turns" in the process of drawing up the draft legislation. For instance, the drafting was held up for a

⁹⁸ Xinhua, "Press Law Being Drafted," 22 December 1987.

⁹⁹ Xinhua, "Formal Draft of China's Press Law Expected by Year's End," 11 February 1989.

period of time when his staff tried to combine the press law with the country's overall law on publication. But as this concept met opposition from experts and higher authorities, his SPPA decided to keep them separate, Du said. The SPPA director also disclosed that while guaranteeing citizens' rights to press freedom, the draft law would also contain a clause prohibiting any abuse of such freedom. When exercising their rights to press freedom, citizens must not harm the interests of the state, society or collective, nor can they infringe on the legal rights of other citizens.¹⁰⁰

Du added that pending promulgation of the press law, his office would attempt to issue provisional regulations governing journalists -- since they were badly needed by press organizations and legal establishments. Figures revealed by the office showed that in the first half of 1988 Chinese courts handled 200 lawsuits against journalists and news organizations.¹⁰¹

Meanwhile, Chinese news media continued to address the significance of a press law. Xinhua reported in January 1989 that an increasing number of lawsuits had been filed against journalists and writers in the previous years. The report said journalists, prominent writers and publishing houses had

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

been involved in cases charging libel, copyright infringement and non-payment of royalties. In 1988, there were 10 major cases of this sort and the new phenomenon was of great concern. The Xinhua story said the increase in cases involving journalists and writers was a generally positive phenomenon, since people had begun resorting to law to protect their own legal rights and interests. But these cases also had exposed some serious problems in the country's legal system: "The lack of press law and copyright law, for example, makes it difficult for courts to settle many cases."¹⁰²

"Journalists should observe professional ethics of journalism. However, they also need legal protection for their work and rights," Xinhua quoted Guangming Ribao as saying.¹⁰³

However, the drafting of the press law was shelved after 4 June 1989 and no word was heard about it until August 1990, when a spokesman of the NPC standing committee announced that a press law was being drafted and would soon be submitted to the committee for approval.¹⁰⁴ Yet, by the time this thesis was finished, this long-overdue and widely-called-for press

¹⁰² Xinhua, "Lawsuits against Journalists and Writers Increase," 19 January 1989.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Xinhua, "Laws to Promote Reform, Opening Policy Beijing Drafted," 25 August 1990.

legislation had not been tabled for consideration at the NPC, China's parliament. Chinese journalists are still wondering when their long march to having such a press law enacted can reach the destination.

Yet, there has been a renewed call for press reform in the Chinese press. On 10 August 1992, Jiefang Ribao published a bold appeal for greater press freedom, saying the time had come for the Chinese public to "have the right to know." It printed a commentary by Qian Bocheng, a delegate to the NPC, in which Qian called for laws guaranteeing China's right to "have a free press." He said, "If we really want to become an open China in the eyes of the world, then we must first have an open press, that means opening up the press: journalists have the right to interview, the media has the right to report and the public have the right to know."¹⁰⁵

He added, "I feel that now is the best time to resolve this problem." "Opening up shouldn't just mean opening up to foreigners. The differences between media coverage at home and abroad should also be corrected." Qian's commentary also called for press laws guaranteeing the right to cover news.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Jiefang Ribao (Shanghai), 10 August 1992, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

There were also reports on the lifting of bans on some films. Reports from China said government controls on publication was loosened as well. And for the first time in years, Politburo member Li Ruihuan, who oversees propaganda (including arts and literature), declared on 7 August 1992 that arts and literature can be more than tools of political education. He said the arts also can be appreciated for aesthetic qualities and as entertainment.¹⁰⁷ His statement marks a major policy shift and signals that senior leader Deng Xiaoping's calls in January 1992 for greater reforms are finally moving beyond the economy.

¹⁰⁷ Renmin Ribao (Overseas Edition), 7 August 1992, p. 1.

CONCLUSION

The years of reform since 1979 have been a fertile period for China's press development. Changes in China's news media are not isolated social events; they are caused by changes in the country's economy and politics. The changes in news media are both a cause and a result of societal changes. The changes in the press, the Party policies, the people's ideology and the societal structure and social systems are tightly bound together and are strongly influencing each other.

Change, driven by economic reforms, is occurring rapidly and widely. There appears to be no going back, although the whole reform process has experienced zigzags and ups and downs. The impact of the changes raises intriguing theoretical issues about China's press system. For the nation's communication system to effectively support national goals of modernization and economic development, basic questions arise concerning the long-accepted notions of the role of the press. Linked tightly to politics and heavily controlled by the Party, the press must recreate itself if it is to continue to serve the nation. Can an open economic system exist in a closed press system? The answer would appear to be no. And practically the Chinese appear to be

going about the task of making the necessary institutional adjustments to accommodate an expanding market system.

The ideological underpinning of reform in general and the reform of the press in China is the new Party line, the theory of the "initial stage of socialism."¹⁰⁸ It is currently interpreted as a basis for social diversity and ideological pluralism, at least in a de facto way. It is designed to legalize the diversity of socialist ownerships -- state, collective, and private, and to remove the jealousy of other people's getting rich as a result of economic reform. The "initial stage of socialism" theory received Zhao Ziyang's endorsement in his work report to the 13th National Party Congress on October 25, 1987. Zhao said the initial stage will last at least a hundred years from the 1950s, when the socialist transformation of private ownership of the means of production was basically completed, to the time when socialist modernization will have been in the main accomplished. "The principle contradiction China faces during the initial stage,"

¹⁰⁸ The idea of an "initial stage of socialism" was formed in the process of combating leftist ideology. It appeared, first of all, in the resolution on Party history since 1949 adopted at Sixth Plenary Session of the CCP's 11th Central Committee on 27 June 1981. The resolution states that China has reached the stage of socialist society but its socialist system is still in the early phase of development, and it would have to undergo a long process of development before it could be perfected. Hu Yaobang, in his report to the CCP's 12th Congress, and Zhao Ziyang, in his report to the 13th Congress, reiterated the theory that China's socialist society is still in its initial stage and that it is not yet highly developed materially.

he said, "is the contradiction between the growing material and cultural needs of the people and backward production." Zhao declared that class struggle "is no longer the principal contradiction."¹⁰⁹

The signals from the top look most encouraging for reformers. However, the long-noted "implementation problem" for carrying out reform policies is still alive. Conservative cadres, especially at lower levels, resist the new policy in ways that the centre cannot easily counteract. There are clearly constituencies in Chinese society which, broadly speaking, have an interest in reform or in the status quo. These constituencies form a basis for support for either "informational" journalism or traditional "educational" journalism (Cheek, p. 431).

The Party's dominant leadership group, many intrepid journalists, the emerging entrepreneurial class, individuals disgusted with Party perks, and a nascent economic market bolstered by world opinion are all factors supporting journalism reform (Ibid., p. 434).

As we have seen, the "theory of the initial stage of

¹⁰⁹ Xinhua, "Zhao Ziyang on Deepening Understanding of Socialism" (an excerpt of "Advancing Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," report to the 13th Party Congress by Acting Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang), 25 October 1987.

socialism" supports the free debate and legal protection informational journalism needs. Furthermore, intrepid editors, like Hu Jiwei, and "investigative journalists" like Liu Binyan, and public critics, like Wang Ruowang, made a real impact in articulating the need for and demonstrating the value of informational journalism.

Among the middle-levels of Chinese society, rich peasants and small entrepreneurs are likely to support a sort of journalism that provides justification for their jobs and information for their professional use. Even ordinary workers are beginning to express their desire for the press to really reflect their views (Cheek, p. 434). Many intellectuals surely feel the bravery to push for reform (which will protect them from indiscriminate political attack) based on having already experienced the worst, a sort of "what more can they do to me?" There is also a prominent group of intellectuals at metropolitan research institutes providing think-tank advice for the reformist leadership (Zheng, interview).

Another theoretical issue prompted by this overview of the debate about the press reform in China involves the impact on China's press of the nation's opening up to the rest of the world. That is, the focus here has been primarily on internal economic affairs. China also has aggressively pursued economic development in the international arena. Perhaps in

studying institutional relationships less emphasis should be put on a nation's domestic environment and more emphasis on the external environment.

Although changes in the Chinese news media may seem mainly technical and even trivial, they have some significance. First, changes in China's news media were brought about by the country's political changes, and they have also been promoting political changes in return. Because of changes in the news media, the scope and pace of China's political reform have been widened and expanded. Thus news media change has been a very important step in the process of developing, promoting and enhancing the country's openness, public policy-making and democracy. Second, changes in the news media showed that the Chinese news media have entered a new period of their history. In a sense, during the past few years, the country's news media have experienced a revolution which is different from any other changes in the past. Third, China's previous situation both in terms of press policies and political and social systems is not unique. Similar situations and problems also exist in other Third World countries. Therefore, China's experience, both positive and negative, may provide those countries with something useful, thus giving her changes global significance.

Finally, an emerging market in China favours reform and

informational journalism. One trend the 1982 Beijing media survey illustrated was that media audiences prefer believable journalism that reflects people's interests and passes on information they can use.¹¹⁰ As government departments and state-run companies are trying to reduce their expenditures, the number of newspapers a work unit could subscribe to has been drastically cut. The more important thing is that people have begun to buy the papers they want, and if your newspaper does not interest them, your circulation would plummet. This gives newspapers and periodicals a real incentive to respond to readers' preferences (Chang, interview).

Cheek believes that one possible way out of the current impasse between conservative and reformist forces in Chinese journalism would be to shift the focus of the "educational" in Chinese journalism. If it is politically prudent and good marketing to keep the didactic tone, then those who in fact wish to promote informational journalism can shift the "educational" part of journalism from content to the form of journalism. That is, to educate readers on the purposes and value of informational and critical journalism. From this perspective, educational journalism is propaganda written by intellectuals for those in power who believe the truth has been found, while informational journalism is propaganda

¹¹⁰ See "An Analysis of Beijing Newspaper Readers" in Media and the Chinese Public, ed. Brantly Womack, pp. 99-113.

written by intellectuals for the purpose of creating a new social bloc of alliances and compromises among the various social groups and interests within Chinese society (Cheek, p. 435).

It is thus possible for socialist journalism to contribute to a new, more pluralist public arena in Chinese society by "educating" readers about the values of informational journalism. In practice, this kind of propaganda would educate different parts of Chinese society about each other and their respective interests and needs, aiming toward a new consensus. At present, this sort of journalism does not exist in China. The arrival of a truly free press in China seems as unlikely as a return to the stilted propaganda of the early 1970s. The developments in Chinese journalism in the foreseeable future are likely to go along the lines of co-opting the reformist urge into Party goals or, more likely, simply muddling along.

We also have to observe that the driving force for more press freedom and reform arises from within the Chinese press itself. During the pro-democracy movement in 1989, as we have seen, thousands of journalists took to the streets to support the students and call for press reform and freedom of the press. Over the years, Chinese journalists have been making great efforts to improve their professional role, providing

balanced and fair coverage of news stories whenever possible.

The last decade is a very important period in China's history as reform has been in full blossom throughout the country. To date, the main change concerning the press in China is the extent and vigour with which reforms are being discussed. Despite a "retrenching" after June 1989, the urge for reform endures. Chinese leaders are talking about the ideas again, though the direction and nature of the reforms are still at a fragmentary conceptual stage.

Yet, no matter what direction reform goes in the future, the decade has already been regarded, at home and abroad, as a turning point in China's history. In the period of reform, the regime's opening policy to the outside world gave the major impetus to drastic changes in the Chinese news media. On the other hand, however, its severe criticism of "bourgeois liberalization" was the most serious factor that hindered more rapid changes. In other words, China's news media policy in the last decade has both encouraged and confined China's news media development.

In a speech a few months after the student movement in 1989, Li Ruihuan, the new Politburo member in charge of propaganda and ideology, called for pushing on with press reform while stressing the news media's role as the mouthpiece

of the Party and the need to upholding the four cardinal principles. He said that Journalism should "undergo profound reform." Press reform, he added, "involves the question of how to make reform, not whether it is necessary to make reform." According to Li, press reform should "uphold the socialist orientation, and should help to strengthen and improve the Party's leadership over journalistic work." "We should not ... copy the press structure and formulas of the West. The purpose of our socialist press reform is to make journalistic work conform better to the principle of Party spirit in journalism" (Li, 1989: p. 33).

Jiang Zemin, the new Party General Secretary appointed together with Li after 4 June 1989 crackdown, told Chinese journalists that "to strengthen the Party's leadership over journalistic work, the main thing is to take a firm hold of political direction of press propaganda, do a good job of press reform." The purpose of press reform, he said, "is precisely to turn the press into a better mouthpiece of the Party, the government and people and play a more active role in socialist modernization" (Jiang, 1989: pp. 15, 16). Jiang told a symposium of Party propaganda directors in January 1993 that information and ideological work must be carried out "under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping's theory of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, to provide a sound public opinion and social psychological atmosphere for China's

reform, opening up and modernization."¹¹¹

The new director of the Party Propaganda Department, Ding Guangen, told the editorial staff of Renmin Ribao in February 1993 that news reporting "should abide by the Party's basic line, be subordinated to and serve the central task of economic construction." He said the press should have a clear-cut stand on important issues, such as upholding the Party's leadership, adhering to the socialist road, and the reform and opening policy. Meanwhile, he stressed the necessity of "giving impetus to the implementation of press reform" in order to meet the needs of building "a socialist market economy as well as building material and spiritual civilization." Press reform, he said, should be beneficial "to bringing into play the initiative and creativity of journalists, and to the prosperity of journalism."¹¹²

If this is so, the future of China's news media is bright, although some major obstacles are inevitable. Roughly, four trends of change in China's news media during the 1990s can be expected: 1) Press reform will continue, but at a slower pace, i.e. the changes that have been occurring in China's different domains, including the news media, will not

¹¹¹ Xinhua, "Jiang Zemin on Information, Ideological Work," 15 January 1993.

¹¹² Xinhua, "Ding Guangen on Press," 22 February 1993.

stop in the 1990s, but the pace will be slow; 2) Press reform will be implemented in a strictly disciplined manner and pursue definitely planned goals. That is, the authorities will not want to see a kind of "free press" that emerged in 1989 reappearing again; 3) Press reform will focus more on improving professional standards of reporting on a greater diversity of grass roots social issues. But the overall direction and control of the press will remain exclusively in the hands of the government and the Party. That is, future changes in the news media will centre on "technology" rather than "ideology"; and 4) As the country continues to open commercial interests, the Chinese news media will necessarily evolve into what we might describe as "a socialist commercial press." Such a commercial press will take advertisements from businesses, both the public and private sectors, for profits, as it has already been doing for a few years. It will gain more editorial autonomy as long as it achieves more financial independence from the Party, although it will continue to be controlled politically by the Party or the government.

Overall, China and her news media system will change, but China and her news media system will remain socialist and authoritarian. A radical or violent change, either toward Maoism or capitalism, is unlikely. For these reasons and from the above official statements (although full of Party orthodoxy), we can anticipate that China's news media in the

1990s will continue to be reformed, but in a much more cautious way.

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ABEL, Allen, interview, Toronto, 28 December 1992.

Abel is the producer of The Journal of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) Prime Time News. He was stationed in China from September 1983 to September 1985 as The Globe and Mail's Beijing Correspondent. He was sent to Beijing by the CBC on a special assignment to cover the Gorbachev visit to China in May 1989. Eventually, Abel and his team stayed on to cover the pro-democracy movement until early June.

BAO, Guangren, written interview, 17 December 1992.

Bao was graduated from the Graduate School of China Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing) in 1981 with a Master of Journalism degree. He worked for China's official Xinhua News Agency between 1981 and 1991, as editor, managing editor, and Washington correspondent (1984-88). Bao received a Master of Communication Management degree from the University of South California (L.A.) in April 1993 after a two year programme.

CHANG, Binbin, telephone interview, 20 January 1993.

Chang majored in journalism at the Department of Journalism of China People's University (Beijing) from 1978-82. She worked as a reporter at Beijing Evening News from 1982-89. She has been taking graduate courses at the Department of Communication Studies of the University of Western Ontario since 1991 and will be graduated in April 1993 with a Master's Degree in Communication Studies.

HUA, Jun, interview, Montreal, 24 December 1992.

Hua joined the CBC in 1989. He is now the producer of the Chinese Section of CBC's Radio-Canada International in Montreal. He has been taking courses and doing research at McGill University toward a Ph.D. degree in communications since 1991.

NADEAU, Jules, interview, Montreal, 23 December 1992.

Nadeau is the coordinator of the Concordia University-Université du Québec à Montréal Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Communication Research. He was an international reporter for La Press from 1975 to 1980. He first visited China in 1975 and later worked in Hong Kong and other parts of Asia, mostly Chinese speaking countries, for 10 years.

YING, Qian, written interview, 21 February 1993.

Ying, a senior Chinese journalist, is now Xinhua News Agency's Washington Bureau chief. He worked as Xinhua correspondent in several foreign countries and a senior editor in Beijing before he became deputy director of the agency's International News Department in 1986.

ZHAO, Zijian, written interview, 15 December 1992.

Zhao is now a Ph.D. candidate in Mass Communication at the University of Maryland. He received his Master of Journalism degree from the Graduate School of China Academy of Social Sciences in 1982 after a three-year program. He served as an editor, managing editor at Xinhua between 1982 and 1992, during which he was assigned to Washington as a correspondent (1984-88).

ZHENG, Min, telephone interview, 20 January 1993.

Zheng majored in journalism at the Department of Journalism of Fudan University (Shanghai) from 1980-86 and was graduated with two B.A. degrees in journalism and international relations. She was a movie and television reporter at Xinhua News Agency from 1986-90. Zheng has been taking graduate courses at the Department of Communication Studies of the University of Western Ontario since 1990 and will be graduated in April 1993 with a Master's Degree in Communication Studies.

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