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**Communism and communication: News media and political
communication in China**

Shi, Xiaoguang, Ph.D.

University of California, San Diego, 1992

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

COMMUNISM AND COMMUNICATION

News Media And Political Communication In China

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Communication

by

Xiaoguang Shi

Committee in charge:

Professor Daniel D. Hallin, Chair
Professor Chalmers Johnson
Professor Richard P. Madsen
Professor Herbert I. Schiller
Professor Michael S. Schudson

1992



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The dissertation of Xiaoguang Shi is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm:

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University of California, San Diego

1992

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To my husband

Jianhua

and our son

Yan

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

**Communism and Communication
News Media and Political Communication in China**

by

Xiaoguang Shi

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

University of California, San Diego, 1992

Professor Daniel C. Hallin, Chair

This dissertation examines the relationship between communism and Chinese news media. The research focuses on the five critical yet largely ignored facets of the Chinese communist news media established since 1921, i.e. its relation with the former Soviet press, its news selection process, its professional journalists, its system of worker-peasant correspondents, as well as its publicly financed economic base.

After the detailed discussions in these areas, the author argues that the political communication in China has followed a unique and basically non-Western model, i.e. the

participative communication model. During the Chinese revolutions in the 20th century, this political communication model has played a crucial role in the country's political campaigns and social life. In addition, the dissertation also provides critique on the weaknesses of the model.

The crisis faced by the Chinese news media is also discussed in the dissertation. The author believes that Deng's free market reform and political relaxation in the 1980s have fundamentally restructured the classical relation between the Chinese Communist Party and its press. A wide-ranged co-operation with the Western news suppliers, the decline of the worker-peasant correspondent system and the commercialization of the media have been challenging the traditional operation of this communication system. Meanwhile, the participative communication model has realized its limitation in solving recent political and social crises.

The research of this dissertation is mainly based on the literature, archive and primary materials from all kinds of journalistic publications available in the library. These materials are either in English or Chinese. The author's previous experience as a reporter of the *People's Daily* has provides the dissertation with important information and insights. The research also benefits by the view of the author's former Chinese press colleagues. The correspondence with them has undoubtedly enriched the content of this dissertation.

Introduction

What is going to be told in this dissertation is one of the essential issues in the communication research -- the relation of Communism and the communication. The question is how a political and economic system creates a new type of communication, which is constantly re-created and re-newed in this social setting while plays a central role in reinforcing and glorifying the system. My case study is the Chinese news media in the eras of Mao Tse-tung and Deng Xiaoping.

Different from the previous researches on Chinese news media, which tended to stress the history, the orthodox institutional relation with the "powers that be", the political indoctrination or more often, the media's propaganda "brainwashing effect" on the masses, my goal of research is to study the news media itself. In other words, I want to find out in what way Chinese Communists transformed within a century an old, commercial press into a news media which bears the essential characteristics of Marxist ideology, public ownership and the ability to mobilize one billion Chinese into dozens of the PRC's political campaigns and social movements.

The study focused its angles exclusively on such long-time ignored facets as the political privileges and commitment of Chinese journalists, both professionals and non-professionals; the news selection process where news values are not only decided by the

Marxist ideology, but also by many other social and cultural factors; the publicly funded economic base of the press; and the media's strong identification with a universal Communist journalism pattern, which to a large extent, was part of the legacies of the Soviet interference in the early development of Mao's media.

It was a broad, and also historical, survey of the media. I, however, tried not to repeat the simple introducing of another "classical Marxist press" to the communication research community and readers. Instead, I placed these subjects in the changing society caused by Deng Xiaoping's free market economy and political relaxation in the 1980s since Mao passed away. All of these facets of Chinese news media I discussed in the dissertation have been, and still are, experienced enormous crises. Through documenting and analyzing these fundamental changes in the media, I traced and explained the complexity of the changes and the significant impact they had on Mao's traditional communication.

I also attempted to employ my main findings about Chinese news media to prove a communication hypothesis, i.e. the central form of the political communication model in China is a "participative communication." This is basically a non-Western communication model. It is not a typical capitalist, democratic system, but a one where Marxist ideology had prevailed and a central planning decided the entire nation's economic activities. The model thus requires the participation from and the co-operation among the three major social forces, the Communist Party, the masses and the news media. As an active process, the model provides a political arena for the three to play a heavy role

respectively. The relationships among the three were interdependent, interwoven and interactive.

At the same time, the model presented a communication process full of confrontations and contradictions. For example, as for the Party-press relationship, the Communist Party granted the press the privileges to get involved in the country's important public affairs in the form of *Nei Can* (internal reports), where the press enjoyed more freedom and autonomy, but the journalists had to agree to be politically committed to a mutual cause. The participation of the masses was practised through a nationwide worker-peasant correspondence network, yet, in the Cultural Revolution, this kind of engagement was developed at the expense of the professional reporters. And recently, the rapid growth of an expert free lancer system had replaced the worker-peasant correspondents. Another example. The wide-spread commercialization of the press gradually pushed the traditional public support system away. Meanwhile, the Communist Party lost much of the control it used to have because of its impoverishment in the last ten years which forced the Party to allow the press to seek for private finance.

But fundamentally, the participative communication model suffered from its innate weaknesses. The power balance of the model had usually controlled by the Communist Party and thus, the participation of the media and the masses for too many times was the "participation without power" or "participation without influence". After many compromises and negotiations made by the press and the masses with the state power, they realized the hardship and less influential position they had held needed a change. They espe-

cially drew a conclusion from the Cultural Revolution, in which the press was severely hurt by the political campaigns in which it bravely and devotedly participated. Also after the Cultural Revolution, the once very promising worker-peasant correspondents finally retreated from "occupying the superstructure", a principle slogan and practice of Mao's Cultural Revolution, to the original grass-roots level.

Secondly, besides this almost "powerless" participation, the model from the very beginning was not designed to provide a "public forum" for different ideas and opinions. It, on the contrary, opposed any suggestions that opponents have the rights to present themselves to the public. The model was very efficient at mobilizing the masses but far from being capable of channeling diverse voices and organizing constructive public debates. The participation, besides denying the opportunities of different opinions, sometimes took advantage of a social movement to threaten the political or academic dissenters of the Party. The intolerance of any heresy resulted in a nearly religious fanaticism in China whenever the participation of the media and masses reached its peak.

Thirdly, I pointed out the model lacked the ability to manage social conflicts. Because the communication in China's case was used to convey the unified information rather than demonstrate controversies, the social conflicts among different interest groups were normally underrepresented or kept invisible. When political or social crisis appeared, such as the the strong opposition to the 1987 urban reform and the massive protests against the organized government corruption in 1989, the communication model was too incompetent to deal with the social turmoil. The journalists, although being able

to represent some oppositions through internal reports, were unable to provide multi-voices to the public.

The news media of China has played a crucial role in reinforcing the regime in many ways. Since 1921 the Chinese Communist Party was founded, a fledging but strong-willed Communist communication system had grown into a nationwide information empire. Generations of Chinese people have been brought up in the environment created and defined by the Chinese Communist news media. The media has assisted the Communist Party in establishing an independent nation-state and strengthened the ruling of the Party over one fourth of the world population. I tried to offer some interpretations to the question why and in what way the media could be so successful in accomplishing such a great task. The discussions on the participative communication model, its early history, news selection process, internal reports, non-professional involvement, and its single-patterned state-run economics, I hope, will help media scholars have a better understanding of the function of Chinese news media.

More interestingly, all of this model and practice won't last forever. In the 1980s and early 1990s, this communication empire began to see numerous cracks here or there and realized a rapid change taking place. The traditional Mao's Communist communication had to admit the model could not handle a reforming society and tried very hard to adjust itself to a new social setting ruled by a free market economy instead of an orthodox Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology. I related in my dissertation the communication model and Chinese news media to China's changing society -- sometimes the changes

were almost dramatic -- and believed that by doing so my analysis would be more interesting and timely.

Again, the focus of my dissertation is not to give an overview of Chinese communication system from print to electronic media. The previous studies on the subject have laid down a huge and solid foundation and provided me with rich materials and certain theoretical frameworks to conduct further research. More precisely, this is a study on the Communism and communication after the ending of the cold war. This historical turning point has a ground-breaking effect on the research on Communism and grants more access to scholars. A wide range of materials and information now become available simply because of the collapse (the case of the former Soviet Union) or the weakening (the case of China) of the Communist countries of the world. In addition, it is the changing of the way people think that inspires new research projects. In the West, calling a Communist press a "propaganda machine" and conducting the "brainwashing effect" research on the masses sound out of date these days. The celebration of the downfall of Communism in the Eastern Europe did not last very long; for instance, the massive joy over the collapse of the Berlin Wall has been overridden by the distrust and unemployment of a united new Germany. The wide spread chaos in the former Communist world has ironically showed that the claim that capitalism can revitalize these people's life is somehow too soon and too romanticized. Meanwhile, the reformers of the remaining Communist countries, especially China, try to reform the system and regenerate the country through a combination of Communism and capitalism. The media researchers of the PRC, for example, are more interested studying the new and fast development of Chinese news

media, rather than trying to restore the old model. The will is how to peacefully transform Mao's classical communication into a more democratic institution which participates in a reformed society. In this sense, the study on a Communist media is expected to be path-opening and make new contribution to the communication research of the post-cold-war period. And that is exactly what I want from my dissertation.

The whole study is divided into six parts, five chapters and a conclusion. First, this dissertation attempts to find out when and how the Communist news media was established in China. This, thus, becomes the task of Chapter one. Different from the past research which emphasized the propaganda tradition of Mao, I discovered the hidden relationship between the Soviet press and the Chinese one. The chapter presents the connections among Moscow, the Comintern and the returned students trained in the USSR, who later became the leaders of the Chinese Communist press. The chapter demonstrates that it was after the decades of bitter conflicts between Mao and Moscow that the Soviet press model was finally accepted by the Chinese press. This legacy still has influence on today's Chinese journalism.

Chapter two covers the Chinese news values and the ideology. The way I discuss the news selection process used by the Chinese news media is to place the Chinese news values in the related political and social environment. Trying not to label a Communist press as a "propaganda machine", I analyze in the chapter the relationships of the Chinese news media's coverage and the value system it holds towards the ideal of socialism, international relations, role models and human interest stories.

Before I became a Ph.D. student of the Department of Communication, University of California, San Diego in 1986, I worked as a reporter with the *People's Daily*. My personal professional experience with the Chinese news media as well as with the journalistic education tradition, provides me with the valuable insights to write about the Communist media practitioners. Besides in their conventional roles of being propagandists, advocates and organizers, I am interested in understanding a Chinese journalist from a wider angle. As an insider I myself, I focused chapter III on a hidden valley of Chinese reporters daily routine -- their political commitment and privileges. I used *Nei Can* as an example to present to the communication research community the involvement and participation of the Communist communicators. Thus, Chapter III offers a unique examination of a rarely discussed communication form and its impact on the Chinese society.

Normally, the news media is considered as a profession like medicine and law. It is not a lay-man's world. But the Communist news media has the tradition to mix the common people with the profession of news writing and reporting. In Chapter IV I gave a detailed discussion on the development and function of a worker-peasant correspondent system which has assisted the news media for years. Chinese journalism is regarded as a social and political cause which acquires the involvement of the masses. Chapter IV also discusses the decline of this tradition in the Chinese news media during the whirlpool of Deng's free market economy in the 1980s.

The last chapter exposes the relationship between Communism and communication by analyzing its political economy. I try to answer the questions like how important the

public ownership is to a Communist press and what the impact of the adoption of advertising is on the nature of the press. The chapter tries to use the fast-growing commercialization of the Chinese news media in the 1980s to illustrate the fundamental change of a traditional Mao's communication model.

When I was doing research on my dissertation, the military conflict occurred in Beijing in June 1989. It since became difficult for me to go back to China to conduct some research. This obviously is one of the flaws of this study. But I tries my best to compensate for the loss of the chances for possible interviews and collecting relevant publications in Chinese. For years, my former colleagues of the *People's Daily* and other journalist friends working with a variety of Chinese news institutions, corresponded with me since I started my Ph.D. program here. During my dissertation research, I turned to them for help and raised specific questions in our correspondence on the issues in which I was interested, such as the commercialization of the press and the writing of *Nei Can*. My old friends came to my rescue without any hesitation. As a matter of fact, they conducted interviews on behalf of me in Beijing. For example, Xie Guoming interviewed the advertising manager of the *People's Daily* twice and Shi Yang interviewed the head of the Global Advertising Company of the New China News Agency. Based on the notes they sent to me, I wrote part of Chapter V, a chapter covers the commercialization of Chinese journalism in the 1980s.

I also tried to take full advantage of the International Relation and Pacific Study Library of UCSD. Thanks to Richard Wang, Chinese librarian, the library has a wonder-

ful collection of books, magazines, and other kinds of publications published in mainland China, even the latest annual books. These materials had kept me catching up with the new development of Chinese communication study and press reform. In fact, a large portion of my dissertation used these publications.

My chapter I, which was on the Soviet press influence on the early development of Chinese Communist journalism benefited greatly by the microfilm collected by the Central Library of UCSD. I was surprised to find that almost all of the early-time CCP's newspapers and journals from *The Guide* to the *Liberation Daily*, were available through that collect. The *Red China*, a newspaper published in Mao's base area, was the only one missing from the collection and was later provided by one of libraries in Chicago through a UC library loan.

Chapter I

Emergence and Early Development of the Chinese Communist Press

It has been an interesting phenomenon in world politics and the history of the Communist movement that China and the former Soviet Union are seen as the long-term antagonist giants, rather than the comrades-in-arms. The astonishing resemblance between the two has been intentionally downplayed and ignored, especially by the two countries themselves. Yet, when the former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev took the initiative in launching *perestroika* and *glasnost* in 1985, the political earthquake resonated in his southern Communist neighbor caused no less encouragement and confusion than that in Moscow, if not more. As a matter of fact, China's reform started six years ago in 1979. The reform made the Chinese to think twice of the Soviet Union and the Communist system as a whole. What the Chinese found then was the remarkable similarities between the two Communist countries.

China and the former Soviet Union are twin brothers in front of the capitalist world. After almost a century-long Communist revolution, after going through endless and painstaking rivaling, they had been maintaining their one-party political system, struggling with their state-run central planning economy, promoting a supreme Marxist-Leninist ideology, a proletarian dictatorship and above all, a powerful, sophisticated and penetrat-

ing Communist news media system.

The current Chinese communication system bears many similarities to that of the former Soviet Union. The first and foremost, the media is part of a Party-state political and social system. Its wellknown job is to propagate and advocate the Party's lines and policies. The state ideology, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, is also indoctrinated via the news media. Economically, the news institutions of China and the former Soviet Union are the public properties and financially supported by the public funds. Sales and the private advertising, therefore, play little role in the media operation and the content of news. The two countries also develop a special journalistic practice, the worker-peasant correspondents. Through their participation in the news reporting, the Communist news media closely relates itself to the masses. In the two countries, journalists are educated in the state-run universities and assigned to the various positions of the Party and state news organizations.

There could be some differences between the two. For example, the Chinese journalists routinely *Nei Can* (internal reports) to the Party Central Committee to report the unlawful activities conducted by the Party cadres and government officials at the lower levels, besides writing news stories regularly for the public news media. But so far we do not know very much on the practice of this sort of inner channel communication done by the former Soviet journalism.

Despite all this resemblances, the Chinese Communist communication system is by

no means a fine imitation of that of the former USSR. This Chapter is designed to discover the origin of the Chinese Communist news media. Many official historical documents and individual memoir have proven that the origin of the press bears many similar qualities to the former Soviet press model. The latter contributed a great deal not only to the former's journalistic principles, but also to the former's propagandists training, news contents and advocating style. During the late 1920's and early 1930's, Moscow and the Comintern were heavily involved in the building of the Chinese press system. But due to the years of revising and rewriting by the Chinese, the origin of the communication network has been deliberately buried through the CCP's dozens of political purges and survivals. For certain reasons, this emergence and early development were depicted either as an isolated, native, Mao Tse-tung's journalism which has nothing to do with the influence and manipulation of Stalin and the Comintern in its early time.¹ Or the origin was treated as something no more than a marginal, and odd historical occurrence, which did not have anything to do with a Soviet Communist communication model either.²

The significance of revealing the relationship between the two Communist communication giants is that both of them represent some historical phenomenon much bigger than themselves. The Communist communication from news media to political communication demonstrates a way of life through which almost half of the world population obtain and process their information within the decades of the 20th century. This communication pattern is not a one-country show but a pattern that has been universal in

¹ Fang, 1983; Hsu, 1988.

² R. Bishop, 1989.

the disappearing Communist world. To disclose the buried connection between the two communication systems of China and the former USSR will help us understand the Communist news media as a whole.

What I am interested in in this chapter is to discover under what circumstances the young liberal intellectuals in China in early 1920's decided to build their own Communist journalism based on the Soviet pattern. What was the difference between the Chinese model and the Soviet one? What kind of role did the early Chinese communication system play in fulfilling the goals of liberating the nation from Western domination and its war-ridden homeland? And what are the hidden defects rooted in this communication model which found itself confronting an outraged mass and a private economy reverse in the 1980's?

1. The emergence of the Chinese Communist Press

The Chinese Communist press was born in the early 1920's, decades before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The emergence of the press was closely associated with that of the Chinese Communist Party. Yet, one thing was clear, i.e. the Chinese Communist system was not a natural product of the Chinese society but to a large extent, the product of the Soviet Marxist influence.ⁱ

One of the ever-lasting questions which have kept bothering Chinese and foreign

scholars for almost a century is why many Chinese modernizers "embraced Marxism" ?³ It was an "accident," some China experts claimed, because then these young intellectuals virtually knew nothing about the "many divergent schools of Marxism in Europe and in Russia." They even didn't have any slightest ideas on who Bebel, Libknecht and Lassalle were when they studied Karl Marx' Critique on Gotha Program.⁴

Chinese scholars, under the pressure of the Communist ideology or not, seemed more confident in identify the relevance between a foreign idea and ancient China. Li Zehou, one of China's current leading scholars, argues that China welcomed Marxism for liberating itself from the yoke of international powers. The urgency of salvation tries to use Marxism as a remedy, their lost hope, to defend their ancient civilization from foreign barbarian bullies. This is the utilitarian rational and obviously, it was the only thing which worked at that time.⁵ At this point, Chinese grabbed Marxian theory of class struggle. "Chinese and dogs are not allowed here", the humiliating signs which were prevailing in the country's parks, beaches, theatres, etc. stroked the red-blooded Chinese youth so hard that they would rather embrace any dogma, traditional or radical, Western or Eastern, as long as it could restore the nation's self-esteem and respect.

Another major similarity lying between Marxism and China is the utopia. By no means an odd concept for Chinese, the Marxian utopia continues and enlarges the old Chinese Utopia at every aspect. China has never lacked its own native Utopian writers.

³ Johnson, Foreword to Chi's *Ideological Conflicts in Modern China*. 1986.

⁴ Ladany, 1988.

⁵ Li, 1988.

Since the pastoral poet Tao Yuanming of the Chin dynasty told the first utopian story in the history of the Chinese literature in 400 b.c., a harmonious society had been worshiped as the ultimate human life for many millennia. The Unsuccessful intellectuals, ambitious peasant rebellion leaders and especially liberal social reformers, untiringly imagined an equal and free society, not necessarily wealthy but definitely without coercion. The Chinese-style utopia was actually happy to find its echo within the Marxian utopian thought in the early 20th century.⁶

However, Marxism was not the only novel thought among the Chinese young intellectuals in the 19th and 20th centuries and in fact, among various fashionable Western ideas, Marxism was a rather late comer. Britain's Thomas Henry Huxley, John Stuart Mill, Germany's Nietzsche and Hegel and the like were translated and introduced by the liberal Chinese scholars in the earlier time. Yen Fu was regarded as one of these best pioneers.⁷ The brilliant Western theorists opened the eyes of an isolated and stale civilization. The Chinese readers were thrilled, moved and reckoned. But, the ideal to acquire the nation's "wealth and power" was frustrated by the reality. In the meanwhile the Chinese students were taught Western conceptions of the "liberty, equality and fraternity", the Western warships fired at the coastal cities of the ancient empire and dismantled its social structure at an unprecedented speed. "Why did teachers always invade students?" Young Mao Tse-tung, who forty years later established the People's Republic of China, asked and realized that reading and following the Western bourgeois social

⁶ Chi, 1986; Li, 1988.

⁷ Schwartz, 1964.

reformers' doctrines were no good. Given the fact that China has signed twenty unequal treaties with several foreign countries including the UK, France, Russia, Japan, Germany, accepting Marxism was absolutely no temper decision at all.

But Mao actually knew little about German Marxism, the one with heavy philosophical terminology and polemics among German scholars. The only form of Marxism available to the idea-hungry young Chinese students at that time was Russian school of Marxism, "Marxism of Lenin, interpreted by Stalin."⁸ It was a kind of Marxism packaged by, besides Stalin, L.D. Trotsky, N. Bukharin, G.Y. Zinoviev and even Stalin's envoy in China, M.M. Borodin. This second-hand doctrine, magically, fitted into a semi-colonial country like China. In 1920's, Bukharin's the *ABC of Communism* became popular and sold in the dozens of the Chinese big cities for only 20 fen, as twice expensive as a piece of Tofu. Stalin's *On Leninism* was circulated on the market at the exactly same price.⁹

Marxist theory, after popularized and simplified by the Russian revolutionaries, were available to the working class of China not only economically, but also intelligently: the theory had been contextualized and proved by the Russian revolution.

In the history of studying the exporting of Marxism from the Soviet Union to China, many early prominent figures have been literally overlooked, for example, Gregory N. Voitinsky or Wu Tingfang, Secretary of the Far East Department of the Comintern. How

⁸ Ladany, 1988.

⁹ Some issues of the *Guide Weekly* carried the book advertisements. According to them, a copy of the *Communism Manifesto* was sold at 10 fen and the *Constitution of the Russian Communist Party* only 6 fen when on sale.

many people today know this very first Soviet envoy sent by Lenin in 1920 to seek for any possibility of establishing connections with the radical Chinese university faculty members? No, few. Voitinsky only deserved one line in an official Chinese history book. Same was Borodin, the brain and highest commander of China's revolution in the 1920's. The image of Borodin has been so vague that most Chinese only know he used to be Sun Yat-sen's mysterious political adviser. Why should the high-ranking CCP's leaders, having survived unbelievable hardness within half a century, open an old wound? Why do they have to face the old humiliating questions once more, such as who should be responsible for the loss of the 90% party members and millions of the Communist sympathizers in the 1927 Revolution? Plus there are so many circumstances which nobody dares to provide as a reliable account. As a result of this, the transplanting of Marxism from the Soviet Union to China, an unprecedented historical thought exchange and the fatal cause of Chinese social revolution later on, has been downplayed for long, long time since the tragedy in the 20's.

But, Voitinsky was the very first Comintern representative came all the way from Siberia to Beijing, then called Peking, to meet Li Tao-chao. As a radical faculty teaching economics on the country's most prestigious campus, Beijing University, Li was famous for his political stance on the October Revolution and Marxism. From 1913 to 1920 before having any real contact with the Comintern, the world Communist headquarter then, Li pioneered individually the era of introducing and spreading Marxism in China, a land which had been diagnosed as not favorable for Marxism by Marx himself. Li wrote many articles for the Chinese journals and newspapers. Li also founded two journalists

himself and his close colleagues. His articles on the traditional morals and Bolshevik triumph, such as "The impact of Russian revolution", "The comparison of French and Russian revolutions", "The victory of Bolshevik" and "My Marxian stand", made him quite controversial among the Chinese intellectuals and young students.¹⁰ In 1920, with a Chinese-Russian interpreter, twenty-seven-year-old Voitinsky visited Li and converted him to the Russian Communist Party's Marxism. Li later on introduced Voitinsky to another same awesome radical in Shanghai, Professor Chen Tu-hsiu.¹¹

Chen was then as famous as Li. The popular saying among the Chinese political and academic circles in the early 20's referred to North Li and South Chen. Voitinsky "carefully" introduced Chen to "the fundamentals of Russian Bolshevism and Lenin's views on national democratic revolutions".¹² Chen was once arrested by the Peking police on the charge of the anti-government activities and then moved to Shanghai. He formed Marxism study groups among Shanghai intellectuals and many of them later on became the key figures of the 20's national revolution. When Li Ta-chao and Chen Tu-hsiu became the founders of the CCP, Mao Tse-tung was only a secondary leader.

In the first several years, the CCP was operated more or less as a social elite group, with most of its members educated and relatively rich. It was a salon party instead of a real revolutionary organization. By 1923, there were only about 300 Party members and 3,000 to 4,000 members of the Socialist Youth League.¹³ In April 1927, right before

¹⁰ Li, 1962.

¹¹ Wilbur & How, 1989.

¹² Peng, Introduction to *Leon Trotsky on China* Evens & Block, 1976.

¹³ Bishop, 1989.

Chiang Kai-shek betrayed the 1927 Chinese Revolution, northern warlord Chang Tso-lin ordered his troops to raid the Soviet Embassy compound in Peking and arrested Li Ta-chao and some twenty other Chinese and Soviet Communists, including M. Borodin's wife, Fanny Borodin. During the raid, about eighty CCP's documents were captured. Sixty years later, American scholars C. Martin Wilbur and Julie Lien-ying How provided the researchers with a complete collection of all the documents and their analysis of the early history of the CCP as well as the performance of the Soviet advisers in the 20's.¹⁴ The book has become one of the major accounts on the CCP in its infancy and the tragedy of the 1927 Chinese Revolution under the control of Stalin.

According to Wilbur and How, the leadership of the early CCP was to organize proletariat and to educate them with revolutionary ideas, not necessarily Marxism. Given that the military rebellion and the overthrow of the state apparatus through violence were an unrealistic idea for most of the CCP members in the early time, especially to Chen Tu-hsiu, it would be natural to believe that the CCP counted heavily on the Party press and organizations for the success of the revolution. But, did CCP have a well-developed reliable press which it could count on to advocate its principles? None. Even though there might be some radical publications around, few were operated in the hand of the Party members. For example, *Hsin Ching-nien* (New Youth), was popular but far from appropriate as a Communist Party's organ. The natural solution was to establish one, a brand-new Communist press different from the foreign missionaries', from the Chinese

¹⁴ Wilbur & How, 1989.

national bourgeoisie's, from military warlords', even from the petty bourgeois radical colleagues'.

Chen and Li thought of their well-known and prestigious magazine *New Youth*. Being the mainstay of the ever-increasing nationalism, the magazine had contributed a great deal to the New Culture movement and become the leading voice in the 1919's May Fourth movement.¹⁵ Chen was the journal's founder and editor-in-chief for the whole time. The contributors and major editors were the university professors. Accompanied by a French title, *La Jeunesse*, the magazine, while advocating American statesman Benjamin Franklin, Russian writers Tolstoy and Turgenev, English poet Wilder, Mill's *On Liberty* and the French revolution, etc.. It was underpriced for only 20 fen for ninety pages. In the 20's, a poor urban labor's one-day meals would cost fifty to sixty fen and the contributors' remuneration was two to five yuan per thousand Chinese characters. (One hundred fen make a yuan.) By 1923 when the Communist *New Youth* came out, it carried the same title to attract the new readership and maintain the old; the old *New Youth* had enjoyed a large circulation and distributed among seventy cities from Harbin to Canton.

Abandoning one's own established publication was a painstaking thing, plus it had been a perfect forum for a nationwide democratic political discussion, even though it was very liberal in the eyes of the foreign powers, warlords and conservative landlords. Nevertheless, Chen, being a CCP founder and general secretary, was more than eager to

¹⁵ Fang, 1983; Hsu, 1988.

sacrifice his journal for a Communist publication. The converted *New Youth* dropped the French subtitle *La Jeunesse* -- how could it still use an imperialist language-- and what was more was that it was no longer an urban-wandering liberal journal, propagating Englishman A.V.Dicey's *The Law of the Constitution* or discussing "the fundamentally Differences between Eastern and Western Peoples' Thought". As a matter of fact, the new *New Youth* devoted its very first issue to Lenin -- the Special Issue of Lenin and in the later time, the Special issue of the World Revolution and the Special issue of Communist International. Among the total nine issues of the Communist *New Youth*, eight articles were written by V. Lenin, such as "Nation and Colonial issues," "Chinese War," "China after Revolution," "The Awakening of Asia" and "The Backward Asia and Advanced Asia."¹⁶ Stalin, Bukharin and Trotsky's works were too published after the translation. One interesting phenomenon should be cast to this amazing realm of the Russian-school Marxism. Given the consideration that the magazine was identified as the CCP's authorized theoretical journal and none of Marx or Engels' original works was ever paid any attention to, it seemed that the Russian revolutionary missionaries had been very successful in China!

The converted *New Youth* came out in Canton, on June 15, 1923, nine months later than the CCP's Party organ -- *Hsiang Tao Chou Kan* (The Guide Weekly), which was originally founded on September 13, 1922 in Shanghai. *Hsiang Tao* had run 201 issues by July 18, 1927, was the most important Communist news medium with the longest

¹⁶ Fang, 1983.

life-span and regular circulation in the early CCP history. Actually, the title *Hsiang Tao* was no random decision. In its Second Congress held in Shanghai, the CCP decided to revise its out-of-date propaganda policy, stopping the *Communist*, a secret small monthly journal aiming at the CCP members, and launching a nationwide political Party organ. According to the Comintern representatives' suggestion, the first CCP organ should be a daily. *Yuan Tung Rih Pao* (Far East Daily) was proposed by the Comintern representatives. The proposal got some resistance. First, it's not the organ of the Far East Department of the Comintern and secondly, the term Far East implied a Western geographical sense. China had never thought it's located in the Far East, on the contrary, it's right here, Central Kingdom. One month after the congress, the CC of the CCP opened a special conference in the picturesque West Lake of Hangzhou. Again, Hendricus Sneevliet, the Comintern's chief directive to China, known to the Chinese as Maring, thought a weekly was more practical for the CCP than a daily. Although most CCP members didn't appeal to Maring, the "aggressive", "stubborn" Dutch who was "hard to deal with", his idea was anyhow accepted. Another Comintern representative Voitinsky also suggested that the weekly might be named *Guide*, since it would be used by the CCP to guide the Chinese national revolution. Voitinsky was much more popular among the Chinese, not only because he adopted a Chinese name Wu Tingkang, but also because his winning personality, reasonable and lacking of an appearance of superiority.¹⁷

Despite of being called the forerunner of the *People's Daily*, *Hsiang Tao* did not

¹⁷ Wilbur & How.

look as formidable and authoritative as the latter at all. Its sharp but not extreme political purposes, honest attitude towards the readers, the simple and clear language used and cheap price impressed tens of thousands of the Communist sympathizers and supporters. For instance, the journal's largest circulation once reached 100,000 issues and was distributed abroad in places such as France, Germany and Viet Nam.¹⁸

The political claims carried forward by *Hsiang Tao* were not proletarian revolution targeting at the private ownership and working class' dictatorship. As a matter of fact, what *Hsiang Tao* advocated was to finish the privileges of imperialism in China, restore the nation's sovereignty and diminish the warlords who chopped China under their individual domination. Those were mild bourgeois democratic programs and successful in allying, instead of scaring the mass away, including the gentry class and shaky middle-and-small businessmen.

Shouting anti-imperialism slogans in the early 20's was certainly regarded as one of the very unpleasant subjects apparently avoided by most of the press. But, *Hsiang Tao* did. Almost every issue of it carried an article "exposing the criminal activities of the imperialism invading China" and "explaining once again the idea that imperialism was the root of China's poverty, backwardness and internal wars."¹⁹

Owing to its poor economic situation and relatively small recognition among the

¹⁸ Fang, 1983. From issue No. 1 to No. 201, the last issue published on August 17, 1927, the English title *The Guide Weekly* had been bigger and bolder than its Chinese title written in calligraphy.

¹⁹ Fang. Hsu.

Chinese population, the journal kept a rather low profile. *Hsiang Tao* did not call its readers "comrades" as what the later Communist press did, but "dear readers" or "gentlemen". Also, it didn't address its editorial department as a formal committee but "the Guide colleagues". When it posted an announcement in the weekly, begging for financial support, the appeal was made very humble and impressive.²⁰

Although what you have paid for the Guide is tremendous, the Guide is yet hard to make it, because your efforts are merely a cup of water for a wagon of burning woods. It had been fifteen issues so far and the cost is no less than one thousand and three hundred yuan. However, the sale of the weekly is barely one hundred and fifty yuan. Plus post office always confiscated our weekly so we suffered a lot unexpected loss. positions and care about it as much as we do. Therefore, we dare to ask for help from you gentlemen.

As a weak and poor political organization, the CCP organ had to be very cautious to not to alienate the middle class and even working class readers, though the major claims of it remained politically radical. Knowing its own powerless position and formidable social and political opponents, the organ tried to be honest with its readership. It maintained a column on every six-page issue, called the "Readers' Voice." The left, right and modest opinions from the society were posted in every issue. A college gentleman wrote to the editor, complaining about some young people who would rather spend a few yuan to play *Ma Chiang* (a Chinese table game), ten fen to buy brand-name cigarettes but refused to spend eight fen to buy *Hsiang Tao*. He suggested that the journal should cut its price again. The editor respectfully answered, that the price had already been reduced from eight fen to four fen per copy, but he was really appreciated the advice. And since

²⁰ See *Hsiang Tao*, Vol.15.

the misplanning and many shortcomings, the editorial board would love to be further advised by Mr. Readers.²¹ The sharp contrast between the mild attitude of the editors towards its readership and agitating strategy adopted in its main contents, showed the awkward financial circumstances and adversary political environment faced by the CCP's baby organ.

While the *Hsin Ching-nien* and *Hsiang Tao*, the two crucial Communist news institutions were arduously struggling their way to create a new category in the Chinese journalistic history, the nation's journalism as a whole had undergone a rapid development. During the sixty years from 1842, the end of the Opium War, to 1900, 170 dailies or journals which equals 95% of the total Chinese and foreign language press in China were launched by the foreign churches or individual missionaries.²² However, by 1926, the Chinese periodicals boomed to 2,000 and dailies to 628. Most of them were rather small with a circulation below 10,000. The top two dailies in the 20's were *Shen Pao* (Shanghai Daily--the ancient name of Shanghai was Shen River) and *Hsin Wen Pao* (News Daily). Initiated by an American, John Calvin Ferguson, *Hsin Wen Pao* reached its career peak in 1929 with a circulation of 150,000 and a reputation of "Oriental Times" due to its Western-style journalism.²³ The rival of *Hsin Wen Pao* was *Shen Pao* competing at a circulation of 140,000 in 1926. *Shen Pao* was founded originally by a group of British merchants, but became a pure Chinese assets by 1920's. The advertising proportion was nor-

²¹ See Vol.94.

²² Fang.

²³ Hsu, 1988.

mally 60% of the content and the news was merely the words lacing the ads. A famous comment made by Lin Yutang, a prestigious Chinese writer, linguist and journalist in the 20th century, was that "The difference between *Shen Pao* and *Hsin Wen Pao* is that the *Shen Pao* is poorly edited, while the *Hsin wen Pao* is not edited at all."²⁴ Yet, The dailies and periodicals like the two attracted the majority of the Chinese urban population and local business.

Besides the mushrooming national bourgeois press, the CCP infant Communist press was also facing an intimidating imperialist press, mainly operated by the U.K., the United States and Japan. Actually, a pen war did occur in the 20's between *Hsiang Tao* and the foreign press in China. Within only two years, *Hsiang Tao* launched thirty some articles blaming the foreign press for spreading the faulty accusation against it and the counterrevolutionary propaganda.

It was no surprise to see the heavy confrontation between the CCP's press and foreign powers' press. "Down with imperialism!" was one of two major proclamations of the CCP's press. From day one, the foreign press had never grant a favorable word to the CCP and its press and the head-on clash showed on many principle issues. Since the overwhelming victory of Britain over the Ching dynasty in the Opium War in 1842, foreign powers, such as the U.K., France, Japan, the U.S., Germany, had got used to the superior position they had enjoyed and the various franchise they were granted. Actually, the Communist press was the first and only media dared to challenge their privileges.

²⁴ Lin, 1936.

Worst of all, all of this was conspired with the Soviet Union, the Western powers' number one enemy in the world.

The head-on opposition could be seen in almost every issue of *Hsiang Tao*. For example, one article said,²⁵

Everyday imperialist newspapers in Tienching, Peking, Canton, Shanghai.....always slander our liberation movement. Each conscientious Chinese, each independently thinking individual ought to recognize the cheat of imperial propaganda in China, -- because of the cheat, we hate the shamelessness of imperialism!

The foreign powers wouldn't stand the critique at all, returning it with police raid, arrests, confiscation and execution. The extreme situation, especially after the tragedy of 1927, forced the Communist press to go underground; the antagonism and distrust between the Communist news media and its rival's rooted since then. The Communist press, furious at seeing its constant oppression and severe lack of freedom of speech under foreign powers' control, swore to revenge someday. It said,²⁶

If people of Shanghai drive the imperialists out by force, the papers like Shi Hsin Pao (Current News) must be closed down. Freedom of speech should be given to majority. The minority has to be deprived of rights of speech, just the opposite of before.

The editors and essayists of the Communist press had never seen anything like democracy or, even the Western-style pluralism. From day one, what the devoted Party jour-

²⁵ No.96.

²⁶ Recited from Hsu's work, 1988.

nalism practitioners experienced was the bloody power oppression and class struggles. It just looked so natural to them to totally deny any possibility that their enemies even should enjoy any right of speech. The historical judgement finally came in twenty years. In November 1948 when Mao's troops stormingly took over the big cities in North China, the CC of CCP announced the basic principle of dealing with the non-Communist press and wire agencies: protecting mass' freedom of publishing and speech while confiscating and closing any anti-people press. The British, American, French and German wire services based in Shanghai and Nanking, the old capital of Chiang, were literally shut down by the Communist press, "to prevent faulty news dispatches from them to Chinese press."²⁷ The blow came so unbelievably fast that *Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury* (1867- 1949) and *North China Daily News* (1850-1951), the two oldest and authoritative foreign newspapers in China, wouldn't accept their fates. Especially, the British paper *North China Daily* had experienced the Ching dynasty, Sun Sat-sun and Chiang era and operated for more than one hundreds years, found it's so humiliating to follow the Communist revolutionary government's order and to see a Communist press worked side by side with it, the one weakly shouted "Down with imperialism!" twenty years ago. They chose to call it off -- both papers out of business shortly after the Communist ultimate victory in 1949.

²⁷ Fang.

2. Ardent Pilgrims and Arrogant God (1927 - 1934)

Summer, 1927. Wuhan, China. It was terribly hot and humid.²⁸ But first of all, the city of Wuhan was full of revolutionary enthusiasm and enormous chaos. Being the red capital of the Chinese national government, Wuhan was then right in the whirlpool of the 1927 Chinese Revolution.²⁹ The coalition government was made of both the Chinese Communists led then by Chen Tu-hsiu and the Nationalists by Chiang Kai-shek. It just moved from Nachang, Jiangxi province to Wuhan. There were revolutionary rallies, street marches, gun fires between the different factions and the picket lines of the newly-armed Wuhan workers. All of this made most the people of Wuhan believe that they were about to witness a fantastic Chinese revolution which was by no means less significant than the 1917 Russian Revolution, which occurred ten years ago and opened an era of Communism in the human history.

As a matter of a fact, the 1927 Chinese revolution was widely regarded as a social movement virtually engineered, directed, and certainly dominated by Moscow. The Russian political and military advisers from Moscow constituted a large part of the brain of the government. Moreover, many historians noticed that from 1927 the year the Chinese

²⁸ Wuhan, a city located in the Central China by the side of the Yantsi River, is famous for its heat and humidity in the summer time. Actually, it is named one of the three "furnaces" of China with the other two as Nanjing and Chongqing.

²⁹ The 1927 Chinese Revolution is often remembered as the 1927 Great Revolution in the Chinese modern history in China.

Communists lost this revolution to 1934 when the Central Red Army had to take the Long March to retreat from its southern base to Yen-an in the Northwest of China, Moscow had been heavily involved in the affairs of the Chinese revolution and the Chinese Communist activities. Hundreds of the Soviets, as young and idealistic as their Chinese counterparts, were sent to China by Stalin and the Comintern to "advise" and "direct" the Chinese. Among them was Michael M. Borodin, the chief Soviet political adviser of the national government in Wuhan.

When American journalist Anna Louis Strong, "the most famous American woman engaged in newspaper correspondence" who "told the true story of new Russia to the English-speaking world", went to Wuhan, the first thing she did was to get in touch with Borodin. Yet, she was told by Borodin that she was probably "too late for the Russian revolution and now she is too soon for China."³⁰ But Borodin was very confident about the great revolution itself, the showcase of the Marxist social theories in the biggest Asian country participated by the proletariat. He was also very proud of himself as one of the major architects. The Chinese revolution was "the biggest thing in the world." He explained to Strong.³¹

"You thought, did you not, that we did a big thing in October, when we made the Revolution in Russia? Well, this revolution is many times bigger. It is one-fourth of all earth's people. It will take long. It will kill more than one Borodin before it is through."

What the later history has proved was that the splendid would-be revolution turned

³⁰ Strong & Keyssar. 1983.

³¹ Ibid.

to be a cruel military coup staged by Chiang after an abrupt switch to the Western imperialism. During the coup, the coalition government of the Nationalists and Communists fell apart. The Nationalists took the power and the Communists were arrested and executed in tens of thousands. Being a Communist became illegal in the country with the revolution ending up as a miscarriage. But Borodin was not "killed" by the coup. "The star that glowed so brightly and briefly over China," according to Dan Jacobs, an American Sovietologist and Sinologist. Borodin was arrested twenty years later in Moscow by Stalin, the man who pulled strings behind the curtain and promised a deal between him and Borodin on the issue of failed 1927 Chinese Revolution until 1949 when the Chinese Communists became the masters of their country's fate. Borodin died at 67 after two years' harsh imprisonment, with his burned-out ashes "mixed with the soil outside a labor camp in Siberia."³²

After the failure of the Chinese Revolution in the 20's, Moscow withdrew all of its military and political advisers from Wuhan. Internationally, Stalin was greatly humiliated by the heavy loss in China. And Trotsky, his formidable rival in the Soviet Communist Party, challenged the quality of his leadership on China affairs. The tragedy in China became such an issue that it threatened not only the position and reputation of Stalin, but also the universality of Marxism-Leninism in the international Communist movement as a whole. Most Western scholars, earlier or later, had laid the blame on Stalin, the key architect of the fantasy project in which he arbitrarily and stupidly manipulated

³² Dan Jacobs. 1981.

another country's historic destiny at the expense of numerous lives.³³ Chen Tu-hsiu, the intellectual-converted Chinese Marxist, one of the forefathers of the country's Communist movement and the Chinese Communist leader in the 1927 revolution, in the eyes of the Western China experts, was only the unfortunate "scapegoat" caught between Moscow and those Chinese who were by no means Moscow's disciples.³⁴

The remarkable role played by Borodin and other Russian military advisers in the revolution, however, has remained vague and ambiguous among the Chinese scholars. Despite an awesome literature available in English, which richly presents a controversial comprehension of the "Soviet policy itself, the inner working of the CCP-KMT alliance, the strategy of the Comintern, the role of Stalin and other leading figures,"³⁵ the historical and political reasons have made the Chinese overlook, rather than exaggerate, the contribution made by the Comintern and Russian revolutionary missionaries. Same was true regarding their responsibility for the tragedy of the Chinese Revolution.

Also in the official Chinese accounts of the revolution in the early 1930's, the history was intentionally portrayed as the one in which Mao's correct line wrestling with a series of wrong lines until the Tsun-i Conference in 1934. Moscow's continuous behind-the-scenes involvement and its political and military impacts were never seriously discussed. Furthermore, the Chinese version of the country's early Communist history has been virtually silent about all of figures from Voitinsky, Borodin, Mif to Trotsky and

³³ Isaacs, 1938, 1951; Brandt, 1958; Schwartz, 1966.

³⁴ Jacobs. Chen.

³⁵ Levin, Introduction to Vishnyakova-Akimova's *Two Years in Revolutionary China*. 1971.

Stalin, no matter how much they had contributed to the Chinese Revolution or how much they should be accused for the CCP's vital loss in 1927, the Long March and the later on CCP's internal power struggle.

In this respect, the study on the influence of the model of the Soviet press in the early development of the Chinese Communist journalism has been no exception. The official Chinese communication theories have never really answered the basic questions of the origin of today's formidable Chinese news media, e.g. where the CCP obtained the idea of a Communist press which was obviously different from, and certainly had no root at, all the other press models at the time in China. If there is some connection between a Soviet news media pattern and the Chinese one, then how was the pattern imported from Moscow to China? Where were the CCP's early propaganda cadres and pressmen trained? What were the early Chinese Communist press structure and style alike?

As American scholar Brandt pointed out, the Russians' exporting revolution on a large scale to China, as well as its ambitious control over the Chinese domestic affairs, were considerably reduced after the 1927 tragedy, nevertheless, its hand-on meddling up was far from disappearance.³⁶ The further interference was demonstrated not through its representatives like M. Borodin, but through the "Bolshevized" Chinese agents. Among them were the "Moscow-trained" students who later on became the backbones of the early Chinese Communist press. They was dispatched to the USSR in the late 1920's and educated there in a quasi-secret university in Moscow -- the Moscow Sun Yet-sen

³⁶ Brandt, 1958.

University. In this way, Stalin made sure that the CCP's propagandistic and ideological work was usually in the hands of the Russian-trained Chinese intellectuals. What they brought back, after finishing their study in Moscow, was far more than the Party loyalty and "iron disciplines". It was the press model with a strong Soviet style of propaganda and agitation. Throughout the effort of this group of youthful and ardent pilgrims educated by the Soviets, the Chinese Communist press gradually developed a news media model of its own. This model, with the revision and improvement of the following seventy years, distinguishes itself clearly from a capitalist-democratic press model and bears enormous similarities with that of a Communist world.

At 16 Volkhonka Street, Moscow, in 1925, was located a plain four-story building with one hundred rooms. It was plain because of the Church of Christ the Savior, which was just across it and famous for its six gold domes. But this common building became the "Red Mecca" to the thousands of the young Chinese "pilgrims" who came to Moscow to search for a modern China, after a normally ten-day trans-Siberian sojourn. For many political reasons, the *Pravda*, the organ of the Communist Party of the former USSR, had never given it a noteworthy coverage, neither had other Soviet media. It was only known as the "Moscow Sun Yat-sen University" among the Central Committee members of CPSU, the Comintern and Chinese revolutionaries. The drabness of the University in the Soviet Union didn't prevent its awesome function in the Chinese history. From 1925 the school opened to 1930 it closed, thousands of the Chinese young revolutionaries had been educated under the heavily packaged courses such as Marxist historical materialism, dialectic materialism, revolution and propaganda, military doctrines and Russian, except

for any thought of Sun Yat-sen, the one the school was named after. While Borodin and hundreds of his brave young men and young women flocked to South China to participate in the Chinese revolution, a much larger number of the Chinese youth went to Russia, who later on became the heroes of the Chinese Communist revolution and more importantly, played the role Borodins could have never dreamed to play.

One of the prides of the university was that it was the cradle of the notorious "28 Bolsheviks" in the Chinese revolutionary history. People such as Ch'en Shao-yu (Wang Ming), Ch'in Pang-hsien (Po Ku), Chang Wen-t'ien (Lo Pu), Ch'en Po-da, K'ang-sheng, Yang Shang-k'un, just name few of them, were among them. Around 1930 upon their graduation, the 28 Bolsheviks (another popular notion was "28 and a half", since one of them was only 14 year old.) with their "nanny" Mif, the second president of the University, one of the Comintern leaders and Stalin's most favored China expert, went back to China sooner or later. After that, a battleground was set among the different Russian-trained factions, anti-Li Li-san line for instance; and finally between the "Bolshevized" 28 graduates of the Moscow Sun Yat-sen University and Mao Tse-tung. According to Schwartz, the "callow Returned Students Clique," which was completely defeated by Mao in Yen-an Rectification campaign, was simply no match for Mao, since they "had no history in the Chinese Communist Party and represented nothing. They had, in fact, been directly imposed on the Party by the Comintern delegate Mif and could be expected to be more dependent on the Kremlin than other group within the Party."³⁷

³⁷ Schwartz.

In this period of time, the Party press became the important part of this inner Party power struggle, as well as practising the Soviet press principles. After the "August Seventh Conference" in 1927, the Chinese Communists decided to revitalize its revolution. Accordingly, *Hsiang Tao*, the Party's organ since 1921, was shut down and a new weekly was born, *Bolshevik*. Serving as the last salute to the withdrawing Borodin and his colleagues, the journal *Bolshevik* reflected the identification of the Chinese revolutionaries with the school of the Soviet Marxism. It also demonstrated the growing direction of the Chinese Communist press, from the *New Youth*, which was much milder and appealing to the broader public, to *Bolshevik*, which strictly advocated Bolshevism favored by the Soviets.

The title *Bolshevik* was the idea of Cheng Chao-lin, a Soviet-trained student (Sheng, p.171-2) and chairman of the Propaganda Department of Hupei province.³⁸ The reason for Cheng to proposed such a brand new Party organ to replace *Guide Weekly* was that Chiang's Nationalists had betrayed the revolution and there was any need for the CCP to "guide" the Nationalists any more. In the words of Hsu, a Chinese media scholar, "Cheng Ch'ao-lin wanted the title to sound simple, explicit, very red and he literally named it *Bolshevi*. Cheng played a comprehensive role in operating *Bolshevik*, from titles, paper supplies, printing house to contributing articles. He wrote extensively on Chinese revolution, Soviet government and Marxist doctrines. His suggestion was accepted by the leaders of the Chinese Central Party Committee."³⁹ On October 22,

³⁸ Sheng, p.171-2.

³⁹ Hsu. 1988

1927, the Bulletin # 11 of the CC of the CCP announced the acting editorial committee of *Bolshevik*, with Ch'u Ch'iu-pai as the director and (Lo) Yi-nung, (Deng) Chung-hsia, (Wang) Jo-fei and (Cheng) Ch'ao-lin as the Committee members. On this committee, four out of the five committee members were earlier or later trained in Moscow. Starting on October 24, 1927 and closed with the last issue dated on July 1, 1932, *Bolshevik* had existed for four years and nine months and published five volumes and fifth-two issues. It was the second largest CCP's organ besides the *Guide Weekly*.

Bolshevik was the confession of the CCP's press on its relation with Moscow. The main editors-in-chief of the journal were all foreign-trained Chinese intellectuals. Three of them were famous for their Russian connections, Ch'u Ch'iu-pai (October 1927 - April 1928), Li Li-san (1929 - September 1930) and Wang Ming (after the 4th plenum of the 6th Congress); the rest was a France-trained Chinese revolutionary, Ts'ai Ho-sen (July 1928 - 1929)⁴⁰

One of the Soviet press model's characteristics was the commitment made by the journalists and their participation in the revolutionary cause. This combined quality of being a revolutionary and at the same time being a pressman also was strongly shown through the work of the Chinese Communist press. The staff writers and editors were revolutionary advocates or propagandistic journalists. And somehow, they believed in an ideal more than the reality and they were dedicated to advocate for the ideal. The three

⁴⁰ Based on Hsu Huan-lung's research, *Bolshevik* was under the control of Wang Ming after the fourth plenum of the Sixth Congress.

Russia-trained editors-in-chief, who were fluent in both Russian and their native language, felt easier to identify themselves with the Comintern international policy and the Soviet revolutionary theories than with their own country's complex reality. The formal training they received through the handsome curriculum outlined by the brilliant Soviet professors and Comintern professional revolutionaries had unquestionably persuaded the youngsters that an urban proletarian Soviet was the only way to liberate China. And to reach that goal, they believed it was necessary to "Bolsheize" the CCP since the Party was unfortunately constituted by an overwhelming number of illiterate peasants and some sentimental urban petty bourgeoisie.

Bolshevik was a loud trumpet of agitating the Russian revolutionary theories and strategies. The Soviet leaders such as Stalin, Trotsky, Bukharin, V. M. Molotov, Mif, etc. These Soviet Marxist theorists kept contributing to the journal (through translation and the translation work was mostly done by the returned students). The central theme of the journal was to advocate Lenin's path to take over the state power. In fact, *Bolshevik* issued a great many essays elaborating on "a violent revolution led by the proletariat." The education and training they received in Moscow made them believe that the tragedy of 1927 was because the Chinese failed in following the October Revolution model. They were not "red" enough and not "Bolshevik" enough and particularly did not emphasize the significance of the Chinese "proletariat." What the Chinese Communists needed to do was to build the "Soviets" – an elected legislation mainly consisted of the urban proletariat in the large cities, like what the Russians did in St. Petersburg. Stalin and the Comintern's ghosts still haunted in China even thousands of the revolutionaries' lives

had tragically testified. And the press was one of the loudest voices advocating the idea.

The journal always thought that the inner Party power struggles of the CPSU was also part of its business. The leading CCP's organ and later on CCP's top theoretical journal paid a lot of attention to another Communist Party's internal affairs. For example, the disappearance of L. Trotsky from the journal's list of the Russian contributors reflected the editors' political sensitivity, after he was ousted by his rival Stalin. The only places where the Party journal's readers could have any chances to hear from him were the articles attacking him. Bukharin experienced more or less the similar glory and insult, first being introducing to the Chinese readers as a brilliant Marxist theorist and later on as a "people's enemy".⁴¹

To a large extent, the inner party struggle of the Soviets was related to that of the Chinese. Not only was the critique on L. Trotsky by the Soviets reported by *Bolshevik*, but also was his Chinese followers severely criticized, especially after 1929 when Ch'en Tu-hsiu was kicked out of the CCP. The Chinese revolution had been a key card played by both Stalin and Trotsky for a long time. Obviously, the former was received a setback because of the catastrophe in 1927 and was strongly criticized by the latter. However, by allying temporarily with Kaminiev and Zinorvivif, Stalin successfully exiled Trotsky from the power center of the CPSU. On the other hand, Ch'en Tu-hsiu, the grouchy scapegoat of the tragedy and disappointed at the Comintern and Stalin's towards the

⁴¹ See the total 52 issues of *Bolshevik* from 1927 to 1932. The articles or reports on the internal power struggle of the CPSU were either written by a Soviet contributor or one of the journal's staff writers.

1927 Chinese Revolution, undoubtedly backed Trotsky up by creating a Trotskyite organization on China's soil -- "The Communist League of China". Later on, the Stalin-Trotsky power struggle in the Central Committee of the USSR extended to the editorial board of *Bolshevik* itself. Cheng, Chao-lin, One of *Bolshevik's* founders and major editors, was elected in 1931 into the Central Committee of the League. According to Sheng, Cheng was arrested by the Nationalists in a raid shortly afterwards and had never been seen again.⁴²

The editor-in-chief of *Bolshevik* was Ch'u Ch'iu-pai, who was meanwhile general secretary of the Central Committee of the CCP.⁴³ Unlike other naive and hot-headed young Communists, Ch'iu was much more sophisticated in Marxist-Leninist theories. He went to the Soviet Union in 1921 as a Communism-sympathizer and a correspondent for special assignment of *Ch'eng Pao* (Morning News) in Peking. In February 1922 in Moscow, Ch'iu became a CCP member.⁴⁴ When the Moscow Sun Yat-sen University opened in 1925, Ch'iu was already the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee's member and wrote extensively on Leninism and the Russian revolution. In the August Seventh Conference in 1927, Ch'iu succeeded Ch'en Tu-hsiu as the Party's secretary general. As the later history had proven, Ch'iu was a much better intellectual than an organizer and leader. His books such as *O-kuo Ko Ming Yun Tung Shi* (History of the Russian Revolution) and *hung-kuo Ko Ming Te Cheng Lun Wen T'i* (The Controversies of the Chinese

⁴² Sheng. 1971.

⁴³ Ch'u Ch'iu-pai was elected general secretary in the August Seventh Conference after Ch'en Tu-hsiu was criticized for the failure of the 1927 Revolution and ousted.

⁴⁴ Yang. 1984.

Revolution) were found as popular as Bukharin's *ABC of Communism* and Stalin's *On Leninism* among the young Chinese readers.⁴⁵

After elected secretary general, Ch'iu used his journal *Bolshevik* to advocate the Soviet orthodox principles and methods of the proletarian revolution, especially these theories on seizing the state power and building the Soviet in the big industrial cities. In one of the political essays he wrote for the journal, Ch'iu summarized,⁴⁶

"Russia's October Revolution succeeded under the command of the Soviet of proletariat, peasantry and soldiers, as well as among the automatic armed violence of them. ... How can we liberate China? How can we liberate the proletariat and peasantry and eliminate the wars by warlords? Only if the Chinese proletariat, peasantry, soldiers and masses arm themselves and build a Soviet China -- could we overthrow the old regime of China, including warlords, bully landlords, the bourgeoisie, imperialist powers. Let's continue the October Revolution and display the second stage of the world revolution!"

What Ch'iu was taught in Moscow, however, didn't seem work under China's circumstances, and the radical, Soviet-flavored ideas advocated by *Bolshevik* were proven impracticable. The Canton Uprising was suppressed by the Nationalists and five thousand and seven hundred proletarian workers' lives were lost. Chang T'ai-lei, one of the major leaders of the Canton Commune, a Chinese imitation of the Paris Commune during the uprising, was killed in the merciless street battle. Chang T'ai-lei was Ch'iu's best friend and the one who introduced Ch'iu to the CCP in Moscow. The Nan-chang Uprising led by Chou En-lai, Chu Te and Ho Lung was also crashed down by the Nationalists. *Bolshevik*, as the organ of the Central Committee of the CCP was severely criticized for its immature radical advocacy about the Chinese revolutions by the inner Party

⁴⁵ Ch'iu works including translations were listed on *Bolshevik*, no. 24.

⁴⁶ *Bolshevik*, no.3, Nov.7, 1927.

opposition. Soon, Ch'iu was deprived of secretary general position and the editor-in-chief of *Bolshevik*. He stayed in Moscow as a Comintern representative since then until 1930.

Sixty year later, the Chinese media scholars made some comments on *Bolshevik*⁴⁷

On the other hand, *Bolshevik*, due to the influence of the "leftist" policy, insisted on the rising revolutionary situation, proposed the blind strategy of rebellions in the urban cities. It messed up the line between a democratic revolution and socialist revolution, and overlooked the changing class relationship after the Japanese invasion on "9.18". It scared away the middle force. These "left" wrong propaganda brought serious damages to the revolutionary cause.

There are some very interesting interpretations of *Bolshevik*, especially its bitter relationship with Mao. On the one hand, the journal presented a typical style of the traditional Communist press, e.g. advocating the Party's line and policies at any cost and without providing the public with a forum. Actually, the style had been the hallmark of all of Mao's political campaigns during the following half a century. On the other hand, *Bolshevik* has never been the official model for the Chinese Party publication. As a matter of fact, Mao never wrote anything to *Bolshevik* and it, in return, never reported any of Mao's successful stories of the armed peasant revolution in *Ching-kang-shan* (Mt. Ching-kang), although Mao was assigned in December 1927 one of the twenty-one editors of the journal.⁴⁸

It is true that Mao was smart enough to carefully keep himself away off the stormy whirlpool of the inner Party power struggles from 1927 to 1932 until the CC of the CCP

⁴⁷ Fang. 1983.

⁴⁸ In the Announcement 18 of 1927, the CC decided to add 21 more people to *Bolshevik* as editors, but most of them never really worked for it. See *Chinese Social Sciences*, 1983, no.3, p.64.

had to move its headquarters from Shanghai to Jui-chin, the Soviet Republic of China under the control of Mao. It is, nevertheless, hard to think that Mao had not contributed any article to *Bolshevik*, nor to any other Party news media for five years. Mao was praised as the "outstanding Marxist advocate and a soldier of journalism".⁴⁹ In as early as 1919, he ran *HsiangJiang Pinglun* (Hsiang River Review), a one-month-old liberal student newspaper in Hunan as its editor-in-chief. The following year Mao established a short-lived wire service in Peking and he was the president. In 1925, Mao was assigned the minister of the Propaganda Department of the Nationalist-Communist coalition government and the editor-in-chief of *Politics Weekly*. His later life was even more dramatically mixed up with journalism and ideology indoctrination in China -- the hundreds of columns and editorials were written for Hsin Hua She (New China News Agency) and *Jen Min Rih Pao* (the People's Daily). His very last contribution to the world Communist movement was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which was marked with the ultimate objective of reorganizing the country's superstructure including news media. Then why didn't Mao support *Bolshevik* and other news publications in the late 1920's and early 1930's?

There is every reason for Mao to be interested rather than to be ignorant of *Bolshevik*. What made him to estrange himself from the journal and remained the same attitude towards other similar Party's publications, such as *Hung Chi* (Red Flag) and *Shih Hua* (True Words), which were all published in Shanghai intermittently from 1927 to 1935.

⁴⁹ Hsu. 1988; Tou. 1986.

One of the most possibilities was that he just didn't like the smell of *Bolshevik* the smell full of the Russian orthodox Marxism-Leninism and authorities of the Comintern. The unspoken secret was that the journal was affiliated with the Comintern's and Moscow's faction. Mao had never been interested in the urban proletarian revolution, which was one of the main characters of the Russian Revolution and the part of the ideal revolution exported by the Comintern. Instead, Mao was born and raised up in the countryside. The millions of the Chinese peasants were what he really loved to associate himself with. He was never interested or believed in a Chinese urban proletarian revolution based on the Leninist model.

In Dan Jacobs' words, "Mao had been on poor terms with the Russians since 1927."⁵⁰ As a Party secretary general, Mao probably was the only few who did not have any Russian patrons as all of his predecessors did, and no personal connections with any Russian China experts, from Voitinsky to Mif, none of them. He was not "Moscow-trained" -- a quality which weighted very much in the early Chinese politics and Sino-Soviet relation. In his entire life, Mao did not step onto the Russian soil until he became the supreme leader of the Chinese Communist Party and president of the People's Republic of China. In 1951, Mao went to Moscow to meet Stalin and by then Mao had secured his position in the Party and most importantly, he did not need any patrons. "Stalin further distrusted his peasant-first doctrines and other anti-Marxist heresies." As a result of that, in the early 1930s, Moscow tried to "sidetrack him as long as they could".⁵¹ The

⁵⁰ Jacobs. 1981.

⁵¹ Ibid.

legitimacy and effectiveness of Mao's Soviet in *Mt. Ching-kang* made of all kinds of the social classes from the poor peasantry and the urban proletariat, had been in an obscure position for a very long time. And the Party press didn't even bother to cover his success. As Schwartz said, "Most available histories of the movement have, of course, focused their attention on the Soviet areas and treated the activities in Shanghai as peripheral."

The arrogance of the Kremlin and Comintern was symbolized by the late 1920's and early 1930's Party publications like *Bolshevik*. This mistreatment of Mao's Soviet in China's hinterland was revenged decades later. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, few remarks and the academic discussion on *Bolshevik* and the like had been heard. *Bolshevik*, the formal and formidable CCP organ only deserved a couple of paragraphs in today's journalism textbooks. Its heritage of the Russian school of Marxism and strong Comintern connection had been entirely minimized. Since the histories is always written by the most successful protagonists, it is no wonder why the early Communist news media after 1927 became confusing from time to time. *Bolshevik* and *Hung Chi* were depicted as the struggling, marginal press published and circulated in a small amount, and of course made serious "leftist" mistakes, in "white area", while *Hung Se Chung Hua* (Red China) -- a weekly-turned-daily circulated in Mao's Soviet area -- was portrayed as the mainstream of the CC's press.

⁵¹ Schwartz. 1966.

3. Mao's Ultimate Victory Over Moscow:

Ye-nan Rectification

In the late winter of 1969 and the early spring of 1970, about 20,000 young students were sent to Yen-an from Beijing to "receive the re-education of poor and lower-middle peasants", a trendy social and political reform aiming at the ideological continuity of the country's second generation.⁵² After several days' tiresome journey of trains, trucks and finally tractors, the Beijing students, with their minds ridden by decades-long legends, romances and heroes of the Party history, were simply stunned by the plainness and apparent bareness of Yen-an, the Holy Land. I was one of them. Also I was told, when touring the mountain town, one of the caves near the Yen-an Pagoda was the exact location of the *Liberation Daily*, the CCP's official newspaper from 1941 to 1947 and the latest predecessor of the *People's Daily*. What was also highlighted was that the Daily, under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung and the CCP, played an important role in achieving the ultimate triumph in 1949.

Nevertheless, the *Liberation Daily* was not among Mao Tse-tung's favorites in Yen-an for a long time. It was an alien paper. Not only because Po Ku, Wang Ming's lieutenant, was the head of the Daily since the establishment of it, but also because the whole format and content made it more like a miniature of the *Pravda* in Moscow, than an

⁵² As part of the great strategy of the Cultural Revolution, millions of Chinese young adults aged from 14 to 18 were settled down in the countryside of virtually all of China's provinces and state-run farms along the Sino-Soviet border in Hei-long-jiang and the Inner-Mongolia.

organ of the CCP located in a small base in one of China's poorest areas. It was bold: the whole front page was completely devoted to the international news, with the news about Soviet Red Army battling against the Nazi Germany always making the headlines and some coverage on the reluctant Western allies and the worrying Pacific war zones. It was arrogant: the reportage about the activities of the CCP, the poor but happy peasants of Yen-an as well as the Communist troops in North and South China was apathetic and always squeezed into small corners. The third page was designed to cover the domestic news and only the fourth the base and literature.⁵³ It was, finally, empty. The Marxist-Leninist jargons used by the paper editors scared away many half-illiterate readers and the editorials came out everyday no matter what, with sometimes bourgeois tones and sometimes shouting revolution slogans without any reasons.

The Daily of January 1, 1942, particularly made Mao uneasy. It was the New Year's Day. On the right top of the paper was *Kung Ho Hsin Hsi*, a routine Chinese greeting of Happy New Year. Mao didn't have problems with that. The problem Mao had was the next. "Bow here by all the colleagues from *Liberation Daily*, New China News Agency and the Central Printing House." Why did we see "colleagues" here instead of the "editorial committee"? How could we imagine that a Party's organ was operated by a bunch of bourgeois or petty bourgeois "colleagues", the word commonly used by the newspapermen around the country to demonstrate their professional identity and sort of intellectual independence, aloof from politics and worldly consideration? Yet, that was not all.

⁵³ Fang, 1983.

The most important news of the day was a dispatch from the UPI, a wire service of an enemy-turned-ally, the content of which was on the Soviet Red Army's small battle victory. Among the 23 dispatches on the front page, big or small, all of them were world news, 17% being provided by Hsin Hua, 9% by Chung Yang(KMT) and 74% by the foreign wire agencies (Tass 26%, Reuters 26%, UPI 21%). The editorial, the spirit of the paper was a long but weak rhetoric, fluent in an empty language discussing the current international situation but nothing about Yen-an.

The format and content of the January 1 Daily was no accident. It was a miniature of an atmosphere in the Party. The eloquence and profundity of the "twenty-eight Bolsheviks", in terms of their capacity of citing and elaborate Marxism and Leninism, deeply impressed a great number of the native Communists and the way the Party exercised its daily routines. By imitating the style of the "returned students", the cadres of the CCP, from the top to the bottom, cultivated an atmosphere of vanity. Mao criticized,⁵⁴

When presenting in a Party meeting, the cadres usually talked "first international, second domestic, third the base and fourth local." The meeting always lasted from morning till night and people who had nothing to say had to say something. Otherwise, he felt guilty.

For those Communist military generals who were not able to quote Marx or Lenin, they were mocked as the men who "only knew *San Kuo Chih*(The Romance of the Three Kingdoms)". Mao himself was once joked by the Moscow-trained students too, "What do you know about Marxism and Leninism? You just read some *Sun-tsu Ping Fa*(Sun-tsu

⁵⁴ Mao, *Selected Works*. 1964.

On Art of War)!"⁵⁵ It was a big insult to Mao and to the other village revolutionaries who literally led Chinese revolution for decades without an opportunity to read books. It might be true that Mao and his colleagues were not able to comprehend the heavily-packaged and Hegelian-German-philosophy-based Marxism, but it didn't matter, as long as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Sun-tsu On Art of War*, the ancient and creamy spirit of politics and wars, could assist them in holding a Soviet, implementing the Long March, building Yenan and defeating Japanese. But Mao pledged to seek for justice, not only for himself, but also for the Chinese Marxism as a whole. Ten years later, Mao reputed in Yenan in a lecture delivered at the opening day ceremonies of the Party Academy.⁵⁶

Can we claim that we possess theoreticians just because we have read a great many books on Marxism-Leninism? We cannot say this either. Marxism-Leninism is the theory Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin created on the basis of actual facts, and it consists of general conclusions derived from historical and revolutionary experiences. If we can only read this theory, but have not used it as a basis to study the historical reality and the revolutionary reality, have not created our own and specific theory in accordance with China's practical needs, then it would be irresponsible to call ourselves Marxist theorists.⁵⁷

Mao further claimed that the CCP would be better off if there were "fewer such theorists" who could "read ten thousand volumes by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and read each volume a thousand times so he could recite every sentence from memory".⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Nieh, 1983.

⁵⁶ The lecture was delivered on February 1, 1942 and titled as "Correcting unorthodox tendencies in learning, the Party and literature and art".

⁵⁷ Ed. Brandt, 1959.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Before Mao launched his Rectification campaign in the early 1940's, the control of the Comintern and the impact of Moscow in Yen-an was still strong enough to ignore Mao's critique. Plus, Wang Ming re-printed his monograph in 1940 in Yen-an, *Wei Chung Kung Keng Chia Bu-r-shih-wei-k'e Hua Er Fen Tou* (Struggle for Further Bolshevization of CCP) and he was particularly popular among young people who newly entered the base and admired his eloquence and theoretical knowledge. For example, when he lectured on the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short course*, the rewritten CPSU history by Stalin and one of the most popular books in Yen-an, Wang was applauded and hailed warmly by his young audience.⁵⁹

This was what bothered Mao when he read the newspaper. The Daily operated by Po Ku always reminded him of the control and the impact. For years, Mao had been thinking about a campaign to "correct" the Russian tendencies of the CCP. In short, he was more than ready to drive the Comintern and Moscow's representatives and envoys out of his Party.

The Rectification campaign was from 1942 to 1944. Though it has been re-evaluated after Mao's death and became controversial and thus extremely interesting today, is not the subject of the dissertation. Yet, the Daily, as the leading CCP press, was do closely engaged to the campaign. In the light of Mao Tse-tung himself, the rectification aimed at the "subjectivism", "factionism" and "stereotyped Party writing". Also the "subjectivism" included the "dogmatism" and "empiricism". The terminology

⁵⁹ Yang, 1989.

was formidable and the question was who *were* the people whose unorthodox tendencies should be "corrected".

It depended on who were the enemies on Mao's mind then. Mainly and strategically, two different kinds. The "returned student clique" in the Western scholars' term⁶⁰ and "*Kuo Chi P'ai*" (the Comintern faction) in the Chinese CCP history specialists' term was actually Mao's most threatening rivals. The second group, somehow beyond many people's comprehension still, was intellectuals, young students and the people Mao defined as "petty bourgeoisie". The paper of January 1, 1942 consisted of those kinds of "petty bourgeoisie", the people who addressed themselves "colleagues" not "comrades". Among the enormous literature on the CCP's history published in China, the classic version of the "dogmatism" is as follows,

The Party's *Tsun-i* conference corrected the leadership of 'left' doctrinism led by Wang Ming, yet, his influence had not been clear up politically and theoretically. So that since the Japanese war, Wang's mistakes demonstrated itself in terms of 'right' and continued harming the revolutionary cause.⁶¹

During the early Japanese war, some of our Party's leaders, under the influence of empiricism, were deceived by Wang's faulty Marxism. Those comrades, due to the lack of marxist theoretical guidance, don't understand how to solve the question of how to apply Marxism to Chinese revolutionary practice, therefore, they mistake the dogmatism which fluently citing Marxism by heart but far away from Chinese revolutionary situation as Marxism and trusted them blindly.⁶²

Based on the official journalistic textbook and also scholarly research in China, the Communist press was "part" of the target of the campaign. Besides the "erroneous"

⁶⁰ Landany, 1988.

⁶¹ Hao, 1984.

⁶² Wang, 1985.

impact from Wang on the Party's press, the urgent reform needed among the press was also due to the increase of middle-and-petty bourgeois intellectual members and their bourgeois conceptions of journalism.⁶³ One of the results of the campaign was that nobody dared to address himself as a "colleague" of his Party editorial committee.

On April 1, 1942, the *Liberation Daily* announced its reform. It severely criticized itself in the editorial on the same day, "We are embarrassed to say that we didn't accomplish the task as a real fighting organ of the Party." Because the Daily "lent most of its space to the international news while lacked the systematic records of the life and struggle of the people of the country and bases." Moreover, "we used huge space for boring and empty essays and translations, instead of articles written in fresh, vivid and simple language to explain burning questions." "We didn't gave feedbacks to the Party's policy making and practice." "We didn't thoroughly reflect the mass movements carried out within the base." All in all, the Daily "hasn't possess the qualification of holding Party principles, organizing masses, criticizing enemies."⁶⁴ The very next day, the Daily issued another report on a meeting held at the end of March, in Yang-chia-ling, a relatively green hill in Yenan where the CC was located. The news made the headline of the day, "Comrade Mao Tsu-tung called for utilizing newspaper to rectify Party's work styles" and Po Ku, also criticized his own work as the head of the paper, asking for suggestions and help from all ranks of the base. Po Ku knew clearly that as one of the "twenty-eight" Bolsheviks, he and his Daily were caught into another stormy inner Party purge.

⁶³ Fang, 1983.

⁶⁴ The editorial "To our readers" appeared on the *Daily* on April 1, 1942.

Recognizing that the campaign was much bigger than only the fate of a newspaper, Po Ku had a premonition of the ending of the "returned students" and the remote control of Moscow.

From April 1, 1942 the new format and contents of the *Daily* was first introduced to readers, to February 16, 1944 a summerizing editorial "The 1,000th issue of the Daily", the newspaper had undergone its thorough reform. During the period of the time, it published dozens of editorials and articles used, on one hand, as propaganda weapons to efficiently carry out Mao's Rectification campaign, on the other, to clean up the remaining influence of Moscow and the increasing power of the newly-entered-base intellectuals. A Communist press was clearly and unprecedentedly defined in the campaign as an "instrument" of the Party and the latter should smartly take advantage of the tool to gain its purpose. Mao could never forgive the mistreatment he had endured during the past years. His *Report on Hunan Peasantry Movement* was killed in 1927 in *Hsiang Tao* after its first half published; obviously, the second half was killed by the editor who had no interest in poor poor and illiterate Chinese peasants.⁶⁵ *Bolshevik* didn't even bother to report the striking development of the Chianghsi Soviet, the very first base he found; even after the Tsun-i Conference, the starting point of Mao's rising, his article "On the allies of Germany, Italy, Japan and the Soviet Union" was declined by the Party's organ *Hsin Chung-hua Pao* (New China), the predecessor of the *Liberation Daily*, with Wang Ming as its editor-in-chief in 1940. Wang insisted that the stance of the article would

⁶⁵ First half of Mao's article was issued on No. 195 of *Hsiang Tao*.

smear the image of the Comintern and he further threatened to telegraph Comrade Stalin and Comrade Dimitrov. Mao didn't want to try his luck and compromised to have the article published in his own name, instead of the name of the CCP Politburo.⁶⁶ To Mao Tsu-tung, the hidden message was that a Communist press could function in a dangerous way, if it was controlled by an inner Party opponent. The propaganda was no less critical than canons and rifles: Mao had all of the latter, but he was still frustrated by his own press. Lenin's Party discipline had been stressed again and again during the campaign, "One of the Party's central jobs is to properly run the paper." "The high-ranking Party units should keep an eye on editorial work of the paper, and combine editorial committee of Party paper tightly with the political life of the Party's leading institutions."

The editor-in-chief must be a trustworthy man of Mao. Yet Po Ku didn't surrender easily. As the number two leader of the "returned students clique", Po Ku was the Party Secretary General for a short time after Wang Ming was scared away by the "white terror" in Shanghai and resigned his position.⁶⁷ Being intelligent but hot tempered, Po Ku had many unpleasant clashes with Mao in the Central Soviet in Chiangsi. He was deprived of secretary general position during the coup by Mao in the Tsun-i conference, however, he was still a Politburo member and operated the propaganda division since. Even in the editorial issued on April 1, 1942, Mao's D Day launching attacks on the *Liberation Daily*, Po ku still managed to present his stance in the end of it, "While making *Liberation Daily* a real fighting Party's organ, we also try to make it a paper of all of

⁶⁶ Wang, 1980.

⁶⁷ Sheng, 1971.

the people under the sky, a common tongue of people who are fighting the enemy and establishing a national state. ... We are willing to reform our paper to be a mutual tribune for the nationwide anti-Japanese organizations and groups. We welcome all kinds of anti-Japanese individuals and partisan groups to take the use of our space to all the suggestions and ideas favorable to fighting Japanese and consolidation." Mao didn't ignore Po Ku's sneaky strategy and furthermore, could never tolerate his ideal of a "common tongue" and a "mutual tribune". Nothing will be more risky than legitimizing a "mutual tribune" within the CCP: God knows what kinds of "suggestions and ideas" will be advocated in the paper. Mao decided to compel his stubborn opponent to knell down. According to Wang Ming, the only former CCP secretary general abroad writing extensively on the CCP and Mao, the purging of his Lieutenant Po Ku was almost dramatized.

In between April 20 and May 3, 1945, Li Fu-ch'un, P'eng Chen, Kao Kang and Lin Piao sent by Mao Tsu-tung to the editorial department of the *Liberation Daily*. Po Ku was told that he would be arrested and executed immediately if he refused to "expose and justify three entities-- himself, Wang Ming and Russians". After his death, he was also told, that he would be treated as a counterrevolutionary by the press. Po Ku was desperate: he cried at the midnights and refused to do so until the last minute. On May 3 the Seventh Congress of the CCP, Po Ku spoke out at the meeting on the third "leftist" opportunism in terms of its emergence, development and fall.⁶⁸ Wang Ming collapsed at the same time. He wrote a letter to the CCP two weeks earlier than Po Ku's confession,

⁶⁸ Yang, 1989.

admitting that he "completely knew nothing about Marxian theoretical basis, completely understand nothing about the real situation of Chinese society and revolution, didn't study the historical facts and experiences of Chinese politics, military and culture and, had no idea about international experience and national tradition."⁶⁹ Wang Ming was no longer the arrogant and ambitious person he was fifteen years ago when Mif took him back to China. The "returned students clique" eventually disappeared from China's political arena since. The propaganda division used to be their territory had been under the control of Mao. Po Ku was killed in an airplane accident in 1946 and long before that, Lu Ting-yi, one of the victims of the "returned students clique" in 1930s, was assigned as editor-in-chief of the *Daily*. The article he wrote "Our basic position on Journalism" was regarded as the very first contribution to Communist press theory in China.⁷⁰

4. legacies of the Soviet Press Model

The Comintern was dissolved in 1943 and the Cominform was not founded until 1947. It was a power vacuum in the international Communist world. Two years after 1943, the CCP held its Seventh Congress in Yanan, Mao was elected chairman of the CCP and chairman of the Central military Committee. After the arduous struggling for

⁶⁹ Young, 1989.

⁷⁰ Wang, 1988.

one fourth of the century against all kinds of his enemies, Mao finally became the supreme leader of a powerful Marxist party with 2.7 million members. His thought, Mao Tse-tung thought, was praised as "*the thought which combine Marxism-Leninism with Chinese revolutionary practice*", and was *the Chinese Communism and the Chinese Marxism*."⁷¹

For Mao, the Russians were no longer a nightmare or a patron who always looked over his shoulders. As a matter of fact, the Chinese Communist Party had grown into such a giant that what happened in the 20's, 30's even the early 40's was gradually overshadowed by the larger historic events, or intentionally diminished from the records. While the heroes in the 20's like Borodin, Karakhan, Blyukher and the most of the Sovietniki were purged and executed by Stalin as Menshevik, Trotskyite or simply people's enemy in the 30's and the 40's, Mao gained his decisive victory over the "returned student clique" in the mid-40's, which also served as a slap on the face of Moscow-- it lost its well-trained and loyal agent in China. The independence Mao and the CCP achieved from Moscow was a watershed in both party's history: the former had created its own brand-name-name Marxism, becoming the leading actor of the cast of its own revolution drama; the latter was preoccupied with the war and more or less regretted of what had been done in the past.

Yet, the Russians were not just disappeared from the history textbooks, newspaper headlines and stayed within the older generation's anecdotes. It would be too easy. The

⁷¹ Wang, 1985.

legacy of Leninism and Stalinism brought into China in the 20's by the Comintern representatives, the young military and political advisers and especially by the Russia-trained returned students, continued to shape the country's political and cultural values including the Chinese Communist press. Wilbur and How, after devoting years in their fantastic research on the 1920's revolution of China, pointed out,

Probably Soviet Russia's greatest contribution was to transmit the Leninist system of organization to the Chinese Communist Party. Soviet advisers endowed Chinese Communism with the Bolshevik ideal of a totalitarian party dominating state and society. Ever Since the Chinese Communist Party established the People's Republic of Chian, it has tried to control the national economy, the art, education, all channels of information, all social organizations, and of course, China's entire political life—done to forward particular ideals for China's development.⁷²

The emergence of the Chinese Communist communication system, it was only a small press and weak-powered radio system in the 40's, was so closely messed up with the Leninist propaganda model that it would be impossible not to bring Lenin's ideology as a whole into our consideration. The historic irony appears here that no matter how strongly the Chinese Communists headed by Mao tried to get rid off the Russians control, the former, unfortunately, had to identify themselves with the latter's model, the only successful Communist model in the world. Even during the Rectification campaign in Yen-an in 1940's, the weapon Mao used to "correct" the unorthodox tendencies of the "returned student clique" was a nicely selected combination of Leninism and Stalinism. Among the 22 official Rectification study materials, at least half of them were excerpts from the works and speeches written and delivered by Lenin, Stalin and Dimitrov.

⁷² Wilbur & How, 1989.

However, these documents have been deliberately buried since, and simply "disappeared" from the Party's history.⁷³

The Newspapers of the CCP, such as *Liberation Daily*, played an important role in the Rectification campaign and Mao's power establishment. Lu Ting-yi and other cadre journalists assigned to the *Daily* during the campaign, eventually realigned it from a more or less independent, sometimes misfocused and intellectually idealized press into a loyal instrument of the CCP. The partisan characteristic, which had been obscured for a long long time under the leadership of the various "leftist" and "rightist" lines, was hammered undoubtedly. To the editors and reporters of the Communist press, profitability of the papers sounds like a story of *One Thousand and One Evening*. The nature of the Communist press is to advocate a Communist party's programs, lines and policies, at the same time organizationally submit itself to the Party. In "An Notice of Reforming Party's Newspapers" issued by the propaganda department of the CCP in 1942, the principle was heavily emphasized. By doing so, Mao made the signal clear to the inner-party dissenters, who had a long history of controlling the Party's press, and naive inner-party intellectuals, who plunged themselves into the Party with all kinds of liberal ideals, a Communist press will never be a "common tongue" nor "mutual tribune", nor "a press of colleagues".

⁷³ The 22 documents were only mentioned in China by the numbers and a few works written by Mao, Liu and Ch'en (Yun). But the files originally published in *Liberation Daily* included those written by Lenin, Stalin, Dimitrov and the CC of the CPSU.

Then how will a Communist press function under the "white terror" of the KMT, in the Soviets in South China, in the liberated bases in the 40's and in mainland China as a whole after the Party takes the national power? To survive in an ever-changing environment, the press tried to accommodate itself to new tasks it faced. Although Lenin's words as "newspaper is an advocate, propagandist and organizer" was further elaborated as that the press should be adopted to "organize wars and to generate economic development", in the 30's and 40's, neither Wang Ming, Po Ku or Mao had a complete plan for a Communist press. Neither did Marx, nor Lenin. The fragmented sentences and paragraphs on the nature and function of a proletarian press in a socialist country or, in socialist bases such as Yenan, pulled out of the contexts from the Communist forefathers' works, looked alien, confusing, and too general to the Chinese Communist journalists. These were things they could start with but far from enough. In the early development of the Chinese Communist communication, the process found its starting point, which was unquestionably the "standpoints, principles and methods of Marxism-Leninism", yet, after that, it pledged to work in its own way.

In the late 40's, Mao further elaborate on the function of a Communist press, when he talked with the editors and reporters of a base paper in Shansi. He believed that the power of a paper lies in its ability to disseminate the party's programs, lines, policies, tasks and methods to the masses as widely and quickly as possible. The press could embody the "connection" between the party and the masses. For Mao, a press was a dependent political tool used by a political organization like a party to reach its goal. He might be right, since in his life, in the semi-colonial and semi-feudal China, none of the

newspapers, journals aloof themselves off the dirty politics. Any newspapers could be traced back to its strain-pullers, i.e. foreign powers, national bourgeoisie or warlords. Why not Mao? Why not a Communist press?

Later on, Mao's simplification and analogy of a Communist press were well revised several months later by a late star of the Chinese politics, Liu Shao-qi. Being a Moscow-trained student himself, Liu cleverly estranged himself from the "returned students clique" and rallied around Mao. He was one of the few farsighted wise men in Yanan caves raised and promoted the Chinese Marxism, *Mao Tse-tung thought* as early as 1945. For many reasons, he wouldn't oversimplify a press as an instrument. On his mind, a press, particularly a Communist press in a country as huge as China, should also serve as a "bridge" and a "link" responsible for conveying the "cries, requests, difficulties, experiences and even the errors (of the Party)" to central authorities. At certain point, Liu's "bridge" and "link" theory of a Communist press was the copy of Po Ku's "mutual tribune". The indeed, like the late editor-in-chief of the *Daily*, Liu paid high price for that in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in the 60's: he was purged by Mao as the country's No. 1 "capitalist roader", "traitor and scab". His press theory was crashed, which was rehabilitated in the 80's and praised as one of the profound contents of China's proletarian journalism, and he himself died alone in a primitive local hospital in Honan and was quietly cremated without a name attached only a number of " 273 ".

This was especially true after the Rectification campaign in 1942. The collapse of the "returned students clique" headed by Wang Ming and Po Ku provided Mao and his

followers with an valuable opportunity to practise a Chinese version of the Communist press. And also, with the defeat of the young intellectuals, who bravely entered Yen-an, a place then was surrounded by the KMT troops, to naively exercise a bourgeois liberal press, the Chinese Communist press draw a line clearly between itself and a "bourgeois" one. Yet what makes the later press history more interesting was that while the fall of the "Moscow group" is a death forever, except writing poignantly against Mao and his policies under the protection of the Soviet authorities, the unfortunate returned students couldn't make any difference in the Chinese politics, the native Chinese intellectuals embracing "bourgeois" ideals once in Yen-an wouldn't easily give up. Forty years later, their weak but consistent pursuit for an improved, even perfect, Communist communication process reached its peak in the 1980's. This time, much earlier than the spark and encouragement of the Soviets, Gorbachev's new thinking -- *perestroika* and *glasnost*.

Chapter II

News Values And The Ideology

Two very interesting events in the history of world journalism will help illustrate the process of ideology: the U.S. moon landing and the Chinese Black Dragon Fire.

In 1969, when two U.S. astronauts landed on the moon, the epic news stunned and excited nearly the whole world. Only three countries' news media did not report it; China was one of these.¹ What appeared in the Chinese press instead were pungent headlines such as "The incurable diseases of the U.S. imperialism" and "Nixon's tricks can bewilder nobody".² Mao Zedong's quotation also was highlighted in large boldprint: "All kinds of unreconcilable domestic and international contradictions threaten U.S. imperialism everyday like a volcano, on which American imperialism is sitting."³ Truly, the country was then struggling in its abyss of the Cultural Revolution but, still, the repression of such a scientific and technological achievement is astonishing. After all, it is a political consideration instead of a mere professional "neglect". The reason could be simple -- the news did not seem to fit into the ideological criteria of Chinese news selection.

¹ Andrew J. Nathan (1985). *Chinese Democracy*.

² For the international news reports during the moonwalking time, see *People's Daily* in July and August, 1969.

³ See *People's Daily*, August 5, 1969.

China is not the only country that ignores important international news. Twenty some years later, the West totally ignored a disastrous forest fire, the Black Dragon fire, in Northeast China in May 1987. The fire burnt over vast areas of China and the former Soviet Union for almost a month. It was possibly the world's worst forest fire in three hundred years. The destroyed area was as large as New England and the fire was five or six times bigger than the Yellowstone National Park fire of 1988. In China itself, the news media was furiously stirred by the inefficiency and irresponsibility of Chinese bureaucracy; it lashed out heavily at the legislatures at state and provincial levels. The media reaction was regarded as a Chinese *glasnost* in the post-Mao era. But the forest fire attracted few Western journalists. Harrison E. Salisbury, one of America's outstanding specialists on the Soviet Union and China, found it "hard to believe" (that) "a catastrophe so great had gone unnoticed in the West".⁴

China's news media deliberately oppressed a groundbreaking news event on aerospace high-technology and persistent human inquiry of the universe. Western news did not report or show pictures of a natural catastrophe which further damaged world's already fragile ecosystem, a system that Western liberal journalists are committed to defend. But why? Why did the moonwalking and the great Black Dragon fire fail to be picked up as headline news, when their news values were too great to be missed? If newsworthiness doesn't count, then what does?

⁴ Harrison E. Salisbury (1989). *The Great Black Dragon Fire : a Chinese Inferno*. Salisbury went to the burnt area in the fall of 1987. He later found that "even one year after the fire, specialists in the United States possessed only bits and pieces of information about it". He admitted that the tragedy had been "ignored by so many". p.12.

These events are not occasional, neither are they one-on-one retaliations -- U.S. media abandoned the fire news not because of the humiliation caused by Chinese media's contempt of moonlanding. These are very predictable journalistic maneuvers. It is natural for a communist or a Western journalist to present the world based on the way he/she sees it. The way a Maoist or a Western journalist interprets the world is always framed by the way the mainstream values of the society. When the news is selected, written, manufactured, and promoted, it has gone through all the stages of consideration and become a truly collective process. It is always bigger than an individual's spontaneous response. In the history of the Chinese Communist press, deciding what is news is not only a professional behavior, but also a decision made after heavy consultation of the prevailing social and political ideals.

In this chapter, I will discuss what is pulling the strings behind the news selecting procedure in China's newsroom and how Chinese news media has functioned -- walking a fine line of ideology. I choose to focus only on one of the fundamental values, which is actually alien to but pre-eminently governing in Mao's and later Deng's China: the value of socialism. The central theme of this chapter tries to explore how socialism in the sense of a popular mass sentiment, not just a communist party's political program -- constantly generates, revitalizes, criticizes, and regulates Chinese communications after 1949, especially post-Mao. The relationship between the socialist values and news will be systematically spelled out in the chapter discussing aspects of domestic reporting, international affairs coverage (on the West and former Soviet Blocs), spiritual life, and human interest stories.

1. Western And Chinese Theories On News And Ideology

Deciding what is news and what is not is a perplex process in Chinese news media, as it is everywhere else. News selection thus becomes the first and foremost step to process the enormous messages collected every moment. To both reporters and editors, finding suitable news means selecting a number of stories out of thousands that fit certain criteria. In reality, there does exist a list of written rules which journalists could adapt to justify their findings. There remain, however, certain unwritten rules which reporters and editors unconsciously follow loyally. In their professional jargon, Chinese journalists would attribute it to a sensual capacity as "eyes of journalism" or "nose of journalism", or simply boast that they are able to "spot" and "smell" the news.

The written rules, which can be found in journalism textbooks, professional training seminars and workshops, in trade apprentice, or "internship" if we prefer a contemporary Western term, are universally professional creeds. They are something used to identify journalism as a profession and distinguish journalism from other occupations dealing with symbols, such as fiction writing, drama, and political polemic. Although being professionally criticized on writing style and rigid political stance, Chinese Communist news media is not off the mark of journalistic practice: it tries hard to meet the basic requirements of five "W"s, leads, and so on.¹ In this sense, there is not much difference to be

¹ Generally, Western media researchers would agree that Communist news media is a legitimate profession not just rhetorical and ritualistic propaganda.

found between Western and Communist news.

There are, however, unwritten standards looming around when a reporter writes a news story and then an editor edits it. To a large degree, the unwritten rules are greatly related to the socio-political consensus. The Communist media at many times has been accused of acting as a "mouth piece" for the Communist party, which, in the 20th century, has meant a one-party totalitarian rule. Most of the time, this accusation leads people to think that Communist communication delivers *only* the ideas and opinions of a "dictator's" party, without naturally reflecting a broader and deeper public opinion. The impression left by the literature on Communist communications during the Cold War, unfortunately echoes more or less one of the central themes of the war: Communism attempts to "mold people's consciousness" by using mass media as the most effective instrument. The evilness, or the "mistakes" the Chinese communist communication system has made is that it has plundered the country's public opinion by presenting a false reality which appeals to and is only responsible to the communist party.

One of the justifications for these ideas is that generations of media scholars have taken Leninist press doctrine at face value. The three main functions of a Leninist press, the functions of agitating, organizing, and educating, are actually idealized media functions and the bold illusions of a Marxist revolutionary such as Lenin. In practice, even the Communist party's organ can not smoothly promote the institutional view if the consensus is not yet formed. The result is often that the media will try to balance and reflect a wide spectrum of public opinion, rather than a singular Communist ideology.

Throughout his life, Mao has felt satisfied with the *People's Daily* and *Red Flag*. In fact, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai, not Beijing -- the articles which drew the curtain of the Revolution in 1966 had to be first published in Shanghai due to the Beijing news media's strong resistance.

I would like to suggest here that social values, or "hegemonic ideology" to use a Gramscian term, determine the news content of the press. Of course, in a nation state ruled by a communist party and its official ideology, social values are overwhelmingly influenced by this ideology. In China's case, the political and social consensus has been willing to reconcile, with and actually welcome Communism in 1949. This open attitude of the Chinese masses made the penetration of Communist ideology into the country's everyday life after 1949 much easier. Still, the CCP's ideology is not the basis of the country's public opinion. On the contrary, Mao's radical theses often find themselves colliding with a conservative Chinese tradition. (During the Cultural revolution, "Old tradition" was one of the "Four Olds" to be attacked by Mao.) The dozens of political and economic campaigns that swept through China during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, are the clashes of Mao's "continuous revolution under proletarian dictatorship" school with a very diverse, reluctant, and sometimes liberal or conservative, public consensus.

Being the officially heralded "propaganda machine" of the CCP, the Chinese communication system is often caught in a very awkward situation. During many political campaigns, it did choose to stand with the CCP's ideology due to the lack of freedom of speech and fear of persecution. Nonetheless, as soon as political dust settled down, the

"Party journalism" gradually moved to a softer position, a more-or-less apologist posture, appealing to a wider public opinion, seeking every available compromise, as it did after the People's Commune campaign in 1958, anti-rightist campaign in 1957, and the latest anti-liberalization campaign in 1989 immediately after the Tiananmen Massacre.

Also, interestingly, the news staff of the CCP find it untrue that it has to drag a far-behind, backward, sluggish national passion all the time. On certain issues, the policies of the CCP are right in alignment with the social consensus. For example, when dealing with international issues such as imperialism, colonialism, or Soviet hegemonism, the CCP's position has always been to take the lead easily with a supportive populace. This is undoubtedly a happy moment for a communist press. It simply jumps onto the bandwagon and gets an easy ride, as its Western colleagues do when they advocate a Cold-War ideology, which was the political consensus of the Free World. Another popular thesis of the CCP is to modernize China. The impressive support from hundreds of millions of Chinese masses in the Great Leap Forward movement in 1958, the year when Chinese believed and were thrilled that they would be able to catch up with the Great Britain and the United States as soon as their backyard furnaces produced pigs of iron, manifests an overlapping of the CCP's program and a longed-for national dream. There is nothing more natural and meaningful for a Communist press than carrying development statistics and production reports, because the whole country is "building a great socialism". Even some political movements see the common interests of both the CCP's ideology and popular sentiment. For instance, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 and that of the land reform (it is also an economic movement) in 1950-52, the

enthusiasm of young students (many of them Red Guards) and newly liberated poor peasants resonated the essence of the purpose of the CCP.

Therefore, it seems oversimplifying if we assert that it is the Communist party's ideology that completely commands and manipulates the operation of a Communist communication system. I would like to suggest a further look at what is actually a more complicated social environment. Socialist values are a combination of the CCP's leading ideology and a national political recognition. They are the underpinning factors influencing the forty-years after WW II, and directing the information flow of Chinese communication. Before I get into the concrete analysis of "socialist values" and news contents, let us look at the historical trend of theoretical discussion on this subject in both the West and China.

In Herbert Gans' words, the criteria are "enduring values".⁶

"Enduring values" can be found in many different types of news stories over a long period of time and they affect what events become news.⁷ Under most circumstances, the enduring, or "invisible", values behind the news reinforce the power they have over the events and news analyses. The myths values create over time through individual news stories contribute a great deal to the build-up of a society's ideology and culture. Nowadays, fewer and fewer media scholars believe news selection and reporting are just simple professional behaviors. Instead, people are more interested in discovering the relation

⁶ H. Gans, *Deciding what's News*.

⁷ *Ibid*.

of concrete messages to their social environment. In Western communication studies, scholars attempt to relate news media, as well as all kinds of such newly-invented technologies as television, cables, satellite communication, to the development of their capitalist production and democracies. In other words, the widened values promoted by news media are seldom the designation and orchestration of journalistic training, but one derived from the dominating ideology of a given society.

In the West, the emergence and development of capitalist democracy in the past several hundred years transformed news from a privileged bulletin of royalty, political parties, and commerce, into a powerful and lucrative modern information industry. The access of common people to news has been enormously improved; meanwhile, the ownership of this industry is more concentrated in a few hands. The development of the press in liberal capitalism looks like a winning battle against the monopoly of feudalism and Church. Communication opened up to be a "public sphere" and journalists were crowned the "fourth estate". However, a state corporate capitalism has made it harder and harder for the liberal news media to play an independent role in a democratic process, since government and authorities always come first as primary sources, and a more and more sophisticated public relation industry employed by corporate America and the rest of the West manipulates the journalistic working procedure. Under these circumstances, Western academia has been divided into different schools when analyzing the relation of media industry and ideological values.

The school which holds the most radical view of function and political effect of

media claims that the corporate control of the media industry, in terms of ownership and advertisement, determines the nature of it. Despite the moments media might voice liberal ideas, its function is to maintain a legitimate and prosperous capitalist system. For example, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman believe that American media is a propaganda machine which "manufactures consent" to the existing order.⁸ Herbert Schiller also states that media as well as the information industry as a whole function as a "cultural Inc." disseminating the ruling class' ideology and "managing public "mind".⁹ The American television industry, in particular, is criticized by Elayne Rapping as a "looking glass" offering an ideological view of society.¹⁰ The strong critique brought by this school on America news media serves as a warning against a media-saturated society. It provides the American public with the clearest map of the conspiracy between big business (corporate America), governing political institutions, and the news media. Its sentiment on the media's implementation of U.S. Cold War policy has been proven to be not exaggerated.

Opposite to radical thinking are conservative theorists. Backed up by Republican Nixonism, Reagan-Bushism from 1970-1990, the conservative position claims that the American news media is far from being an instrument of capitalist democracy. Rather, media has promoted a "liberal bias", which fundamentally undermines the legitimacy of the capitalist system. Edith Efron attacked television evening news programs saying they

⁸ N. Chomsky & E. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*. N. Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*.

⁹ H. Schiller, *Culture, Inc., Information and Crisis Economy, Mind Manager*.

¹⁰ E. Rapping, *The Looking Glass World of Nonfiction TV*.

overwhelmingly portrayed R. Nixon in a negative way while positively supported H. Humphrey.¹¹ On the issue of defense, Ernest Lefever found in his research that CBS's coverage in 1972-73 unfavorably criticized U.S. military policy and supported a detente with the Soviet Union.¹² In the 1970's, media was under attack of neoconservatives for producing an "adversary culture" which weakened the state's ability to govern. In the 1980's, journalists continued to be described as primarily liberal-oriented.¹³ From the point of view of conservatives, the danger of a left-wing media should be taken seriously. The hostility presented by a powerful and liberal media sounds out-of-tune in a capitalist hegemony and harmony.

Yet, the majority of American media scholars would view the role and effect of media not from such extreme perspectives. The research on "objectivity" after the second war raises the ideas that the intimate and enterdependent working relationship between a "democratic" state and a "free" journalism makes an "objective" media mere fantasy. The rise and rapid development of the profession of public relations in contemporary Western democracies also put many scholars at alert. Thus, the new critique moves from the traditional "political economy" theory to that of the practical state/media relationship. This criticism argues that the legitimacy of state power in Western democracy compels an "independent" journalism to give it ultimate favor in terms of time, space, priority, and, most of all, authority. According to this theory, the ownership of the means of production

¹¹ E. Efron, *The News Twisters*.

¹² E. Lefver, *TV and National Defense*.

¹³ S. Lichter, S. Rothman & L. Lichter, *The Media Elite*.

weighs much less in determining news content than a practical power structure would do. Or, put it in another way, the social controllers do not have to financially and directly control news media, the substantial control is realized more through smart "news management", i.e. P.R., and the mighty structure of "the powers that be".¹⁴

In the 60's and 70's, Western media research interest shifted to the discussion of ideological hegemony. Much inspired by Antonio Gramsci's reflections on Marx's theory of superstructure and hegemony, this new round of inquiry focused on how social/political ideology influences the behavior of Western news media in reproducing democracy through coverage of everyday life. The creative thought shed on this newly defined "ideology" is that the ideology is the outcome of a hegemonic process. The ruling ideology is not only framed by a ruling class but also "consented to" by the ruled classes. Plus, none of the existing ideology would remain forever – its content is renewed and regenerated from time to time because of pressures from different social groups.¹⁵ Western communication researchers try to use the theory of "hegemonic ideology", for example, sociologist Todd Gitlin to rationalize the political association of Western news media to a nation-state as a whole. This theory states that media practitioners who have been born, raised up, educated, and have worked in an environment saturated with a "hegemonic ideology", would naturally identify themselves with that system instead of with any deviant system. Therefore, despite the constant liberal rebellion pumped by

¹⁴ On this perspective, please see Daniel Hallin's *The "Uncensored War"*, Herbert Gans's *Deciding What's News*, Leon Sigal's *Reporters and Officials*, Michael Schudson's *Discovering News*, and Dan Schiller's *Objectivity And News*.

¹⁵ A. Gramsci. *Prison Notes*.

journalism during a political crisis, journalists would never denounce capitalism as a whole and their critique, which has made the right-wing so upset, would never step beyond the boundary.¹⁶

How this "hegemonic ideology" really works among the news media is not very clearly accounted for. Under what circumstances, will the news media follow the dominant ideology and when will it oppose that ideology? What will then make up this new political ideology, being more liberal or more conservative? American political scientist and media scholar Daniel Hallin proposed the theory of "three spheres" to further explain the content of the "hegemonic ideology" and its relation with journalism. Hallin states that the three spheres, spheres of consensus, controversy, and deviance, represent three major situations of ideology. Journalists are very conscious about the spheres of consensus, e.g. patriotism, and of deviance, e.g. communism. However, the sphere of "legitimate controversy" does leave media practitioners room and leeway to criticize, debate, and expose, for example, the abuse of power, government corruption, appropriation of policies, etc..¹⁷ Thus, Hallin argues that the news values presented by American media are more "ambivalent" than they are thought to be. Also in his article analyzing U.S. TV in the 1980's, Hallin argues that the "ideological meaning" assigned by TV to political events have two layers, liberalism promoting "ideals of fair play, equal opportunity, and prosperity"; and conservatism emphasizing "order, consensus, moderation, leadership,

¹⁶ T. Gitlin. *The Whole World Is Watching*. Douglass Kelner (1990). *Television and Crisis of Democracy*.

¹⁷ D. Hallin (1986). *The "Uncensored War"*

and the basic soundness of American institutions and benevolence of American world leadership".¹⁸ In his study on sound bites of television news during U.S. election campaigns from 1968 to 1988, Hallin argues that a changing "political consensus" challenging the establishment is part of the explanation for declining sound bites.¹⁹

The way Western academic media scholars look at their own media industry/institutions bears interesting similarities and dissimilarities to the way they look at a socioeconomically different media, compared with the way this media look at itself. When attempting to understand the role and function of a communist news media of such communist countries as China, the former Soviet Union, North Korea, and ex-Eastern Europe, media scholars have found the task might become easier if the Cold-War ideology could help them scapegoat Communist communication for the totalitarian control of Communist regimes. Otherwise, people would have to go through the painstaking process of understanding the motivations and dynamics of an alien communication system. On one hand, the public ownership of the means of communications, except for rumors and gossip, creates a scenario free from financial limitations -- any individual can not put his hands on public media property just because of the economic power. The new ownership, which revolutionizes the private control prevailing in human history for thousands of years, is established on the assumption that the new ownership would guarantee the equal chance of citizens having their voices heard. In practice, in

¹⁸ D. Hallin (1986). "We keep America on the top of the world", *Watching Television*. Edited by Todd Gitlin. Also on this point of view, H. Gans expresses the very similar understanding in his book *Deciding What's News*.

¹⁹ D. Hallin (1992). "Sound bite news: television coverage of elections, 1968-1988". *Journal of Communication*. Vol.42, No.2

Communist countries, the state media's identification of itself with a "public" cause, as well as with common citizens participation in a "people's" press, indeed somehow materializes a new form of communication in human history (see Chapters 3 and 4). On the other hand the lack of, or the reluctance to build democratic institutions and procedures to handle civil affairs, media's ordeal to adopt an "adverse" position, and the domination of a deified ideology, Marxism and especially a traditional Marxism interpreted in a rigid way, silenced the human society to a large extent. For all these historical and sociological reasons, the focus of researchers on communist communication's dynamics and imperatives after the World War II have been largely diversified.

First, the sharp criticism comes from two directions, inside and outside the communist communication system. The stance taken by critics within the system agrees that the media of any given society advocates the ruling class' ideas, and it assumes that a communist press is supposed to propagate the official communist ideology and continue to repress any possible opposition. The critique this school offers on Chinese news media is that the media should be severely charged with promoting and reproducing a Western bourgeois world view, instead of the orthodox Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. The cultural sectors in general and news media in particular, this school argues, have the possibility to betray the public ownership and thus became a privileged forum of social elite and "class enemies". Mao Zedong, the late chairman of the PRC, was the leading crusader of this school. Mao's distrust and critique of China's news media was one of the main factors leading him to initiate a "cultural revolution" to eliminate a corrupted, alienated, and elitist communist media, and to build a new one. Interestingly, public ownership did not

weigh heavily in deciding the nature of news media, at least not in Mao's rendition. The late chairman insisted that the transformation of ownership from private to the public would not guarantee the control of public over a state media, nor would a constitutionally-supported democracy. Rather, it was a "continuous revolution under the proletarian dictatorship within the ideological sphere that will prevent the superstructure of China, or that of any socialist countries, from being 'poisoned' by smuggled bourgeois ideas and thoughts."²⁰ Sharply opposite to Western right-wing critique which attacks and mocks Mao's communications as that of a communist "propaganda machine" dangerously "brainwashing" a nation's mentality, Mao would never give China's media such a high grade. It is because of the late chairman's constant dissatisfaction and suspicion of the news media's seemingly conscious deviance toward a more conservative consensus that the journalists of China as a social estate have been placed much lower than working class and peasantry. (During the Cultural Revolution, intellectuals, including most of journalists, were ranked as the ninth estate even behind capitalist roaders and former landlords.) The disfavor with its own news media escalated in post-Mao era. The three large political campaigns which occurred in the 1980's during Deng's administration, demonstrated the ever-enlarging doubt of the Communist leadership of a communist media system. The "anti-spiritual contamination" campaign in the early 1980s, the "anti-bourgeois liberalization" campaign in the mid-80's, and the criticism of the press for its behavior during the 1989 Tian An Men Massacre, brought to the surface Deng's concern that there was a "liberal run-away media."²¹ In fact, Deng dismissed several editors-in-

²⁰ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. vol. 5.

²¹ Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*. vol.1.



chief of the *People's Daily* when outraged by the paper's out-spoken attitude and "tendency of fostering bourgeois liberalization" in the 1980s. The same thing was done by Mao in the 1960s (during the Cultural Revolution, the former director and editor-in-chief of the *People's Daily* and several high-ranking editors committed suicide due to the political pressure).

The critique of a communist communication system coming from outside the communist world, on the other hand, presents a very dissimilar point of view. This school claims that the system, including *Da Zi Bao* (big-character poster), group meetings, radio, film, print, publication, television, etc., serves the self-interests of communist parties, and functions as an instrument of a party-state ideology. Certain research on the former Soviet media system offered the same opinion. The overall view of such a system is that it is "repressive", "manipulative", "biased", and a "mouthpiece" or "propaganda machine". For instance, Wilbur Schramm depicts the Soviet media model as an "instrument of social change and social control, and reflecting the "official Soviet ideology".²² If Schramm just theoretically depicted the mechanisms of a Soviet-style communication system, in the 1960s and 1970s more and more literature was produced in attempt to concretely reaffirm Schramm's point. In the book *China: Rationalizing The Demonic* (in his book, the PRC was repeatedly referred as C.R.P), Jay H. Ginsburg argues that unlike Western media, the Chinese way "is not merely to inform", but to establish and maintain the "legitimacy and philosophy of the C.C.P." It is the "main instrument of class strug-

²² W. Schramm (1963). "The Soviet Communist Theory", *Four Theories of the Press*.

gle".²³ The communication system was also evaluated by Franklin W. Houn in 1961, as one of the "bandmasters of mass persuasion", displays the "most extensive propaganda effort of all time". The media, according to Houn, is virtually completely controlled by the Communists could "limit" and "cut off" public debate almost at will.²⁴ Also, undoubtedly aligned with the once popular sentiment, is Frederick T.C. Yu. Yu claims that the "shrewd manipulation of coercive and persuasive communications" of the Chinese Communist Party are one of "its most striking characteristics" and the "instrument of power and a method of control."²⁵ The bleakest and scariest scenario cast by most of the study of this period of time (1950-1980) is the "brainwashing" effect in which innocent Chinese, especially illiterate poor peasants, were unfortunately "bombarded" by overwhelming communist lies and coercion. One of the consequences of this critique is that the news carried by Chinese news institutions (actually this school doesn't believe Chinese press provides any news at all), is heavily "drugged" with the CCP's ideology. Mechanically serving the CCP's and the communist regime's interest, Chinese journalism doesn't have its own identity and independence, things which this school considers to be the hallmark of *the* modern press based on a Western model, except for fanatically "brainwashing" the populace according to the Party's blueprint. Thus, the news values and newsworthiness couldn't mean anything but an empty trade standard. Not only did this school's theory conveniently fit into the political atmosphere in the West after the World War II, but also it created a barrier for the school itself to further investigate the

²³ J. Ginsbury (1972). *China: Rationalizing The Demonic*.

²⁴ F. Houn (1961). *To Change a Nation*.

²⁵ F. Yu (1964). *Mass Persuasion In Communist China*.

mechanisms and imperatives of the communication model which has indeed radically transformed human communication history.

It would be unfair to claim all of the research falls under the Cold War rhetoric. Alen P.L. Liu, financially sponsored by the Department of Defense and the Air Force Office of Advanced Research of the United States, found in 1970 that the Chinese communication system under the CCP administration played an important role in establishing an unprecedented "national integration", which, despite its potential problems, makes a start for Chinese to seek "wealth and power".²⁶ Western understanding and analysis of the communist communication system underwent a big change in the 1980s after years on isolation of both sides. British broadcaster and scholar John Howkins went to visit Deng's China in 1980 as the first Western media researcher. Howkins, surprisingly ignoring Cold-War ritual, confronted the communication system and then offered a new approach it, in a manner both comparatively and historically. This position thus has been widely taken by his Western world colleagues, the younger generation in particular, to try to understand a non-Western, non-capitalist-democratic communication. For instance, American media scholar Robert Bishop appreciates the system as a continuation of the long history of human and traditional communication in this ancient civilization, appraising it as a practical and useful national and interpersonal network, while paying much less attention to the old framework hanging on ideological control and "thought remolding".²⁷ Chang's research on Chinese mass media shows an attempt to accredit Chinese

²⁶ Alen P.L. Liu (1971). *Communications And National Integration In China*.

²⁷ R. Bishop (1989), *Qi Lai! One Billion Chinese*.

media institutions as legitimate professional organizations, not merely treating them as ideologically fanatic cult tools. Although the conceptualization of the communication mode was obscure, Chang's study provided a detailed map of its history and routine procedure.²⁸

The recent political and economic developments in China had caused many media researchers to think beyond a traditional, Cold War-flavored framework. The latest research is the application of an active audience theory. American researcher James Lull argues, after interviewing 200 Chinese TV watching households, that television in China works more than as just a modern gimmick or a government instrument, but a "political and cultural forum". The ideology of an authoritarian communist regime has been undermined by this powerful "forum", which is created by liberal media professionals and, especially, actively interpreted by the Chinese audience on its own terms.²⁹

Indeed, the political and economic developments in China, as well as those of the West in last two decades, have made researchers think beyond a narrow black-and-white framework of a communist media. A more interesting work was done by Judy Plumbaum on Chinese journalists' contemporary dilemma of "serving two masters". She sensed, after spending some time in China and talking to journalist practitioners, that the liberal tendency, boosted especially by a new generation of young reporters with after-1949 college educations, had been proliferated during the ten-year reform and thus, had chal-

²⁸ Chang, (1990). *Mass Media In China*.

²⁹ J. Lull (1991). *China Turned On : television, reform and resistance*.

lenged the old media consensus.³⁰ Meanwhile, China's own media researchers criticized journalism's weakness of reflecting social dissent. The critique confronted the dominant theory of a positively "unified consensus" regulated by *the* ideology and political pressure, calling for a widespread opinion difference and a check on the establishment.³¹

This critique and new suggestions in fact go beyond the principle thesis – whether or not the dominating ideas of a society are those of ruling classes; and whether or not the media which handles primarily ideas and opinions in a mass society represents the voice of that power, if so, in what way. The theories adapted by Western media scholars to analyze their communications should also be appropriate to be used as a reference to understand a communist one. This thesis agrees with the assumption of the relationship between an ideology and a news media in any given society. What this chapter elaborates is how Mao's and Deng's "hegemonic ideology" is actually expressed in news reporting. What kind of social values have been amplified, accredited, denied, revised, and disseminated through news onto Chinese readers and audiences? How do the "spheres" of consensus, legitimate controversy, and deviance (Hallin) shift, get fuzzier or clearer during four decades of time?

In China's case, the leading social values which make the news "newsworthy" have gone through many different stages. From a socioeconomic perspective, the People's Republic of China, unlike its counterparts in most Western representative democracies

³⁰ J. Plumbaum (1990).

³¹ Hou Jun (1989). *Piruan Di Yulun Jiandu*.

which have remained relatively stable for the last couple of hundred years, just celebrated its 40th anniversary, which marks a sharp departure from a Confucianism-oriented feudal and quasi-colonial society to embrace a very empirical communism forty years ago. (Needless to say that Marxist philosophy is now facing a dark present and a very unknown future.) For these historical reasons, the enduring values of Chinese news could not be as "established" as those demonstrated in Western social systems and other cultures. For instance, such values as individualism, entrepreneurism, competition, law-and-order, leadership, even underdogism have gone through decades of ups and downs. Some of the social values promoted by the Chinese media, from the very beginning, tended to be fundamentally experimental and subject to change, as with collectivism of the People's Commune, and the distributive egalitarianism of public ownership.

When discussing the process in which a classical communist news media system amplifies and disseminates a "hegemonic ideology", I do not agree with the traditional conspiracy theory which insists that "Party journalism" serves as an in-house authoritarian instrument for a communist party's interests. The 40-year history has, in my opinion, proved that media operation is much more complicated than simply being convenient tool for an ideology. Using an easy formula to stereotype Chinese communist journalism without consulting the historical/developmental situations from which it originated wouldn't help us to gain the essence and lesson this empirical journalism might show us.

Therefore, when Mao's "enduring values" were gradually introduced nationally

after Mao's revolutionary troops victoriously drove off those of Chiang, the pre-revolution social "values" lost their glamor and struggled to match a new political regime and economy. Deeply influenced by contemporary Chinese politics, the Chinese news media has made several turns, from left to right, and then left again. The same swifts could be spotted in its news presentation, both domestic and foreign. And the latest and greatest swift was since 1979 -- the "enduring values" having undergone enormous adjustments. The fact is that the "enduring values" as guidance for journalists to process news have become controversial and not clearly-cut at all. And certainly they led to the contradictory media presentation of the post-Mao era.

Even during Mao's era, the governing principles of media information processing did not always follow a model (which is quite contrary to some Western researchers' conclusion on China's consistent hard-line propaganda model). As there has never been a "monolithic communism", there have never been "monolithic values" dominating the country's news media. The notion that a "party journalism" manipulated the information process and massively "persuaded" millions of people to convert themselves to a communist mentality behind the "bamboo curtain", is a myth, a product of another "brainwashing". The thing we have to remember is that within a 40-year time span, Chinese communists have experienced enormous uncertainties, a set of "core beliefs" often interrupted by another. The agrarian reform, Korean War, socialist reformation of means of production, One hundred flowers's campaign, anti-Rightist campaign, People's commune campaign, the Great Forward campaign, bitter but determined disputes with the Kremlin, etc. -- just name some of the political hurricanes in the 1950s, were

supposed to send the world a strong message of Chinese Communism on such significant principles as imperialism, colonialism, revisionism, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. Yet, the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 denounced, through all the revolutionary enthusiasm human being can imagine, all of the achievements of the 1950s. What seems more amazing is that in the post-Mao era, the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s are nostalgically romanticized as golden "good old days". In other words, reporters, editors, and producers have been encouraged to re-glorify that age and the social values related to it. To some extent, for other countries in the world, post-WW II history bears a great deal of resemblance. For example, for many Americans, the 1950s, 1960s and first half of the 1970s was an age of prosperity, of cars with tail-fins, of "*Leave it to Beaver*" and "*I love Lucy*", of nuclear families and an image of U.S. benevolence in the rest of the world. Nonetheless, the U.S. has never been confused as to what capitalism or socialism is, even though it adopted social programs such as social security, social welfare, Medicare, etc.. In contrast, China's core beliefs have been violently thrown back and forth, and news media has thus repeatedly ridiculed itself by propagating contradictory "enduring values" during different periods of time.

We may therefore, draw a fine line here to say that the values represented and reinforced by Chinese news have been strongly influenced by individual periods of time. After the second World War in which Japan was defeated and large-scale military confrontations ended, including Mao's driving Chiang and his Nationalists to Taiwan in 1949, the news media plunged itself into a brand-new series of political campaigns and social reforms, including the Cultural Revolution. However, none of them can be as

alienating and threatening as Deng's ten-year reform to the values the media has observed and eulogized. Deng's reform worked as a huge social eraser which denied the legitimacy of certain values which were frantically worshiped, while advocating others which were severely denounced. Journalists, in the post-Mao era, found their old rhetoric often refuted by their current discourse. Readers, thus, often sense the obvious contradictory values between lines. This, on the one hand, makes the values promoted explicitly or implicitly through the news media dramatically diverse. On the other hand, makes audience feel confused when identifying itself with certain types of values. Moreover, the shifts spotted in a value system are much deeper and more threatening to a society, since they are not simply switches from liberalism to conservatism or to "middle-of-the-road" values as happens all the time within a context of capitalism, but changes occurring to a human society where thoroughly denounced values come back again and flourish, such as free market entrepreneurship. Or the values promoted before may suddenly be under attack, such as sacrifice and egalitarianism of income and distribution. Therefore, when deciding the suitability of news, a journalist may face a wide range of choices; an unsuitable news story can be made suitable if a journalist is good at interpreting its appeal to another value. The result of all this is that news selection and reporting in a country like China with subjective value systems and radical social turmoil can be very complicated.

One of the interesting and also important reasons for using China as a case study of the relation of media to society is that while Communism collapsed globally after almost one century of existence China, the last dinosaur of a disappearing fantasy land, might

become the only communist country which peacefully transforms itself from a one-party monopoly, authoritarian regime to a more democratic society while reserving some socialist practices. By avoiding causing the abrupt political turmoil and economic "electric shock" which has devastated the former Soviet Union's standard of living, the Chinese news media cautiously and gradually introduced news containing other contending values without discriminating either one to the audience. The result has been significant. First, people started getting accustomed to a wider spectrum of ideas and opinions. This has never been an easy thing to do in Chinese history. Information control and opinion repression has been a national policy for the Nationalists, the major political rival of the CCP, for almost half a century. Under the "white terror", the propaganda of communism was legislated as illegal and could lead to execution. After the CCP successfully took power in 1949, it made the same publishing and cultural policy that doesn't give opposition any chance to express itself. Mao's well-known saying is that "either east wind defeats the west wind, or the other way around. There is no compromise between the two."

2. Socialism As The Most Promising System

Socialism as the most promising social system in modern human history, is one of the central themes advocated by Chinese communist journalism for forty years. Defending the socialist system is the ultimate job for the Chinese news media to do. Unlike the

³¹ Mao Tse-tung. 1960.

American media which does not rally around the term "capitalism" very often, the Chinese love to relate any of their achievements articulately to the socialist system, and do it in a strikingly straightforward way. The word "socialism", or "socialist motherland" is among the most used journalistic phrases. In a variety of cases, cases like investigative reports, role-model reports, production statistics, and international coverage, the unbeatable advantage of China being a socialist country remains the conclusive message.

In the history of Chinese journalism, from the imperial gazette in ancient times to electronic broadcasting in the modern era, socialism has been a preeminent subject of the news media only in the 20th century. Surprisingly enough, the CCP is not the first one to extensively use propaganda-information media of all kinds to hail it. Chapter one shows that Chinese national bourgeoisie, which was born at the turn of the century and squeezed by both imperial and foreign powers, cried for state protection to some extent. The emergence of the Chinese communist journalism is in fact the continuation of some forms of radical bourgeois media, for example, *New Youth*, side by side with some early working-class media.

The popularity of socialism in the 20th century Chinese society as a concept and later on as a dominating ideology, depends on many factors. Unlike the socioeconomic situation in Western Europe where socialism claims its birthplace, socialism came to China as an imported remedy from the West for an ancient civilization in deep crisis. The Qing dynasty, the last system of Chinese royalty out a total of 19 dynasties and nearly 4,000 years of unbroken history, was forced to step down under the pressure of the

Chinese bourgeois revolution. Yet, the revolution itself was the outcome, or side effect, of an international colonial and imperial expansion. The corruption of administrative affairs, and especially the weakness and betrayal in front of Western capitals and well-equipped armies, made Qing royalty a scapegoat for all failures and embarrassments to national sovereignty. While the revolution ended the Chinese Qing Dynasty, *Confucianism*, the traditional and official ideology, was severely bashed, ridiculed, and abandoned by radical liberals. A vacuum of ideas and concepts appeared after the ending of a feudal history, and was soon fulfilled by various fashionable Western perspectives. Socialism was one of them.

Socialism appealed to Chinese urban proletariats and rural peasantry, who had been impoverished by the invasion of foreign capitals in the country since the 1840 Opium War with Britian. Intellectual liberals welcomed it too for seeking social justice. But the relatively small working-class and an affluent bourgeoisie which quickly associated itself after the 1911 national bourgeois revolution with Western investments and military powers, prevented socialism from taking hold in China. It was not until 1921 when the CCP identified itself with it, that socialism remained as a marginal social approach and pure intellectual subject. From 1921 to 1949, the term socialism was exercised to some extent in Mao's revolutionary bases from time to time. For instance, Mao's cadre system including propaganda cadres and professional journalists, practiced equal income distribution. Plus almost all of the CCP's publications plus other media from newspapers to radio stations, were publicly owned and the employees' medical care was free (because of the extremely harsh economic situation, we could say the socialism in Mao's bases

was primitive, or "military communism" to use a Chinese sociological term).

Mao's victory in 1949, which certainly surprised the United States and Stalin's Soviet Union, again made socialism a reality in human history -- one fourth of the world population -- since the Russians established the first socialist state in 1917. Chinese socialism, in the eyes of Mao's revolutionary journalists, symbolized true national victory over more than one-hundred years of imperialism and colonialism intrusion. On a larger scale, the victory restored Chinese pride in their history and civilization, which had been humiliated in the past half century. Therefore, when socialism was overwhelmingly hailed and advocated by China's news media in the post-1949 era, it wasn't a staged media showdown at all. Socialism wasn't treated by Mao's increasingly developing media as a pure ideological game, rather, it was a new way of life. The Chinese audience put a lot of faith, some of which turned into disillusion later on, in socialism, basing it on their own memories of the "old society". They trusted Mao's media and believed that the coming "socialist society" was for their best welfare and being.

In the period of 1949-1979, the socialist experiment in Mao's China went through many ups and downs. It kept active all the time and unfortunately, the political campaigns, in which the news media played a crucial role, hurt and disgusted millions of people. But, as an eternal theme, socialism, especially its supposed superiority over capitalism, remained the criteria for news selectivity. For example, during the Korean war of early 1950s -- the first war after the establishment of the People's Republic of China -- the military maneuvers of Mao's army were fundamentally interpreted by China's media

as "defending socialist China". The purpose of the war was described by media headlines as "trying to kill China's socialism in its cradle" by Western imperialism, which a certain extent was true. Later on in the transformation of private enterprise to state-owned, first private-public and then national, which essentially reformed the country's quasi-private market economy, public ownership was advocated by Mao's news media as the only way to achieve a highly productive economy and terminate social inequality. The former chairman's blueprint for transforming the country's agriculture from a feudal land ownership to a collectively owned and managed production unit -- the People's Commune -- was one of the propaganda storms created by the media in the 1950s. Today, Mao's people's communes, in which I spent four years working with poor peasants in early the 1970s, were disbanded by Deng and some journalists openly regret the mistakes they made then, but not on "socialism". Nothing wrong with socialism. The problem was that the Utopia happened to occur in the wrong place at the wrong time.³²

one of the ways to elaborate the positive side of Chinese socialism is to re-emphasize the advantages of a socialist system by making a comparison between the Old China and the New China. (The former refers to the "half-feudal and half-colonial" society before the 1949 Chinese Communist victory and the latter, the "socialist China" under the rule of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and public ownership.) To older generations, the method has proved very convincing, for they lived through two

³² The critique of the mistakes of media in the past in China has been vaguely and incompletely discussed by Chinese media workers themselves, for many political reasons, although the majority of them did feel sorry about them. And there wasn't much academic discussion and research on the people's Commune movement covered by Chinese news media.

Chinas and, obviously, life in the latter is much easier. However, for younger generations, those who consider themselves "born in New China and grown up under the red flag" as well as "children of the Cultural Revolution", the effect of the comparison is just not satisfactory. Yet, the media so far still use the method whenever there is an opportunity. The typical news story before 1980 would be the coverage of political meetings where the young generation was taught to "remember the old bitterness and understand today's sweetness".

Natural disasters, seldom employed as human interest stories which will be discussed later in this chapter, are a suitable chance to remind readers for to grateful for socialism too. Government relief and a state of emergency often protect the poorest peasants and urban disadvantaged from becoming refugees through the strength of the central government. The victims of a disaster, some of whom must belong to older generation, would be called in by news media to publicly talk about the social security socialism can provide.

National holidays, including traditional holidays such as Chinese New Year,³³ Mid-autumn Day and Ghost Day,³⁴ and revolutionary holidays, e.g. National Day,³⁵ the

³³ Political holidays, such as the birthdays for the Chinese Red Army, Chinese Communist Party, New China, etc., are always reserved on journalists' calendar. They are the days to revitalize common citizens connections with the revolutionary tradition. The date of the Chinese New Year varies because of the calculating method used by a lunar calendar, but it is usually in February.

³⁴ Ibid. Mid-autumn Day occurs normally in September and the Ghost Day April.

³⁵ Chinese people in mainland China celebrate their National Day on October 1, which is the date when Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding of New China in 1949, while people in Taiwan officially observe their National Day on October 10, the date marks the victory of the abolition of Ching dynasty, the very last Chinese royal dynasty.

Communist Party Day (July 1) and the People's Liberation Army Day (August 1), are other good times to remind citizens of the valuable existence of the country's socialist system. On revolutionary holidays, the media make the reviewing of revolutionary tradition the biggest of news stories. The news coverage of all types of ritualistic celebrations, the written speech of a ranking official, and a timely editorial are all leading to the salute of today's socialism.

The two most crucial international holidays observed in China are the International Labor Day (May 1) and International Women's Day (March 8). Remaining loyal to an international communist movement, China honors these two days, despite the fact that people from the birthplace of these two dates don't observe them any more. The international consolidation is actually less stressed for a variety of reasons, but Chinese workers and women would be reminded, by the news media, of the political rights and economic benefits they enjoy in a socialist China. The contrast is drawn between their social status quo vis-a-vis that before 1949, which is notoriously unbearable.

Socialism as the basic principle of the country was under tremendous scrutiny in the 1980s. The distrust and discontent in the years soon after Mao's death were striking but did not lead to the questioning of socialism as a way of life. The real move came in in 1979 when Deng's reform group won an overwhelming victory in the Party's third plenum of the eleventh congress. The resolution of the plenum was to redefine their "socialism". The notorious "cat theory" of Deng reduced the ideological responsibility of socialism to an minimum, while it demanded high performance economically.

The media coverage of 80s' socialism was much less self-promoting and more cautious. From the dismantling of Mao's people's commune in the early 1980s, urban reform of the mid-80s, to the "consensus supervision" of the late 80s, socialism maintained its place in the headlines, but only through ceaseless controversies. For example, propagating "to get rich is glorious" was an important element of Chinese communist journalism. Thousands of "self-made" *wan yuan hu*, ten-thousand -yuan household, the majority of them were non-party members, were praised as socialist heroes and models. Their individualism and motivation were appreciated by the media to an unprecedented height. However, "to get rich is glorious" was soon under strong criticism for neglecting those poor households which could barely make a living and had to live on public assistance of some kind. "Breaking the rice bowl" used to be a powerful slogan advocated across national media to recognize competition and efficiency. Soon after the competition socialism was forcefully introduced to by a communist press, the journalists were severely attacked by the opponents for creating instability and inequality of the workplace. Also the media was blamed for misleading Chinese people into deserting socialist ideals by encouraging capitalist consumerism. In a Chinese media researcher's words, the media was "contradicting and slapping itself".³⁶

The media is "slapping itself" in the face -- an element of the whole restructuring of Chinese news media in last decade. Honestly, the journalists were loyal enough to reinforce and glorify socialism. They were not political dissidents at all. The problem was

³⁶ Jin Xiguang. "TanTan baozhi xuanchuan di hungguan kongzhi", 1986 *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian*.

that "socialism" was such an ambiguous term and, more importantly, a social practice that was almost impossible to justify. The media restructuring put the reporters in a very awkward position which they had never experienced before. The new politics in the 80s weren't the same as the ones in Mao's era. Despite being one of Mao's oldest comrade-in-arms, Deng granted more freedom to some un-orthodox policies and the monolith which marked Mao's ruling wasn't very popular any more. New politics left the gate open for new operations and maneuvers. Apparently, the media was willing to take advantage of this new political freedom to better defend socialism.

Also, development news means the success of socialism. As an indication, development news always presents a showcase of China's socialist modernization. On the one hand, the showcase assures domestic people of the healthy growth of their country which in return imposes an influence on their everyday life. On the other hand, the underpinning logic of the showcase explicitly reinforces the leadership of the CCP and central government. From time to time, western media researchers on Chinese journalism are puzzled by the huge pool of development news. Coverage on fulfillment of production quotas, finishing up of a water dam, or celebrations of a new school or a new rural clinic,³⁷ occupies more than half of news space, in both electronic and print media. Development news weighs much less in Western journalism than in Chinese, because the "news value" of a water dam would be interpreted differently.

³⁷ On the subject of "development news", see Wilbur Schramm and Erwin Atwood's *Circulation Of News In The Third World, a study of Asia*.

To the mind of a Western media practitioner, news media are definitely not the billboard of a country's economic development. The news of the stock market, bankruptcies, mergers, etc. is always "humanized" by personal stories, or interpreted strategically. For example, the *Los Angeles Times*, when covering the deep recession of U.S. economy in the early 1990s, skillfully rewrote bad business news into individuals' ordeals, rather than data reports on gains and losses.³⁸ W. Schramm and E. Atwood point out in their research on Third World news reporting, that four leading international agencies, Reuters, AP, UPI, and Francis, scarcely cover "development news" in Asia, because "development news" is regarded as neither political news nor "striking events".³⁹ Then why does "development news" mean so much to the China's media? Why does Chinese news media view "newsworthiness" so differently from that held by Western media? One of the factors is that "development news" promotes the CCP's socialism. What else can be used as proof of successful socialism than the news stories on record harvests, new housing projects, exceeded quotas, and new educational opportunities? It is the need of the communist establishment to reinforce its political credits, as well as the need to cheer for socialism.

The fundamental reason for Chinese media to repeatedly pump out "development news", even if it's a trivial one, is also that the country has been a centrally planned economy. Mao believed the function of media in wartime is to command battlefields, and in

³⁸ See the paper's news on S & L scandals, defense budget cuts, and real estate slumps in 1991 and 1992.

³⁹ W. Schramm & E. Atwood, *Circulation Of News In The Third World, a study of Asia*.

peace time to command production. The Party Central committee has to utilize, in addition to other channels, the news media to manage its economy. For example, the media complains about the "four-season songs" -- journalists have to campaign for plowing in spring, watering in summer, harvesting in fall and other work in winter. During the period of the Great Leap Forward (1958), the *People's Daily* was actually an output billboard of China's rural iron-steel plants and fake agricultural harvests.

"Development news" is one of the main characteristics of news values in China. Any small social improvement was eligible to become "development news", since the improvement proves that socialism is the cure for an economically backward country like China.

This is largely related to China's economic status. Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic policy about a "socialism with Chinese characters" has been harshly criticized by both China's internal opposition and by Western observers as capitalism in the name of socialism. But there was one thing that all of them agree with -- China's old-fashioned socialism has been collapsing. Under the new leadership of the post-Mao era, the decades-long People's Commune system which was praised as Mao's agricultural socialist model, was first dismantled. Means of production, such as land, tractors, seeds, farming tools, collective orchard and fishing pools, were redistributed or leased to individual peasant families via contracts. Called a "production responsibility system", Deng's reform in rural China not only created a huge sensation in socialist countries, which include the ex-Eastern Bloc countries and former Soviet Union, but also put socialism the test. To some extent,

the collapse of the People's Commune is the end of a philosophy and a way of life.

Deng's reform, though, didn't linger over the victory of Mao's agricultural collectiveness. Before the Chinese people pieced themselves together to get used to countless open-air free markets mushrooming around the country, before the Chinese central government and its provincial and county administrations adjusted themselves to the new private market of agriculture, Deng and his reformers, a strange incompatible group, extended the reform to Chinese cities and urban areas in 1983. Since then, the contents of Deng's reform have been added to such capitalist terminologies as stocks, bonds, banking, financing, foreign investment and joint ventures, as well as floating prices, salary rearrangement, medical care and state housing reforms.

Deng's definition of what socialism is, or should be, is fundamentally different from Mao's, as is Deng's way of practising it. In the post-Mao era since 1976, news coverage on socialist China by the Chinese news media switched quickly from Mao's model to Deng's. Despite journalism's portrayal of a new socialism, socialism remained with a vague and sometimes empty core. To begin with, the same media which zealously propagated the former Chairman's idealistic socialism, headed into a new direction to advocate Deng's pragmatic socialism. Ironically, a great deal of activities praised nowadays were wildly criticized ten years ago.

Despite the self-contradictions everywhere, in the newsroom, in the news stories and interviews, the country's media tried its best to catch up with the new changes. News

selection regarding socialism as the most promising social system goes far beyond empty theoretical phrases and words. It means journalists have had to learn to interpret and defend socialist values, when reporting the passing of China's first bankruptcy law, the opening of China's first stock market, the success of a booming private sector and the shrinking of the old public one. The predicament of Chinese communist journalists (not all of them party members) is that they have to find the beauty of old capitalist gimmicks to prove a socialist value. "Thus, what is the nature of the reform? And how can we indicate it (to readers) and sharpen the propaganda on reform?" wrote Wang Jihui, one of Beijing's top media scholars. "First, (we need) to reflect the socialist nature of it. It is not capitalist, nor the rigid 'leftist' model which shackled the development of socialist productive force, but a socialist economic managerial system, which is with Chinese characters and full of energy."⁴⁰

The modification of socialism as one of the perpetual journalistic values has great implications for Chinese journalists. They needed time to prepare themselves for the capitalist-turned-socialist values, and at the same time help the whole nation through spreading news to establish a revolutionized understanding of socialism. The old centralized media system and the newly founded decentralized, non-party organs which have had the tendency to overshadow the former, forced Deng's socialism into millions of Chinese readers with strongly confusing and contradictory information. Because the values introduced by Deng's reform, e.g. entrepreneurism, competition, income

⁴⁰ Wang Jihui, "Jieshi gaige benzhi, shenhua xuanchuan gaige". *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* 1987.

differentiation (in terms of "to get rich is glorious"), and efficiency, etc. were skillfully interpreted by Chinese news media as part of Deng's basket of socialism, (here the best example would be the sweeping and yet one-sided propaganda of the "socialist commodity economy", makes this ambiguous new thinking on the socialist economy clearly identified with basic socialist principles, China imposed a very controversial capitalist/socialist reform into a post-Mao, post-Cultural Revolution era without involving social chaos.

3. International News and China's Socialism

In addition to focusing on domestic reporting, the Chinese news media also addresses the prosperity and potentials of China's socialist program in its international news coverage. Fortunately, shortcomings and crises with capitalist countries are not hard to find. Plus, on this matter, capitalist journalism, born interested in muck-raking its own scandals. Regardless of whether these journalists do it for a living, out of a liberal principle, or from being manipulated by politics, such news stories are very likely to be used by the Chinese media to discredit capitalism, and eventually, to eulogize socialism. Watergate and the resignation of American president Richard Nixon was Chinese media's most favored story to portray the rampant political corruption and manipulation of Western democracy. Recessions, strikes, crimes, drug abuse, riots, demonstrations, etc. are more often than not employed to create and reinforce that image, e.g., "the enemy is rotten day-by-day, and we are progressing day-by-day."⁴¹

⁴¹ Mao Zedong.

This basic tone was not modified until 1972 when then president Nixon paid his visit to China, the very first U.S. presidential visit since the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949. The critique was softened to a degree that more "neutral" news stories were brought to audience, such as history, culture and exotic geography. Some aspects of capitalism, like technologies and management, have been positively reported in last decade. Even so, the Chinese news media won't blur the line between the two "isms" and their social practices. In contrast, the principles of a Western capitalist democracy, despite its economic efficiency and checks and balances, is portrayed over and over as a system unsuitable to the country -- "only socialism can save China!"

The strong attitude of a classical Chinese news media against capitalism and imperialism in last three decades (1950's-1970's) seemed to be collapsing in the 1980's. In part, this resulted from the ideological relaxation after Mao's death in 1976 and China's new leadership's eagerness to trade with the West for capital and technology. Deng's more realistic foreign policy gradually gave up the old hardline and picked a realistic policy to make friends with representatives from the West in Beijing so as to obtain foreign capital and technology. Consequently, the working class strikes in Western capitalist countries eventually disappeared from the CCP's organs, which should have been reported and taken advantage of routinely. The issues of homelessness, inner city poverty, racial confrontation, government corruption, and political scandals -- which were more than welcomed in Mao's time -- were sensitively downplayed.

Yet, the international news coverage of the West in Chinese official media is not

consistent, neither is there a universal standard by both print and electronic media conform to. It is true that the print media is the oldest and most established source for one billion Chinese to know how "capitalism" operates, with hundreds of correspondents based around the world⁴² (The number of print media's international correspondents in 1983 was 174 and in 1989, 195.) The medium which got the lion's share of international news reporting since 1980 is television. The maverick televised international news changed the anti-imperialism-capitalism tradition that Communist print media had nurtured in Mao's time.

In the 1980's, television as a new communication technology unexpectedly dwarfed the Chinese conventional print press, and produced a more powerful impact on Chinese people's perception of the world. The underpinning of global TV news is that it is a non-Chinese journalist-made, bought-beyond-the-boarder Western commodity. Televised international news, the colored, exotic, fast-paced, and dubbed newscast with an identical English accent on its sound track, invades hundreds of millions of Chinese households at least ten minutes a night, seven days a week. It is an informational zone where the world is viewed and interpreted thorough the eyes of non-Chinese non-Communist journalists. China's own infant international news crew seemed not be able to compete with outsiders. The few projects they could get their hands on were limited to Asian areas. One of them was about the Marxist revolution army in Cambodia, which was drawn in the poured-in images from the luxurious West.

⁴² See 1983 *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* and 1990 *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian*.

It sounds out-of-date to continue to claim there is a "Communist propaganda" machine "modeling" readers' consciousness, because what the Chinese Central Television (CCTV) put on the air was international news shows produced and distributed by two leading Western telecommunication corporations: Visnews, owned by the British Broadcasting Corporation and Reuters, and UPITN, a US-British joint venture -- owned by United Press International and Independent Television News.⁴³

Before looking at the political consequences of the market share of Western news media in Deng's China, we may need to spend some time on China's television history. China was a relative latecomer to television broadcasting. In 1958, 22 years after the establishment of British public television service and 19 years after the U.S.,⁴⁴ Beijing launched its first television program. The black-and-white experiment was very primitive. "There were only a dozen people involved in the whole news production," recalled Zhang Zhuangyi. "We only had a few 16mm cameras and little black-and-white film." With several huge crocks bought from local grocery stores and hand-made wooden shelves, the broadcasters kicked out behind-the-screen production in a remodeled bathroom.⁴⁵ The young pioneers were apparently inspired by Mao's Yan-an spirits, the spirit developed in that remote and poor revolutionary area where Mao and his comrade-in-arms created from 1935-1948. It had been praised after the 1949 Revolution to encourage

⁴³ See *Global Journalism : survey of international communication*, edited by John C. Merrill. 2nd edition.

⁴⁴ According to Raymond Williams, the British public broadcasting began in 1936 and the U.S. in 1939. See *Television : technology and cultural form*. Also see *Global Journalism*.

⁴⁵ Zhang Zhuangyi, "On zhongguo dianshi shiyie sanshi nian lai di fazhan gaikuang", 1990 *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian*.

Chinese to building their "modernization" from scratch despite the capitalists' longtime military and economic blockade. But the "struggling period of time" wasn't without any international help. The Russians indeed lent Chinese fledgling broadcasting industry a hand. The USSR supplied most of the technical assistance and equipment.⁴⁶ But, the Sino-Soviet honeymoon ended soon in 1960. The "devastating break" left Beijing Television without spare parts and expertise.⁴⁷ This was the lesson clearly remembered by the Chinese in 1973 when it decided to choose PAL as its primary color television system without hesitation -- a system developed by then West Germany and adopted by the UK and others over SECAM -- developed by France and used by the former USSR and Eastern Blocs.⁴⁸ The first television news aired in CCTV history was in 1958, about the establishment of *Hong Qi*, (Red Flag in English). The news of the CCP's authoritative theoretical monthly was produced in silent film and broadcast with occasional voice-over from an anchorwoman.⁴⁹ The lack of technical facilities, capital investment, and an experienced television crew hindered the young Chinese broadcasting media from venturing into the international news business. In the late 1950's and early 1960's, the regret was somehow compensated by trading television programs with members of the former "socialist camp," e.g., the "Soviet News," the "Romanian News," and the "GDR News."⁵⁰ The news show exchanges between China and Eastern Europe more or less satisfied Chinese domestic citizens' curiosity to see the world, despite the documentaries'

⁴⁶ John Howkins, *Mass communication in China*.

⁴⁷ James Lull, *China Turned On*.

⁴⁸ James Howkins.

⁴⁹ Zhang Zhuangyi.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

propaganda purpose and terrible time delays (without a satellite linkage, all the programs had to be "bicycled" from one country to another). In this way, the world displayed before Chinese viewers, in numbers of no more than a thousand, was dominantly the "promising socialism." The absence of imperialism on the Chinese television screen didn't reduce the evilness of it, because the prosperity and hope embodied in the "Soviet News," the "GDR News," etc. proved from the other side that the days of the world bourgeoisie were numbered.

The bitter dispute between China and the Soviet Union in the late 1950's led to China's rebellion against the Soviet patriarchy in international Communist. The rebellion was conducted not only in ideology and politics, but also in information sharing. In order to gain its independence in communication operations, the PRC began in 1960 to purchase international news stories which were selectively aired on its own infant network which came from Britain's Visnews, the only Western democracy maintaining full diplomatic relationships with China. China, since then, signed agreements with such countries as Japan, the Arab League, Cuba, and others to exchange news programs. From 1964 to the eve of Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966), the CCTV regularly scheduled its *International News* three times a week for 15 to 20 minutes.⁵¹ Mao's 1960's Cultural Revolution "sabotaged" the *International News* program, accusing it of "advocating imperialism and revisionism." The CCTV dismissed many of its Broadcasting professionals, basing on their political qualifications, and soon the program stopped. In 1970,

⁵¹ Ibid.

when a British broadcaster visited the country, he was astounded by the reality that 18 out of a total of 26 minutes of the main evening news bulletin consisted of rolling captions of Mao's thoughts with background music of *The East Is Red*⁵² a popular song extolling Mao as the great Savior of the Chinese people.

In 1978, the CCTV, freshly recovered from the damage done by the Gang of Four during the ten-year Cultural Revolution, initiated a new evening news program, a program borrowing many characteristics from Deng's era. However the program had its weakness: the absence of international coverage. Titled *United Broadcasting News*, a combination of domestic news contributed from provincial and local TV stations to the CCTV, it aired Party-state official meetings, news on production quotas, and cultural events. Somehow, the CCTV remembered its old partner, British Visnews, one of the Western communication tycoons which helped the CCTV in the 1960's to counterbalance the Soviet hegemony. This time the business partnership was exercised at an even more advanced level. Through an international satellite, the producers of the CCTV received international news in its latest version from Visnews. Later, a British-US joint venture, UPITN, joined in. On April 1, 1980, the Chinese audience, besides watching conventional home-made domestic news as usual, saw the world in such a manner of immediacy and non-Chinese taste, in their living-rooms, conference rooms, and neighbor's backyards. And most importantly, they saw the same news as American or British audiences did. Canadian media scholar Marshall McLuhan's prophesy was again

⁵² James Howkins.

realized – the world became a global village. Soon, *International News* provided by Western journalism formally became an important ingredient of the CCTV's *United Broadcasting News*, and the entire program lengthened from 15 minutes to 30.⁵³

It was a communication revolution, in terms of visual images, professional performance, and "hegemonic ideology." Frankly, the Chinese TV audience was thrilled by the exotic "professionalism," "immediacy," and "objectivity," all the virtues presented by Visnews and UPTN. An article carried by *Beijing Review*, a Beijing government propaganda journal, praised "international news" in 1980, "it immediately became one of the most popular programs."⁵⁴ In fact, *Beijing Review* didn't exaggerate. In 1983, a television audience poll was conducted in the Zhejiang province, one of the richest provinces of China. The poll showed that *International News*, current affairs, and scientific and technology news, were the three most favored hard television news, respectively by 46.4%, 35.8%, and 32.2%. When asked if they trusted the television news or not, 94.4% of the people surveyed said they thought current affair news were trustworthy or basically trustworthy, while 88.2% told survey workers that they believed or basically believed the "international News" fed from satellite.⁵⁵ A survey among teenagers in the city of Hangzhou also claimed that Chinese teenagers ranked the "international News" program as the most preferred TV news (52.2%), second only to sports news (61.0%) and much higher than the third: accident reports (35.7%).⁵⁶

⁵³ Zhang Zhuangyi.

⁵⁴ *Beijing Review*. July 21, 1980.

⁵⁵ Dianshi Zhuanti Diaocha Xiaozu, "Jianshi guanzhong di zhuanti diaocha", 1984 *Zhongguo xinwen Nianjian*. (n=913)

⁵⁶ Dianshi yu qingshaonian zhuanti diaocha xiaozu, "Zhongxuesheng dianshi guanzhong di

Seven years after the immediate success of Visnews and UPITN in providing information to Chinese audience about the world, the CCTV took a national survey which showed some very dramatic opinions. According to the survey, 51% of the respondents said they were "satisfied," and 30% "relatively satisfied" with the international news, when asked how they liked to evaluate the role played by TV news to "introduce all kinds of important news in the world." The survey analysts even noticed that when watching *United Broadcasting News*, the enthusiasm of the audience was more with international news section than with domestic one. "It is a widely held opinion," the Chinese researchers wrote, "that the viewing interest of the audience is more for the international news than for domestic news."⁵⁷ The popularity of Visnews and UPITN was so phenomenal that for more than ten years the CCTV did not have the intention to replace them with its own international reports. The big audience slice enjoyed by the Western news suppliers is not in any danger so far.

In Deng's China, 35% of television viewers watched literally from beginning to end (tv commercials were not allowed in the evening news), while 41% claimed their watching behavior was more selective -- they only paid attention to whatever they were interested in. Survey workers pointed out in their report that international news, supplied by Western news suppliers, was among the "more attractive" programs. Why? The fundamental reasons, we were told by the researchers, were that the "international news" fed in by the Western media, was fast-paced and informative, while the domestic news, which

zhuanti diaocha", 1984 *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian*. (n=529)

⁵⁷ 1987 *Quanguo Dianshi Guanzhong Chouyang Diaocha*.

was manufactured by China's own media, was full of official "conference news", boring and stale.⁵⁸ In 1990 when giving a review of three-decade of CCTV development, Zhang cheered the participation of Visnews and UPITN in China's *United News* for "taking the evening news program a vivid and relatively complete and systematic coverage of domestic and international occurrences."⁵⁹ This revealed largely a popular mentality in China's communication professional and research arena. If the new leadership in Beijing would rather look at the world from a different perspective, so would the media.

The trendy approach in Deng's media in the 80's was that it was sick and tired of the traditional theme of "evil capitalism." The suspicion of the Communist regime's accountability and independent procliamator of socialism's "superiority" accumulated during the ten-year social revolution, pushed the Chinese media to have second thoughts about its old policy – promoting socialism by criticizing capitalism. (See Chapter 3 for more discussion of this issue.) The media professionals of the reform era hardly believed the continuing of a white-and-black denial of a more complicated international environment could accomplish anything. The new thinking of Deng's media was particularly bold and appealing to a new generation of audience, when Deng decided to "work" with the capitalist world to "modernize" the country. ("If you can't beat them, join them."- the American idiom also applies to China.)

China's television media did not enjoy the same revolutionary and heroic history as

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Zhang Zhuangyi.

the print press did. It started right in the middle of China's own bureaucratization in the 1950's. The television professional staff tended to be technocrats more than revolutionary agitator or propagandists. In fact, there was little opposition in television concerning purchasing and broadcasting Western news agency's international news. This is in strong contrast with China's revolutionary print press which has never allow any Western news dispatch to appear in its papers. In the 80's, Chinese television stations were more than eager to mix with Western news programs and technology. But one thing is for sure, Visnews and UPITN will never portray the world in the same way Mao would have liked to have done in his time. The central assumption that "socialism is superior to capitalism" was in fact ridiculed and wiped out by the success of the Western electronic media, in the name of "hi-tech," "immediacy," and "professionalism."

In addition, defending "socialist superiority" in news coverage also meant to draw a line between China's socialism and that of the ex-Eastern Blocs and the former Soviet Union. In the 1950's, under the slogan "today's Soviet Union will be tomorrow's China!" the Chinese media's propagating of the great fulfilment of the Soviet socialism marked the way for the Chinese socialism. The more successful Soviet socialism was, the more promising Chinese socialism looked. Therefore, the praise of such socialist countries as East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, North Korea, Cuba, etc. often carried the same implication: socialism as a political and economic system functioned contentedly worldwide. Almost all of the news dealing with that camp had a positive presentation and sometimes the coverage was excessive. According to Wang Yingxiu, senior editor of the *People's Daily*, the *Daily* devoted a great deal of space to reprint important

articles and speeches published by the Soviet media.⁶⁰ During the 19th Congress of the Soviet Union's Communist Party, for example, the *Daily* carried only three or four "Tofu-sized" small news stories to report China's domestic news, while it used the whole front, second, and third pages and rest of the fourth to cover another socialist country's party congress.⁶¹ In the old days, almost all of the stories about Eastern Bloc countries were considered imposing. News about the happy life on collectively owned farms, impressive achievements of modernization, close relationships of the masses with their Communist parties, and so on, were the indispensable international news, contrasting with the negative news about the West. By airing news on the socialist camp, China gained its international identification: it linked up with the international environment in an advantageous way by allying itself with other "brother socialist countries." Also, socialism, as understood by Chinese audience, wasn't a uniquely Chinese social system, but a universal practice. The daily message carried by Chinese communications was that they were with their international comradeship, marching towards a brilliant socialist tomorrow.

However, the identification with an international socialist camp several times got China entrenched in deep trouble. The disagreements among China, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and the Italian Communist party accelerated in the late 50's and early 60's from verbal dispute to furious polemic attacks. The most famous debates were openly carried by the Chinese news media. Numerous political group meetings, working

⁶⁰ Wang Yingxiu. "On learning from the Soviet press", *Renmin Ribao Hui lu*. 1988.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

seminars, and collective listenings took place in China's big cities to politicize the Chinese people, especially the young. I myself as a young teenager was often one of this loyal listeners, and participating in heated discussion. The solemn voice of broadcasters and pages of debates made us very excited, believing the international revolutionary cause had been shamelessly betrayed by the Soviets and their followers and that we must defend with our life and our youth. The disputes marked the open announcement of China's departure from the once happy-ever-after socialist camp. The hostility between China and other socialist countries forced China's news media to abandon the priority these countries used to have to be covered as socialist models.

Still, socialism, supposedly as the most advanced and promising system in human history, persistently remains the number one newsworthy story. The confrontation between China and the former Soviet Union as well as its satellites, compelled the Chinese news media to switch its socialist model coverage to the other Marxist countries that were either on bad terms with the Soviets or kept a neutral position. Among these was North Korea which rose to be one of the major news stars in Chinese international coverage up until now. North Vietnam, which had disputes with China on border issues during the 1980's despite China's consistent support for its war against the U.S. in 1960-70, occupied China's official news bulletin for years.

In Europe, Albania was another interesting alternative. It wasn't the concern of Mao's media as an ideal foreign socialist country until the mid-1960's when China felt betrayed by the Soviets and Beijing's foreign news reports about Moscow all turned

negative. The friendship between China and Albania was dramatically boosted by both countries' media. As a socialist model, Albania was extolled by the Chinese press for its political and economic independence under the pressures of global capitalism. However, its rigid Marxist orthodoxy strongly disagreed with China's reconciliation with the U.S. after 1972. A few years later, socialist Albania quietly disappeared from the Chinese press. Mao's media finally dumped Albania after an Albania-mania for a decade but the inconsistency of media policy towards socialist countries widely upset the Chinese people.

In the history of Chinese media's coverage of the socialist movement after WW II, Romania was probably the most enduring news figure honored by China's press. Functioning as China's closest comrade-in-arms when the latter rebelled against Soviet hegemony, and a match-maker between China and the United States by working with Chou Enlai and Henry Kissinger, Romania's socialism, as reported by the Chinese media, was always glorious and progressive. The collapse of world Communist in 1989 brought Romania's privileged position in China's print press to an end. When the 1989 Romanian Revolution finally broke out and then President Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena Ceausescu were executed by his opposition troops, China's authoritative press adopted an unprecedented low-key position. The death of China's former socialist ally was described by only one sentence, short, cold and very business-like, dispatched by Xinhua News Agency from Bucharest the same day the execution was carried out.⁶² As a

⁶² See the international news in the *People's Daily*, December 27, 1989.

matter of fact, Beijing journalists decided to put an end to its promotion of a once-flourishing international socialism, and its history. Though painful, the Chinese news media bid farewell to and buried the socialist ideal in a special way -- the American invasion of Panama generated the news headlines, while the Romanian Communism regime fell apart.

Soon after Mao's death in 1976, the Chinese news media, though not abandoning socialism as a pivotal part of its news priority, finally gave up the idea of advocating a worldwide socialist movement. The experience of more than two decades with an intricate international socialist circle proved that it is too costly and inefficient to search for *the* socialist model, when socialism was only actually fledgling, and the success of a socialist experiment seemed to largely depend on each individual country's historical/cultural heritage. The task thereafter turned internally to focus on China's own socialism -- "the socialism with Chinese characters." The idea of building a Chinese-style socialism -- free market economy, open-door policy, political relaxation and pragmatism -- again shows the country's commitment to socialism, though not one orthodoxly concerned with a socialism Mao would agree with.

4. News Value Of A Socialist Role Model

As Chinese, we have worshiped hundreds and thousands of role models over our entire lives. But, never have we had as many models as since 1949. As a school girl, I got to learn about the "most loved men" of my life, the heroic soldiers who fought the

arduous war in Korea against U.S. imperialism. Although the war happened even before I was born, the war heroes as well as many other heroes accompanied me, and my entire generation in New China, all the way to the Cultural Revolution. The stories were written and delivered to us by the state news media, which I joined more than two decades later.

What can be taken as a contrast is the system of American role models I learned of after starting my Ph.D. study in the United States. One of California's role models, was a Vons grocery store manager and Father of the Year because he worked hard and maintained a lovely nuclear family. Behind the stories of models, I sensed the news values appreciate different individuals: the Man we want vs. the Man they want. At least in 1987 I wouldn't, were I a working journalist, have had recommended a man without a party affiliation or a clear political attitude for the Father of the Year.

The significance of Chinese role model stories, is not the role models themselves, they are too deified to even get close to, but the messages radiating from the news. Readers and audience are shown by the Chinese press *the* values of a New Socialist Man. The normal criteria used by Chinese journalists to select and write about socialist men, however, weren't simple.

The Man the Chinese media looks for is a hero. In Margaret Mead's term when she analyzed the Soviet attitude, it is the "Bolshevik ideal personality."⁶³ As an anthropologist, Mead interpreted the new man of the former USSR as a hybrid of "Puritan fathers of

⁶³ Margaret Mead (1951). *Soviet Attitudes Toward authority*. Cited from *Four Theories of the Press*.

New England" and "a complete subjection of the individual to the control of the Party."⁶⁴ Schramm also acknowledges that there is a frightening responsibility for the "Promethean leadership" of the Party and the socialist heroes.⁶⁵ In the classical Chinese Communist journalism principles, role models function as the middlemen between the masses and the Party wise men. The press needs to locate somebody who can embody the values of a given period of time. They are media-created characters with real names and addresses.

What values do they represent? Why wouldn't a classical Communist journalist cast his eyes on, say, the "man of the week" promoted by the American media? What marks the profound dissimilarity between the personal stories reported by the American media professionals and those by Chinese counterparts?

Generally speaking, U.S. news admires individuals who most of the time are underdogs, not wealthy or well cultivated, but who dare to go through a hellish of ordeal to seek truth. While having the tendency to be against establishment, American role models are successful career climbers, driven by the dream of self-made millionaires. H. Gans points out in his book, that "the good society of the news is populated by individuals who participate in it, but on their own terms, acting in the public interest, but as they define it."⁶⁶ Dan Hallin also notices the underdog character of U.S. media. "Television loves

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Wilbur Schramm (1963). *Four Theories of the Press*.

⁶⁶ H. Gans (1980). *Deciding What's News*. Gans believes that "individualism" is one of crucial values of U.S. media look for.

nothing more than a story about a 'little guy' who stands up to the 'powers that be'"⁶⁷
 Other political culture critic, for example, Herbert Schiller, argue against the individualism of the U.S., thinks it is nothing but a "myth."⁶⁸

China's national heroes, however, bear different cultural messages. With forty years of revolution, Chinese Communists tried to create a socialist new man on top of an ancient culture, assigning the new values to the man who acts in the "brave new world." China does not have the historical heritage of the New England Puritanism nor the Greek Prometheus. But the traditional oriental cultural does grant role models a similar spirit of self-sacrifice and discipline. The innate Confucianism which advocates the ultimate improvement of a "perfect man" plus the concept of social involvement and responsibility derived from Marxism-Leninism, e.g., "Proletariats can't emancipate themselves until the whole of humankind is emancipated"⁶⁹ synthesize an ideal citizenship of Mao's, and somehow, Deng's China.

The socialist new man is not equivalent to U.S. underdogs, but he is not a model Communist party member either. It was not the intention of the ruling Communists to transform every ordinary Chinese into a Communist in the first place. The limitation of party members of about five per cent of the population is needed to remain elitist. Then who could be a national role model and worshiped eternally? In what way can a common Chinese citizen be promoted and confirmed by authorities as a socialist new man?

⁶⁷ D. Hallin (1986). "We keep America on the top of the world", *Watching Television*.

⁶⁸ Herbert Schiller (1965). *Mind Manager*.

⁶⁹ Karl Marx.



The man is supposed to be politically conscious, an active participant in social activities, industrious, disciplined, with little self-interest and ready to sacrifice his personal life for a public cause. The candidates for this distinguished Chinese personality come from a wide range. The news media would maintain an all-year-around promotion for such role models as Communist martyrs who forfeit their lives and happiness over a long revolutionary period of time for the birth of a socialist China; and aging party and governmental officials who have a legendary past and continue working for the building of a socialist China. In this regard, the prominent members of the Communist pantheon from Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai to Deng Xiaoping and those members of the Central Party Committee and Central Party Consultation Committee, most of whom experienced the bloody 1927 *coup*, the Long March, the anti-Japanese War, life of decades in South China's Soviets and Yanan base, are qualified examples. In the U.S., politicians and public office holders are the target of media scrutiny, while in China, they are born to be national role models.

Yet, those are not the people of rank and file. Making them social models run certain risks. Ranking party and governmental officials, despite the incredible hardships they went through during the revolutionary wars, are resented more often than by the Chinese masses because of the social status and perks they enjoy in a supposedly equal society. The rituals of worshipping revolutionaries of the older generation performed on national television and in the print media leads to cynical critique when the young people claim that the lack of opportunity for them to achieve higher goals makes the ritual meaningless. Although the country's news media maintain a schedule of showing the merits of

the "proletarian revolutionaries of the older generation" on regular national revolutionary holidays and during important conventions, the news media constantly reaches out for fresh faces from the younger generation of ordinary Chinese who can more efficiently carry national values.

In China's long history, ordinary people have hardly had any chance to be national models, unless they rebel against a feudal dynasty burning royal palace down to the ashes as a leader of a peasant uprising.⁷⁰ The new China after 1949 to some extent did provide ordinary Chinese with a chance to be famous and recognized. People who worked back-breaking jobs, who fulfilled a miraculous production quota, who grew from a country girl to a high-skilled textile worker, etc. are picked up by Chinese reporters to be praised on national or local media. In Beijing, a well-known role model, among many others, before the Cultural Revolution was a city sanitary worker, who cleaned old-fashioned toilets for Beijing residents everyday. Shi Chuanxiang, a Shangdong peasant-turned-public-service-worker, pledged to love his job and worked it to his last day. His devotion and self-sacrifice inspired hundreds and thousands of Beijing youth, the latter also pledging that, when they were old enough, to do the same thing. The work place of Shi and his buddies became the popular shrine of the socialist new man, where people poured in from all over the country to "just work with Master Shi" for one or two shifts so as to comprehend the spirit. Even Wan Li, the then deputy mayor of Beijing, and now deputy chairman of standing committee of National People's Congress, cleaned alley households

⁷⁰ Xiang Yu, one of the peasant upheaval leaders, burnt the whole compound of the magnificent palace of emperor of Qing to the ground in 207 A.D..

toilets with Master Shi, and they became close friends.⁷¹ Master Shi Chuanxiang was Beijing media's favorite. He was more appealing to ordinary citizens in terms of some traditional Chinese values.

There are, at least, two primary characters distinguishing American role models and Chinese ones. First, Chinese role models are perpetual. Once an individual becomes a hero, especially a national one, he/she will be ritualized and live in the pantheon forever, except for some short-lived heroes, produced for apparently political reasons during the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese news media usually presents role models in a storm-like campaign, such as bombarding news stories, television documentaries/docu-dramas, radio interviews, followed by a series of how the model's spirit inspires the followers. The expected values are usually confirmed and regenerated through the moral campaign. Some role models joined the Party leadership later on, e.g., two textile workers became ministers of textile. American role models most of the time are local models, except for some civil rights activists such as Rosa Parks, and they tend to disappear fast.

Second, Chinese role models are officially sponsored by the media as part of the creation of an important media campaign. They are often selected by local party and governmental organizations first and then promoted by the media. American ones tend to be the favorites of a variety of news media, from ABC's "man of the week", to *Time's* "man of the year", to the "Channel Ten Award" a TV program run by an affiliate of ABC

⁷¹ Shi was persecuted to death in the Cultural Revolution, while Wan who was under attack himself couldn't save him at all.

in San Diego that promotes role models. The decentralized format determines that he or she is only *A* model, not *the* model. Boosted by an official news media, the Chinese role model bears more authority and responsibility.

The function of a role model is to embody certain values. For Chinese news institutions, devoting much print space and many time slots to promote moral people happens because the underlying values fit into the media's criteria of news selection. The finding of a model is usually in two ways. Reporters, after discovering a possible model during his/her work, consult with their superiors and, if the criteria is met, the role model will appear on the front page. Sometimes, reporters would be assigned to interview an model worker or soldier, whom are normally elected by co-workers quarterly or annually. If the material sounds fresh and encouraging, the model worker would be promoted by the media as a public example. There are, from time to time, conflicts between journalists and role models. The sweeping campaign that is set and led by the news media often catches the model in very embarrassing situations. The social responsibility and moral pressure entrench him/her in such an environment that no one is able to live a normal life.⁷² At this point, some model workers would beg reporters and television producers to spare them and not to destroy their privacy. The clash somehow results in another media trend to promote role models -- promoting dead ones instead of live ones.

⁷² According to Chinese journalists accounts and critique, media campaign often leads role models to be isolated in his/her work place. The consequence is that "the flower blooms inside the wall but the fragrance is sensed outside." See Liu Shiping (1988). "The philosophical thought of role model campaign". *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1989*.

Among the dead Chinese national role models, none is more famous and far-reaching than a young soldier named Lei Feng. But, before we discuss Lei Feng and the media campaign which emerged in 1964 and has lasted until today, let's trace the development of Chinese role models since 1949. In the early 1950's, a socialist new man in the eyes of China's print media -- electronic media was very much a late comer -- shed light on "three goodnesses," being healthy, learned, and hard-working.⁷³ These goodnesses were proposed by Mao and delivered to young students for them to follow. The virtues the media rallied for were fairly modest. Much to the surprise of the leftists' standards during the Cultural Revolution, Mao's early requirements for his new young followers leans more towards Confucian doctrines of being a gentleman. Mao even placed "healthy" at the top of the list instead of political commitment of any kind. The rigidity of a socialist new man emerged in the late 1950's, when the anti-rightist campaign had just been launched. The new man had to be both "red" and "specialized." (being "healthy" became a lesser priority) Obviously, the Chinese individual preserved by news in the 1950's tended to be a politically and professionally perfect man. Careerism was on the list of media workers, while social involvement was highly recommended. However, news media's selection and promotion of values had its ups and downs. In the Cultural Revolution, the press launched a bigger campaign to deny the "specialized" role models. This created enormous confusion as thousands of ex-models were humiliated and became notorious for their poisonous "bourgeois knowledge." The ideological hurricanes which constantly swept the 1960's and 1970s drove news values of a socialist new man

⁷³ Zheng Derong, *Mao Zedong Sixiang Fazhan Shi*. 1991.

again and again towards its extremes.

But none of the national figures portrayed by news media can be expressed more effectively than Lei Feng. He is no "rugged individual" greatly appreciated by the American media. Being an poor orphan in one of the devastated southern Chinese villages before 1949, Lei Feng was rescued and trained by the local party organization and governmental office. Later on, Lei Feng was recruited by the army and died in a traffic accident in 1963 at the age of 24. The big deal about the young military soldier is that the media loved him as a saint who advocated a list of virtues. He is the most eternal and respected moral model created and deified by Chinese Communist journalism in the age of both Mao and Deng. The deal between this greatest role model in Chinese Communist history is mutually beneficial. From the national media, Lei Feng achieved his legitimacy and authority after his death; from Lei Feng, the national media made a hero which at least journalists believed would carry the right message and "educate" a whole new generation. His unquestionable loyalty to the CCP and the Communist cause as a devoted disciple of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism made of the ideological color of this young soldier, which generated an incredible bulk of news stories on innumerable Chinese individuals who had done similar deeds in almost three decades.

Still, Lei Feng is no ideological puppet. One of the reasons why Lei Feng has been treated as a national character is that he represents the traditional Confucian values. Loving, caring for people, cultivating himself to be a perfect man and an indispensable part of the society. The conformity and congruence the media love to promote also guarantee

Lei Feng's acceptance by Chinese society as a whole. In fact, ordinary Chinese are not concerned about political loyalty – it's pretty much a media standard for news selection, just like I wouldn't vote for a Vons grocery manager to the Father of the Year. People appreciate Lei Feng's self-sacrifice and his love of the community. He donated all of his little military allowance to the poor and the needy for emergency areas devastated by catastrophies and famines. He went to local district schools to get in touch with problem students. On an impulse, Lei Feng would work during weekends on a construction site for free. He was ridiculed as being "foolish." But in the pinnacle of the Cultural Revolution, the fanatic Chinese loved this "foolishness" and believed in the Utopia. In this sense, Lei Feng is much less a Communist than a follower of Confucia. The Chinese media skillfully employed the national passion and cultural identity to reinforce a much older value system. Almost all of Lei Feng-like national heroes are active members of the community. Daring to sacrifice one's personal fulfillment and pursuits for family and social interests are exactly the messages sought and disseminated by the state media.

The idea of being a civilized man who mixes together the ancient Chinese gentry class' perfection and modern Marxist political commitment and iron discipline, has been severely challenged by the new ethic of the country's news media since 1980. Overall, the old heroes are not obsolete yet, but the new ones are right around the corner. The national role models Chinese media love to deal with in the post-Mao era have nothing to do with the leftover ones from the last political tide. The brand new national heroes are self-made entrepreneurs, college-trained general managers, scholar-turned-corporate-presidents, three-piece-suit professionals, off-beat politicians, and citizens coming up

with unofficial ideas. These Chinese do not resonate the age-old values; rather, they represent the new spirit released by Deng's economic and political reforms. They are loved especially by journalists of the younger generation: not laid-back but aggressive enough to pursue their own interests. In the past ten years or so, Deng's reformers had opened the door to hundreds and thousands of "entrepreneurs," from peasants and workers, to schools and public organizations.

The tradition of enjoying a small-town intimate atmosphere and loyal ties with well-extended family members, which results from China's thousands-year-long agricultural lifestyle, are also losing attraction in the eyes of reform-minded media. Facing the new social tide, Deng's press found it abandoned old-fashioned models and "reporting Reform characters." One thing I want to point out here is that how news media deals with a swiftly changing social revolution, the balancing constantly happening between media values and social values. In a country like China, radical social reforms undoubtedly cause reformation of its value system. As the most prominent information disseminator and value generator, the news media itself tries to deliver new values to help reform the society at the same time it has to go through enormous change itself. In the beginning of rapid social reform or crisis, media tend to drag behind, refusing new values and allying with old ones. It is not until the tide is formed that they function as a public opinion leader.

The following is the result of a 1983 survey on national role models. Here, the Chinese media showed the interviewees its preference of the values displayed by heroes.

Much to its surprise, the Chinese reform-minded media professionals discovered they lag somewhat far behind current social values.

Table 1. 1983 survey of national role models.

A	B	Values	Scores
1	3	intelligent, knowledgeable, loves to learn	1,817
2	4	enterprising spirit	937
3	11	patriotic and national integrity	900
4	1	lives a simple life and works hard	714
5	7	independent thinker who dares to speak out	674
6	6	concerned with social issues and problems	487
7	12	fast to accept new thinkings	363
8	2	studies Marxist works diligently	288
9	5	likes to help others	287
10	9	hard-working	188
11	8	obedient and disciplined	180
12	10	cares about collectives and sacrifices oneself for the public interest	108

A represents the preferred order of interviewees. N= 1,116.

B represents Beijing news media's preferred order.

Source: "Beijing chengshi qingnian dui xuanchuan zhanghaidi de fanxiang", March 1983. *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1983*

The questionnaire shows that in the early 1980's, Chinese social values changed even more radical than did the media's. When media advocated a "socialist new man" with the spirit of individual initiation, the society's younger generation were ready to dump the old obedience and self-sacrifice. For example, "study Marxist works diligently" which the media valued as the second important virtue for a "new socialist man," was ranked eighth by readers. The traditional values popular in the 1970's and 1980's, such as "obedient," "disciplined," and "sacrificing" were ranked exceptionally low by the media already but still turned out to be some of the least appreciated values for a "socialist new man" in the eyes of Chinese youth. What we can conclude is that in 1983, the news values for national role models combined the different values of two generations; the Communist press surprisingly leaned towards the conservative. The survey analysts admitted that the press has to recognize the "socialist new man": a man who was a hybrid of values, old and new -- studies Marxism, lives a simply life but is intellectually open and enterprisingly aggressive.

Three years later in 1986, the Public Opinion Institute of the Chinese People's University conducted another survey in the Beijing area on national role model in which media values were found by very close to social values.

Table 2. 1986 survey in Beijing area on role models.

A	B	Ideal national role models	Scores
1	1	established scientist	1,389
2	3	gold-medal athlete	1,347
3	2	sacrificing own life for saving others	1,115
4	5	ambitious, successful, but controversial, reformers	1,101
5	4	indomitable, learn to be professional	1,036
6	9	explorer and pioneer	956
7	8	diligent and conscientious	757
8	6	caring and helpful	572
9	7	renowned artist, actor/actresse, writer	298
10	10	other	40

A represents the orders of readers' interests.

B represents the original orders of the investigators.

N = 1,336

Source: "Beijing Ribao renwu xuanchuan di zhuan ti diaocha", The Institute of Public Opinion, Chinese People's University. *Zhongguo xinwen Nianjian 1987*.

We can see clearly from the above table that in the late 1980's news values became more representative of current social values. News media started paying much less attention to out-of-date models. In 1986, being an ardent Marxist follower, caring for others' welfare at the expense of one's own interest, and living a simple life were watered down by journalists, if not totally ignored. Trying to catch up with the reforms, the Chinese media constantly justified its new policy on role models: "They (scientists and gold-medalists) symbolize," argued the survey designers, "a successful example of realizing one's dreams and contributing to the society through individualistic efforts." Also, they suggested that "ambitious and controversial reformers" embodied the spirit of 'Challenger' (U.S. spaceship)", which would be "understood" even if it was a "failure." The increasing denial of "sacrificing" and "caring" indicated the change of social morals. The Chinese media scholars concluded that news values and propaganda methods must be updated in order to meet new social taste of China's national role models.

However, the old revolutionary spirit dies hard. And that requires national opinion leaders to walk a fine line: not to offend other Chinese who are suspicious of what is happening in the Communist world. Especially the die-hards within the Party Central committee. In 1980, right after the free-market reform took off, Marshal Yie Jianying, one of the CCP's and Red Army's founding fathers, raised the necessity of "building high-quality socialist spiritual civilization." It was read then as a signal of resistance to any possible "invasion of Western ideas and culture," which might dare to take advantage of Deng's open-door policy. But, the concept of a socialist spiritual civilization was not an overreaction towards Western values and should not be interpreted as anti-foreignism.

The idea targets the corruption and power abuse nurtured in the Cultural Revolution.

The decreasing moral standards brought out by the furious ten years of the Cultural Revolution were regarded as the worst damage ever done to Chinese Communist culture and values. Lei Feng's spirit was trashed in the power-mania of the last half of the Revolution and the newly-developed entrepreneurism in post-Mao time pushes self-sacrifice to the edge of extinction. Interestingly, the one who was most furious about the disappearance of old-fashioned role models was Deng Xiaoping himself, the aging but still ambitious architect of China's Communist reforms.

One day Deng retold a political joke in one of the Politburo meetings in his early years after his rehabilitation in 1977. The joke concerned Lei Feng, the veteran national role model and the most thoughtful and obedient one. On a Beijing public bus, Deng told his Politburo colleagues, an old grandma and her little grandson couldn't find a bus seat and had to desperately struggle against the bone-cracking crowd of indifferent people and the shaking caused by bumpy streets. The innocent boy asked his grandma why there was no one on the bus to offer them a seat. The grandma signed, "Sweetheart, because Uncle Lei Feng is dead." Obviously, it was the grandma's despair and sarcasm that hurt and shocked Deng -- the China he was going to rule is an immoral and ruthless society devastated by a long-time political upheaval.

The grandma's witty critique and Deng Xiaoping's outrage were channeled down to every Chinese news institution soon after. In January 1981, the Central Committee of the

CCP issued a document, *Decision on Current Propaganda Policy of Press and Broadcasting*, stating that "without socialist spiritual civilization, a socialism can not be built."⁷⁴ The Decision quotes Deng's address to the Central Committee's working meeting: "The so called spiritual civilization not only includes education, science and culture, but also Communist thoughts, ideals, creeds, morals, disciplines, revolutionary stances and principles, and comradity between people, etc." Actually, this was Deng's response to the bus legend and the response to a demoralized society at large. In September 1986, five years after the first Decision, the CCP opened its Sixth Plenum of the Twelfth Central Committee and re-stressed the significance of the Communist social values. "The basic task of socialist spiritual civilization," claimed the resolution on guiding policy for building socialist spiritual civilization, "is to cultivate socialist citizens who have ideals, morals, literacy, and discipline."⁷⁵

The slogan "Learn from comrade Lei Feng!" was picked up once again to remoralize Chinese citizens to fit in with 1980's social life. In a media term, the model citizen was summarized as a "socialist news man of 'four haves'": having ideals, education, morals, and discipline. Thus, recovering traditional morals and Communist revolutionary values were journalists' assigned tasks.

The news values employed by media workers for the "socialist new man" was at a crossroad. Intimacy, conformity, devotion, group identification, and industry, which fun-

⁷⁴ *People's Daily*. January, 1981.

⁷⁵ Zheng Derong, et al. *Mao Zedong Sixiang Fazhan Shi*.

damentally belong to a peasantry-turned-Communist culture in the past decades found themselves challenged face-to-face by competence, inquiry, risk-taking, and individual engagement and achievements which are more related to a wheeling-dealing capitalist economy and social environment. Journalistic creeds have been interestingly confused; what appear in the press and on the screen are a mix of opposite social values. Because nowadays, the trendy and also popular models are non-Lei Feng, more and more news stories are devoted to glorify the new values. And the new role models promoted have proved their newsworthiness. In other words, they are more marketable commodities.

5. Socialism and Human Interest Stories

There are myths about human interest stories. They are held as "not serious," but necessary for a commercial or publicly financed news media. Some theories direct the emergence and development of it to a social and psychological need while others suggest that it symbolizes a kind of capitalist democracy. However, the crucial myth to some extent is that human interest stories are hallmarks of the Western democratic press alone and that generally, a Marxist-Leninist communication system does not have much appreciation for them. Does this assumption hold water? If not, why?

On the other hand, from the perspective of classical Communist journalism, human interest stories are basically the innovation of "yellow boys," people like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. News stories of this kind are regarded as heavily characterized by scandals, sex, sensation, and crime. The readers who follow human interest

stories are bourgeoisie or the innocent young who have been allured. The most traditional example taught in China's journalism school after 1949 on the Western human interest story convention is "man-bite-dog." The *Chicago Sun* editor's joke functions as the ultimate summary and exact image of human interest stories in China.

According to the standard of Western journalism, the Communist press is probably one of the least exciting presses in the journalistic profession, partly because it lacks human interest stories. During a study of 1977-78 on Asian journalism, Wilbur Schramm and Erwin Atwood find that the New China News Agency, the primary state news service of China, rarely reports accidents, disasters, violence, or court trials when making news exchanges with international news services and delivering to subscribing papers. These kinds of news, Schramm and Atwood point out, are "aberrations" in the eyes of Chinese newsmen, while Western readers think of as some of the most exciting parts of their news.⁷⁶ The time when Schramm and Atwood conducted their media research in Hong Kong on Chinese news media was one or two years after the Cultural Revolution, one of the most inconvenient times to do research on this subject. During the ten-year Cultural Revolution, politicization and involvement of news media in both public and private affairs escalated to their peak, which undoubtedly pushed basically a-political human interest stories to the far back seat, even if some did exist before. Even without the Cultural Revolution, carrying "soft" news was not at all the strong point of a Marxist-Leninist media. It would not be exaggerating to state that paying much less attention to

⁷⁶ W. Schramm and E. Atwood, *Circulation Of News In The Third World, a study of Asia*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1981.

dramatic, entertaining, and personalized stories in news has been one of the main signatures of all Communist journalisms. For example, Ellen Mickiewicz found, based on her own survey in 1984-85 of ABC and Soviet *Vremya* television programs, that when American TV programs carried 6% human interest stories, the Soviet counterpart only 0.6%.⁷⁷

However, there have to be some rationale behind the Communist journalism's hostility towards human interest stories. In China's press history, human interest stories in particular and social news in general were an indispensable part. Rather than a journalistic form imported from abroad accompanied with the Western capitalist expansion, news on individual anecdotes and natural disasters had composed of *Peking Gazette*, a Chinese royal news bulletin circulated until the collapse of the last feudal dynasty, Ching dynasty (1644-1911). For example, as early as in 1626, *Peking Gazette* reported a news on the explosion of a Peking ammunition depot. According to the report, tens of thousands of residential houses were blown off, death toll went up to more than 10,000, and even a pair of 2,500 kg heavy stone lions flew miles away by the explosive airwave. The vivid description of the scene was no less sensational than any modern journalism. "With the explosion," the royal paper wrote, "human heads and bloody bodies fell down constantly from the sky along the Everpeace Boulevard," the royal street of Peking. At the site of the ammunition warehouse which caused the disaster, "scattered human hands and feet" could be seen everywhere.⁷⁸ *Peking Gazette* is a court news-letter mainly carrying

⁷⁷ E. Mickiewicz, *Split Signals*.

⁷⁸ Fang Hanqi. *Baokan shihua*, 1981.

emperors' orders, subjects' reports, official assignments and recalls. However, news dealing with social interest were also valuable to *Gazette* editors. Although principally, the publishing of human interest stories in *Gazette* didn't aim to stimulate circulation -- the *Gazette* then didn't target to make a profit, the paper was permitted to be sold in the street and subscribed to by a special readership, including feudal bureaucrats and administrators, urban gentry class, and rich merchants.⁷⁹ The appearance of social news then seems to indicate a pure enjoyment of information and entertainment. Peking at that time was a big metropolis with a population of nearly half a million.

In 1949 almost four decades after the end of *Peking Gazette* in 1911, Mao's Communist press took over the designing and managerial power of national communication. Human interest stories felt the pinch of a dissimilar journalism. With Mao's liberation army swept most of the major cities of China, which were occupied by Nationalists, the new social orders and moral codes were forcefully introduced. Prostitution, gambling, drug dealing as well as mafia of an underground society, were eventually incriminated and under control. A large chunk of the old press which concentrated on seeking and selling stories of sex, murder, trials, kidnapping and personal privacy, were out of business. The new journalism of the new China created by Mao's Communist beliefs and military forces, set an example for an appropriate Marxist news media. Not only were the size, content, and format changed, but also the concept of news. The judgement of the value of human interest was one of the fundamental journalistic transformation in Mao's era.

⁷⁹ Fang Hanqi. *Zhongguo Xinwen Shiyie Jianshi*. 1983. Recited from Zhang Guoshen, "Shehui xinwen di diwei, tedian he zuoyong," *Xinwen Xuehui Tongxun*, 1982, No.1.

One reason for Communist journalism to dislike human interest stories or dislike the way human interest is reported by traditional Western press, is its understanding of the function of journalism. In a Communist view, news is not simply encoded Chinese characters. News plays the role, at first, of an instrument pursuing certain political and social causes. In Mao's words, news undertakes the great task of "organizing," "inspiring," "fostering," "criticizing," and "generating." These are glorious crusades, if not noble, with heavy and serious societal responsibilities. Human interest stories emphasizing everyday life and deviant social behaviors look too humble for a Communist party's organ to be concerned with. And it would be too humiliating for the same journalism to merely juxtapose a soft feature story on a juicy movie star with the Communist party's solemn policy announcement.

The second reason is more cultural than political. It seems to be a preference of one way of living over another. Among the tons of books I have read in graduate school, the one about a town mouse and a country mouse amused me the most. The town mouse lives in big cities and obviously has a different philosophy from those in the country. He tries to show the country mouse "How nice a life could be!" but his country cousin only feels comfortable in his own shabby, yet cosy, cabin, eating root and barley corn. It is a life of vanity fair vs. a life of peaceful simplicity. Interestingly, Herbert Gans also found some similar cultural characteristics of "enduring values" preferred by the U.S. media. In his study of American journalism in the 70's, Gans argues that American social values after two hundred years of a capitalist establishment, still prefer small-townism, Protestant working ethics and simple lives. The classical Chinese Communist journalism, in a

sense, is analogous to the country mouse character. If it is out of character to imagine that an official political party's press runs apolitical news, it is too very unlikely to think of a country-based, peasantry-oriented Communist journalism appreciating social news belonging to a hustle-and-bustle metropolis.

A Chinese peasant's traditional judgment of the city is that towns are jungles full of crimes, frauds, and luxuries. Chinese Communist journalism had been lived, literally, among Chinese peasants for decades before entering cities, in their revolutionary bases which were often located in the poorest and the most isolated areas of the countryside. Facing the bewildering neon lights of a metropolis' street after 1949, the press, including its fledgling radio broadcasting sector, was suddenly nostalgic of the dim kerosene light it used for years. The sharp contrast in living standards led to a vital disagreement on the philosophy of life. Values such as diligence, frugality, simplicity, and temperance, which were historically associated with an agricultural society, unconsciously influenced the way the Communist media practitioner saw human interest stories. By instinct, most revolutionary journalists thought their interpretation about human interest were much more moral and serious than their bourgeois colleagues in the city. Naturally, Mao's pressmen could immediately spot the triviality and sexual degradation of human interest stories written by an old city press, even without bothering to employ Marxism to screen its ideological stuff first.

The life of Mao's journalists in the countryside was extremely tough. According to the records kept by Chinese media researchers, the Communist pressmen had to always

put up with hunger and poverty, as well as military threats and pressure from the Nationalists and Japanese troops. A great number of revolutionary journalists dedicated their lives to a cause they believed could bring to the country back its dignity and esteem, which always took political and military news for granted. More importantly, long country dwelling and a scarcity of material goods from newsprint to food, made them hold that frugality and thrift were the principles of a decent human life. "They were engaged during their spare time," observed Fang Hanqi, a Chinese journalism specialist, "in growing cereals and vegetables, spinning cotton thread, making their own shoes, and producing cultural products."⁸⁰ It was also an unwritten rule for Mao's country-based press that any piece of paper, no matter how small it was, had to be used on both sides before being tossed away, including envelopes. Even on the day of their triumph when they entered big cities to confiscate enemy newsrooms and printing machines, following the People's Liberation Army's tanks and military vehicles, Mao's country journalists brought with them their home-made dry food and ate it with cold water.

It is not unexpected that the Communist press did not feel comfortable with a city press. The former had an innate resistance to the latter's infamous city-dweller gossip, high-society scandals, and sensational crime stories. Neither could the former endure the stylish and extravagant way in which social news was disseminated, like huge but empty headlines and showy vocabulary. But how bad, or how "infamous" was the old press? Based on an investigation of the print press before 1919, Ge Gongzhen, China's journal-

⁸⁰ Fang Hanqi, *Zhongguo Xinwen Shiyie Jianshi*.

istic research founding father, categorized China's human interest news into two types, "social news," which includes poverty, suicides, hunger, sports, bandits, ceremonies, legal issues, and charity and "crime news," which consisted of homicides, kidnappings, robberies, drug abuse and gambling. The two kinds of news made up 13.5% to 39.2% of domestic news.⁸¹ In the next 30 years, from 1919 to 1949, Chinese city journalism developed much faster than ever before. Chinese-owned newspapers, periodicals, wire services, and radio stations, surpassed the missionary press which was established in the mid-19th century and owned usually by Western churches. City dwellers made up the largest readership and audience. To appeal to a city reader and listener, the pre-1949 press had to carry human interest stories to meet its financial need. During anti-Japanese War (1937-45) and Civil War (1945-49), the weak central government couldn't afford a national, even quasi-public, media and reporting human interest stories, or even concentrating on such stories to make a profit, had grown stronger. Yet, all this doesn't mean that Communist journalism was determined to drive all social news out of the city press. What the country press did, in fact, was to replace an "unhealthy" domain of human interest stories and social news with one honoring working-class and peasant values.

The emergence and development of social/cultural news with a human interest aspect in the Western world has been well discussed by Western social scientists in the context of a commercial press. Michael Schudson, in his *Discovering the News*, provides one of the best interpretations on the subject. He argues that American human interest

⁸¹ Ge Gongzhen, *Zhongguo Baoxue Shi*.

stories started with the Penny Press in the 1830's. The Penny Press, Schudson states, inaugurated U.S. journalism's extensive news coverage of the "police, courts, the commercial district, the churches, high society, and sports." "The penny papers," Schudson argues, "made the 'human interest story' not only an important part of daily journalism but its most characteristic feature."⁸² The human interest stories didn't merely stay in the penny press. Up through the last two decades of the 18th century, human interest stories became an indispensable element of the American press, though "yellow journalism" led at once to extremes. Interestingly, Schudson views social news in a positive tone. First, he believes the human interest story growth from the Penny Press is a sign of American democracy and, later, he interprets such news carried by popular newspapers like Pulitzer's *New York World* in the late 18th century, as offering guidance and counseling to working class people who were new, less literate, and less fortunate in modern city life.⁸³ In other words, Schudson suggests that human interest stories brought to readers the commonality of everyday life, which actually democratized an old genre where political opinions, commerce activities, and aristocratic life styles had dominated. No matter how vulgar the news was, how flamboyant the layout looked, working and middle-class people could read and get to know the ordeals of people like themselves. But this is obviously not what a Communist press conceives of. There is little connection, in the thinking of classical Maoist journalism, with a socialist democracy and human interest stories. Besides stating news as political cannon and a symbolic system preserving traditional

⁸² M. Schudson, *Discovering the News*.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Chinese values, Mao's pressmen clearly hold a conqueror's attitude towards the pre-1949 city press.

As a conqueror, Chinese Communist journalism enjoys, in fact, new power and privileges, which it had never dreamed of before, claiming that it is *the* institution influencing government policy and the public. The once marginal economically and technologically primitive news organization found itself authoritative, commanding, and popular. As the intellectual advisers for dozens of peasant uprisings in China's long feudal history, that the peasant rebels after overthrowing a dynasty, should set up their own "media and public relation center" so that the national public opinion could be controlled, Mao's Communist journalists also believed that their news media system should be the commander of China's media and consensus. Superior to its city competitors, in ideology, ownership, professionalism, including the way a human interest story is handled, the conqueror's communication system is undoubtedly *the model*, not the other way around. Its ambitious crusade was to transform a rainbow spectrum of diverse news media which constituted the pre-1949 news media.

As a result, the old-style societal news disappeared soon after Mao's revolutionary journalists secured their position in China's metropolitan areas. A brand-new nationwide communication infrastructure was thus fundamentally ingrained as the signature of the Communist press.⁸⁴ If the historical development of a U.S. press shows a continuity of a

⁸⁴ One of the best books, in English, on the Chinese communication infrastructure is Alen Liu's *Communications and National Integration in Communist China*.

commercial information industry, then the domination of Chinese Communist press after 1949, demonstrates a sharp discontinuity in the country's journalistic history. This means that the communication system denies the credibility of its predecessors. What the Chinese Communist press sought in 1949 was apparently the end of a national bourgeois press model which struggled under the pressure from both Communist media and foreign capitals. Mao's news media perceived the combat between as "ours" and "theirs" a proletarian position vs. a "bourgeois" stance.

Mao was determined to terminate the way human interest stories ran in the old press. And he succeeded. Human interest stories in China's media in Mao's time either disappeared quietly or went in another direction -- to be politicized. As we discussed earlier in this chapter, many news stories on accidents, natural catastrophes, social crimes, etc. were associated with a socialist system and the leadership of the CCP, rather than as pure entertainment or informational messages. For example, when reporting the situation of a poor rural county in Henan province, which suffered greatly from hunger, poverty and a severe winter, the Chinese media, without emphasizing the human cost of victims and finger-pointing, used the story to re-state the leadership of the county party committee in fighting the odds. Socialist superiority (over capitalism) was also implied by comparing the present situation of the county with the would-be situation (imagingly worse) under the old regime (Chiang Kai-shek's National government before 1949).⁸⁵ Similarly, the news of the U.S. moon landing was killed by editors because, far from being a human

⁸⁵ *People's Daily*. 1964.

interest story, the moon landing suggested an ideological setback for the Communists.

The Cultural Revolution made the "soft news" of the Chinese press very difficult. By the time the huge crowd of exciting American journalists poured into China in 1972, following President Richard Nixon's first visit to the country, human interest stories carried by the Chinese media had almost disappeared as a journalistic genre. Based on my own comparative research on the coverage of Nixon's first visit, I found that there existed an enormous gap between the U.S. press corp and China's press. Led by their human-interest instinct, American correspondents searched for any stories which could inspire the imagination of their home audience. Their stories ran from the unbelievably low price of live carp in local grocery stores to Beijing's ballerinas' naked thighs, the only place where the baggy Maoist pants didn't get in the way of appreciating a female body. The color of Chinese citizens' clothes -- the famous dull blue -- was one of the highlights appearing on the front page of the *New York Times* with the legendary biographies of a handful of Chinese Communist elites. The whole, very political, coverage of their president's history-making visit was exactly the U.S. media style -- a political instrument at the same time interested in selling detergents and morning cereals.⁸⁶ In contrast, the Chinese press did not seem interested in their American guests as common human individuals beyond them as politicians. The coverage of the high-quality, yet extremely witty, negotiations between Chou Enlai and Henry Kissinger, and even Mao-Nixon summit, the first time Chinese citizens had seen their Chairman in months, was mainly occupied by

⁸⁶ See Daniel Hallin's article "We keep America on top of the world." *Watching Television*, edited by Todd Gitlin.

dry official announcements and endless guest lists.

Natural disasters were largely neglected too, if they were not helpful in ideological battles. The 1976 Tanshan earthquake, one of the most destructive earthquakes in the 20th century which killed an estimated 800,000 Chinese, wasn't reported until an entire month later. The death toll remained a mystery for three years and was a vast under-reporting (242,000).⁸⁷

Even in the post-Mao era, the Chinese press still insists that "the social news of the proletariat is fundamentally different from that of the bourgeoisie." Zhang Guoshen, writing in 1982, elaborated on the nature of the "two kinds of human interest stories." The evilness of "bourgeois social news," in light of Zhang's analysis,⁸⁸

"is focusing on rapes, robberies, murders, suicides, obscenity, absurdity, and bad taste. ... And their social news mainly presents the negative side and rarely offers positive coverage. Their target is to sensationalize and exoticize, so as to attract readers, increase circulation, to make more money for the bourgeoisie, and serve a bourgeois politics."

The assumed interest confrontation between two major social classes, proletariat and bourgeoisie in a modern society, a conclusion reached by K. Marx more than one hundred years ago, still makes the Chinese Communist press believe that it should abolish any establishment of the the old society, including old society's press, once Communism wins the power. The suspicion and hostility of a "yellow" journalism operated under the Nationalist regime gave Mao's city-entering Communist press in 1949 all kinds of

⁸⁷ *Global Journalism*.

⁸⁸ Zhang Guoshen, "Shehui xinwen di diwei, tedian he zuoyong." *Xinwen Xuehui Tongxun*.

excuses to reduce, if not eliminate, human interest stories, or at least the way it was presented.

In the vocabulary of the post-Mao press, "human interest" stories are have never been a pure, lightly-loaded term. The nature of a socialist human interest report lies in that the hearty, moving news radiates moral guidance, educational awareness and socialist values. Pure enjoyment of entertainment doesn't exist. For example, *Guangxi Ribao*, Guangxi Daily, reported in 1981 that a young woman volunteered to live with and take care of five orphans at the cost of her own youth. The value attached to this social news was that the young woman's "noble ideology and merits ... will inspire and encourage people and promote socialist civilization."⁸⁹ Chinese reporters believed that one of the major differences between Chinese and American social news is that the former always tries to provide a audience with "guidance," while the latter just wants to offer interesting information or entertainment. "Social news," Zhang explains, "through facts, explicitly tells people what is in accordance with a socialist orientation and what belongs to a socialist spiritual civilization and what is rotten bourgeois ideology, leftover feudal ideas, and petty bourgeois influence."⁹⁰ In the communication theory of a Communist media, readers, as a matter of fact, are not sophisticated enough to make their own judgements when contacting news with human interest factors. The media, within a Communist system, shoulders the responsibility to help its audience/readers to "understand what they should do, what they shouldn't do, what is promoted and what is denounced."⁹¹ Thus, a

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Communist media has to draw a clear line between right and wrong. This is certainly an awesome task, for the line is not that easy to draw.

When studying the enduring values of human interest stories within a Communist information system, we may want to know what have been the consequences of these kinds of social news. Does the audience really enjoy them? What kinds of social effects have resulted during last 40 years? Are people happy with the social news they have read and watched? The available media surveys conducted by Chinese journalism in the 1980's (there was virtually no audience research during Mao's era) show an interesting phenomenon.

One of the direct consequences of reorganizing the way a human interest story is reported is the monumental politicization of the Chinese audience. If the content of news is always interpreted politically, instead of through human interest side, political news will be admired as the official mainstream information. Reading and being concerned with political issues would be desired and normal social behavior. After several decades of downplaying a-political aspects of human interest news, Chinese audiences have gotten used to paying more attention to the "serious," not the "trivial," side. Guiding the interest of the audience towards worthy, important, and "healthy" issues is exactly the mission of the media.

The majority of the Chinese audience told interviewers that their purposes of reading a newspaper or watching television, were to "be informed of Party's policies,"

"obtain knowledge" and lastly, to be "be entertained." *Beijing Ribao*, the Beijing Daily, found that 53.9% of its readers (the largest group) was interested in the coverage on "domestic politics." 46.9% (the second largest) stated they liked to read about "legal and social security" news, and 41.1%, "knowledge and anecdotes." The readers of Tianjing, the third largest city of the country, told *Tianjing Ribao*, the Tianjing Daily, in 1987 that the priority of their interest in news was as follows: international news (62%), political news (62%), sports news(57%), social news (57%), cultural news (39%), science news (33%), and financial news (29%).⁹²

Television, as a relatively new medium in China, appeals most to non-elite and working class people. However, a survey conducted by Chinese Central Television (CCTV) in 1987 in 27 provinces (except Tibet and Taiwan) and three municipalities which are directly under central government, indicates that the purpose of 68.6% of the audience who turned on their television sets was to obtain accurate information about international and domestic affairs. Only 49.7% claimed that the reason they watched television was to be entertained. In fact, according to the survey, 35% of TV viewers would watch the half-hour news program literally from beginning to the end, and 41% are interested in news and watch often⁹³ In one of the remote and less developed provinces of China, Yunnan, the loyal evening news viewers (watch every minute of it) claimed to be 40% of the audience and another 40% admitted that they "were interested

⁹² 1987 *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian*.

⁹³ In CCTV's half-an-hour evening news program, no commercials are allowed to interrupt. After the broadcasting of the news, fifteen minutes are given to air ads.

in."⁹⁴

However, Deng's ideological relaxation and the booming private sector of the country since mid-1980's brought a renaissance to human interest stories. Interestingly written, human factor involved, and yet more or less value-tuned news became more and more popular and it has been concerned as a new form of communication. Human interest story is no doubt easy to sell. In a changing political culture like Deng's China where ideological commitment and self-sacrifice are no longer seriously appreciated, the news which deals with "lightened up" human factors about all kinds of people not just model workers, has prospered. They have been smartly taken advantage of especially by non-Party organs, which counts for 80% of the total publications.

The very interesting scene in China today is that at the same time they are still very politically conscious and concerned about political affairs, Chinese audience reach out to look for "fun." A survey in 1989 shows that the readers of *Tianjin Daily*, ranked three social news sections, "Moral and law," "Seven-color society," and "Zoom out," among the most loved.⁹⁵ One of the respondents confessed that as a cadre his everyday reading habit was to jump to social news immediately after finishing the paper's headline news.⁹⁶ The same survey also found that the social news which was full of direct preaching and pure "duck-cramming," as forcefully feeding a Peking duck for a better dish, was disgusted the most.⁹⁷ In China's largest metropolis, Shanghai, *Jiefang Ribao*, Liberation

⁹⁴ 1987 *Quanguo Dianshi Guanzhong Chouyang Diaocha*.

⁹⁵ Li Ai, "Tianjin Ribao duzhe diaocha," 1990 *Zhongguo Xinen Nianjian*. (n=936)

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Daily, had been proud of its social news page, based on several readership surveys conducted by Shanghai City and Rural Area Survey Team during late 1980's. The section concerned itself of current social issues was evaluated by Shanghai readers as the "most favored" social/cultural section.⁹⁸ The issue of social news revitalization in China's media indicates the painful transition from a classical Marxist-Leninist media to a more open public institute. Still deeply influenced by Mao's media model, most readers don't think themselves as "consumers" or "spectators," but as "students" and conscious "followers" of media. *Liberation Daily's* social reporting page, for instance, was hailed as "invisible dear teacher," while editors and reporters of the paper viewed the function of their deed as "raising social issues, analysing social phenomena, guiding consensus, promoting positive values, and optimizing social environment."⁹⁹

How did China's classical Maoist journalists like to try some really hip human interest stories? They liked the idea very much. The reporters of the Cultural Revolution Generation were actually resentful of what they wrote in the nightmarish ten years and really looked for a new start. When the Party's Third Plenum of the Eleventh Congress officially claimed the ending of the Revolution in 1978, the journalism of that era was immediately under attack from all aspects of the society, including journalists themselves. It was characterized as being a "faction press" (of the Gang of Four) and operated the news which was "fake, exaggerative, and empty." The post-Cultural Revolution gen-

⁹⁸ Huang Jingyao, "Jiefang Ribao renmin guangchang fukan--tichu shehui wenti, yindao shehui yulun." 1990 *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian*.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

eration, influenced by Western journalistic writing style, were therefore expected to refuse to imitate their older colleagues's tradition. News has to be readable, the generation argues, which is especially crucial when the news story is about human beings. The college graduates freshly received their journalism degree tended to fall in love fast with Western "soft news" writing style: a touching lead, then stretching the juicy part and making it attractive, if not sensational.

Yet, among the first humanistically written news in the early Deng era was but an obituary -- a kind of news even Western reporters wouldn't make many efforts to make it interesting. Guo Lingchun, a woman reporter of the New China News Agency, shook Beijing journalistic circle by "revolutionizing" an obituary news. Guo wasn't famous nor controversial for a decade or so as a reporter of the state-owned wire service, until she wrote an unusual obituary in 1982, a Deng's era when reform was highly encouraged. The obituary was about Jin Shan, a veteran Communist stage actor a top administrator of an art and performance college, who died at 71.¹⁰⁰ The success of the obituary revealed the secret of Deng's journalism -- a journalism searching for common people's passion not a political party's aggressive mission. Written like a graceful prose, the obituary strongly distinguished itself from traditional monotonous death announcements. The Communist artist was depicted as an independent and creative human being, instead of a party hack.

¹⁰⁰ "Jinshan tongzhi zhuidaohui zai Beijing juxing," the *People's Daily*. July 16, 1982.

The news was honored the 1982 National Best News Award by being "ice-breaking" and "innovative." That was the year when I entered the graduate school of journalism of the CASS in Beijing. Guo and her prize-winning obituary story stirred up the classroom and newsrooms as well. We read the obituary again and again, debating among ourselves about the professional message sent by a story on one man's death. The excited journalism graduates suddenly saw the news writing in a different way. If obituaries can be reformed into a prose, then what cannot? Although in the following years, many journalists stated questioning the significance of writing an obituary from a human interest angle, a large number of pressmen realized that the door did opened up for them to try something less rigid and official, after one reporter tried a unique prize-winning obituary.

Chapter III

Journalists:

A Politically Committed & Privileged Community

My first assignment, as a journalism graduate student of the Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social sciences, working as an intern with the *People's Daily* in 1983, was to interview one of the deputy vice ministers of machinery of the People's Republic of China. It was not an impressive debut: I was nervous and the interviewee was a typical bureaucrat. But what stunned me and still makes me feel mysterious is a special kind of relationship. With his gray-haired head deeply buried in a pile of documents which he consulted from time to time, the deputy minister spoke to me, a reporter half as old as he was, with full respect. Obviously, at the moment, I was not, at least in his mind, a green-horn reporter, but a lifeline linking his political career to the Central Party Committee. A journalist of the *People's Daily*, no matter how young he or she is, bears ultimate authority.

Western journalism relates to political power in a completely different way from its a Communist counterpart. In the British political arena in the 18th century, the weight of the press was indicated by being the "fourth estate" sitting in and sharing parliament with Royalty, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons.¹ In the United States, press is

¹ Edmund Burke (1972). *The Fourth Estate*.

proud of itself as the "fourth branch" of the government and the "watchdog" of the public that reports and investigates activities of the power that be. The core of this fundamental modern power/media relationship in the West lies right in the media's detachment from the state. It has been proud of its political independence and cultivated the illusion further.

The logic then goes on to state that an "attachment" and "intimate association" with the country's political power would undisputably lead to political docility and corruption of the media. The media of the nation states such as China and the former Soviet Union are considered as politically lifelessness and media practitioners as pitiable hack writers, because the Communist party dominates almost every facet of society through its news media, and rips off the media's freedom of speech.

On the other hand, the media scholars and journalists of Communist countries have for decades mocked the fact that the ownership of communication organizations has been controlled under a handful conglomerates, and shows the narrow-mindedness and prejudice of upper class. In certain sense, the attacks from either side hit the soft lower belly of both Western democratic and Communist authoritarian communication systems. Yet, the question still remains, i.e. how a Mao's reporter and producer works in the country's daily life, besides being a party policy propagandist and mass work organizer? In what way, does a journalist involve him/herself in the political and social activities? And finally, how does a media worker understand and rationalize his position in such a communication sphere?

My journalistic education and life in China provided with me chances to experience the "untold stories" hidden to outsiders. The situation when meeting the deputy minister was repeated so many times that I would have felt strange if I were not treated as a link connecting the Central Committee and its subjects. Like my colleagues, senior or junior, I learned the privileged position of being a "tie" or a "bridge" between the power and the powerless, and learned to take advantage of my position to ask for political bargain. One of the legends among journalism students at my graduate school was about how the party's journalists get deeply involved in the country's political and economic affairs, and without doubt, the legend served as a role model to senior graduating journalism students. (The story tells that when a reporter from one of the local branches of *New China News Agency* messed up with the provincial party leadership, she was finally challenged by the outraged local elite: "Are you in charge here, or me?" "Both." She replied confidently.)

I also found the secret of how to get into a local party's not luxurious, but very comfortable, lodging when I was in a province gathering, news and how to get on the airplane at the last minute by just suggesting to the ticket clerk that I was under an important political mission, of course by showing him my *People's Daily* reporter's ID card. All of these are absolutely seen as "sins" in the eyes of my colleagues of older generation.

Many a time I encountered ordinary Chinese citizens, from sophisticated intellectuals to half-literate peasants, and realized how many expectations they had of the Com-

munist party media institution and its reporters. They told me all of their sorrows and happiness. Sometimes, a request was made to petition a certain economic or cultural policy and sometimes they were just chatting. Even the institutions themselves, especially national newspapers and electronic media, are guarded by the soldiers of the People's Liberation Army. The shining rifles on the young guards' shoulders make the ordinary citizens more believe that the words and voices inside the tall wall where the national media resides are the spirits of the Party and the state power.²

The relationship between the media and the Party has been a myth of a Communist media system. It is hard to make any outsider believe that a national information network ideologically and financially controlled by a Communist Party could play any active role in the country's political and social life, except to act as a "mouth piece". In this chapter, I will discuss the political commitment made and the privileges enjoyed by the Chinese journalists. I want to point out that despite the heroism illustrated by "internal reports" and personal sacrifice made during each political campaign out of individual political commitment to an ideal "people's cause", Chinese journalists' involvement and participation in China's political communication exposes the severe weakness of the model. It, as a matter of fact, maintains an image of an elite communication circle among party journalists and state leadership which excludes the masses from information access and

² The rifle and the young guard of the *People's Daily* compound surprised Kenneth Starck, an American visiting professor teaching journalistic writing and editing at the Department of Journalism, Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences at Beijing. Nothing too unusual about it, he was told later. "Still, armed guards make you think differently about the power of the press." Prof. Starck admitted in his 1991 book *The Dragon's Pupil, a China Odyssey*.

decision-making engagement. It is the political privilege possessed by Party journalists that fundamentally denies the right of the masses, which ironically is the ultimate purpose of the Party through all of its revolutions. And the compromise made by media in gaining a high social status is the loss of its basic right to disagree with the Chinese Communist Party.

1. A General View Of Chinese Journalists

Despite hundreds of thousands of energetic propagandists and advocates who have fundamentally mobilized and transformed an isolated, war-ridden China into a revolutionary one, Mao Zedong's era of the 20th century educated only two journalism graduate students -- maybe Mao thought a master's or Ph.D. program wouldn't make a difference to the Chinese Communist communication tradition. The two were enrolled in one of China's premier universities, Fudan University in Shanghai in 1961, and did not receive a master's degree until 1965, for Mao's Socialist Education campaign required all college students to spend at least one year participating the class struggle in China's rural areas.³

The fact of having only two master's students in journalism before the Cultural Revolution, and closing down all the universities of China during the Revolution, includ-

³ Wen Jize, "Woguo xinwen yanjiusheng jiaoyu fazhan gaikuang", 1984 *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian*.

ing suspending the only journalism master's program for 12 years, was later harshly criticized by Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping. In 1978, Deng's education reform opened the door for re-establishing graduate study in journalism and communication. As a result, 97 graduate students were enrolled in 1978 in graduate schools of three universities, one of which is the school I went to in 1982. In 1984, with the permission of the State Council, two of China's leading universities were granted the right to offer the country's very first Ph.D. program in journalism and mass communication. In 1989, almost 70 years after the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, the first journalism /communication Ph.D. dissertation came out. Being politically conservative but safely classic: it was on *The Journalistic Thought Of Marx And Engels -- Founding Fathers of Marxist Press Theory*,⁴ the Ph. D. dissertation was among about 830 master's theses on communications in 1980s. It actually opened up a new era in China -- journalism and mass communication were no longer the pure propaganda and advocacy which had been regulated by traditional Party's propaganda departments and cadres, but a social behavior which was conducted by professionals and studied by academically trained media researchers.

News media considered as a social science is only one of dozens of fundamental changes taking place in Deng's China in the 1980s. At the same time when academics put their hands on what was historically the Party propagandist' turf and further categorized it into fields such as audience research, public opinion, etc., propaganda cadres felt

⁴ The Chinese title is *Makesi Xinwen Sixiang Dianjiren Makesi Engesi Xinwen sixiang Yanjiu*. See *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1989*.

the pinch among themselves. Different opinions clashed between Party-loyalty revolutionary reporters and profession-oriented media workers. As journalists, the former tried to hang in to the traditional values of being a revolutionary propagandist and tried to educate any newcomers to this ethic. The old timers and old-fashioned Maoist social propagandists, including those who experienced the Long March and Yenan era and most of Mao's political campaigns after 1949, enjoyed and held tight to the halcyon days' working style, appreciating the collectivity, unity, and magnitude the press could get. On the other hand, the younger generation called more and more for a broader social responsibility over Party loyalty, professional individualism over collectivity, and decentralization over unity. Obviously, the traditional way of conducting business in propaganda and advocacy, the backbone and heartbeat of Mao's communication pattern, did not interest a younger, more liberal and less orthodox generation. Still, the battle between the two wasn't as clear-cut as most Western experts expected. There could be two reasons for that. First, the younger generation had in fact enjoyed the political privileges of being a Party journalist. Identifying themselves to state power and using that power at will made it a hard decision to install a revolution in order to eliminate all the social status Mao's press has enjoyed, in which they now also had a stake. Secondly, the older generation was deeply hurt by constant political campaigns led by Mao directing at various political opponents since 1949 and thus very suspicious and inevitably cynical about the classical Party-press relationship.

Let us look at what was really going on in China's news media system after Mao's

death. The number of journalists of the PRC sounds surprisingly small compared with the country's huge population. In 1982, only 200,000 reporters, editors, and producers were engaged in media activities.⁵ In other words, there was only one journalist available for every 18,000 Chinese people. In Shanghai, the largest metropolis of China with a population of 12 million, there were about 1,000 working journalists in 1984.⁶ That means one journalist per 12,000, which is higher than the national average. According to a survey conducted by the Journalism Bureau of the Propaganda Department of the Party Central Committee in 1983, the total number of media professionals increased from the 200,000 of 1980 to almost 260,000 in 1983,⁷ including reporters, editors, producers, anchors and translators. Among them, the average age was 41.2 years old with 8% older than 56, 61% aged between 36-55, and 31% below 35. Senior editors were an average of 51.3 years old. The education background of Chinese journalists broke into levels such as college degree of 41%, high school diploma of 39%, and below junior high as 20%.⁸ Journalists who were journalism majors represented only 6.1%.⁹ This percentage isn't striking if we know that for 33 years (1949 - 1983) only about 5,200 journalism majors graduated from China's universities and only 3,000 of them were assigned to news media positions.¹⁰

⁵ An Gang (1982). "Xinwen shiyie ti chuntian". *Chungguo Xinwen Nianjian 1982*.

⁶ "Shanghai xinwen gaige ti qingkuang yu sikao", *Chungguo Xinwen Nianjian 1984*.

⁷ The exact number was 259,949 with 45,014 held temporary positions. The bureau admitted that the real number was actually larger than it. "Statistics on national news media workers", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1984*.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The number was revealed in a document of Propaganda Department of the Central Party Committee and Education Ministry in August 1983. "Guanyu jiaqiang xinwen jiaoyu gongzuo ti yijian", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1984*.

The other 2,000 or so were distributed to propaganda departments at all levels and some to publishing houses.¹¹ Among the 41% of media practitioners who claimed that they held a college degree, many of them had an associate's degree which they got by taking courses through television, or by passing a national examination for college education credentials.

The age and education of Chinese journalists were not evenly distributed at central and local levels. For instance, the percentage of college degree holders of those who worked with central Party's organs and other top national media was 59.4%, while the number reduced to 27.8% among county press and broadcasting newsmen.¹² Media practitioners who only had lower than a junior high school education counted as 24.3% among municipal press and the number was even higher among enterprise newspapers at 29.8%. As for ages, county press was the youngest: an average of 37.4 years old, while news agencies had more older people, averaged at 43.5 years. Central Party Committee's organs and leading national papers were the next oldest institutions and their averaged age was 42.4.¹³ The statistics of the age and education of Chinese news media in 1983 shows an interesting phenomenon: the higher level a news institution is at, the older and more educated it is; the lower, the younger and less educated. There might be some explanation. Leading national news organizations have more opportunities to get more college students, who were assigned by the state to news media each year. The basic rule

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

of assignment is that top students from top universities are most likely assigned to top media. On the other hands, college-graduates always try their best, including using some secret "back doors", to make sure they are introduced into a large, prestigious, national Party organs for the sake of fame, better housing, better benefits, and an ideal environment for networking their career. In the 1980s' Chinese literature reflecting college life, many brutal wars of assignment were depicted to show how crucial it was for a graduating senior to get a job which would relocate him to the big cities in affluent Chinese provinces and the big state institutions where social climbing was easier. Meanwhile, the aging of key state and Party news media resulted from the over-concentration of veteran Party propaganda cadres, most of them working as senior reporters and editors. For many reasons, they had no intention to leave the institution and treated the institution as part of their personal life. For example, in the *People's Daily*, there were more cadres who ranked over Rank 13 than in any other journalistic organizations in China. This rank was the cutting line which provided perks such as a luxurious soft-sleeping compartment when traveling by train, access to internally circulated *Internal Reports*, better health care, and the right to schedule a chauffeured Shanghai or Honda when attending a news conference in the other part of the city. Generally speaking, most key national news organizations are Party organs or affiliated with the Party in one way or another, and possess more resources in terms of professional training and proper knowledge than local media.

The situation of 1983 looked very different from the scene of 1949, the year Mao

and his propagandists took over the national news media. As we discussed in the previous chapter, Mao's press was basically a rural, small-scale, propaganda-purposed but publicly owned media. And the pressmen then were very young with most of them in their 20s. Freshly graduated from colleges and universities, the young people identified themselves with Mao's cause, instead of Chiang's ruling Nationalist government, and went to Mao's revolutionary bases in the 1930s and 1940s to work for Communist press and broadcasting.¹⁴

The newsmen of the media, whether print or radio, considered themselves first of all to be political activists of the Chinese revolution, and propagandists of the Communist Party. The word Mao's press used to address its readers and audience was "comrades", rather than "Mr." or "Mrs.". In addition, the hardship and instability of military life created a working environment in which solidarity of all the staff members including cooks, chauffeurs and print workers was emphasized over individual competition and professional proficiency. The relationship between the Communist Party and its news media was like blood-and-flesh. Despite the fact that Party's propagandists had to unconditionally propagate the Party's lines and policies, the economic and social egalitarianism among journalists and Party leaders was widely popular and respected as a principle. For instance, in *Dawn*, (*Fe Xiao Bao* in Chinese) an organ of the North Jiangsu province Party committee, the Party leader decided to give newsmen a meat meal once a month, a

¹⁴ For example, the journalists of *The Dawn*, (*Fe Xiao Bao*), a newspaper of North Jiangsu base, used to study in Tokyo Japanese University, Central University, Yanjing University and Beiping University. *Fe Xiao Bao Shihua*. 1987.

special treatment, because they worked so hard under extremely strained conditions. The Party committee also asked the base administration to buy mosquito nets for the journalists, who had to wear long-sleeve shirts and put their feet in water to get away from violent mosquito attacks when writing during summer nights. One reporter broke his only fountain pen, which was so rare in the countryside of 1940s' China, that the Party commander bought him a new one with his own monthly subsidy, which was not surprisingly little more than the price of the pen.¹⁵

With the fast development of this media ideal since the 1949 national revolutionary victory, Mao's classical Communist communication has been preserved as the essence. From 1949 to 1976, journalists tried very hard to use the model to generate and educate themselves again and again. The older veteran journalists who happened to work for the Party's press and broadcasting institutions in all sorts of revolutionary bases before 1949, were treated as living fossils of this tradition, and the younger generation was supposed to respect them as role models. Higher education and youth became somehow disadvantageous in front of revolutionary experience and Party loyalty.

Yet, the long-lived balance was broken by Mao's last, and also the largest, political campaign -- the Cultural Revolution. The revolution called for rebellion from younger journalists, to stand up against the older ones and criticize "their bourgeois reactionary line in press". The authority which used to be universally in the hands of veteran Party

¹⁵ Yang Juren, ed. *Fe Xiao Bao Shihua*. 1987.

journalists was severely challenged by experience-poor younger reporters. Although the old order was restored and veterans rehabilitated ten years later, the suspicion of the universality of Mao's classic communication model in a more complicated social environment was raised and became widespread. Media people started questioning, very vaguely though, the ever-lasting Party-media relationship. Old and young were outraged at the easy manipulation of the Chinese press by ultra-leftists in the 10-year Cultural Revolution, and couldn't see how the press was able to avoid its repetition in the future. One of the legacies of the Revolution shows that media people believed that there must be something wrong with this kind of relationship and something had to be done to change it. The press reform introduced by Deng in the late 1970s enlisted more of the younger generation's enthusiasm and participation. More and more tended to think of alternatives to a traditional propagandist communication model.

Some Chinese media researchers raised the concept of dividing Chinese journalists into five generations. For example, in his five-generation theory, Shi Tongyu believes that the pressmen of late Qing Dynasty who "advocated national independence from Western powers" and a bourgeois democratic republic constituted the first generation. The second one refers to those news media editors and reporters who lived in the early 20th century, "exposing imperialism and feudalism", but who didn't believe in a thorough social revolution. The third generation consists of the journalists who transformed themselves from a "revolutionary democratic" to a "Communist", who showed their "independent integrity" in Chiang's "white terror" and the "historical cons-

ciousness toward firm Marxist beliefs".¹⁶ However, the journalists who have more to do with Mao's communication system are the fourth and the fifth generations. Many researchers believe that the Cultural Revolution and Deng's reform have produced a new generation, which challenge the fourth generation mercilessly. For instance, the fifth is praised as a "history conscious" and "subject conscious" generation.¹⁷ Its historical awareness drives younger journalists to report and expose China's society and public affairs within a historic context. They relate the issue to the development of Party's long-term policies and international political and economic relationships. They are not interested in the slogan of "practicing journalism as a statesman", but reporting the facts as they are. Their commitment to the Communist Party's cause is being transformed to a larger one which can provide them with more freedom, more interesting topics, and more opportunities to illustrate their personalities and prove their competence. They are more critical about Mao's classic communication model, suspicious of the orthodox Party-media relationship, are open-minded, and refuse to simply explain Party lines to their readers and audience like the fourth generation had. In the last ten years, Chinese press did contribute much politically critical and eye-opening coverage, such as the series of reports by the print media and broadcasting media on the huge forest fire in Northeast China and those on China's economic reform.

In some sense, the fifth generation of journalists is more courageous than the fourth

¹⁶ Shi Tongyu, "Lun zhongguo ti wudai jizhe", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1989*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

one, which is portrayed by Chinese researchers as "retreating with little self-consciousness to a defensive individual spiritual world and enchanted by a modern religion which had frozen their integrity and professional ethic".¹⁸ However, no matter how much more liberal the fifth generation journalists are than their predecessors, they do not go beyond Mao's decades-old communication pattern. What they have been looking for is "reform" not "revolution". Especially, when they realize that their political and social status to a large extent relies on the Party's paramount position in the country, the generation denies the idea of overthrowing the CCP. Their commitment is another burden on them. This self-assigned mission pushes tens of thousands of reporters and producers to the frontline to "serve the people", a very vague and misleading terminology, because what they do is still to act on the persuasions and conviction of the mainstream consensus, which has been labeled as "people's demands". At this point, they are still political "missionaries" instead of "professionals" in the Western sense.

2. Internal Reports: The Untold Story

Having been for a long time the privileged instrument of the Party, the Chinese news media considers itself as a special political and social community which stands aloof from the Chinese civil society. This by no means indicates that the media has not been heavily involved in everyday life; on the contrary, the message it carries on and

¹⁸ Ibid.

amplifies could turn the society upside down overnight just as in the Cultural Revolution. It is due to something else. The vital relationship between the Party media and the Politburo is far more than one of commanding and obedience. In general, the trust in the media that the Party holds, the inter-dependent relationship between the two which allow them to survive and rule respectively, the identity of media as the very first insider of Chinese political operation, the bridge between the God and man while the country is trapped in a religion-like ideological fanatic, all of this allows the Communist press to enjoy political privilege and immunity from a secular social status.

The media has, for several decades, been above every Chinese citizen and, most of all, it has become an incarnation of the ultimate power and has exhibited all of the magic because of being this incarnation. Under the conditions of Chinese communication system, the masses have to go through the media, rather than legal and administrative processes, by means of readers' letters and critical news coverage to petition the policy makers at various levels. Besides which, the general public also has to rely solely on the media for notification of significant Party doctrines and policies. In a country like China without a sophisticated, functional, and well respected legal system, many administrative affairs have to be investigated and handled, not just printed, by Communist journalists. On a great number of occasions, the corrupted human leaders were investigated, prosecuted and constrained first and foremost by the lash of the press. And the Party intentionally employed the news media as a para-legal, para-administrative institution to criticize and punish its crooks, embezzlers, and political dissenters, ultra-left or ultra-

right. Some American China watchers regarded the political function of the country's media as becoming "more important" than the slowly changing and inefficient constitution.¹⁹

Evidence to illustrate this power relationship of the CCP and media is contained in "internal reports", known as *Nei Can* in Chinese.²⁰ Being an internally circulated bulletin, *Nei Can* is not one journal, but a generalized name for a kind of publication. The format and layout of the news bulletin varies among news institutions which publish it, yet the regular size of it is 11x8.5 usually printed horizontally. As either a daily, bi-weekly, weekly, or maybe semi-weekly, the titles of a *Nei Can* differ depending on the taste of editors of the respective news organization. For example, the *Nei Can* of *Guang Ming Ribao* (Brightness Daily), one of China's top ten national dailies with a circulation of 620,000 (in 1989), named its *Nei Can* as *Qingkuang Huibian* and *Qingkuang Jianbao* (*Situations Summary* and *Situations Briefings*).²¹ Meanwhile, the *People's Daily* titled its *Nei Can* as *Brief Reports on The People's Daily Work Conditions and Life In The Editorial Department*.²² Like its elite readers, *Nei Can* is also ranked, or classified, according to its contents. Some of them are only allowed to circulate among the Politburo members while others can be accessed by Party cadres of Rank 13 or higher.²³

¹⁹ Lynn T. White, "All the news: structure and politics in Shanghai's reform media", *Voices of China*.

²⁰ *Nei Can* is pronounced as "nay tzen".

²¹ Mu Xin, "Wangshi ti huiyi", *Guang Ming Ribao Sishi Nian*.

²² R. Bishop, 1989.

²³ My own experience with *Nei Can* started earlier than my journalistic profession, which provided access for young reporters who do not reach Rank 13 to internal reports in the institutional office. Because of my father's position, I had the chance to read them at home, and in fact my father encouraged me to do so.

Interestingly, China's intellectuals, regardless their Party identification, have the right to read internal reports. For example, Academia Sinica (China Academy of Sciences, including its sub-academies in different regions) is entitled to the rank of *Nei Can* only available to the governmental officials whose rank is equal to a minister, or to military officers ranking equal to an army commander. Shi Yafeng, a well-known Chinese geologist and president of Academia Sinica Nanjing Division, told me that the director of a research institution of Academia Sinica ranks the same as a division commander of the People's Liberation Army, and the *Nei Can* they are able to read are the same. Certainly, high-ranked *Nei Can* is not available to low-ranked officials and officers.²⁴ The internal news bulletins which contain top secret news are usually printed in much larger characters to make it easier to read for senile Politburo members who often complain that small print hurts their poor eyesight. Not every news institution has the right to write and publish *Nei Can*. Generally, only top Communist Party organs and state-owned leading news institutions of hierarchy are engaged in the *Nei Can* business. These are, for example, institutions such as the *People's Daily*, *Brightness Daily*, *Liberation Army Daily*, *China Youth*, China Central Television, New China News Agency, and Central People's Radio.

There is no secret about the *Nei Can*. Nonetheless, none of the Chinese journalism textbooks or college courses really ever gives an explanation of it, let alone offers an analysis. As a matter of fact, it is more or less like an old-fashioned in-house craft which a Party journalist can only learn on the job as an apprentice. Theoretically, anyone can

²⁴ Interview with Shi Yafeng in August 1992.

generate a *Nei Can* news article and submit it to his senior editor. In practice, however, veteran journalists have more chances of getting their news articles published in *Nei Can* and most importantly, commented on by senior Party officials who read it. Of course, experienced reporters always know more about complicated policy processing and have more political connections and insights, which helps them to target the core of an issue. To a greenhorn reporter, drawing a fine line between a mass-serving news (for the general public) and an elite news (*Nei Can*) is far from whether or not he or she has an advanced writing skill. Most of the time, *Nei Can*'s writing style is down-to-earth and straight-talking -- leaders of the PRC are not interested in routine propaganda rhetoric. The sugar-coated, preaching news-writing is catered to the masses. What the Party seeks to know is conveyed by the basic journalistic principles of the five Ws,²⁵ especially "what" happens and "why". Young reporters often fail to explain "why", which requires years of experience and independent thinking.

The content of *Nei Can* is often gloomier and franker than a news report carried by a public-oriented newspaper or a television news program. Since *Nei Can* serves as the quasi-secret discourse exclusively conducted between the Party and state elite and their journalistic community, compared with the public propaganda or propagandistic news, the discourse should be much more honest. As a matter of fact, it is explicit, embarrassing, urgent and ugly. Bad news on crises, corruption, nepotism, confrontations, etc. dom-

²⁵ Five "W"s are a Western press standard, but has been widely accepted by Chinese Communication practitioners. Five "W"s refer to "What", "When", "Where", "Why", and "How".

inate *Nei Can*. And it escalates from bad to really bad when the materials are classified higher. Because *Nei Can* aims to tell the true story of Chinese society, it certainly makes very desirable hot news stuff.

A comprehensive knowledge of the production number of *Nei Can* of a variety of kinds is still a myth. So far we don't know how many pieces of *Nei Can* are written annually by media institutions nationwide, although occasionally some news institution publicizes its record of *Nei Can* writing in order to show the public the institution's competence and social responsibility. For example, the *Nei Can* news contributed by the Central People's Radio in 1983 accounted for 16% of its year's news production.²⁶ Owing to a special relationship with the CCP and the large professional journalist pool they have, the *People's Daily* and New China News Agency are the two leading news organizations in the country providing the Central Committee and the central government with all kinds of internal reports. For instance, in 1985 New China News Agency domestically distributed news of 100 million characters, and at the same time reported and edited *Nei Can* news of 110 million characters.²⁷ In 1989 the Agency published 6,005 pieces of news articles in *Nei Can*, which was equal to 44% of the agency's annual general domestic news coverage. The number is also 12 times as great as the news items (488) the Agency prepared for dozens of national evening newspapers, and 4.4 times the

²⁶ *Chung-kuo Pai Ko Nian Jian 1989*, Beijing, Shanghai: Chung-kuo Ta Pai Ko Chuan Shu Chu Pan She, 1989.

²⁷ Wei Yuanli, "1985 nian woguo xinwen tongxun shiyie fazhan gaikuang", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1986*.

feature stories (1,359) for publications nationwide.²⁸ Local news institutions, despite the limited circulation and a lean staff, also managed to engage themselves in channeling information through *Nei Can*. Sometimes, they simply write up a *Nei Can* story by editing a reader's angry letter. For example, *Yanfu Dazhong Bao*, (*Yanfu Mass Daily* in English), is a district newspaper with a circulation of more than 70,000 copies (in 1982). The *Daily* received 9,216 readers' letter in 1982 and apart from publishing 247 in the paper and transferring 1,227 to concerned work units, 42 of them were edited and published in its *Nei Can*,²⁹ which of course went all the way up to the Central Party Committee. In the light of the work report of the editorial committee of *Hunan Ribao*, (*Hunan Daily* in English), one of the routines of the paper is to process numerous contributions and letters from the masses and put some of them in internal reports after careful selection. In 1981, the paper received a total of 184,000 letters from people in the Hunan province, with some ending up in their *Nei Can*.³⁰

In the eyes of Chinese, *Nei Can* and the power of Party journalism has become an open secret. And despite little access by the general public to *Nei Can* -- all sorts of it are restrictively circulated among Party cadres of and above Rank 13, except low-ranking journalists who are able to read *Nei Can* material only in their organization's office -- the commoners are fully aware of its existence. One of the popular political jokes of the

²⁸ Wei Yuanli, "1989 nian woguo xinwen tongxun shiyie fazhan gaikuang", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* 1990.

²⁹ Editorial Department of *Yanfu Dazhong Bao*, "Dazhongbao yao mianxiang dazhong", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* 1983.

³⁰ Editorial Committee of *Hunan Daily*, "Ruhe ba baozhi ti zhidaoxing yu qunzhongxing jiehe qilai", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* 1982.

1980s was that people who argue over issues tended to end their disagreement by saying "I will see you in *Nei Can*!" instead of "I will see you in court!" When meeting a journalist, some people directly asked the journalist to write their story into *Nei Can*, instead of the public news media. Even media researchers were conscious of the wide recognition of internal reports by the Chinese masses.

In the PRC's very first audience survey, conducted in 1982, one of the questions asked was about the news sources of China's public affairs. Besides the four normal sources -- newspapers, television, radio and the "grapevine" -- which are almost universally considered popular news sources, the survey officially listed *Nei Can* as the fifth source of information. Interestingly enough, the main constitution of the people who were interviewed were not high-ranking Party officials, but blue-collar workers (30.5%), peasants (26.6%), students (8.5%), service workers (6.9%), scientists and engineers (5.8%), retirees (4.8%), education professionals (4.6%), and the unemployed (1.2%). The cadres, people who might be qualified to read internal reports, made up only 11%, much less than that of workers and peasants.³¹ Apparently, the survey designers and conductors assumed that the Chinese general public, although having no access to it, knew all about internal reports and wouldn't have many difficulties in choosing answers. In fact, 0.8%³²

³¹ See Table 8 of *Beijingshi duzhe, tingzhong, guangzhong diaocha gaikuang. Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1983*. The table only provides with the numbers of people of different occupational categories, such as workers, peasant, etc. I calculated the respective percentage based upon the statistics of Table 8. The N was 2,325 on this question and the final total percentage adds up to 99.9%.

³² Just for reference: according to the survey, newspaper reading counts as the number one source of news (38.9%), next are radio at 35.5%, television at 19.5%, and the "grapevine" at 4.9%.

of the interviewed claimed that they got their news right from *Nei Can* (Here N = 2,325, which means approximately 19 people). But survey analysts were skeptical of this result, noting that it quite possible that some interviewees might mistake *Cankao Xiaoxi*, (*Reference News* in English), an internal tabloid published by New China News Agency mainly focusing on international news, for *Nei Can*.³³ Even if this assertion holds water, the 19 people still obtained their news through some internal source or "two-step communication".³⁴ If survey designers were confident enough to list *Nei Can* as one the five main news sources of Chinese audience/readers, then *Nei Can* must have been extremely popular among the masses, at least the public had either heard about it or known the contents through second-hand grapevines.

Thus, internal reports do indicate a very interesting form of communication in China. If, as we discussed before, *Nei Can* is the exclusive discourse between the Party and its journalistic community, then why does it hold so much attraction to and influence on the masses who have no right, no access to it? Why is it so famous, or should we say mysterious, to the powerless? It doesn't seem like the public develops a crush on internal reports out of curiosity for its exoticism. One explanation could be that internal reports are not purely an intelligence exchange a Communist Party journalist does as a hobby or a secret service agent. Journalists who are involved in *Nei Can*-related investigations and

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ "Two-step communication" is a popular Western communication concept. It states that in some societies and cultures, especially the Third World, news flows first to social/cultural elite and then at the second step, to the masses. Here, the theory seems applicable to China's situation in terms of the re-distribution of *Nei Can* news.

problem solving are not "neutral observers" or the "third party". Writing internal reports, editing readers' complaint letters into the reports, arguing over the issues, and defending certain reports which are disputed by two parties, are undoubtedly operations in a power struggle, and for journalists, a process of political communication. What internal reports cover is the real life in China rather than showering the readers with a brainstorm of hypotheses. In this political wrestling, journalists are mostly the spokesmen of the powerless and defenceless who have nowhere to go for help. It might not have been the original purpose of the *Nei Can* when it was started after 1949, but soon the masses found out that it somehow could channel the impact of their anger, devastation, grievance, and frustration to high-level policy makers. When the public is bewildered by a slow and sluggish bureaucratic machine, as well as corruption and blackmail, maybe a news article written by a Party journalist published in *Nei Can* could be the "express", which reaches Party leaders much faster than a normal process.

In the public's mind, internal reports bear enormous power, sometimes even magic power. But how does it work? The news, which is investigated by journalists and appears in *Nei Can*, would be distributed regularly to high-ranking officials at central, provincial, and municipal levels. Because of their urgent and serious nature, the reports will be immediately transferred to the concerned administrations and Party committees, accompanied with written instructions and comments by individual Politburo members and other ranking officials. Examples of situations worthy of this treatment may occur when a large state-run plant faces shutdown in a few days for the lack of raw materials, a strike

possibly breaks out because of an injustice caused by local corruption, or an armed gang robs railway passengers threatening their safety and paralyzing transportation. In a great many cases, the Politburo members' remarks on the reports can have a legal effect. There are many heartbreaking tales of how the written words of Hu Yao-bang or Zhao Zi-yang in *Nei Can* saved a large farm, punished a villain in the neighborhood, or revise out-dated policies. This, however, is more or less similar to the way it worked in the old dynasty, when the imperial envoys of His Majesty brought stability and prosperity to local life. Yet, the Chinese public feels grateful to their Central Committee leaders, after all, something has been done and they are, in some way, represented. They are also thankful to the reporters, who listen to their grievances, help them to analyze them and make them an issue with the Party Central Committee. Isn't that wonderful? Without internal reports as an alternative channel, without the participating journalists who inform policy makers of existing crises, it would be very difficult for frustrated individuals and organizations to overcome their misfortunes. Certainly, internal reports are not panacea and frequently battling injustice and corruption and trying to do the right thing for China can not be achieved by one simple news article; yet, it does bring some hope to the masses and gives journalists the opportunity to participate in the country's political communication. (This point will be discussed further later in this chapter.)

Here is a personal experience of Zhang Sheng-you, a reporter from *Guang Ming Daily* (*Brightness Daily* in English) – an intellectual-professional-oriented national paper with an estimated circulation of one million. When on a trip to South China to gather

news, one day he found himself surrounded by a large group of outraged residents of a small town where he stayed. It turned out that they were the unofficially elected delegates of a local community where people had been seriously disturbed by the noise from a neighborhood gear plant. Not only couldn't they rest and sleep, but also the industrial noise was so powerful that it also had already destroyed two old houses. Before they came to see Zhang, a journalist they had never met, the neighbors tried to talk to the Party secretary of the plant about the issue about of noise. The response was "Don't try to make a fuss! If somebody dies in a fallen house, I'll support his child to age 18 and his parents to the grave. My plant is rich enough to pay for that!" Then the locals sued the plant in the town court house, but the judge refused to make it a case simply because "the rank of the plant Party secretary is higher than the judge's". The frustrated residents knocked at the door of the town's Environmental Protection Bureau -- after all it was noise pollution. The head of the bureau, obviously, not wanting to embarrass the Party boss of the plant, since it's a close-knit and "everybody-knows-everybody" town, suggested that they appear by the hundreds, push down the plant wall, smash the machines, and make a big sensation. Then the whole issue would be brought to the attention of provincial Party Committee: a serious investigation would be conducted from above. The locals did not dare: they did not want to make things worse, and they were afraid of prison. Then they heard that a reporter from Beijing was in town and they, at the end of their patience and wits, caught him. The end of the story was that the local villain submitted himself in front of the Party's journalist, who confronted him on behalf of the devastated neighbours. After threatening to write a news report and make this injustice

nationally known and implying that, of course, a state investigation would soon follow, the Party secretary agreed to reduce the noise.³⁵

That was one of many stories I heard from my colleagues around the lunch table in the well-designed cafeteria of my *Daily*, in the hustle-and-bustle editing room, and by the side of newly-imported Japanese-made laser typesetting machine when I worked on late night changes to a story. Although some young journalists couldn't help bragging, most of their stories were true. I remember one of my graduate school classmates who wrote an internal report during our internship with the *People's Daily* in 1983-4. We were so proud of him because his report aroused great attention from above. Publishing a news report in *Nei Can* during the internship period was regarded a great achievement.

The internal report did not go without notice from Western media scholars and China watchers. During the four decades of its existence, quite a few writers either mentioned or discussed this subject in their works. For example, Robert L. Bishop considered it in his 1989 book *Qi Lai! Mobilizing One Billion Chinese* as an internal publication which was put out by "each ministry" in China and circulated to "other ministries".³⁶ Bishop provided some information on the *Nei Can* run by the *People's Daily* and gave his reason for its presence: the paper had a staff of a "reported 630 journalists" working "for this eight-page paper" and "its policy is to allow them to work on *Nei Can* entitled

³⁵ Zhang Sheng-you, "Monologue of a journalistic soul", *Forty Years of Guang Ming Daily*, Beijing: Guang Ming Daily Press, 1989, p.290.

³⁶ R. Bishop. *Qi Lai! Mobilizing One Billion Chinese : The Chinese Communication System*. 1989. p.148.

*Brief Reports on The People's Daily Work Condition and Life in the Editorial Department.*³⁷ The same sketchy reports on *Nei Can* can also be found in Fox Butterfield's work. Butterfield believed that *People's Daily* reporters could investigate very sensitive problems such as official corruption, strikes, ethnic friction, and discrimination against women in internal reports.³⁸ In his latest book on Chinese television, James Lull mentioned about the "confidential government channels" within China's communication system, but didn't provide any details. However, Lull was very critical of the "internal channels", claiming that they divided the Chinese into "different informational 'classes'".³⁹ Some of the most compelling and comprehensive research on *Nei Can* so far was done by Jennifer Grant. In her 1988 research article on the subject, Grant offered an unprecedented examination with an insightful analysis.⁴⁰

Grant pointed out that the "PRC media worker is a part of the governmental system and has always had a dual function: propagandist and intelligence gatherer".⁴¹ And she believed that when writing up internal reports, "... there is a lot of more freedom for journalists to criticize and to report serious matters."⁴² What is more interesting in her discussion is that Grant stated that the internal reports "contribute to the political policy-making processes of the Party" and function as "an important means for politicians to

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Fox Butterfield. *China, Alive In A Bitter Sea*. 1982. p.391.

³⁹ James Lull. *China Turned On: Television, Reform, and Resistance*. 1991. p.86.

⁴⁰ Jennifer Grant, "Internal reporting by investigative journalists in China and its influence on government policy", *Gazette*, Vol.4, 1988.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

check up on the administration of policies".⁴³ Grant's research also discussed the ordeal the PRC's reporters had gone through when exposing mismanagement and corruption through *Nei Can*. Thus, based on her research, Grant introduced a new understanding of the function of Chinese journalists – more than just being the Party's propagandists and organizers, they are also intelligence collectors.

As an important channel of political communication, the information conveyed by *Nei Can* writers provides the Party with extremely valuable intelligence about how the Party's policies have been executed. One of the theories on "internal reporting" is to stress it as the means of the Communist Party to rule the regime. "...the Party needs journalists", Grant argues, "to supply it with intelligence because the regular information reporting channels within the government and Party can be blocked for bureaucratic and political reasons."⁴⁴ Grant's analysis of the reporters's role in Chinese political communication processes correctly reflects the original intention of the CCP. The Party envisioned journalists as their "ears" and "eyes" from the very beginning. And *Nei Can* just happen to be the proper forum to transmit the information reporters collect through their journalistic routines. What do the Chinese Party and state leadership think of their *Nei Can*? In 1956, Liu Shao-qi told some Party journalists that if it seemed likely that publication of a news item would benefit the enemy more than the Party, "don't report it publicly; you can write it for the *Internal Reference News*".⁴⁵ Liu also pointed out that the central

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Jennifer Grant.

⁴⁵ Recited from Andrew J. Nathan's *Chinese Democracy*.

leaders relied on correspondents' investigations to find out when policies were inadequate, were being incorrectly implemented, or had run into unforeseen problems that required adjustments.⁴⁶ In 1984, Hu Qili, a Central party Committee member and a fast-rising political star during Deng's reform years, went to the New China News Agency to address to journalists on *Nei Can*. Hu said, that *Neibu Cankao*, a kind of *Nei Can* written and circulated by the agency, had provided the Central Committee with important information on every region and frontline nationwide. It had helped the committee with its work and functioned as "ears and eyes" and "assistants".⁴⁷ Hu also admitted that Party and State leaders could spot and solve problems only if *Nei Can* provided them with needed information. In Hu's opinion, internal reports had become a "premier channel" employed to "reflect the situation to the Central Committee" and a "powerful instrument" to assist the committee to direct its work.⁴⁸

There were some reasons for Hu to heavily praise *Nei Can* in 1984 and enlist the support of *Nei Can* writers. Although the official line about the role played by *Nei Can* had not been changed very much in the course of four decades, the influence of it on Chinese society had dramatically increased. In the 1950s, the general public was rarely aware of internal reports. The common Chinese might have sensed something about it, but there was no public interest nor curiosity. It was no more than a closed information route from a group of committed correspondents to the leadership. Three decades later,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Hu Qili, "Guanyu *Neibu Cankao*", *Zhongguo xinwen Nianjian 1985*.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

particularly after ten-years of the Cultural Revolution, *Nei Can* suddenly became well-known and, to some extent, desperately needed by the Party, media and public. When Deng Xiaoping wen to power in 1979, Chinese society was not the same as in 1949 when Mao came into office. The Chinese Communist Party was stunned to find that as a ruling political institution, it was losing not only the trust of working people but also the control all the way from central to local administrations. The public on the other hand, was sick and tired of rampant governmental corruptions, organized embezzlement, power abuse, and incredible nepotism and favoritism. A few years after the wholesale pushing of a free market economic reform by Deng, the Communist leadership was weakened, not improved, by the capitalist economy which brought rapid decentralization, a wheeling-dealing work style, with widespread economic chaos, an increased gap between the rich and the poor, and a decreased social ethic. The traditional public news media could not absorb the fast growing complaints, disagreements, frustrations, and grievances, for it was originally designed to "interpret" Party policies and "educate" the public with "correct ideas and opinions". And first, and the foremost, it was not a forum for public debates and criticism. Thus, it seemed very natural for *Nei Can* to become the ideal alternative to communication in a Communist country between the Party and the public via journalists. And indeed, it was grabbed and employed by both sides to protect their own interest and to survive. That is why Hu Qili gave *Nei Can* a great boost and encouraged Xinhua Agency's reporters to continue to write more *Nei Can* to the central Committee. Hu even made a plea to thousands of Xinhua reporters:⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ibid.

"We are right in a great reform era and walking along a socialist path with Chinese characters. During this period, new situations and problems will keep coming up. In our work, within our team, there have been many problems, some of them are very serious, because of the ten-year turmoil or this or that reason. ... We need people who are honest and outspoken to point these problems out."

The booming popularity of *Nei Can* in the 1980s' China had put much greater pressure on journalists and Hu was very clear about that. Internal reports stirred up governmental scandals, exposed power abuse, criticized organized corruptions and the unlawful profiteering of numerous ranking officials' in-laws. The names and positions and wrongdoings appearing in *Nei Can* dealt with many bigwigs and they certainly didn't like it. As a result, a counterattack followed after a scandal was exposed and was always aimed at *Nei Can* writers and their families. Hou Jun was a veteran reporter of *Tianjing Ribao* (*Tianjing Daily*), a Communist Party organ of the third municipality directly under the Central Government.⁵⁰ Once Hou investigated a case of physically assault on a senior intellectual. The case itself wasn't too complicated: the intellectual was innocent and the attacker should be punished. But, within three days, an invisible "net of connections" caught him by involving two of the "most authoritative and influential relations" in his life: his father and his boss. Under this heavy pressure, Hou agreed to re-write the open criticism into *Nei Can*. Finally, even *Nei Can* was considered inappropriate and Hou compromised again to a handwritten memo as he couldn't get approval to print it. Hou's memo was sent to the head of a concerned work unit and that was it.⁵¹ "Strangled by a

⁵⁰ There are three such cities in China, the other two being Beijing and Shanghai.

⁵¹ Hou Jun. 1989. *Piruan Ti Yulun Jiandu*. Beijing: Zhongguo Furu Chupanshe.

net of connections", Hou criticized in his book, "journalists are tied up and can't move. Breaking the net will cost dearly and even honest reporters have to give it a second thought"⁵² Grant also mentioned in her work that Wang Aisheng, a *People's Daily* domestic correspondent based in Shanxi province, was retaliated against by the local power and influence. Wang wrote forty critical reports for the *Daily* and *Nei Can* which drew great attention of the Central Committee and the National State Council. Not only was he constantly verbally bashed by the local Party leadership but also his son was beaten several times.⁵³

Airing the Party's dirty laundry in the public upset many officials who had been involved. Some outraged Party leaders, besides lashing out on *Nei Can* and its journalists mercilessly, took the case directly to the Central Committee. Certain internal reports were thus accused of being "inaccurate" and "incorrect". In Guangxi province, for example, the poor record of ancient grave preservation was reported by a Xinhua Agency correspondent via *Nei Can*. The news report provoked the critique of some Central Committee member and his remarks and the report were soon passed back to the local government. The angry local authorities repudiated the report and successfully defended themselves in front of the Central Committee. The case, whether justified or not, turned out to be a setback for a lot of *Nei Can* writers and intensified the relationship between the news media and state power. The critical argument of the case was that it was "inaccurate",

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ J. Grant.

which was later on widely used by Party conservatives to ask for re-opening their cases. Hu Qili claimed that, from the judgement of the Central Committee, only "0.2-0.3%" of internal reports were "inaccurate" and the overwhelming majority of *Nei Can* written by Agency's journalists were in fact "good and relatively good".⁵⁴ in order to decrease the discontent of the news media with the Central Committee. Hu also tried to defend the counterattack on internal reports, noting that the bash did not mean to deny the achievement of *Nei Can*, but showed, on the contrary, the trust, dependence and hope of the Committee on it. Because *Nei Can* had played such a crucial role, Hu explained to the frustrated media workers, that the Committee had no other choice but to harness the working procedure to serve the Party better.⁵⁵ The relationship of the Central Committee and journalistic community on the issue of *Nei Can* was summarized by Hu in his speech as "glorious obligation, lofty trust, and tough requirements."⁵⁶

The rapid development of internal reports bore an enormous impact on its twin sister channel -- the public news media. It may be hard to believe, but sometimes it is really difficult to judge which one has more glamour and power. The news which openly circulated in the mass market, from television news programs to print media, provides a safe mass diet for the Chinese. It is not low-brow, cattle-feeding, tabloid news -- the purism of the Communist media will never degenerate to feed its audience a low quality product; rather, it is political indoctrination about social progress, official conferences, the Party's

⁵⁴ Hu Qili.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

victorious leadership, etc. It is true that Chinese news was notorious for having 70% good news and 30% bad news.⁵⁷ The proposition was so ridiculous that the public news media alienated a great many of its truth-seeking audience. At this point, the disappointed public would get information from *Nei Can*, even though it was an "ugly" truth which might depress them. Indeed, *Nei Can* lured people away from public information bulletins, particularly those who considered themselves as either concerned citizens or public-affair lovers and were interested in keeping themselves informed. Ranking officials also needed to keep an eye on the internal bulletin to make sure that they were not exposed by a reporter convinced by the news presented by his opponents. Further, because access was denied to anyone not ranked high enough, the frustration made the public fantasize about this "mysterious" publication. In the Chinese society, people who are lucky enough to read internal reports always are very likely to be a political rumor center. A citizen who has journalist friends or connections with the media community was well respected by his or her friends and workmates. In this sense, *Nei Can* has more glamour and power.

Still, things are not always that simple. Because political deals are always conducted behind closed doors and it usually takes a long time to get the whole picture in print, *Nei Can* can, on the other hand, make many readers and political insiders nervous and impatient. Under these circumstances, if the public news media gets itself involved

⁵⁷ Sometimes the proportion goes to 80% to 20%, or 90% to 10%. It all depends on the Central Committee's mood. See Hou Jun, 1989.

in the public affairs debates and its critical voice is loud enough to be heard, which happened more and more in the late 1980s, then the public would shift its attention to the public news and the reaction would be incredible. In this way, an unconventional public news media, which could be surprisingly brave and poignant, would steal the scene from *Nei Can*. In fact, that did happen in China in late 1980s.

In March 1988 the leaders of Wuwei district of Gansu province invited some people's deputies of Wuwei to talk about governmental management. *Wuwei Bao* (*Wuwei News*) reported the event and some critiques of the deputies. The news article, however, irritated district Party bosses and top administrators, who ordered that the distribution of the day's paper was stopped and who even sent eight journalists to get back all the sold copies. The next issue of the *Wuwei News* carried a rewritten article about the same meeting and an announcement asking readers to destroy the previous daily by themselves. The incident outraged the people of Wuwei, and telephone calls and letters poured in to the paper protesting the Party's decision and supporting the reporter. "Tell us what's wrong with today's paper," readers angrily asked one of the eight journalists who were sent out to collect the issue, "otherwise, don't think you can get it back!" The eight poor journalists walked the whole day, went to dozens of work units, talked with hundreds of people, and only collected 110 copies towards to the end. Somehow, the scandal was scooped by one of China's largest national newspapers, *China Youth*.⁵⁸ Not

⁵⁸ *China Youth* has been is the organ of the Chinese Communist Youth League since 1951. In 1989 its circulation was 1.37 million, one of the top ten national newspapers. See *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1990*.

only did the *Youth* publicize the "ridiculous story" but also spread the news among the 1988 convention of the People's Congress and 1988 CCP's convention, both in the session in Beijing then. (What later turned to be more bizarre was that quite a few Western journalists who were in Beijing reporting the conventions thought the story was just a super joke for April Fools' Day – the date *China Youth* published the news was April 1, 1988.) Needless to say, the *Youth* was hailed by its one million young readers. The scandal astonished convention delegates and embarrassed the Central Committee in front of the Chinese and Western news media. Later on, other national newspapers engaged in lashing the Wuwei district Party leadership. The Gansu provincial committee, pressured by public opinion forced the district Party Committee to present an open self-criticism to the people of Wuwei, and an apology to *Wuwei Bao*.

This is exactly the upside of public mass media and the downside of *Nei Can*. Compared to the former, the latter lacks that great power which can influence public opinion. It's true that *Nei Can* could have solved the same problem, for example, a Xinhua Agency correspondent based in Gansu could have written up a report to the Central Committee and gotten remarks which would have compelled the Wuwei Party committee to submit itself to criticism. But, it would be an all-in-all secret political game of negotiation among Party's media and the state power, with the working class being completely shut out of it. The wrongdoings and poor administration would have only been exposed

⁵⁸ Hou Jun. 1989. Also see He Guangxian, 1990, "Zai chongfen fahui xinwen shehui xietiao ti zongti gongneng zhong duokui", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1990*.

⁵⁸ He Guangxian. 1990.

within a very limited circle and quietly corrected later. There would not be any public knowledge, and public opinion would not be involved. Therefore, a corrupted government official or a power abuser would never be pressured by public opinion and feel the public supervision. In practice, the masses have no right to know what has been going on and have no access to internal reports – the only place carrying the information. Theoretically, China is a "people's republic" and people are entitled to news of all kinds. Nevertheless, by not being made aware of the ongoing public affairs, the masses can by no means participate actively. It has to be the public news media that presents China's general public with the opportunity to speak their mind and comment on a variety of issues. When the Chinese public media opened up, it found that it assumed the power and glamour previously reserved for *Nei Can*, which had unfortunately overshadowed it for a long time.

For a very long time, internal reports and public news media were playing a complimentary role in China's political and social communication. Yet, the two are fundamentally exclusive. The emergence and development of *Nei Can* should be regarded as a tragedy rather than a healthy brilliant innovation. It denies the individual right of citizens to information, and unfairly casts them into ranked public, granting access to some and not others. *Nei Can* lifts, all those who pass Rank 13 to a privileged position of being the information elite. When being exposed or criticized, governmental officials and Party leaders would rather see their names mentioned by *Nei Can* instead of by the public media, though don't want any checks on their activities in the first place. But with expo-

sure only in *Nei Can*, their mistakes or even criminal behaviors may be considered a skeleton-in-the-closet. The Chinese Communist Party or any other leadership in the world will never be happy to expose any of its scandals in public, and neither will the power abusers. In this way, ranking officials are safely protected from any possible public scrutiny by the Party internal publications. Many illegal activities are not persecuted properly by state law, but only criticized by *Nei Can*, which by comparison is far less brutal than the scrutiny of Western media of their public servants. *Nei Can* also isolated state policies from public debate, even if millions of people's life styles are at stake. It does carry a lot of information, but it is an intelligence report for the Party, not information for the public.

What does a Chinese journalist think of his job of writing internal reports for the Party? He is in a very paradoxical position. As a Party journalist, writing for *Nei Can* makes him proud of himself. The job shows his commitment to his people and country as well as to the Party, even though he might not be a Party member. If there were anything a Chinese journalist could do to help the country's economic reform, he would do it, and *Nei Can* news is one way. It is very clear to every *Nei Can* writer that whatever he writes up is not for the public but for the power elite. However, if a piece he wrote is labelled as not "appropriate" for the public to digest, it will either end up in the internal reports or go down the drain, and he would agree to rewrite it and submit it to *Nei Can*. But like what Hou Jun did in the case of the assault on the intellectual, journalists usually target the public news media first, and if they fail, they then try internal reports. This take-it-or-

leave-it situation forces a journalist to make political compromises in his or her career.

A Chinese reporter also might view internal reports as an opportunity for him to participate in the country's public affairs. Since the political system of China is not a democratic electoral one, voting (which keeps American news media occupied every minute from presidential, congressional to district election campaigns), and all the other voting-related election campaign activities have never been part of a Chinese reporter's political agenda. Nor do they have to deal with analysis of an offensive or nasty political advertisement. Without this huge area of coverage, there is little material left for a journalist to fulfill his social and political duty. In China involvement in public affairs is limited through the public news media and it is not surprising to see that internal reports become the last channel for a baffled Chinese journalist to express his political commitment and social consciousness. At least it gives him the chance to prove that he is not politically apathetic. For the decades of Mao's era and also Deng's, going somewhere, talking to people, observing problems, taking a position, and then reporting the situation to a concerned administrator have been highly respected as model behavior for a Chinese reporter. This stereotype (ideal) of political communication has indeed been cultivated by generations of Chinese reporters. They usually feel pretty much fulfilled when devoting themselves to a muddy public-affairs-related issue, and believe that their engagement is their contribution to a great cause. In the eyes of a Chinese journalist, reporting has never been, and will never be, a pure, simple craft.

The last possible reason for a Chinese journalist to turn to *Nei Can* is the attraction of power. Once involved, the taste of being part of a high-powered game, and the sense of being indispensable in the eyes of both sides enchants many career-driven, public-affairs-loving reporters. Hu Qili warned Xinhua Agency journalists again and again in his speech that *Nei Can* went directly to the Central Committee, and that a reporter must be extremely cautious when taking advantage of that power.⁵⁹ In this power triangle, the news media functions as the Party authorized loyal watchdog looking over lower Party committees' and administrations' shoulders; meanwhile, it works as a sympathetic and responsible representative of the powerless by making pleas in front of the power that be. (Remember the story about that gear plant?) The Central Committee, however, is above the Constitution in China making the political communication very deformed, but at the same offering a journalist the rare opportunity to illustrate his talent and quality. In this power struggle, a Party journalist might get victimized like Wang Aisheng of the *People's Daily*, but Wang won a reputation among his colleagues, and made a lot connections among ranking officials from the Central Committee down to the provincial level. If some Western media scholars' observations are correct that Party journalism tends to be a docile and obedient instrument of the dominating political institution, the Communist Party, then the power relationship revealed by *Nei Can* demonstrates the other half of the story -- the untold one.

⁵⁹ Hu Qili.

3. Commitment And Empowerment

When looking at the Chinese press' relationship with the Party-state, a researcher's mind should be caught, if he is careful, by an interesting scenario depicting a complex of commitment and empowerment. The majority of Chinese media workers would admit that they are committed professionals, either as a Communist Party's pressman or a journalist of the "people". Whether this is the legacy of Mao's revolutionary years or a bigger legacy of ancient Chinese culture, which prefers intellectuals' identification with the prosperity of state, the term "commitment" is used by Chinese journalists to indicate that they are responsible, concerned social workers who are fully conscious of what they are doing. "Collectivism" or "unity", is not the purpose of this commitment but a by-product or methodology by which the commitment is practised.

In the 20th century China, a committed Chinese journalist could mean a nationalist and a patriot who pledged himself to revolutions against foreign powers' interference; or mean a public man who fights for social justice. A committed Chinese journalist in Mao's time and also Deng's time stands for someone who works for the best interest and welfare of a modern socialist China. Owing to this commitment, the journalist agrees to play different roles, whether a propagandist, advocate, organizer, intelligence collector, a public media newsman, a *Nei Can* writer, or all of the above. In fact he might have played them all in his lifelong career. Still, one problem remains in this commitment: for whose interest and welfare is it? The Party's? The state's? That of a working class? Or of

a general public? It is this question bewildered and victimized Chinese news media in the last forty years.

What also highlights the character of this press-state relationship is the "empowerment". Commitment does not signify a contribution or sacrifice without getting something in return. When a Chinese journalist associates himself to a cause, the cause promises him social status. Given the fact that the cause in China is designed and led by the Chinese Communist Party, the Party promises the committed political privilege and grants it some power. A Party journalist thus has special social status, by which he participates and plays a crucial role in the country's political communication. The newspapers and news broadcast become another authoritative as the institution of the Party-state; and newsmen become the messengers conveying information between the power and the powerless. News institutions in China are far from a professional organization dealing with information: they are para-legal and para-administrative units solving people's problems. This fascinating complex of commitment and empowerment has, as a matter of fact, ruled and characterized the bitter-sweet press-Party-state relationship for more than forty years.

Let's go back a little bit to my first interview with the deputy minister of machinery. I was not the only reporter there at that moment; Wang Zheng, a *People's Daily* veteran journalist, was there too. He's a more cheerful "old timer" of the paper. I knew that he had been heavily involved in policy making. Having worked as an industrial reporter for the daily for many years, Wang was the first insider in the fields of machinery and coal.

In the big office we shared with other reporters of the *Daily*, Wang handled all the coal-related phones calls, press conference announcements, and policy discussing meetings which I knew were always held in famous resorts' air-conditioning hotels. Coal was his turf and there he knew his territory inch by inch and almost everybody in top the positions, from the high-ranking officials of the central government to provincials and locals.

The resources of coal in China have been mainly located in the North not the South, if we take Yangtze River as a demarcation line. However, the previous administration had blindly invested in the South in an attempt to help the poor South become independent of northern coal. Because Mao was believed to be the patron behind the policy, at least his self-reliance idea, governmental officials and reporters tried to avoid debating the coal policy for a long time, though everyone knew it was a stupid decision. Finally, Wang tested the water three years after Mao's death. He edited and published two articles in the *Daily*, one of them with his long comments on the wrong policy-making. The result was an earthquake, both economic and political. The "coal elite", people who were Party cadres and government administrators related to coal production and distribution, were divided into two opposite camps on the issue. The opponents of Wang even accused him of being against Chairman Mao -- a first-degree murder charge. Behind Wang stood firmly his colleagues of the Department of Industry and Commerce of the *Daily*. Wang's bosses, from the director of the department, senior desk editor to the editor-in-chief and vice editor-in-chief, insisted that what Wang and the *Daily* proposed should be the nation's rational coal policy. More and more news, opinions and feature

stories advocating Wang's position were carried by the *Daily*. Meanwhile, coal minister, an investigation team sent by the State Planning Commission and Bo Yi-po, one of the Politburo members who had been in charge of economy for quite a long time, went to Shanxi to investigate the North coal. It turned out that Bo was on the side of the *Daily* and the investigation team did not report against Wang's position. In this way, the *Daily* and its journalists helped open the discussion and debate on a new coal policy.⁶⁰ And Wang became a leading voice and recognized authority on this issue.

Why did reporters care about the development of coal? Why did they again and again try to prove that their version of a certain issue or event was right? Why did it matter? What is at stake if the journalists win, or lose? How do the Chinese journalists view their role in advocating public policies? This certainly is a very complicated set of questions and can not be answered by claiming that the reporters are Party's hackmen. In a communication system like China, one thing is for sure, i.e. journalists have never just been a simple instrument of a national ideology and political institutions. One of the possible answers that I would like to propose here is the conscious, nearly idealistic, commitment led them to the public affairs. When I say "conscious", I mean a self-awareness, which can be the result of decades-long ideological indoctrination, a historical heritage continued from old Chinese culture. Whatever it is, the commitment of Chinese media workers in Mao's and Deng's time to a large extent is their own rational choice. Although some of them felt disappointed and betrayed after 40-year revolution, quite a

⁶⁰ Wang Zheng, "Dare to seek truth from facts", *Memoirs of people's Daily*.

few still believe there is nothing wrong with this commitment and will stick to it. Whatever they write for, *nei Can* or public news media, the innate attachment to a self-justifies cause, or a mission, had convinced generations of Chinese journalists to get "involved" in their reporting. They're definitely not some "outsiders" who "over-ride the hitches and stumbling blocks of the government communication channels." They did not believe in a cool "detachment" from politics and social issues.

In 1981, Mu Qing, head of Xinhua News Agency, told the journalists of agency's Sichuan provincial division that for a proletarian reporter, there were two essential principles. "One is the strong responsibility towards the cause of the Party and the state", Mu Qing pointed out. "And the other is the deep affection towards the masses."⁶¹ This is probably one of the best summaries of Chinese journalists' commitment complex. For a long time, journalists did not distinguish one part of the complex from the other, neither did they discriminate one against the other. For them, a Party-state's interest, people's interest, as well as their individual interest are, if not the same, at least well adjusted. And when they work as a journalist, they did not allow their commitment to be split to honor only one party. For example, in the "Great Leap Forward" year of 1958, the staff of *Beijing Review*, a English organ of the CCP, made this commitment clear. The year was the time when millions of masses built up their little steel furnace in their backyards and tried to produce high-quality iron out of family woks, kettles and farm hoes. The journalists of the *Review* were part of it. It described the scene in its editorial:⁶²

⁶¹ Mu Qing, "Xinwen gongzuozhe dayou zuowei ti shidai". *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* 1982.

⁶² The following quotes recited from Robert L. Terrell's work "The first 25 years of the *Beijing*

It is not without a sense of pride that we report the bit we are contributing to stepping up steel production. Last week, the staff of the *Peking Review*, in conjunction with other departments of the Foreign Language Press, succeeded in turning out its first heat of steel on a trial basis. Laboratory tests proved it was up to standard. Agreements are being made to start full scale production with iron works to be supplied by the government.

We started making steel virtually from scratch. We have no raw material, no technical personnel. But we had the will and confidence, the iron will of the Chinese people to get the things done, the faith in the collective wisdom and strength of the masses. We have been proved right in a very short time.

In response to the government call for a nationwide effort to push forward steel production, we too turned to making steel in our own backyard. Everybody lent a hand. In no time, some brought in broken pots and kettles, others contributed old bricks and limestone, still others turned in all sorts of odds and ends. In a matter of hours a reverberatory pudding furnace, Chinese style, was built...and trial production started within a day...

This successful melting of steel by a group of editors and administrative personnel gives the reader some ideas as to what China's policy of developing the steel industry with participation by the whole people actually means and how such a policy is working out in practice.

The quotes may be a little bit too long but it did reveal the understanding of journalists of their commitment to Chinese revolution. They later told Robert L. Terrell⁶³ in 1982 that they were "motivated by commitment to a great society" and "felt that a new society, a new world, was being built" and they "were part of it".⁶⁴

Even the most distinguished dissident reporters in exile are the ones who used to bid his commitment to a collective cause. Liu, Binyan, China's most famous former *Review*, *Gazette* 37 (1986).

⁶³ University of Missouri School of Journalism Professor Terrell was on sabbatical leave in 1982-83 and worked with the *Review* in Beijing as one of their "foreign experts". Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

investigative reporter and senior journalist of the *People's Daily*, once made a revealing statement in his self-examination. (Self-examination is a truly Mao's invention which could be psychologically humiliating and destructive but at the same time one could use it to make a tactful self-defence.) Then Liu was under extreme political critique and accused of "anti-Communist Party" because his muck-raking reportings offended China's corrupted system.⁶⁵

"I am often worried for the Central Committee," Liu admitted in 1985. "In such a huge country, under such complex and volatile, with so many problems within the Party's organizations and work, how many investigation groups does the Central Committee have to send out to solve the puzzles? ... Can we grant ... journalists...who are loyal to the Party line and policies... more chances to assist the Central Committee in supervising and stopping the unlawful activities, which violate the state interests as well as damage the reputation of the Party?"

Still, identifying oneself with a political cause can be very risky. Chinese journalists paid a heavy price for being a committed professional of a political cause. For forty years, Chinese journalists have been burnt by the backfire they started as a politically conscious reporter. Almost in every political campaign in Mao's and Deng's eras, a big proportion of Chinese reporters was persecuted. Generally, news media devoted itself to the campaign and each time the campaign it endorsed destroyed a journalistic community with many of them ended up as prisoners and deprived of individual rights. It puzzled journalists. The cause with which a journalist identifies himself is too great to be wrong.

⁶⁵ Liu Binyan, "My self-examination". *The Legend of Liu Binyan*. ed. by Gu Jun. Taipei: Shi Ying Ch'u Pan She, 1987.

But then what's wrong with media practitioners? For example, the Anti-rightist campaign, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, none of them wasn't the revolution to which Chinese journalists made their commitment. Yet, it is these revolutions that broke their dreams, families and individual life. In other words, they were punished by their commitment. They saw and experienced a social disaster when the news media is the conscious warrior of a political campaign.

Liu Binyan, a *People's Daily* senior reporter, was labelled as a "Rightist" in 1957 based on his critique of the Party. He then spent 21 years in the poor and remote rural areas making a living as a mutual labor. Despite this incredible personal ordeal, Liu agreed to go back to the CCP in 1978 to "fulfill his love to people". Within the next eight years, the committed Party journalist devoted himself to supporting Party's economic and political reform policies, and exposing Communist Party and governmental corruptions and all kinds of unlawful behaviors.⁶⁶ His news coverage on these sensitive issues won himself a reputation as the greatest investigative reporter the country had ever had. In 1986, Liu was expelled from the CCP again and later on went to the U.S. in exile. And Liu was by no means the only reporter persecuted by Chinese political campaigns. The staff of *Beijing Review* were under violent attack during the Cultural Revolution. "For more than a year our present chief editor was removed from her office and some of our best editors and translators was forced to work full times sweeping floors, cleaning toilets and doing physical jobs of all sorts."⁶⁷ Another example. Jin Feng, a female senior

⁶⁶ Liu Binyan, 1990. *A Higher Kind Of Loyalty*

⁶⁷ Recite from Robert L. Terrel, "The First 25 years of The *Beijing Review*. *Gazette* 37 (1986):

reporter of the *People's Daily*, was arrested during the Cultural Revolution. She spent more than five years in prison in a single cell without trial and had no idea that her husband was forced to file a divorce soon after her arrest until the day she was released. (It was the same prison where Wu Lengxi, director of the *People's Daily* was jailed in the Revolution.) Her crime evidence was one of the *Nei Can* she wrote for the Central Committee. In her internal report, Jin Feng told the Central Committee that the air force of Shanghai attempted to replace regular military watchwards by Chairman Mao's quotations to command their pilots. Also she reported to the Committee that in a soon open air force convention of Role Models Studying Mao's Works, every reporter present would be given 100 Mao badges and a series of hard copies of Mao's works. In her internal report, the committed *People's Daily* reporter harshly criticized air force, noting that using Mao's quotations to command a war was formalism and making hundreds and thousands of Mao's badges out of aerospace material a big waste. Additionally, Jing Feng reminded the Central Committee that air force, which was then under Lin Biao and Wu Faxian, was getting arrogant.⁶⁸ The Cultural Revolution indeed scared a great many journalists. The *People's Daily* was considered by Li Zhuang, director of the *Daily* in late 1980s, as one of the most "severely afflicted areas".⁶⁹ In many veteran reporters's eyes, the Revolution made the 1957 Anti-Rightists campaign a child play. This is not only because that the scale of the Cultural Revolution and the innocent people who were

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⁶⁸ Jin Feng, "Yiqian babai duoge riri yieyie", *LiShi Zai Zheli Chensi*. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe. 1986.

⁶⁹ Li Zhuang, "Sishinian jian san dashi". *Renmin Ribao Huiyilu*.

involved were much greater than the 1957 one, but also because journalists first time felt their commitment to the revolution put fuel to the fire, and it backfired themselves. When Jin Feng wrote the *Nei Can* to the Central Committee, she did something out of her political consciousness and commitment. And it is the agreement between journalists and the Party, although it was never put in writing, that press is part of the mutual cause and make sure its healthy development. Chinese political communication offered its media workers the special channel to keep the communication going, but it unfairly gave the upper hand to the Communist Party. The balance of a "social contract" that a party-state and its news press agree to work together is broken. Jin Feng, also Liu Binyan and also other Chinese reporters, felt betrayed by the Party that they, the committed journalists lost control.

Thus, in post-Cultural Revolution years, Chinese journalism started adopting a much tougher and more independent line. The old commitment began to crack here or there, and skepticism and cynicism were wide spread. On one hand, theoretical circle and press researchers initiated seminars talking about why and how did the Cultural Revolution happen and how to prevent it from happening again. On the other hand, journalists claimed that they were "committed" only to a "people's cause", or more clearly a social responsibility, instead of a Communist Party's cause because it is very likely for a party to make mistakes. Even though the "social contract" was not yet abandoned, the journalistic community as a whole had a critical attitude towards their old patron and partner.

In the post-Mao era (1976-), the concept of being "committed" to a mutual cause had been seriously revised primarily because of the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution. Liu Binyan raised the concept of having a "second kind of loyalty" which turned out to be a catchword for a critical Party journalists in the last decade. This kind of "loyalty" means a more rational limited commitment to the cause and critical towards Party-state. Sometimes, it was called a "higher kind of loyalty". During this period of time, skeptical reporters refused to follow Party's line blindly and more ready to be a check and balance of the power rather than a committed participant.

For example, in 1989 China Best News Competition Committee found that 80% of more than 1,000 pieces nominated for 1988 Best News were of the function of "public opinion supervision", i.e. the news items criticizing governmental corruption and mismanagement. Among 206 Best News awarded including broadcasting news, print news, cartons, headlines, news photographs, readers' letters, etc., 95% were of the same function.⁷⁰ Among eight news items winning the First prize was a story written by two reporters from the *Liberation Army Daily*. The officers and soldiers of a military company grew some two acres of Chinese cabbages in their backyard and expected a nice harvest until one day their superior institutions sent in trucks and got almost all the several ten thousands cabbages away. After one-year's diligent work, soldiers sold the remained cabbages for about one dollar. The scandal shocked the People's Liberation

⁷⁰ He Guangxian, "Zai chongfen fahui xinwen shehui xietiao ti zongti gongneng zhong duokui". *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1990*.

Army and was exposed by military reporters, who were considered traditionally under much more strict discipline than civilian journalists.⁷¹ Another First prize winner was about the corrupted and incompetent local government. Fufeng County Food factory bought five trucks of milk and was stopped at a neighbourhood village by local cadres. The factory was told that the trucks would never cross their village without 10,000 yuan, about 2,000 dollars, of toll fee. The factory immediately sued the village to the county government which bounced the case back and forth for days without a final decision. The outraged factory head poured the five trucks of already rotten milk into the county government courtyard.⁷² The news was reported by a *Workers Daily* journalist. Yet, more awarded news were about the *Guan Dao*, "organized crime". In Deng's reform era, the phenomenon that ranking officials and their family in-laws took the advantage of the power to get super profit was named "Guan Dao" and deeply disappointed the society. The news exposed scandals such as illegally imported video cameras, which increased from 300,000 sets of 1987 to one million of 1988, one hundred times of the state plan⁷³ and the ripping off of Beijing's Asian Game Village, where the million-dollar-valued construction materials were secretly resold for profits or simply disappeared.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Wang Chaozhang and Ci Aimin, "Wanyuan baicai mailiao qiyuanqian", *Liberation Army Daily*. November 13, 1988.

⁷² Xu Guozhu, "Fufengxian fasheng lingren tongxin ti 'niunai shijian'", *Gongren Ribao*. May 22, 1988.

⁷³ Luo Xiang, "Jiayong Luxiangji feifa jinkou chumu jingxin", *Zhongguo Jidianbao*. September 29, 1992.

⁷⁴ Yin Xinglong, "'Zuier' ti baoweiquan", *Gongren Ribao*. November 27, 1988.



In China's media community, the year of 1988 was called "the year of litigation". The tough position adopted by Chinese news media on exposing Party-government illegal activities at all levels upset many ranking officials and after China's General Civilian Law was issued, they took their anguish to court. (They also took their case to the Central Committee.) In Beijing, print press such as *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* (*China Youth*), *Beijing Wanbao* (*Beijing Evening*), and *Falu Yu Shenghuo* (*Law And Life*) were sued by angry officials and in Shanghai, each of Shanghai's total 38 news institutions was sued on different matters. Two reporters of *Minzhu Yu Fazhi* (*Democracy And Law*), one of the 38 institutions, were convicted guilty of slander and deprived of political right.⁷⁵ In West, news media is often sued, but by film stars and other social celebrities because of the exposure of personal privacy. In 1988 China's news organizations' litigation cases were almost 100% caused by media scrutiny and investigation.⁷⁶ Actually, the year of 1988 was the year when China had its best journalism after 1949 and up to Tiananmen Massacre on June 4, 1989 Chinese news media was trying hard to re-examine its social responsibility and search for its identity in a changing society. The traditional commitment they made to a Party-state, which was still hanging somewhere, started losing its glamour.

The unique power of a Communist media results from the political system and social environment where it is cultivated. Naturally, in a country like China, the former

⁷⁵ Hou Jun.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union, where a Communist Party receives the paramount power and lives like old-time royalty, it's hard to imagine that its news media is merely a message deliver and feedback collector. But this is not enough to explain why and how a Communist news media is empowered. In this section, I will try to examine the issue of empowerment from the perspectives of China's social and political structures.

An Gang, a former vice editor-in-chief of *People's Daily* and director of Institute of Journalism of CASS, proudly admitted in 1982 that to an average Chinese, having a letter published, either written by a staff writer or a reader himself, would be "much more effective" in solving his problems than going through the local administration. "I asked a man why he wrote the letter to the newspaper", An Gang testified. "The answer was that he had no housing." Then why newspapers? Because the poor guy did everything he could, "Burned joss sticks in each temple", meaning making a plea at every concerned administrative office, without success. The newspaper, thought not an administrative office, can do something to help. To the masses, it will be too simple to think that their Communist newspapers function merely as carrying out the political doctrines and interpreting the Party lines. A Communist newspaper, or broadcasting institution, is supposed to not only know the masses' problems, but also to solve them through whatever power they have. When asked by his American press colleagues about the difference between his press and *The New York Times*, the vice editor-in-chief proudly replied: "...our newspapers solve the most urgent problems of the masses."⁷⁷

⁷⁷ An Gang, "Yanjiu women ti duzhe", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1982*. p.117.

We may use Liu Binyan as another example. When he became a nationwide famous muck-raking journalist in the 80s, Liu Binyan had dealt with thousands of unjust cases. "When I sat in the office", Liu confessed when addressing a conference in 1982, "many phone calls for me from local appealers. I had to turn them down politely. I can't take care of that many. Not because I don't want to do it. Be honest, I'd like to a 'defence lawyer' if I had the time and energy." In 1985 when his national reputation as an investigative journalist reached the pinnacle, "People knocked at my door everyday and none of them I invited. I have no time to read, no time to sleep and I have stopped physical exercise for six years. However, I have to open the door because I can't not to listen to their unbosomed feelings and thoughts."⁷⁸ Liu's experience hints two things. First, the trust of the masses in media and also Liu's commitment. Deep in their hearts, Chinese journalists feel lofty of themselves, because "a journalist with social responsibility and a paper serious enough should face the difficulties and be a voice crying for justice."⁷⁹ Secondly, we see a very strange phenomenon that thousands of people try to have their problems solved by contacting one journalist. Why can a news institution have so much power, or potential?

In the 80s, a Party journalist, particularly that of an organ of the Central Party Committee or provincial Party Committee, functions far beyond being a journalist. He is also as a judge, a federal investigator, and sometimes a professional psychiatrist. China's

⁷⁸ *Liu Binyan, On Literature and Life*, Beijing: People's Literature Press, 1985.

⁷⁹ Li Shu-xi, "Cry for Brightness", *Forty Years of Guang Ming Daily*.

heavily centralized hierarchy places a journalist at the position where he or she is "direct to the heaven" (*Tong Tian*). In Chinese, the word stands for a special also efficient relationship with the prominent figures of the Politburo, the *heaven*. This situation is especially true when *Nei Can* is involved. A local problem can be addressed through *Nei Can* and in this way the Central Committee is informed and the problem will be solved much faster.

When he just talks to people and observes things for a future public news media report, as a potential investigator of the Party, a reporter would be highly respected and surprisingly well treated wherever he goes; the smaller the village he visits, the more important he seems in the eyes of innocent locals. As a journalist, he often has to interview a lot of people and many times it is locals who try to find him for petition, advice or just simply comfort, not the other way around. Those who face various problems from factory budget crisis to foreign trade license, would regard a Beijing reporter as their last chance to get the things done. His judgement on the urgent issues, most of the time superficial and prompt, does give hope to the desperate. If the reporter, using whatever power he has, helps frustrated local people, then he would be praised as *Bao Qing Tian*, "Judge newspapers" in English, a Chinese metaphor meaning an honest and competent judge or a benevolent and smart administrator. In fact, most "Judge Newspapers" enjoy being addressed that way and would like to practise as long as they can. On one hand, the title means an honor awarded to recognize journalists' involvement and participation in public affairs; on other other hand, it reveals the fact that a Party journalist can help.

The 1987 Chinese national television rating showed that the CCTV's evening news enjoyed a surprisingly high viewing rate. This half-an-hour news program has an overall viewing rate of 76%, including 35% people watching from beginning to the end and 41% watching from time to time.⁸⁰ Compared with the U.S. evening news viewing rates, three networks about 38% and the PBS 1.5%,⁸¹ it seems okay to say that the program had a high reputation. Plus, according to the same survey, 85% of the people polled admitted that they were either "satisfied" or "more or less satisfied" with the role played by television in "propagating and interpreting the policies and regulations of the Party and the state."⁸² Why do people turn to television to pursue the information and interpretation of the Party's policies? And why do they still intend to do so despite the "boring propaganda"? There could be a cluster of answers, but the one relevant here is that the news program is the "voice" of the highest power, which is presented through images and sound. The Party's will, doctrines, thoughts, critiques and even arrogance are expressed and made concrete through the evening news program. It is not a pure journalistic professional news coverage.

Meanwhile, a news institution itself is an authority, signifying a social and political status which overlooks the powerless and gives them guidance. In the evening news, the CCP is always addressed as "our Party" and if it is about issues of education, it becomes

⁸⁰ *Compilation of 1987 National TV Audience Survey Data*, Beijing: China Radio and Television Publication, 1988.

⁸¹ *American Media : the Wilson quarterly reader*, edited by Philip S. Cook, et al., Washington D.C.: The Wilson Center Press, 1989.

⁸² *China's 1987 National Television Audience Survey*.

"our Party's education project". Chinese audience usually take what news says as what the Party says. Chinese readers, particularly peasants in the countryside, often keep old newspaper clippings to argue against local cadres to protect their interest. In their opinion, whatever said in the newspaper is actually law.⁸³ The fact that it works on behalf of state power and as the only legitimate interpreter of public policies is nationwide recognized.

The empowerment of a news media organization in China is first rooted deeply in its political association. Its identification with the Communist party, the dominating force for almost half a century on the country's political arena, is the first and foremost ally it has. The privileged and elite social status a press gets need to be explained by the political structure it has been bound with. It is the Communist Party who transformed old China's mixed media system of private, governmental, and foreign investment into a single formed Party-state media and crowned it as the official media institution. The institutions, having some of their top ones guarded by high walls and armed soldiers, are directly under the Party's supervision, face direct personnel appointments and financial support. The Party trusts its media even more than its local secretaries; and of course punishes them severely if they turn out to be against or misinterpret Party's policies. Every journalist who works for the Party pledges his commitment in return to his supreme social status. The masses understand on the other hand, very well what the Party's media can do to them and for them, based on decades of political and social

⁸³ An Gang, "Yanjiu women ti duzhe", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* 1982.

experiences. After the fundamental restructuring of 1949, media agrees to act as the political representative of the Party, propagating Party policies from Marxist doctrines, principles, foreign policies to summer harvest, national role models, and sport programs. And at the same time, the Party grants its media the right to investigate, to judge, to interfere, and to interpret public affairs. When the Party committees at all levels hold Party meetings, and when governmental institutions have their policy-making discussions, it is the routine procedure that Party's journalists have to be present. For the intellectual papers which didn't have enough party-member journalists, the Propaganda Department would assign some to the them,⁸⁴ and at county level, worker-peasant correspondents have the permission to be present at county Party and governmental meetings, as long as they are Party members and most of the time they are.⁸⁵

The empowerment of Chinese media also results from the weakness and incompetence of the country's judicial system. Journalists were more than often involved in the cases which belong to a court. Particularly many murder cases that occurred in the Cultural Revolution. And that probably will last for quite a long time before the legal system can really take care of its own business. In the West, citizens contact news media on their cases for drawing public attention, while in China, the masses depend on media for some journalistic investigation and passing on information to provincial or Central Party Committee for a higher level interference. During the course of the forty-year Communist

⁸⁴ *Guang Ming Ribao Sishi Nian.*

⁸⁵ See Chapter V "Shifting from worker-peasant correspondents to expert free lances" of the dissertation."

rule, the news media has become a para-legal and para-administrative bureaucracy which can assist citizens to some extent. And ordinary people do have the knowledge to take advantage of the press in solving individual problems, not just voicing their opinions.

Further, the empowerment of media derives from the fact that China's administrative sector has been greatly tangled with the CCP's, ranging from state level, municipal level, to every single working unit. And more interesting, Party's committees and local branches are always leading administration at the same level. This certainly provides the news media with a unique situation in which its interference looks legal and natural, just because it is the Party's organ. "In economic enterprises, in the past", American political scientist Benedict Stavis pointed out, "the party branch had a dominant role in the enterprise. It had to approve all the enterprise decisions."⁸⁶ Not only in enterprises, but also in the fields of health, education, culture, etc., the Party secretary makes the Party workers superior to administrators. (What happened in the small town on the dispute over a gear plant's noise could serve as an excellent example. The rank of the plant Party secretary is higher than the local judge's and that of head of Environment Protection Bureau.) Yan Jiaqi, the former Director of the Institute of Political Science of CASS and currently in exile in Paris, France after the military crackdown in 1989, outlined the key point of the problem.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Benedict Stavis, *China's Political Reforms*, New York: Praeger, 1988, p.46.

⁸⁷ Yan Jiaqi, *Essays on Chinese Politics by Yan Jiaqi*, Teaneck: Global Publishing Co. Inc., 1990, P.112.

In the real political life, two sets of interacting systems have been formed in managing the state administration. People have got used to this phenomenon that many of them feel strange when we call for the separation of the Party and the government as well as the separation of the responsibility of the two....But in fact, in a great number of regions, legal institutions and prosecution institutions have no way to independently exercise their duty.

One of the most direct consequences of media empowerment is power abuse of Communist media itself. Almost unlimited political privilege such as the access to *Nei Can*, access to Party Central Committee meetings, right to investigation and interference, chances to manipulate public opinion, etc., overwhelmed some journalists. On this issue, there are always some occasions when Chinese journalists criticize themselves for power abuse, present and past. The deepest regret and guilt they feel are their zealous participation in the Cultural Revolution and other social and political campaigns after 1949, where they contributed a great deal to many national human disasters.⁸⁸ Some systematic and critical analysis have been done by mainland China media researchers and practitioners on these matters.⁸⁹ Besides, the hundreds of thesis written by master students of journalism of CASS during last decade, could also serve as sources on the subject. The other sources are available are numerous personal accounts and memoirs. For related information, see *Memoirs of People's Daily*, Beijing: People's Daily Publication, 1990. Also see *Forty Years of Guang Ming Daily*, Beijing: Guang Ming Daily Publication, 1989.

⁸⁹ See Hou Jun, *Weak Surveillance of Public Opinion*, Beijing: China Women Press, 1989.

The concept of the empowerment of a Communist communication network has been unfortunately overshadowed by the concept of it being a passive and lifeless tool of a Communist Party. For years, the media have been mocked as a "propaganda machine", "a political instrument", and "a house organ", etc. This is somehow understandable because for media to be part of a Party-state itself is pretty scary and unacceptable according capitalist-democratic values. James Markham, the first American journalist and scholar doing research on Communist communication system, the former Soviet Union and China, states in 1967 that "..., the function of communications in Communist China becomes essentially what it is in the Soviet Union -- to disseminate propaganda, to agitate collectively, to organize collectively, and to serve the regime as an instrument of control.⁹⁰ Godwin C. Chu, after conducting detailed research on some of China's campaigns in the 50s, described the functions of communication system as informing the people, generating their support, and assessing the progress.⁹¹ At some point, Chu discussed the feedback function of Chinese media in carrying out the Party's policies. But still, the media lack the glamor and magnitude possessed by their Western counterparts. Later, researches done by several other media scholars,⁹² more or less repeat the same judgements.

The overemphasis on the media's function of being loyal and docile to the party,

⁹⁰ James Markham, 1967. *Voices of Red Giants*.

⁹¹ F.C. Chu, *Radical Change Through Communication In Mao's China*, Honolulu, The East-West Center, 1977, p.212.

⁹² See A. Liu, 1986; J. Townsend, 1988; R. Bishop, 1989; W. Chang, 1989.

uncreative and dull, blocked the way to study the other side of the story. It's not only unfair to the tens of thousands of ambitious Chinese journalists, but also unfortunately neglects an important social and historical phenomenon and valuable research subject, i.e. the way a Communist journalist views his professionalism, he or she justifies his/her political identification with a specific "cause", and the way he or she judges the political participation as part of being "democratized".

We may want to take the "commitment" and "empowerment" as a useful concept to understand Chinese Communist communication's behavior in last forty years. For a media system, making "commitment" means "giving" or "devoting", while "empowerment" "taking" or "sharing" power. The Communist communication system is a built-in block of the whole Communist elite edifice and does receive political prestige and power. The institutionalized media system endorses and maintains the political structure and the myth of the Party; in return, its political patrons have to assure its special social status and power. Any change towards this structure, for instance when media detaches itself from the Party or commercializes its financial sources, the unbalance of press-Party-state power structure will occur and re-balance is needed. If this really happens, what media may have is its professional independence and what it may lose is the privileges and old power. Undoubtedly it is a political earthquake in Communist communication system.

The empowerment of the media and the participation of the journalists in propaganda are the major characteristics of a Communist communication. Journalists, as the dedicated agitators, try to make their voices heard by both the power and the powerless.

Defending one kind of national policy or the other by writing news reports or *Nei-can*, the journalists acknowledge their political obligation as their job number one. The division between a political soldier and a professional is getting sharper when the former is credited by national morals as an innate, indisputable and somehow sacred mission and, the latter is viewed as a hypocritical, pale and bourgeois behavior. The institutionalization of news media in a Communist society only recognizes, moreover fosters, the media's political participation right in the regime's political and social field based on denying of the media's identity as an independent professional career. The political communication in the country, because of the severe lack of electoral politics, is strongly characterized by the interaction between the media crusaders, since they regard what they do as missions, and the millions of masses. This structural relationship formulates the sharp ideological tendency of the media and its persuasion as well. The nationwide, decade-long and overwhelming indoctrination of Marxism-Leninism is only part of the mission of Party journalism, and if that has been analysed as the major task, then the judgement seems incomplete. What has been missing from the discussion on the function of a Communist media in the political communication is its communication workers' real commitment and conscious participation during the public opinion processing. It was no surprise at all when Liu Binyan was considered by folks of ranks and file as "*qing-tian* (Blue-sky) Liu", Judge Liu if translated into English. In fact, he was invited by numerous places to muck-rake the injustice and wash the Party's dirty laundry in the public. Although being an honest and insightful journalist, twice expelled from the Party because of the dissident opinions, Liu functioned as an envoy of the party liberals with the

political recognition as a senior journalist of *People's Daily*.

Chapter IV

Shifting From Worker-peasant Correspondents

To Expert Free Lancers

Worker-peasant correspondence is a traditional and widespread practice in China's journalism. This journalistic practice suggests that professional journalists routinely share their journalistic duties, such as news collecting, reporting and disseminating, with non-journalists. The non-professionals in this sense are understood as people who are not on the payroll of a news media institution, but intensively or regularly involve themselves in journalistic service. The cooperation between professional reporters and non-staff participants is not only officially encouraged, but also organized and institutionalized. It has been a long-time standard of China's communication operation since the early 1920s.

Before giving a further discussion on how the system of worker-peasant correspondence works in Chinese media and more important, how this tradition shifts in the '80s from such a norm to a new trend of relying on expert free lancers, we might need to know the way Chinese Communist communication system has been approached so far. The understanding and analysis of Chinese communication has been largely focused on two different approaches. One approach believes that the task of information gathering, producing and disseminating is undertaken by the country's news media, as most of the

countries in the world do. People who hold this perspective, individuals like James Markham, Frederick Yu, Mark Howkins, Won Ho Chang and Chin-chuan Lee, likely to emphasize their scholarly attention towards the issues related to press, electronic media and wire services. The nature of communication in China is, in their perspectives, similar to a Western model and a mass communication guided by a set of modern science-technology-triggered media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Journalists, in light of this position, should be the predominant figures of the whole information processing. Moreover, communication has been further interpreted as the relations between the Party, the CCP (sometimes together with its symbolic government) the press, and the people. The press has been singled out to represent the pivotal center which is responsible for the country's information flow and public opinion formation. Plus, the news media is characterized based on a Western professional model, a press run by journalists who are proud of their professional ethic and skills, as well as their political and economic independence. When the Western model applies to Chinese news media, the chance a Communist communication system passing a representative democratic press test is predictable: it fails in all categories. And *vice versa*.¹

The other approach, raised by the individuals like Godwin Chu (1977) and Robert Bishop (1989), argues that the nature of communication in China are more likely to be small group communication and interpersonal communication. A Western-style mass

¹ On this kind of relativist arguments between a Communist media worker and a Western democratic one is best discussed by Wilbur Schramm in the classic work by him and his colleagues *Four Theories Of The Press*. The Chinese official side of the argument can be reached in journalism textbooks and other academic articles.

communication is not the mainstream of the country's communication process. The justification for the stance lies in that China has been and still is a nation with high illiteracy and half-illiteracy rate, an underdeveloped economy and weak communication infrastructure. Chu goes one step further to state that other communication media and forms, such as a network of cadres, small study groups, and family and personal grapevines, finally accomplish the mighty job of message conveying and feedback. Therefore, mass media do not play a major role in the country's information flow. This approach, though not flawless, suggests a more interesting direction to study media-society relationship and function in the countries like China.

In this chapter, I would like to propose a different perspective to approach the way Chinese Communists operate their communication system. I believe that an idea of a new paradigm could be helpful to understand structurally and functionally China's modern communication. The paradigm, a set of philosophical beliefs and values that lay out the way Chinese communication is organized and practised, shows that Chinese communication structure consists of three main pillars: a network of amateur correspondents, a network of propaganda cadres and that of professional journalists. The three pillars by no means operate in isolation from an another. On the contrary, the relationships among the three since 1920s have been a constant mixture of balancing and compromising. When looking back, one can definitely see an arena on which were staged many live dramas. In fact, they interact with one another, and most of the time, they interfere into each other's field, claiming a mutual co-operation and interests. The paradigm of China's communi-

cation system tries to demonstrate that it is not the modern media with all of the mighty technology and intelligence advantage, that play first fiddle in front of the other two. Three of them have been equally important and taken turns to occupy a dominant position.

In addition to the usual competition and co-operation among three rivals, the paradigm represents a historical pattern of mass information process. It differs fundamentally from a feudal and traditional Chinese print press, so does it from a commercial and Western one. Unlike a traditional Chinese press, it utilizes modern media technologies, such as radio, satellites or electronics, to reach millions of Chinese masses everyday. At the same time, it is also interdependent on a enormous number of propaganda cadres and amateur correspondents, which is far from a mass media dominating model in the West. The pattern has embedded itself in and ruled China for decades, first in Mao's marginal revolutionary bases in the late '20s and after 1949, the whole mainland China.

One of the outcomes of such a paradigm is the incredible involvement and participation of non-professional journalists, such as worker-peasant correspondents and professional propaganda cadres. Amateur correspondents and propaganda cadres, the first and second pillars of the paradigm, have no doubt occupied a very important position in the country's communication, and still do. Not just because the two have involved millions of communication workers and their appearance at almost all the mass agitation and mobilization scenes is omnipresent, but also because that the tradition of non-staff reporters and propaganda cadres demonstrate a strong tendency of social participation, or de-

professionalization, if interpreted from another perspective. The practice is so routinized and officialized by the regime that it becomes one of the primary characteristics of a Communist communication pattern. This means that the involvement of thousands and thousands of non-journalists in news media service, at first clearly distinguishes a Communist media from a Western one, from purpose and function of a press in a society to basic definition of news in the occupation. Secondly, a non-professional control and management of media operation leads the media towards a profession where occupational deeds and codes gradually lose grasp, drifting away step by step. Lastly, the division between journalism and propaganda has been blurred, since what appears in the news media and what is propagated during political rallies and study groups tend to share the same tone and vocabulary.

What had happened in the '80s, interestingly, is not the continuity of this three-pillar paradigm. On the contrary, the worker-peasant correspondence tradition had been replaced by expert free lancers, though not completely. The network of propaganda cadres had also lost its control nationwide, with the penetration of a new free market economy policy and the fast restructuring of China's social life. Clearly, the old communication pattern felt the pinch of socioeconomic pressure and therefore, it significantly re-adjusted itself accordingly to catch up.

Although to study this whole paradigm, and its changing face, is not yet the task of the dissertation (it could be a very interesting but awesome job), I believe the discussion of the restructure of Chinese news media in the '80s can greatly benefit from the

analysing the interlocking relationship of media to the other two pillars. Due to the lack of raw materials available in the United States on the behavior and rationale of propaganda cadres, this dissertation won't be able to tackle that important portion of the system. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to provide a critique on worker-peasant correspondence as a tradition, and expert free lance as a new trend. The chapter tries to find out why a Communist communication pattern, here non-professional correspondence in particular, is adopted for decades; what causes the decline of this tradition; and what the shift means to communication study. The discussion will be conducted in four sections, based on a historical survey of the country's amateur correspondents, and a philosophical analysis on the bittersweet relationship between amateur correspondence and professional journalism.

1. Amateur Correspondents In The Revolutionary Years

"Amateur correspondent" is the name given to those who are not professional journalists but organized by the media to regularly contribute news stories and commentaries to the press. Its Chinese equivalent is *Tong Xun Yuan*, which was originally used in Communist communication system before 1949 Revolution and replaced by a more explicit title *Gong Nong Bing Tong Xun Yuan* (worker-peasant-soldier correspondents) in the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). The term does not include general contributors. It refers to the people who are in Mao's revolutionary army or with a working class background.

In practice, the amateur correspondents started functioning in as early as 1920s. According to the recent researches done by Chinese historians of journalism, Chinese proletarian press particularly sought contributors with working class background immediately after the press was born in the 1920s. *Lao Dong Jie* (Labor World), one of China's earliest working class journals founded by Shanghai Communist circle in August 1920,² solicited worker contributors by advertising in each issue. As a result, the articles and letters written by workers appeared very often in the journal.³ By the time when Mao and his comrades set up China's first Soviet Republic in Jiangxi province in the early 1930s, *Hong Se Zhong Hua* (Red China), the forerunner of today's *People's Daily*, had a network of "amateur correspondents" as many as 1,000.⁴ How many staff writers did the editorial department have? A staff of less than 20, who managed a six-page daily with a circulation of 40,000 at its peak.⁵ For a period of time, the editorial department of *Red China* received regularly some 30 submissions each day from its amateur correspondents.⁶ To organize and train these non-professional journalists, the paper published an internal journal, *Worker-Peasant-Soldier Correspondents*, circulated among the committed laymen who were recruited by Communist media. The tabloid journal taught working class contributors how to write to the media and how to keep in touch. "Attracting a large strata of poor worker-peasant youth to press work" claimed *Qingnian shihua* (Youth

² Wang Fengchao, 1988. *Zhongguo Di Baokan*.

³ Xu, Huanlong, 1988. *hongguo Xiandai Xinwenshi Jianbian*.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Wang, 1988.

⁶ Fang, 1982.

Truth), the organ of Chinese Communist Youth in the Soviet Republic," and establishing a system of active young workers-peasants correspondents at the bottom level" were a breakthrough of the old close-door press policy.⁷

There were, by the statistics of Communists themselves, some 100 Communist and Red Army publications in early Chinese Communist tiny revolutionary bases, scattering among such southern mountainous provinces as Jiangxi, Fujian, Guangxi, etc. The stingy wartime economy and unstable military environment of these bases compelled the fledgling Communist press to compress its editorial department into as small as possible, at the same time extensively relied on amateur correspondents selected from the Red Army, Communist administration and masses. Therefore, inviting non-staff writers to work with professional journalists had formed a common practice and pattern of Mao's communication system. Deng Xiaoping, the current China's paramount leader, was actually the editor-in-chief of *Hong Xing Bao* (Red Star, 1931 - 1935?), an irregularly published newspaper by the Political Department of China Workers and Peasants Red Army. The paper had a very tiny staff of no more than five editors. Meanwhile, it's network of amateur red army soldier correspondents numbered more than 500. Certainly, with the help of these 500 non-professionals, the paper reached its peak circulation of 17,300 copies in Juijin base, Jiangxi province, and later became the only newspaper (of approximately 100) that survived the epic Long March (1934-35).⁸

⁷ Xu, 1988. Wang, 1988.

⁸ Jin Yaoyun, 1988. "Changzheng tu zhong di *Hong Xing Bao*", *Xinwen Yanjiu Ziliao*. See Yang, 1988.

By 1942, amateur correspondents had played such an important role in running the news media that the CCP's Propaganda Department institutionalized the practice in its documents. During Rectification campaign in Yenan (1942-45), in one of its documents on remolding Party press, the Department required each Party publication have its own network of "amateur correspondents" and "writers with special assignments".⁹ Yet, the practice had not been well theorized until Lu Dingyi, then Minister of Propaganda Department of the Communist Party and one of China's leading journalism theorists, clearly stated in 1943 that the significance of having amateur correspondents was that it was the watershed of a Communist media and a bourgeois one. "This kind of newspaper", Lu stated, "not only has to have its own professional journalists, but also, and more important (I say it again, more important) to have non-professional correspondents who connect closely with the people by blood and flesh."¹⁰ Lu advocated that "the policy of combining professional journalists and non-professional journalists" was of the primary importance to a newspaper. It had the priority, according to Lu, over other journalistic rules, rules like five "W"s -- when, what, who, how and why -- and the journalistic investigation, etc.¹¹

There were reasons for Lu to re-emphasize the importance of amateur correspondents. The composition of Mao's news media had undergone a big restructuring. After

⁹ Zhong Xuan Bu, 1942. "Zhongxuanbu wei gaizao dangbao di tongzhi". Reprinted in *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian (1982 nian ban)*.

¹⁰ Lu Dingyi, 1943. "Women dui xinwenxue di jiben guandian". Reprinted in *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian (1982 nian ban)*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*



Mao and Red Army transferred their military and political center from south China to Yanan, Shaanxi, the CCP in its history gained a relatively peaceful time and sufficient economic supply. Meanwhile, the early revolutionary media workers were joined by hundreds of educated youth, who attracted by the increasing reputation of the CCP and discontented with the repressive and corrupt Nationalist regime. Yanan was more than happy to received thousands thousands of young intellectuals, including journalistic professionals, escaping from Nationalist-occupied areas and sneaking into "red" regions, the placed occupied by Communists. Unfortunately, their bourgeois educational background and professional skills were subject to Communists suspicion. "Since the outbreak of Anti-Japanese War (1937)", Lu analyzed, "the intellectuals who participated in the Party journalism came from an old society." "Among them, some people have brought the society's ideology and journalistic theories." In Lu's opinion, the ideology and theories were not "honest" at all, neither were they "scientific". If the newly-arrived young journalists apply these theories and professional skills to the CCP's journalism, the latter will be severely ruined.¹² Lu's position indicates the first clash between a Communist media practice and a traditional one. To the Communist media theorists, it was not the worst issue to work with young intellectuals -- being educated and trained as a bourgeois journalist--, because Communists were confident in re-educating them, given the fact that these young men decided to abandon the Nationalists and exiled themselves to Mao's revolutionary bases. What mattered and threatened a Communist communication pattern

¹² Ibid.

is that the bourgeois professionals "contemned" and "excluded" worker-peasant correspondents. The way the young intellectuals tried to standardize and professionalize the Communist media really upset the Communist founders. Lu even warned those enthusiastic professionals not to be "press lord" to alienate amateur correspondents.¹³ Twenty-five years later, the confrontation between professionals and worker-peasant-soldier correspondents was accelerated into a nasty war during the Cultural Revolution.

The year 1949 witnessed both the final sweeping victory of Mao's peasant revolution and the brave but awkward extension of Mao's small, rural, and ill-equipped media into big national and city media. To thousands of Communist journalists, it had never been so exciting and yet so difficult to transfer a basially foreign- and bourgeois-styled news media into a publicly-owned media, which embodies Communist spirits and uses millions of worker-peasant correspondents. Soon after newspapers operated in modern buildings, using telephones to communicate and taking buses and bicycles to gathering news, they found they eventually lost their connections with the old worker-peasant correspondents.¹⁴

To strengthen the cooperation with the working people, the National Journalistic Work Conference held in Beijing in 1950 re-stressed "amateur correspondents" as "a very significant political force" and requested "all the newspapers" take the networking of them seriously. At this point, an amateur correspondent functions not only as the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Yan Ling, 1988. "Dazhuanbian di liangnian", *Renmin Ribao Huiyi Lu*.

complimentary to a Party journalist, but also a propagandist at a grass-roots level.¹⁵ By the end of 1950, *The People's Daily* claimed a 10,000-member network of "amateur correspondents", meanwhile the editorial departments hold a staff of less than 100.¹⁶

During the first decade of the People's Republic, the worker-peasant tradition was well cemented and developed. Based on Lynn T. White's very detailed research on China's local newspapers in the Great Leap years (1958-1960), the country's newspapers at the provincial and municipal levels had well organized their "spare-time" correspondents. White III reported that Shandong *Tazhong Ribao (Masses Daily)* received "ten thousand articles per month from six thousand spare time correspondents" and *Beijing Wanbao (Beijing Evening News)* gathered "60 percent of its articles 'from outside'". When talking about the effect of amateur correspondents on professionals, White III worried that it really wasn't much time left for professionals to write, since the small staff, in the case of *Masses Daily* was 40 staff members to 6,000 amateurs, had to spend a great amount of time on "sifting and editing" amateurs' contributions.¹⁷ By the time American China expert A. Doak Barnett finished his strenuous study on the country's cadre system and bureaucracy in 1967, he obviously saw a spider-web style of huge Communist bureaucracy, in which was a propaganda network of "designated persons acting as report-

¹⁵ Hu Qiaomu, 1950. "Zhongyang renmin zhengfu xinwen zongshu shuzhang Hu qiaomu zai quanguo xinwen gongzuo huiyi shang di baogao", Reprinted in *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian (1982 nian ban)*.

¹⁶ Yan Ling, 1988. Wang Jing and Chen Hong, 1988. "Weida lishi zhuanzhe shiqi di xinxing baozhi". *Renmin Ribao HuiYi Lu*.

¹⁷ L. White III. 1979. "Local newspapers and community change", *Moving A Mountain*. Ed. by G. Chu & F. Hsu.

ers or correspondents" at the grass-roots level.¹⁸ Obviously, what Barnett called "designated persons acting as reporters or correspondents" are the worker-peasant correspondents in Communist party's tradition. According to his research, the antennas of Communist China's propaganda system stretched itself far to every corner of the society. Mao's People's Communes organized individual network of unpaid amateur correspondents who sent in numerous local stories to their county Party newspaper and radio station.¹⁹ In the following decades, other American communication scholars also reported and commented on the subject of amateur correspondents.²⁰

It is true that the historical and economic development of Chinese working class and its peasantry allies puts them in less privileged position than other social strata in terms of their literacy and schooling. So when the CCP founded its preliminary information and media system in southern China in the early 1920s, the media workers found their worker-peasant correspondents had little knowledge about journalism and even a hard time to read and write. But, no matter how difficult it was to bring working class into a literary and political world, the Communist party press had no other choice. There could be two reasons for this.

The first and the foremost is that Mao and his colleagues wanted to set up a brand

¹⁸ A. D. Barnett, 1967. *Cadres, Bureaucracy, And Political Power in Communist China*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ R. Bishop, 1989. *Qi Lai! Mobilizing One Billion Chinese : the Chinese communication system*. G. Chu, 1977. *Radical Change through Communication in Mao's China*. A. Liu, 1975. *Communications and National Integration in Communist China*.

new media system in China, at least this kind of media was supposed to be plausible in their own revolutionary bases. They named the press "a working class" press, through which, the Communists hoped to awaken, educate and attract politically indifferent, socially unorganized and historically isolated working people, particularly poor peasants. However, the gap between the masses and professional journalists as well as political advocates was enormous. The publishers and editors of the CCP's early publications were mostly Communist intellectuals converted from radical nationalists and social democrats. The famous Communist writers such as Mao Zedong, Li Tazhao, Chen Duxiu, Cai Hesen, Qu Qiubai, Xiao Chun and Yun Daiying, etc., were either educated by traditional Chinese schools, Western universities or Soviet Marxist training. Looking at the early Chinese Communist publications more closely, we would see that the early Chinese Communist press was more interested in political debates and theoretical discussions than in timely coverage of social current events, let alone the concrete reports of life in a working world.²¹

It won't be overstated that the early Chinese Communist media was more likely the continuity of a tradition of political essay journalism, not of a commercial press in a modern sense. The Chinese political essay journalism is a kind of journalistic practice originated around the end of the 19th century, when patriotic Chinese intellectuals and returned students from abroad were outraged by the humiliation and hardship caused by Western capitalist and colonial invasions since 1840 Opium War against British, and the

²¹ Wang, 1988. Fang, 1982.

weakness and corruption of Ching dynasty, the last dynasty of China (1644 - 1911). The journalism is best remembered for its eloquent but often emotional essays addressing current political and cultural issues. Thus, recruiting young worker-peasant correspondents became crucial to the newly established communication system, because only by doing so, could the CCP press get rid off the style of political rhetoric, the tone of educated scholars and therefore, absorb the nation's proletariat and peasants who represent 90% of the populace.

Certainly, the instability of wartime economy and insecurity caused by military pressure and a lack of qualified professionals also could be other factors leading to the employment of amateur correspondents. However, those factors do not seem so crucial. In other words, If the goal of the system is to create a "working people's press" which differs from a bourgeois one, the participation of common people, workers, peasants and revolutionary soldiers, in the press should be the premise. Their input and control of the press count fundamentally to the nature and development of it. Therefore, what Chinese Communist communication system began in the 1920s did reflect an ideal socialist pattern and paved the road toward a mass-oriented press.

2. The Cultural Revolution:

The Climax of Worker-Peasant Correspondents

The Cultural Revolution provided Chinese amateur correspondents with the most glorious opportunity in its history. The ten years witnessed worker-peasant correspondents flourishing into a predominating force of news media. Professional journalists and their long-time heroic practice, following the collapse of old establishment including the Propaganda Department of the Central Party Committee, were severely criticized. The media was accused of carrying out policies designed by an inner-party "bourgeois headquarters" for 17 years since 1949. The former editor-in-chief of *People's Daily* committed suicide. For Chinese media workers, the Cultural Revolution was one of their nightmares.

Along with the downfall of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping anti-Party Clique in 1967, collapsed almost all of news media leadership at various levels. The control of Chinese press, broadcasting and television, from national to local level, were taken over by either inner-institutional rebellions who asserted they were loyal to Mao, or transition teams sent by Central Party Cultural Revolution Committee (*Zhongyang wenge xiaozu*) headed by Jiang Qing, Madame Mao. The Revolution, however, threatened to paralyze the media's everyday business, for a huge number of editors and reporters (most of them senior) were denounced immediately after the Revolution began, and either forced to keep away from their work or sent to May Seventh Cadre School later on.

Yet, keeping the media running was not the primary reason which pressured the new leadership of the CCP to seek the support of worker-peasant correspondents. In fact, the "corrupt" and "bourgeois" media that Mao disliked were soon closed down. The

number of China's newspapers reduced sharply in the revolution. Two years after Mao posted his *da zi bao* (big character poster) "Bombarding Bourgeois Headquarters—My first big character poster" which triggered the Revolution in 1966, there were only 42 newspapers left in the country in total for the consumption of 0.8 billion Chinese.²² This means that 88% of China's newspapers were simply shut down.²³ Given the situation, why did the news media then put worker-peasant correspondents at the height which had never been reached before?

The political ascendance of worker-peasant correspondents in the Cultural Revolution has a lot to do with the nature of the revolution. The premier purpose of the Revolution was to seize back the power usurped by "a handful of bourgeoisie, revisionists and capitalist roaders", and superstructure was regarded the main battlefield. Based on Mao's continuous revolution theory, China's working class and peasantry should carry on their revolution one step further to "occupy the field of public opinion". In this sense, "amateur correspondents" not only should not be "amateur", but also rather be the "real masters" of press. In other words, the major body of news and commentary carried by news media must be authentic contribution from workers, peasants and soldiers, instead of from professionals who had been criticized as being out of touch with working people for quite a long time. Although many of Chinese newspapers, magazine and radio stations did

²² An Gang, 1982. "Xinwen shihye di chuntian" (The spring of journalism). *Chungguo Xinwen Nianjian 1982*.

²³ "1950 nian zhi 1981 nian quanguo baozhi chuban tongji" (Statistics of China's newspapers 1951-1981). *Chungguo Xinwen Nianjian 1982*. The 42 papers do not include those published by district level institutions.

devoted 60 even 70 percent of their contents to worker-peasant articles, it still seemed not enough.

Therefore, news reportage written by ordinary citizens with explicit working class background, though it was heavily politically loaded, was greatly promoted in the Revolution. For example, within the ten years (1966 - 1976), none of the news coverage and opinion articles was allowed to bear the name of a staff writer. Nevertheless, "worker-peasant-soldier" reporters, columnists and commentators, sometimes in the name of a revolutionary critique team, were a normal way to credit the author. Writing a news story jointly with a "worker-peasant-soldier" reporter also proved to be a trendy professional style and politically safe method to report a news. The unprecedented participation of amateur correspondents brought a sharp expansion of the old network and an incredible growth in publishing rate of their contributions.

Although we do not have an official statistics about the total number of amateur correspondents nationally from 1966 to 1976, there are said to be 100,000 in the early Revolution (1966) and 400,000 towards the end (1976), when the number of newspapers went up to about 180.²⁴ *Wen Hui Bao* in Shanghai, for example, as a leading national daily in art and literature with a circulation of 900,000 then, was networked with its 1,900 "amateur correspondents" spreading all over the countryside, industries, army, schools and universities, and government organizations.²⁵ The People's Liberation Army

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Wu Qinglin. 1978. M.A. thesis. "Zhonggong dazhong chuanbo jigou yu xuanchuan zhengce zhi yanjiu".

was also part of the game of news media revolution. For example, about 670 pieces of news reporting and commentary contributed by Chinese Liberation Army Unit 4669 had been accepted by army and civil press and radio stations from 1966 to 1969.²⁶ "Rural correspondents", amateur correspondents in villages, also were very active. In 1968, the number of "rural correspondents" of *Huanglou* (Yellow Building) Commune in one of Shanghai suburbs, were as many as about 150. They submitted hundreds of manuscripts to local news media ranging from Shanghai municipal press to that of *Huanglou* Commune. According to an incomplete statistics, 180 out of more than 400 drafts contributed to their country radio station were accepted and approximately 20 appeared in mainstream print media.²⁷ Because the total number of publications and radio stations were greatly reduced during the revolution, the number itself of worker-peasant-soldier correspondents perhaps will not surpass that of amateurs before the revolution. However, the unprecedented respect and recognition given to amateurs were what distinguished the revolution time from the previous years. It was believed then that promoting a proletarian non-professional and pushed aside the bourgeois and anti-socialist professionals were in the best interests of the country's working class, and the health of a Mao's proletarian press.

In one of the *Red Flag* articles during the Cultural Revolution, the growing network

²⁶ Amateur correspondent, "Zaojiu geming yulun duiwu di i tiao hao tujing" *The People's Daily*, June 20, 1969.

²⁷ By Staff writer and amateur correspondent, "Huanglou gongshe di 'tu jizhe'". *Wen Hui Bao*, December 24, 1968.



of amateur correspondents was viewed as "a revolutionary army of news reporting, which is composed of worker-peasant-soldier activists". The army, according to the article, had played an enormous role in advocating Mao's thought, eulogizing newly emerging things, criticizing bourgeoisie and revisionism, and promoting revolutionary public opinion.²⁸ The "activists" were believed to be real people living at the grass-roots of the society. They were "sons and daughters of poor- and lower- peasants", holding junior high or high school diplomas and doing the farming for at least three years.²⁹ Based on another investigation report of a worker correspondent network in Shanghai Electricity Machinery in 1969, the amateur correspondents were made of pure workers from old ones with 40-year working history to apprentices joining the factory newly. They wrote for newspapers or posted articles during their spare time and were not paid. In another report on soldier correspondents in 1969, soldier correspondents were described as the "soldier with pens". Very familiar with making slides, painting murals, displaying wall posters and contributing press and radio news articles, the soldier correspondents were regarded as an important element of a revolutionary public opinion formation.³⁰

Yet, the quality of the news drafts contributed by grass-root reporters and columnists was low and many times an editorial department had to use professional "bourgeois editors" to work on the drafts submitted by non-professionals. But since editing a

²⁸ Jiang Hong, 1971. "Jiaqiang xinwen baodao tuiwu di sixiang jianshe" (Strengthen the ideological building of news reporting team). *Zhongguo Dalu Xinwenjie Wenhua Da Geming Ziliao Huibian*.

²⁹ "Huanglou gongshe di tujizhe".

³⁰ "Zaojiu geming yulun duiwu di yitiao hao tujing".

proletarian opinion article or even a simple feature story had proved an extremely risky job, most editors would not finalize the version. As to the *People's Daily*, because the *Daily* was the flagship, together with *Liberation Army Daily* and *Red flag*, of the Revolution's public opinion, the wording had already become politically tricky and professionally demanding. When the paper couldn't find enough editors to rewrite the drafts, some ambiguous manuscripts often had to be transferred to late Premier Chou Enlai for final approval. Outraged by endless illogical and ungrammatical news drafts, Chou once asked Lu Ying, then Head of *The People's Daily* during the Cultural Revolution, "Could you spare me of being your (paper's) elementary school teacher?"³¹

Soon after Mao's death, amateur correspondents felt the unfavorable atmosphere brought about by Deng's reformers. Professional journalists went back to their domain, regaining the ground, and news stories with "amateur correspondent" as authors or primary authors eventually lost its glamor. The overcrowded space (regular Chinese daily has no more than eight pages) and time slot made the publication of non-professionally written news more and more difficult. Advertising, the indispensable financial resource of China's news media, often demands 1/8 to 1/3 print space. Workers-peasants-soldier reporters found the most accessible media where their contributions could be appreciated became largely local press and local electronic media, such as county publication and radio stations, where professionals were hardly available. R. Bishop observed in the mid-1980s that the radio station of Nantong area, (one of the eight districts of Jiangsu

³¹ Wang Ruoshui, 1988. "Cong pi'zuo' dao piyou di zhuanzhe". *Renmin Ribao Huiyi Lu*.

province), coordinated 3,000 part-time correspondents through its four editors.³² On the average, they provided the station with about 100 news articles and a dozen letters each day. The station which reached 1.5 million peasants by wired radio in every house, produced daily a forty-minute news and three times a day some feature program.³³

Amateur correspondents, even in the Cultural Revolution, was not the real threat to the professionalism of Chinese journalists. This was partly because the political power which decided what media should carry and what not, was not in the hand of worker-peasant-soldier correspondents. The institutional rebels who pushed the "capitalist roaders" of press aside in the early Revolution, and all kinds of transitional teams sent by upper authorities to keep the order of news media, had no intention whatsoever to share the power with the people at the grass-roots. The unexpected expansion of a working class correspondent network and the retreat of professional journalists in everyday business did present a golden age of "amateur correspondents" , however, their "rights" had never been institutionalized. Their relation with the whole communication system, though improved, was not fundamentally changed. None of worker-peasant-soldier correspondents reached the level of conducting media policy decision with Party representatives and senior editor-in-chiefs. In other words, despite their heavy involvement and participation in a ten-year political socialization during the Cultural Revolution, worker-peasant-soldier correspondents did not gain a position to effectively share

³² Here "part time" is an English translation from Chinese *yiyu*. It means "not-on-the-payroll", i.e. "amateur" according to my knowledge of Chinese media practice.

³³ R. Bishop, 1989.

the control of the media. One of the ironies was that on one hand, the revolution aroused the maximum public attention and unprecedented participation, including thousands and thousands of working class correspondents, on the other hand, the revolution failed to fulfill its promise to rebuild a "people's press" and was severely criticized in the post-Mao era as a "national and ethnic disaster" against working people's ultimate interests. It was true that amateur correspondents were not successful in becoming an independent social force and had never grown out of the boundary of being an informer of the existing Party policy and official supporter of the ever-changing Party line, still, they did see what they can do to a Communist communication system. With the ending of the Cultural Revolution, worker-peasant-soldier reporters were unsympathetically squeezed out of the mainstream of communication, although as a network it is still functioning.

3. De-professionalization Or Political Participation?

Worker-peasant correspondent movement is not an isolated phenomenon; it is, in fact, a product of a Communist ideal of communication affairs. The practice and history of Mao's amateur correspondents carry an astonishing similarity to that of the once Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries. Although we haven't found much solid evidence to prove if the CCP learned the strategy from Lenin and his successors in the early century, the historical and ideological ties between the two Communist giants could be a reliable source to explain the common policies of promoting and counting on amateur correspondents.

The Soviet Union and China started their own amateur correspondent system almost simultaneously: early 1920s, and with a same purpose: to use it as a measure to reform old journalistic professionalism. Both systems went through enormous difficulties and confusion. The place Soviets began their experiments was in big cities of their newly-founded socialist country, while Chinese exercised the system extensively in its backward countryside with 90% of the populace illiterate. In the Soviet Union, *rabselkor* movement, worker-peasant correspondents in Russian, originated from Lenin's idea and aimed at reforming the old regime's press. Under Stalin's rule later, amateur correspondents not only worked as local reporters but also "commanders of proletarian public opinion".³⁴ They were also considered useful to the regime as "a sounding board for undercurrents of dissatisfaction and opposition".³⁵ Soon after the WW II, *rabselkor* declined and it was not until Khrushchev era that the movement was revived again.³⁶ Today, the Soviet worker-peasant reporters become an "old category" and ALL-union Commission for Worker with the worker-Peasant Correspondents and the Lower Press is no longer active.³⁷ In the last two decades, a trendy change occurred to the *rabselkor* tradition. The system of worker-peasant reporters has been either replaced by a variety of free lancers and stringers, or updated to a network composed of well-educated, occupational and concerned social activists.³⁸

³⁴ M. Hopkins, 1970. *Mass Media In The Soviet Union*.

³⁵ J. Markham, 1967. *Voices of the Red Giants*.

³⁶ A. Buzek, 1964. *How The Communist Press Works*.

³⁷ T. Remington, 1988. *The Truth Of Authority : ideology and communication in the Soviet Union*.

³⁸ Ibid. Also see E. Mickiewicz, 1988. *Split Signals : Television and politics in the Soviet Union*.

The original idea for a Soviet *rabselkor* was to gain the citizenry involvement of the rank-and-file worker and peasant in the press. The ideal was that the press was "closer to the public bulletin board on which anyone may tack his notices, announcements and grievances", rather than a profession run by specialized and well-educated elites.³⁹ In the words of Mikhail Kalinin, an early Bolshevik, Soviet press is supposed to be "an enormous parliament or conference in permanent session where the people learn and teach each other".⁴⁰ Kalinin's idea is somewhere near traditional Western definition of press as "a free market of ideas and opinions".⁴¹ Kalinin's definition is an ideal, and it is because of that, the idea was soon drawn in the later revolutionary storms.

In the story told by Chinese, the ideal Communist communication is more or less the same as their Soviet counterparts. Chen Tuxiu, a liberal-democrat converted Communist and one of the founding fathers of the CCP, advocated the applicability of freedom of speech and press in Chinese society.⁴² However, Western enlightenment spirit and its application in journalism found it's not easy to develop a niche in a half-feudal and half-colonial China, and Chen was soon expelled from the CCP in 1929 for his favor of Trotsky's theory of revolution.⁴³ The man who, after all, influences Chinese Communist communication pattern the most is Mao Zedong. When he started his first revolution-

³⁹ M. Hopkins, 1970.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ W. Schramm, 1963.

⁴² Chi, Wen-shun, 1986. *Ideological Conflicts In Modern China*.

⁴³ Wen-shun Chi, 1986. *Ideological Conflicts In Modern China: democracy and authoritarianism*.

ary newspaper, *Xiangjiang Pinglun* (Xiang River Review), a short-lived (one month) student political journal in 1919 in his home-town Changsha, Hunan, Mao did not have an explicit idea about what a Chinese press should look like and how it works. Based on the political-essay journalism popular around the time, Mao began his political propagandist and contributor career without giving much appreciation to the principle of a Western democratic press. But one thing was clear, i.e. Mao was not interested in a press with a *Peking Gazette* style,⁴⁴ nor with a Christian missionary style.⁴⁵ And because of the antagonism with Nationalists since 1927 when a *coup* was staged by Nationalists and hundreds and thousands of Communists were prisoned or killed then and in the following years; and because of the arrogance of Comintern representatives towards native Chinese Communists, Mao did not believe in the model of bourgeois press, neither did he really admire that of the Soviets (operating in cities and oriented towards an urban proletariat). Eventually, Mao and his comrades developed a communication pattern for Chinese, which claimed a public media ownership, an absolute Communist leadership and the indispensable participation of non-professionals with a working class background.

In 1948, Mao raised his theory on the nature and function of a Communist press, when talking to the editors of *Jin Sui Ribao* (*Jin Sui Daily*). Mao believed that a

⁴³ Dou Qiwen, 1986. *Mao Zedong Xinwen Sixiang Yanjiu*.

⁴⁴ *Peking Gazette*, also named *Court Gazette*, has been widely studied among Sino-U.S. media scholars. Some most representative of them are— Fang Hanqi, 1982. *Zhongguo Jindai Baokanshi*. Wang Fengchao, 1988. *Zhongguo di Baokan*. Ge Gongzhen, 1940. *Zhongguo Baoxueshi*. Robert Bishop, 1988. *Qi Lai! Mobilizing One Billion Chinese: the Chinese communication system*. Won Ho Chang, 1989. *Mass Media In China: the history and future*.

⁴⁵ Fang, 1982. Wang, 1988. Ge, 1955. Adrain Bennette, *Missionary Journalist In China: Yang J. Allen and his magazines, 1860-1883*.

newspaper should not be operated by a handful of professionals with the door of the editorial department closed. The informative way to run a paper, Mao argued, was to run it through the leadership of the Party and the involvement of the people. The interpretation of a "people's press" tended to be a press carrying "people's opinion" which derived from common folk and contributed by them. The responsibility of a journalist was to help non-staff correspondents in their news writing, besides collecting and investigating news among working people, report their achievements and problems.

However, Mao's idea of a "people's press" has its built-in contradictions. On one hand, Mao placed a great hope and respect in working class, urban proletariat and especially poor peasants. On the other hand, he did not have a complete confidence in them. In his own words, Mao argued that Chinese masses needed a "Communist education". And one of the premier institutions which executed this education program was news media. As Mao stated in 1940s, the task of press is "to educate masses, let them know their own interests, goal and the Party's policy and line". Even theoretically, there wouldn't be a "people's press" in a purely mass sense, because such a press at any time should also be a "Communist party's press". The worker-peasant correspondents who are recruited to participate in journalistic operation should "report real situation to the Party and write articles for the Party press". That is simply their "responsibility".⁴⁶

Mao's attitude towards journalistic professionalism was full of contradictions too.

⁴⁶ Mao.

He was one of the few Communist leaders in the 20th century who paid serious attention to the function of superstructure in a Communist society, of which news media was a prominent part. Far from being an orthodox of Marxist, Mao tested this Western philosophy in Chinese social context and developed it into his own thought. From a communicative perspective, Mao argued that cultural domains of a given society weighed equally with a domain of means of production. In the last ten years of Mao's political career, he designed and launched a Cultural Revolution to assure that the cultural domains of a socialist country wouldn't dis- and mis-inform public by using anti- or a-Marxist ideology. The primary reason for China to undergo a "Cultural Revolution" is a fear that a working class regime led by a Communist party could be undermined by cultural enemies. In modern communication language, what Mao was concerned about was the power of written words, cinematic images, fictions, broadcast messages, etc.. In the views of China's leading ideologists, the political, cultural and psychological influence of a symbolic world could never be overestimated. The symbols produced and consumed by human beings, Mao believed, could reform, remold and reshape individual's consciousness. Human's mind was such a sensitive and captive "battlefield" that bourgeoisie would go ahead and occupy it, if proletariat did not take actions.⁴⁷ In his continuous revolution theory, Mao insisted that superstructure, including news media, art, literature, film, theater, etc., occupied an important position in a country's political stability and economic prosperity. The confrontation of proletariat and bourgeoisie would continue in

⁴⁷ Mao, 1957. *Guanyu Zhengque Chuli Renmin Neibu Maodun Di Wenti*.

superstructure after Communists took over a state power.

Although Mao, as a complicated and controversial Communist figure in our history, had not commented directly on media studies, Mao's concept of media effect could be compared with such Western communication understandings as "media power". Western communication research has for decades concentrated on relationship between mass communication and a human society. Perspectives ranging from "big effect" to "limited effect" again to "powerful media" and "agenda-setting", outlined a path to discovered how human society and behavior have been shaped and reshaped by a world of messages. The early conception of "hypodermic needle" in the 30s, in some way Walter Lippman's "mediated triangle", was replaced by Columbia school's "limited effect" approach in 50s. In 1960s and 1970s, more and more media scholars tended to think such cognitive effects as "agenda-setting", "co-orientation" et. with the assistance of modern electronic technologies, altered and rebuild a general public. Among them, Canadian researcher Marshall MacLuhan had an important influence on "big effect", since his position on television message was that it's "pervasive and central".⁴⁸ Also American media scholar Herbert Schiller, in his classic *The Mind Managers*, raised the point of media effect could be a threat to American democracy.⁴⁹ Similarly, Noam Chomsky, Ben Bagdikian, Douglass Kellner and others, showed their critical thoughts on media and social justice.⁵⁰ Mao

⁴⁸ Everette E. Dennis, 1988. "Whence we came: discovering the history of mass communication research ". *Communication Research: the challenge of the information age*. ed. by Nancy Sharp. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

⁴⁹ Herbert Schiller, 1973. *The Mind Managers*.

⁵⁰ N. Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*. Ben Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*. D. Kellner, *Television And Crisis of Democracy*.

would, on the subject of media power, greatly agree with the warnings coming from Western scholars' critique. More than that, Mao strongly holds that misinformation and disinformation (counterrevolutionary propaganda if in his language) could deceive general public and lead to the toppling of a state, a much more serious political effect.

Mao's philosophy on media power fundamentally affected Chinese news media studies and behavior, particularly from 1950s to 1970s. Treated as an important component of the regime to promote and install Marxist ideology and Marxist cultural values, journalism became a formal profession with special political assignments working in Chinese civil society. The political assignments it carries, here I argue against the instrumental theory, do not necessarily designate journalism a tool of the CCP. The professional codes and standards it has developed over years, for example, the truth of news, the timeliness of reporting, and social responsibilities, etc., guide Chinese media to function in its own way in a society plagued with political campaigns for forty years. It is an occupation because the Party and the society as a whole need information and direction to move on. It has its own laws to operate and rules to follow. For instance, Mao believes that a newspaper should always be "sharp, poignant and fresh". The worst news writing, to Mao, was a modest and not-straightforward style, like using a blunt knife to cut meat and can't even see the blood for a long time.⁵¹ He also carefully studied a dozen of Chinese non-Communist pressmen, such as Liang Qichao, Kang Youwei and Zhang Jiluan, who were famous for their political columns and journalistic skills in either the late 19th or the first

⁵¹ Mao. 1948. "Yu jisui ribao bianji renyuan di tanhua".

part of the 20th centuries.⁵² Obviously, Mao admired them as successful journalists and prosperous newspaper publishers.⁵³ But, Mao was more concerned with the political affiliation of a journalist than his professional qualifications. In 1964, two years before the Cultural Revolution, Mao mocked his nephew Mao Yuanxin, then a senior of Harbin Military Technology Institute, a para-military college in Soviet style cultivating sons and daughters of Party and state elites. Mao asked, "How could you call yourself a college graduate? You even don't know what class struggle is!"⁵⁴ The same principle applied to Chinese Communist communication practitioners too. For a long time, a journalist's capacity to understand and interpret the official ideology had been much more vital than his or her writing or other professional skills. Mao's understanding of knowledge would put more emphasis on politics than expertise. For example, Mao stated that there were only two kinds of knowledge, productive knowledge and class struggle knowledge. And class struggle knowledge was apparently more crucial than productive (professional) knowledge. When talking with newspaper editors in 1948, Mao told them that "You comrades are intellectuals. Intellectuals are often less matured, less experienced of practical subjects, or have very little experience."⁵⁵ According to Mao, newspaper editors and reporters should participate in the then Land Reform and various mass projects, because "peasants are smarter " than journalists.⁵⁶ It won't be excessive if we understand the

⁵² Wu Lengxi, 1988. "Wu bu pa' ji qi ta". *Renmin Ribao Huiyilu*.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Mao, 1964. "Yu Mao yuanxin tanhua jiyao", *Mao Zhuxi Lun Jiaoyu Geming*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1968.

⁵⁵ Mao, 1948.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

whole information processing in China is dependent on a dual system, media professionals, and non-professionals. The operation highlights journalism as a mass movement instead of a professional action. The work of a press should be done, and had been done, by fewer professionals, by the comparisons with Western standards, but tens of millions of non-professionals. Mao once complained about the "overstaffing" of *People's Daily* to Wu Lengxi, then editor-in-chief of the paper in 1958.⁵⁷ Mao thought it was excessive for a newspaper to hire one hundred or one thousand journalists⁵⁸ because Chinese political essay journalism, which impressed Mao a great deal, which had an enormous impact on Chinese society in the late 19th century through a fairly small editorial department -- no more than ten.

But, how can masses, in number of millions in China's case, involve themselves in a newspaper operating? The innovative answer provided by the experience of Chinese Communist communication system is that they work with and make their contributions to press operation by being "amateur correspondents". Thus, selecting and employing "amateur correspondents" and incorporating their input with professional media routine has become a unique journalistic practice in Communist communication history. And indeed, the practice has grown into a Communist alternative to a traditional, Western-style journalism.

⁵⁷ Wu Lengxi worked as editor-in-chief of *People's Daily* from 1957 to 1966. In 1967 spring, he was once under "military house arrest" and wrote to Mao regretting the acceptance of the job of editor-in-chief offered by Mao.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Mao's innovative involvement of masses, above all, poor peasants, into a Communist press building could be, or has been, interpreted as a cause of de-professionalization. Or, a consequence of the "de-professionalization" otherwise. A rather small news staff, non-elite writing equality, and ideology-oriented reports seem the symptoms of de-professionalization. Yet, it might be the professionalization that Chinese Communist communication had tried to prove for decades. At least, the professionalization style had enlightened and stimulated millions of Chinese people to associate themselves to a set of political values. It has increased the professional level of the working class to a point which none of the preceding Chinese regimes had ever reached before. No matter how diverse is the situation under which working class youth is brought into the professional world, some of them later on become real journalists. The reporter from *Brightness Daily* we mentioned in last chapter who went to the little town to confront a local bully on behave of people, used to be a young rural correspondent recruited during the Cultural Revolution. Zhang Shengyou, the peasant-correspondent-turned-journalist, contributed a lot to local and provincial media. Most of his news articles were written under a dim kerosene lamp during the night after a hard working day. Honestly, he did not appreciated very much what he submitted during the Revolution, calling the Revolution a "crazy and confusing age" and finally throwing his well-kept clippings into toilet. Yet, this young man "learned how to think".⁵⁹ His involvement in the whirlpool of public affairs and the ebb and flow of ideology educated and politicized an otherwise ignorant village

⁵⁹ Zhang Shengyou. 1989. "Yige jizhe di xinling dubai". *Guangmin Ribao Sishi Nian*.

kid. The professionalization, or "de-professionalization" if read from the other side, of a press is not necessarily the best way to democratize public, still, it was part of the rare education and chance accessible to a peasant society and it was what prepared Zhang some years later to help solve local folk's troubles as a real journalist.

Almost at the same time when Bolsheviks tried out their worker-peasant correspondent system in Russia, Liang Qichao, one of China's contemporary thinkers and revolutionaries attempting to install Western bourgeois liberalism in Ching dynasty and not at all a Communist, elaborated on the awakening of the soul of Chinese people. Liang was invited to comment on the country's constant political movements and turmoil since the late 19th century. We did not accomplish anything within the 50 years, Liang criticized, except the abolition of *ko ju zhi*, a traditional Chinese system of education and administration. However, Liang argued, that Chinese citizens eventually understood two important concepts: first, none of the foreigners had the right to interfere China's business and second, every Chinese had the right to concern about China's public affairs. Liang highly regarded the unprecedented political awareness of China's common people, which had by no means been China's national character for more than two thousand years.⁶⁰ Liang soon died in 1929 and he didn't witness the much more sizable and wilder political campaigns and movements led by Communists, which involved people of rank-and-file to a deeper and broader extend. Therefore, if worker-peasant correspondence can be conceived as an efficient political enlightenment, besides a journalistic activity, then the

⁶⁰ Liang Qichao. *Liang Rengong Jinzuo*.

movement might be accepted more positively.

The phenomenon of amateur correspondents has been observed and discussed by Western communication scholars. In 1956, American communication scholar Wilbur Schramm reported that as much as a quarter to a half of the content of a Soviet paper derived from amateurs. (Because of his critique of the Soviet press, Schramm is still very controversial and much resented among some Chinese media researchers, despite his reputation in the West.) He explained that "amateurs" was one of the two main reasons why the size of a Soviet newspaper staff was so small.⁶¹ In the following thirty years, amateurs or more precisely, worker-peasant correspondents were continued to be commented by media scholars such as Antony Buzek, James Markham, Mark Hopkins, Godwin Chu, Frederick Yu, Lynn White III, Ellen Mickiewicz and Thomas Remington. The question was imposed as, besides as a universal Communist communication practice, whether or not it is an embodiment of democratization, or a practice cutting off the ground of journalistic professionalism.

In Communist communication theories, recruiting and training non-staff, unprofessional working class people in journalistic work are considered a genuine professionalism. Mao argues that a press is supposed to be run by non-journalists and it's not professional to operate a newspaper with the door (of editorial department) closed. Lenin believes that a Communist paper would be "lively and vigorously only when for five

⁶¹ Schramm, 1956.

journalists there are five hundred or five thousand non-professional collaborators".⁶² M. Hopkins presents a well-argued discussion about the employment of amateur correspondents. To Hopkins, *rabselkor*, as one of the basic principles of the Bolshevik Revolution, *rabselkor* is the index of popular participative journalism. And incorporating *rabselkor* into professional Soviet press should be one of the hallmarks of their professionalism. In Hopkins opinion, the problem of Soviet amateur correspondent movement began with the replacement of it by a party press and as a result, the brilliant idea of *rabselkor* never was matured beyond its embryonic stage. The professionalism of the Soviet Union, according to Hopkins, was eventually and unfortunately transformed into a "structured, mechanized printed newspaper formed by well-educated and experienced specialists who screen and shape information presented to the public."⁶³ In 1967, Markham worried that the regime's alienation of intellectuals would deprive the Chinese mass media of talent and jeopardize the possibility to build a professionally competent corps of communication workers.⁶⁴ Twenty some years later, Judy Polumbaum, basing on her interview with Chinese media practitioners (1983-84), pointed out that professionalism not only still haunted Chinese news media, but also became one of the central themes of the 1980s journalistic reform.⁶⁵

⁶² See A. Buzek, 1964.

⁶³ M. Hopkins, 1970.

⁶⁴ James Markham. *Voices of The Red Giants : Communications in Russia and China*. 1967.

⁶⁵ Judy Polumbaum. "The tribulations of China's journalists after a decade of reform", *Voices of China*, ed. Chin-chuan Lee.

Honestly speaking, and compared with that of the Soviet Union, the emergence and the full-blow development (in the Cultural Revolution) of amateur correspondents in China's communication history are less studied, both by Western researchers and by Chinese scholars themselves. The available academic analysis about it so far is more fragmented than systematic. In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping's ten-year reform and relaxation era brought about another kind of participation to China's journalism, free lancing conducted primarily by experts and specialists and much easier to be identified with Western style. The old-fashioned worker-peasant correspondence, since then, has been eroded, under the competition of free lancing of a free market style, into a considerably smaller scale. Therefore, the study on non-staff journalism of Communist communication bears a significance in a deeper sense, because what the situation implies right now is not only the social history of a journalistic legend, but also the changing sociology of Communist communications.

One of the ways we can approach this traditional, shifting also, journalistic practice is to place it in China's social and political environment. The phenomenon of "amateur correspondents" has been an important part of China's mass participation and mobilization in the country's political life and public events. American political scientist James R. Townsend, in his classic *Political Participation in Communist China*, argues that contrary to the traditional style, Chinese mass participation activity under the CCP is the major way politics is conducted live and through which the ruler obtains his power over the ruled. At the same time, ordinary Chinese citizens are politically awakened, educated

and involved (politicized).⁶⁶ In this light, we can perceive the activity of "amateur correspondents" as a mass participation in communication process. Moreover, we can further understand how a journalistic practice cultivates a general public, from a situation of social and political indifference to that of concentration and sophistication. Through the involvement in message gathering and disseminating, the working class, who had been historically kept out of any social and literary activities, has a peek and taste of an elite career. The way they look at the society would have been largely changed,, because they have to observe a familiar world in a more detailed and analytical way, not merely "live" in it. Being a journalist, though amateur an ordinary citizen has to readjust his relations with his social and political setting, which emancipates a person from a flat, isolated and shortsighted mentality. Furthermore, his work is under the full guidance and supervision of a highly politicized party with an explicit ideological identification, therefore, he would be politically "educated" and "disciplined", which would help him get rid of being "apathy" to public affairs. When we have a politically and socially "conscious" team of amateur correspondents, the whole process of communication, not just political communication, would become more active, purposive, responsive and complete. In fact, the news reporting and commentaries contributed by working class reporters brought some fresh air to the CCP media's dullness and rigidity, if we can ignore some of their excessive political tendency.

⁶⁶ J. Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China*. 1969.

A socially and politically active non-professional journalism is useful for the Party to better impose its policies and lines down to *ji ceng* (the lowest level). As an indispensable pillar of the whole communication edifice, "amateur correspondents" collect every possibly valuable information and feed it back through mainstream media to the Politburo. Because their social positions, an amateur reporter is much more familiar and accurate about the reaction of bottom-line Chinese toward the Party's decision than a professional reporter. They fill up the spaces left by professional media and knit the information network tighter. More than often, a professional journalist has to rely on local amateur correspondents as his guide and informer to conduct an investigation. Besides, an amateur reporter usually at the same time is a press distributor who is responsible of the subscription and distribution. He would also be active in other activities in addition to submitting news articles, such as holding a study meeting, organizing a mass rally, leading a newspaper reading group, arranging a bulletin, and displaying wall paper and blackboard information. It is with the support of these not well-educated but well trained and loyal bottom-line communicators that the CCP and Chinese government could accomplish their numerous political campaigns, military maneuvers, and economic projects.

4. Shifting To Expert Free Lancers

The Cultural Revolution officially ended in 1976, marked by the *coup* in the CCP's compound, Zhong-nan-hai, which used to be part of the royal Forbidden City of the last

three Chinese dynasties. In the *coup*, Mao's widow Jiang Qing was arrested together with her three accomplices. The year 1976 was perhaps the most mysterious in China's five-thousand-year history. Within the year, Premier Chou En-lai perished in January after suffering a kidney cancer for a long time. Like hundreds and thousands of Americans today can clearly tell where they were and what they were doing when President J.F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, I still remember that cold and gloomy winter morning of an air force plant where I worked after spending four years in Yen-an caves, and my roommate's shocked and painful face with big tears, when both of us listened to the morning news broadcasting Chou's death. In April, tens of thousands of protesters against Jiang Qing (and Gang of Four) were cruelly beaten and jailed in Tian An Men square, when they tried to post big-character posters to pay respect to the late Premier and denounce the ultra-leftists. In August, Tangshan, an industrial city with a one-million population in northern China was wiped out at midnight by an unpredicted earthquake within five seconds. In September, Mao Zedong passed away and only one month later, his wife was arrested. Many, many Chinese superstitiously related the earthquake to Mao's death and the country's political turmoil as well. At the same time, they celebrated the downfall of Madam Mao and her three male political partners. The golden October saw Beijing residents, the most politically conscious citizens in China, lined up to purchase newly-arrived seasoning special -- river crabs from southern China. Most of them asked the shop assistant: " Can I have three males and one female (crabs)?", which referred to the Gang of Four. A political joke as it might be, one of the thousand such jokes which were rampant around the society, it's a sign too important to be ignored.

Chinese were overwhelmed by the ending of the Cultural Revolution and a rosy hope for their future. People could sense a coming new social storm, but none of them would predict the huge change he is going through today. Neither did journalists. What happened in the next fifteen years led China's media workers, professional and non-professional, into an uncharted zone, where they say good-bye to almost all of the old values.

The tradition of depending on millions of working folk to run a Communist press gradually lost its gas in the 1980s. First, the revolutionary title: worker-peasant-soldier correspondent, disappeared from press vocabulary step by step. Nowadays, readers and audience can still spot a news contributed by *tong xun yuan* (amateur correspondent) when reading a newspaper, or hear a broadcasting news when watching television. But the term is not frequently used and does not remind people of the heated Cultural Revolution time. Amateurs' social status goes even lower than before the revolution. In the press, many journalists tend to stress that amateurs are non-professionals and the reason why they still in practice now is that they need the publication and credits for promotion.

Secondly, most important news and news analysis are written and commented by professional journalists. The senior reporters from the Domestic Politics Department of *People's Daily* and the Domestic Reporting Department of *New China News Agency* monopolize almost all of the top news about state, the Party and international affairs. The news which is accessible to amateur correspondents are often second-rate and local. Even when amateur correspondents' name and title appear in the news, it is most of the time

accompanied and preceded by a staff writer's. In the past, a staff writer would feel honored to tie his name to a worker-peasant-soldier correspondent's to promote and protect himself, but today, the practice isn't necessary. More and more journalists, especially college-educated young professionals enchanted by exclusive reports and novel writing styles, tend to work on their own, unless they have to share with amateurs because of sources.

Amateur correspondents are widely under pressure of their working place leaders. Due to the lack of public relation professionals in China, amateur correspondents are used by many Chinese working place authorities as "image makers", who are responsible for publicizing regularly the unit's progress and achievements to the society. The reputation of a Chinese factory, a company, or a school needs to be boosted through news coverage contributed by their own amateur correspondents, or at least the initial contribution of the amateur can hook up a real journalist's attention. In return, amateurs' promotion and bonus largely rely on their publication. This partly explains why amateurs are still in practice, but also reveals the decreasing political commitment from the side of professional journalism.

It is, also, very rare in post-Mao era to see an editorial, long or short, contributed by an amateur correspondent, or a group of "worker-peasant-soldier commentators". The columns written by "worker-peasant-soldier critique groups" in the Cultural Revolution, become history. Professional commenters have been exploring a new way to express themselves. Newspapers, from central government of provincial, sooner or later founded

various columns with their own style. For example, *People's Daily* set up a small patch in front page, "Today's Talk", which was written by the *Daily* night-shift editor-in-chief and other editors. The paper's other small but sharp opinion columns, such as "Market Notes" aiming at protecting consumers' interests, "Shortened long opinion" observing Deng's economic reform, and "After editing" commenting on issues of culture, education and intellectuals, were also mainly managed by professionals.⁶⁷ *Huzhou Ribao* (*Huzhou Daily*), a municipal paper in Zhejiang province in southeast China, organized a team of commentators to operate its eight columns. According to the report made by the editorial department of the paper, the team was constructed by its own editors, reporters and the assistants and secretaries of concerned local government officials.⁶⁸ In China, it is not uncommon for the aides of government officials to draft for press, particularly the aids from major office of the local CCP's committee and local administration. (It's a tradition of Chinese society, but I wouldn't address the subject in the dissertation.) Apparently, Chinese journalism trusts high-ranking officials' assistants and secretaries because "they often visit grass-roots units with municipal leaders and are familiar with common people's complains. Their position often makes them the insiders of political situation and most of them are competent theorists and writers."⁶⁹ *Huzhou Daily* did have free lancers who contributed to the columns. They were cadres with lower ranks (normally lower than Rank 13), school teachers and "workers and peasants". Their submissions

⁶⁷ Yu Ning, "Renmin Ribao shi zenyang zhua zhuanlan pinglun di". *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1985*.

⁶⁸ "Huzhou Ribao gaige yanlun". *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1987*.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

didn't have the guarantee of publishing because of being unsolicited. In addition, the number of contributions were far more than what was actually needed, so professional and authoritative (official) commentaries tended to enjoy priority.

There are numbers of explanation why the old fashioned non-staff writer system has lost its ground in recent years. Surprisingly, the glorious time worker-peasant-soldier correspondents enjoyed in the Cultural Revolution did not discredit the practice very much. This is because that professionals do not see working class amateurs as their enemies. They had been working with them for a considerable time and they knew by their instinct that no matter what, amateurs could never replace professionals. After all, worker-peasant-soldier correspondents gained little in the Cultural Revolution, except as part of celebrity for quite a few years. The decline of and the real challenge to working amateurs derives from the sweeping economic and political reforms in post-Mao era. The reforms, since 1978, have gradually but remarkably changed China's social landscape and relationships. The new social and political structures see worker-peasant correspondents as something which has a respectable history but can't fit in a modernized China.

The number one reason for the decline is the rapid press specialization. A specialized media more likely seeks free lancers who are capable of offering professional knowledge instead of just general reporting. A 1986 nationwide newspaper survey jointly conducted by the Institute of Journalism of CASS and Capital Journalism Association of China, indicates that Chinese newspapers have got rid off the old pattern of generalized papers. Newspapers are now more interested in running their business towards different

occupations, genders, ages or other social and cultural categories. Among them, four fastest-growing categories--science and technology, economy, education, and legal and politics-- represent 28.5% of the total newspapers. Enterprise (corporation) and trade papers occupies 25%, arts and literature papers 4.7%, sports and health 3.3%. Generalized newspapers such as Party organs, military papers and papers towards workers and peasants, have a proportion of about 30%. The specialized newspapers don't have an appetite for worker-peasant correspondents, for the latter usually can not provide special knowledge and advice readers want. Therefore, instead of setting up a network of committed working people, newspaper editors tend to look for specialists for their expertise, and government officials for their interpretation or expectation of policy issues.

For example, *Health*, one of the country's national newspapers, had only three professional correspondents in the provinces beyond Beijing, but a large network of 196 non-staff writers in all over China. The network consisted of medical school professors, public health specialists, biochemistry and biomedical researchers and government administrators who were specialized in health care policy and family planning. Within the two years (1984-85), the 196 contributors submitted 7,121 articles and 41% (3,122) of the manuscripts got published. Among the accepted, 3.2% (102) made headlines of front page, and 3.1% (97) was reprinted by other national media.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Yu Zhiping, 1987. "Jiankangbao zai gedi pinren jianzhi jizhe di zuofa zhide jiejian" (*Health's method of networking non-staff reporters in the country is worth learning*). *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* 1987.

Evidently, worker-peasant-soldier correspondents can by no means provide a specific press with the expertise and professional knowledge it desires. Working people have certain knowledge of their trade and profession, but they find their knowledge is too personal and narrow. Or it is, through working many years with a trade, just experience not "specialized knowledge". Moreover, even "specialized knowledge" sometimes wouldn't be enough and the lack of expertise is not the whole point. It is especially true with the country's economic papers. By 1985, there had been 130 economic newspapers in the Chinese press. (The number of economic newspapers reduced to 121 by 1987 due to the closure in the Anti-bourgeois Liberalization campaign). According to the analysis by Chang Wen Ho, China's economic press was made of five categories: comprehensive economic newspapers, purely economic information papers, specialized economic papers, newspapers for consumers, and those published by economic research institutes.⁷¹ Among the five, comprehensive economic newspapers and those published by research institutes had more complex functions than the other three. The two kinds were all interested in the interpretation and in-depth discussion of the state economic policies,⁷² besides routine news coverage. It was this kind function that shadowed the access of common people to participate in information contribution. For example, the contributors of *World Economic Herald*, the only Chinese newspaper with also an English title, liberal, outspoken and shut down by the Propaganda Department of Shanghai for its pro-Hu Yaobang stance in 1989, are well-known economists, historians, scientist,

⁷¹ Chang, 1989.

⁷² Ibid.

sociologists, entrepreneurs, bankers, and business experts. Also on the list were high-ranking government officials, influential and resourceful celebrities. Obviously, the usefulness of these contributors were not only that their ability to offer their "expertise" on specific economic issues, but also that they themselves as valuable sources. Many times the policy leaking and inner-Party contention lured a larger concerned and curious readership. In order to guarantee the "exclusiveness" of its contents, the paper kept a very close relation with their high-profile contributors, i.e. prominent government officials and their assistants, academic and research institutions, and international organizations.⁷³ Without any doubt, an expert who was at the same time one of the top advisors of Hu Yaobang or Zhao Ziyang, would usually make the news more interesting and implicative. The information leaked through the article seemed even more important than "expertise". Smart readers were very good at reading between lines to find out the power struggle inside the Party and the possibility policy switch at the top. The function of this sort of contributors is very unlikely to be shouldered by a worker-peasant contributor.

In addition, the specialized press has no interest in organizing a committed network as general news organizations usually do. Editors do not want any obligation to select and train amateurs at the cost of their institutions' financial budget either, which is exactly the way in which the tradition is operated. Most of the time, contribution is supposed to be unsolicited. Keeping the door open to a pool of potential contributors means competition and high-quality articles. Unsolicited drafts have proved more appealing to

⁷³ Ibid.

readers because of the diversity of opinions. In the *Herald*, the editors solicited for contributions only once in a while, either due to a "timely issue" or "specific subject". The paper started becoming an open market of different ideas and interpretations. And in fact it had never fallen short of submitted manuscripts. Many people called in to see if the editor was interested in his topic or story and if there was a mutual interest, both parties just began working together from there.⁷⁴

Writers also feel a new position in journalistic world, which they have less sensed before. Free lancers sent their articles directly to the *Herold* without having to ask the permission of his working place authority, because the article he or she wrote was not public relation work, but a personal opinion. Nor did they have to "report" the progress and achievements of their working units in order to keep being a committed amateur correspondent and getting promoted. Their contributions might be rejected, for all kinds of reasons, and free lancers treated it as one of the thousands individual setbacks: certainly not a political failure. In this sense, the editor-contributor relationship is more like a buyer-seller relation, rather than that of committed participants and organizers. (We will come back to this important point later in the chapter.)

So far we have discussed the factors causing the erosion of worker-peasant correspondence of a Communist press. We argue that the re-structuring of Chinese Communist communication in the '80s puts more weight on contributors' professional

⁷⁴ Hsiao Chin-chang & Yang Mei-rong, 1990. "'Don't force us to lie': the case of the *World Economic Herald*". Lee, ed. *Voices of China*.

knowledge, insights and valuable social connections. Clearly, these qualifications required by a new journalism are too high for common folk to reach. Of course, the worker-peasant correspondents in the '80s were not illiterate nor were they ignorant. The majority of them were high-school educated young people in their 20s or 30s. But a modern journalism asks for more, because their audience does.

One of the interesting questions on non-staff free-lancers in the will do to amateurs correspondents, seeking free-lancers or heavily depending on its own professionals. Logically, because television is such a highly computerized occupation, it would be hard to imagine any free lancers in their spare time grouping up with a crew to discover news. The answer seems to be that electronic media tends to be a terrain for professional journalists. However, what happened in China surprisingly offers a different story, while it further uproots the tradition of worker-peasant correspondents. Anhui Province Television Station within three years (1985-1987) aired 11,482 news in total and those produced by non-staff reporters made an average 73% (66% in 1985, 74% 1986 and 75% 1987). Moreover, from 1986 to 1987, the number of television news provided by Anhui province to Channel I of the Central China Television Station (CCTV), the most popular and authoritative channel in China, for United News Broadcasting program every evening, was 585 and 51% (296) of them were made by free lancers.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Wang Yixin, 1988. "Anhui dianshitai yikao shehui liliang bian dianshi xinen" (Anhui province television station relies on social forces in producing television news). *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* 1988.

Who are those free lancers? They must be somebody who knows how to technically produce television news besides knows how to write. The non-staff contributors of Anhui Television Station were composed by county and town television relay station reporters (sort of real professionals), propaganda cadres whose work places have the facilities to make television news, audio/video education cadres of universities and colleges, and media workers and detective technicians of army and police.⁷⁶ It was with the help of them (their work counted for more than two third of the provincial television news production), medium-sized Anhui Television Station with only eight sets of video/audio facilities by 1987, managed to cover a populace of 40 million and a province as large as Indiana. This is also the case in the Soviet Union, as Remington has observed.⁷⁷

Advanced technologies and expensive facilities of modern telecommunication thus become the third obstacle keeping worker-peasant correspondents out of the business. Submitting a piece of news to a television station, central or provincial, requires production know-hows as well as writing skills, "knowledge", and "expertise". The term production know-hows here should also be read as the "access" to or "availability" of communication equipment. Because of the nature of electronic news manufacture, people who happen not to be assigned to the position to know or to learn to know the electronic facilities well enough, would have no chance to use the equipment to produce a news. And if noticing the rapidly increasing business of television in China in the '80s, we

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ T. Remington, 1988.

should believe that declining of worker-peasant correspondents as a tradition is a matter of time. According to a 1987-88 Chinese national television audience survey, the very first in the Republic's 40-year history in which all the provinces participated except Taiwan and Tibet, the Chinese television audience had increased from 120 million of 1979 to 590 million of 1987. 93% of city and town population as well as 33% of rural area population watch television. (China's city/town population is 37.1% of total population and rural area population is 62.9%).⁷⁸ In this huge and fast-growing information market, however, the traditional worker-peasant correspondents can not find a niche.

The fourth factor responsible for the transformation of worker-peasant correspondent practice could be the rapid increase of non-Party papers. In China, the affiliation of the press has been dramatically diversified in last decade. It stepped beyond the single pattern of being the organ of a Communist party committee or government organization at all levels. In 1986, Chinese journalism yearbook started tracing newspapers by new categories, such as party organs, science, women, culture, etc. The statistics shows that Communist party organs (from county up to central committee level) represent only 20.7% of 1,776 Chinese newspapers in 1985 (not include 415 non-registered ones), democratic party organs 0.2%. The circulation of the Communist Party organs is merely 13.6% of the country's total newspaper circulation by 1985. We may ignore the circulation of other "democratic" parties due to their tiny amount.⁷⁹ The rest of 1,776

⁷⁸ 1987 *Quanguo Dianshi Guanzhong Chouyang Diaocha Ziliao Huibian*.

⁷⁹ Chen Chongshan, 1986. "Quango baozhi jiben qingkuang diaocha" (Basic investigation of Chinese Newspapers). *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1986*.

newspapers surveyed represents a huge spectrum ranging from papers dealing with youth, senior citizens and peasants to papers targeting engineers, educators and legal workers.

This indicates a fundamental transformation of China's press structure. Thirty some years ago when Mao and his rural Communist news system took over China, they successfully revolutionized the old communication system. Through the revolutionary storm, a rather complicated communication system of old China was transmitted within two or three years into a centralized one with the organs of the CCP's committees dominantly webbing from Beijing to counties and little towns.⁸⁰ Wang, 1988.

For decades, these organs have been used as the publications of the Party, the government, the administration and all kinds of organizations. Several proposals were raised in the decades aiming at reforming the organ pattern of news media, but political campaigns constantly occurring within 30 years didn't give reformers any chance.⁸¹ It was not until 1986 that communication researchers of the second generation proposed again a practical framework of a non-Party organs media system. The reason behind it was a national newspaper survey. The survey showed that in 1985, five years after Deng inaugurated his reform and ten years after Mao's death, the proportion of the Party organ was only 20.7% of the nation's total newspapers.⁸² while five years ago, the organ percentage was more than 90%. Actually, the statistics of the Party organs kept reducing since then. For

⁸¹ Wang, 1988.

⁸² "Quanguo baozhi jiben qingkuang diaocha".

example, the number went down to 16.8% in 1986 and 18.2% in 1987.⁸³ What was more interesting and alarming is that survey conductors thought the decrease of the organs was not a bad sign at all. "There has been a great number of non-Party organs in our country's newspaper structure." The researchers stated. "This is extremely healthy to reflect the real situation of our four-modernization building. It represents a diversified public opinion and exercises the supervision of public opinion."⁸⁴ Indeed, the blossoming of non-party news organizations has resulted in the re-structuring of its non-staff writers team. The old worker-peasant correspondents tended to associate themselves with party organs and government radio stations at county level, where the traditional chemistry between editors and correspondents still worked. I came across a touching story when doing research on worker-peasant correspondents. A young peasant-butcher, self-employed, worked on a local open-air market, slaughtering pigs and bulls and selling meat to his town people. Besides the knife, he had a pen and he liked writing. What the young butcher wrote was the very local, common affairs of that village market. He won himself a nickname -- "Butcher correspondent", for his town folk loved his stories which were often broadcast by wired radio in their houses.⁸⁵ How did a peasant-butcher come to find a niche in an increasingly competitive journalistic world? Because of the effort of the CCP. Hundreds of young peasants in the same county, just like the butcher, were recruited every year by the county Party propaganda department. They were regularly given free Party newspa-

⁸³ *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1987. Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1988.*

⁸⁴ "Quanguo baozhi jiben qingkuang diaocha".

⁸⁵ "Yizhi huoyue di 'jiexiang jizhe' duiwu". *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1986.*

pers, journals and journalistic books, not to mention free training sessions, workshops, professional seminars, the access to some internal documents, and special permission of sitting in related administrative conferences and meetings.⁸⁶ It's no secret that the CCP and its Communist communication system trained them and made them a worker-peasant correspondent. In Qishan county where the young butcher's home was, a ragged mountain area in Shaansi province, the county CCP propaganda department organized a peasant-correspondent network of more than 500 young men and women scattering in 19 towns and 192 villages. According to an incomplete statistics, the correspondents supplied in 1985 10,700 pieces of news to county radio station and county Party paper as well as other news organs at higher level. 67% (7,200) of their manuscripts were adopted by local Party media.⁸⁷

The fate of worker-peasant correspondents was tied to the Communist party from day one. The legacy of peasants' political apathy and disorganization has been transformed by alluring them to daily social work. In order to promote these non-staff writers' unsophisticated work, the system even jeopardized the professional development of its own journalists from time to time. Given the condition that in 1985 62% of China's population living in countryside, 10% of them illiterate and 58% having only elementary or junior high school education, the support and promotion from party organs to lower class people correspondents should be somehow recognized.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Yet, the relation is not a one without conditions. The Party news network needs its worker-peasant correspondents as local antennas to feel the pulse of Chinese people, to supervise the carrying out of the party's policies, and to report the errors and social injustice. On the other hand, worker-peasant correspondents need to identify themselves with an official and authoritative media to obtain a social status and legitimacy. But, what if the political connection doesn't exist? What if non-Party organs do not have the same need and responsibilities as a Party organ does? Then simply, the tradition will vanish, which was part of the picture of Chinese Communist communication in the 1980s. Owing to the superficial penetration and weak control of the CCP in non-Party organs, the latter are not obligated to find a worker-peasant network in order to collect and report the latest happenings to the Party. Meanwhile, because of their speciality in diverse fields, propagating and interpreting Party's policies, ideology and lines are not their priority. Thus, the idea of using hundreds of non-specialized worker-peasant correspondents to push forward a political line doesn't sound a suitable business to these non-organ papers.

Soliciting for contributions from a well-educated general public is what non-organs are doing to substitute a network of worker-peasant correspondents. "We welcome readers and writers from the Party/governmental departments, economy, finance, journalism and literature to contribute!" wrote *Financing World*, the only comprehensive paper in finance in China.⁸⁸ "If this is a contribution, the postage could be free!" Advertised

⁸⁸ *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* 1986.



Shandong (province) Science and Technology.⁸⁹ "You will be paid immediately after your article is published. Don't submit your same article to other publications when we are processing it. Only if you do not hear from us in two months, are you free to decide what to do with your contribution." *Loving Seniors* made the business as clear as possible.⁹⁰ To lure more readers and therefore charge more on advertisers pushes a great number of non-organs to boast their committed service and professional potentials. More and more of them hope to convince readers of their journalistic quality. Some of them would advertise themselves as what *Jiankang Zixun Bao* (Health Consultation) did. As the first national medical consulting newspaper, the paper put special emphasis on its affiliation with "numbers of Beijing's prestigious hospitals, outstanding specialists and medical doctors."⁹¹ *Brightness Daily*, one of the national top ten newspapers with a circulation record of 1.01 million constantly in recent years, is very proud of the professional qualification and international experience of its correspondents. "We have stationed our veteran correspondents in 33 bases in China and more than 20 countries in the world, such as Washington, Moscow, Toykyo, London, Paris, Warshaw, Bonn and Cario ..."⁹² None of them, whatsoever, bothered to mention if they by any chance have a network of worker-peasant correspondents -- the amateur correspondents living in mountainous town, watching the processing of the CCP's agricultural policy and then report back. They were so out of date in modern Chinese journalism's eyes that they were,

⁸⁹ *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* 1988.

⁹⁰ Ad of *Ai Wan Bao* (Loving Seniors), *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* 1986.

⁹¹ Ad of *Jiankang Zixun Bao* (Health Consultation), *Ibid*.

⁹² Ad of *Guangming Ribao* (Brightness Daily), *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian* 1988.

forgotten. The explanation is simple. Nowadays, amateur correspondents won't sell any more, but professionals do.

The shifting from lower class amateurs to expert free lancers also marks a remolded relationship between contributors and press. In the past, a party press treats its networking amateur correspondents as part of its cause, and *vice versa*. A serious commitment, or a "social contract" if we can borrow Rousseau's term here, exists between the two parties. The decision of a political party to recruit and the decision of an individual to participate are made based on a more political rationalization, not an economic calculation. The gain and loss for both parties are realized at a macro, non-personal level rather than a micro, individual level, because both recruiters and participants agree to cooperate on a public project regarding a political party's ideology and policies. Although we may interpret the relation between a party press and an amateur correspondent as that of a mentor and a protege, since the latter often moves to upper social status, it is not out of any personal needs that a Party editor looks for promising young people, rather, it is a political project that seeks a collective support. As a Party journalism's amateur, he or she is usually entitled to investigate and write report at the public cost, which means paid travel expenses, the free use of one's working time, free seminars and training materials.⁹³ But under most of the circumstances, the contribution made by worker-peasant correspondents is not paid. In other words, the submission of an amateur correspondent is not

⁹³ It is a common practice and many Chinese sources reported it. For materials available in the US, please see "Jiankangbao zai gedi pinren jianzhi jizhe di zuofa zhide jiejian", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1987*. "Banhao 'Zuori Xinwen', jiaqiang xinwen shixiaoxing", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1983*. "Ran shewai qingnian canyu bianji huodong", *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1984*.

appreciated as an individual's accomplishment but, as part of a collective effort.

In contrast, expert free lancers would have completely different agenda and style from an old-time amateur correspondent when submitting an article. First, he or she is not interested in reporting and supervising the execution of a political party's domestic policies. Either a free lance doesn't talk about politics or if he does, his job is to interpret the rational and provide certain critique. Secondly, he or she doesn't make any commitment. Contributing writings is a voluntary action and buying a submission is, in return, a freedom of editors. "You will be paid immediately after the contribution is used." If there is any committee, that would be the committee of "not submitting an article to different news institutions simultaneously". Like any transaction in the market, selling/buying writings are simple business conducts. Thirdly, there might be some personal favoritism towards a specific writer or writing, but there wouldn't be any official organization to rally free lancers. Calling up a training session and distributing party documents and writing materials among expert free lancers, as what a party editor always does to his amateurs to make sure they follow the policy and submit appropriate reports, sound offbeat to non-party organ editors.

Chapter V

Commercialization Of The Communist News Media

Orville Schell, a longtime China observer and a man with insights visited Tiananmen Square, Beijing, in 1979. In the golden fall of the city and under the crystal blue sky, Schell was shocked and amused by the billboards on the square. "These new advertisements", he wrote in his popular book *To Get Rich Is Glorious*,¹

"stood in garish contrast to the massive, hairy portraits of Marx, Lenin, Engels, and Stalin that had kept watch the Gate of Heavenly Peace, along with the red-and-white billboards that for the last several decades had proclaimed such messages as LONG LIVE THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY; WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE; and other sayings culled from the works of Chairman Mao."

The new billboards showed "a young Chinese woman with pink lips, nail polish, and permed hair rubbing her cheek against a Snow Lotus-brand sweater." The caption was even more amusing, "Smooth, silky feeling, velvety softness, elaborate workmanship, smart-looking, warm, comfortable, and durable. Orders welcome in both English and Chinese."² What inspired Schell was not the ad; he probably had seen thousands of similar ones in downtown commercial areas and along highways in the United States. No, it was the unharmonious scene that bothered him, especially when the billboards face Mao's mausoleum in public view, the founding father of the revolution who fought his whole life against the bourgeoisie and materialism.

¹ Orville Schell, *To Get Rich Is Glorious*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, p.151

The Snow Lotus sweater billboard, though, was not the debut of advertising in China. The curtain of a post-Mao commercialization trend lifted in Shanghai's *Jiefang Ribao* (*Liberation Daily*). British scholar Randall Stross noted a decade later that "On the first day of the Chinese New Year in 1979, when a four-day series of advertisements for both consumer and industrial products appeared."³ Also in January 1979, the Shanghai Television broadcast the country's "very first (TV) commercial advertising".⁴ It's no surprise for Shanghai to be the first Chinese city to do so. The coastal city had been legendary and Westernized enough to pioneer the new consumerism after the Communist revolutions. But, this time was not a one-city show; this was the new trend in Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic reform era for the whole nation.

Soon after the *Liberation Daily* in Shanghai, *Tianjin Ribao* (*Tianjin Daily*), Party's municipal organ in city of Tianjin, Hebei province, started running advertisements for a toothpaste produced by local manufacturers.⁵ In May, only a few days after May Day -- International Workers' Day which has been observed in China for more than half a century, the *People's Daily* carried a no-nonsense article on "foreign advertisements". The article was written in an unusually relaxed way, without the traditional lashes at the evils of capitalism. After a long historical review, tracing from the announcement posted on the Colosseum of the Roman Empire to the huge American global advertising

² Ibid.

³ R. Stross, "The return of advertising in China", *The China Quarterly*. No.123, Sept. 1990.

⁴ 1987 *Shanghai Wenhua Nianjian*, Shanghai: China Encyclopedia Publication, 1987, p.133.
Lynn T. White III, "All the News:...", *Voices Of China*, P.99. Lou Shi-fang, "Dianshi Shiyie Qiyiehua Guanli Chuyi", 987 *Quanguo Dianshi Guanzhong Chouyang Diaocha*.p.152.

⁵ *Beijing Review*, March 3, 1979.

corporations, the author cautiously raised the real point at the very end. "We should do some analysis and study of foreign ads," he suggested. "Some experiences such as promoting products, enlarging the connection between manufacturers and consumers, and using ads and trademarks are, after all, worthy of our consideration."⁶

It is true that the article in the *People's Daily* didn't speak on behalf of the Party. In the late 70s and early 80s, the press started adding a new category of news articles to its traditional reporting, which was more information- and entertainment-oriented with very little tinge of ideological demands. Today advertising is no longer an evil term, instead, it is officially referred to as the "socialist advertising", or "advertising propaganda". In January of the same year, the editorial of *Wen Hui Bao*, a popular national daily based in Shanghai and once used by Mao Tse-tung in 1966 to inaugurate the Cultural Revolution, called for "restoring the good name of advertising." It didn't speak for the Party either. The point was that as far back as in 1980, the Party Politburo members regarded advertising of that time as a minor maneuver in the chess game of the nation's reform.

It was not until 1982, three years after the editorial, that the State Council pronounced its Temporary Regulations on Advertising Administration. But, by then ads had become rampant: in the air, on the screen, along the street, and even printed in the Party's own organs. For example, the *People's Daily* started running domestic industrial ads in mid-1979 and foreign consumer commercials in 1980; and among the advertisers were

⁶ Chen, De-zhang, "About foreign ads", the *People's Daily*, May 6, 1979.

Seiko, Isuzu, Mitsubishi, and Hitachi. The Chinese characters used in the ads were at least as big as the paper's headlines on the front page. While Schell was stunned by the Snow Lotus sweater billboard smiling at Mao's mausoleum, the audience in Hangzhou, a beautiful southern China city where former American President Richard Nixon was entertained during his historical visit to China in 1972, already enjoyed foreign advertising billboards during local sporting events such as "consumer non-durable and minor luxury items: Marlboro, 7-up, and Hennessy Cognac".⁷

In the China of 1980s, advertisements were everywhere: on billboards, in print, on the screen and in the air. The major carriers of ads were the Party's news media. According to a 1989 statistic, print media carried 35.75% of the country's ads, television 18.1% and radio 3.75%. (The rest was largely taken over by billboards.) Despite frequent complaints from the Chinese audience for its "unartistic" and "untrue" characters, advertising was warmly welcomed by Chinese consumers and who in fact desperately needed by Communist media institutions for revenue turnover.

As a capitalist concept, and as an activity, advertising had been banned or downplayed in Chinese society since the 1949 Revolution. In light of the observations made by American China media scholar James W. Markham on the former Soviet Union and Chinese communication systems in the 1960s, Chinese print and electronic media carried

⁷ Michael Anderson, *Madison Avenue in China*, Associated University Presses, Inc., 1984, p. 281

few advertisements in the first decades after the 1949 Revolution.⁸ During the ten-year Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), advertising was further denounced as an evil practice of capitalism and imperialism and then it completely disappeared from media and everyday life. Therefore, when advertisements were reintroduced into society in the late 1970s, the older generation had almost forgotten about it, and younger generation hardly knew anything about it. The roughly-produced, cheaply-imitated, still-pictures-with-voice-over commercials amused and, at the same time, angered a great many of Chinese people. "When I was growing up," a Beijing resident told with little nostalgia to an American reporter, "there was no advertising in China at all. Now you see it everywhere. A lot of Chinese people think the advertising is bad because it talks too much about foreign products and foreign technology. And a lot of it is not true."⁹

In this chapter, I will explore the relationship between advertising and a Communist-state owned news media. First, to what extent has the media employed advertising? Second, why does a Communist Party's news institution have to have advertising? Is it a pure ideological relaxation or an economic need? Lastly, I would like to look at the possible consequences of adopting advertising in Chinese news organizations.

1. News Media And The Advertising Return

⁸ James W. Markham, 1967. *Red Giants*.

⁹ Lynne Reaves, "A Chinese appraisal of advertising", *Advertising Age*, Vol.56, Sept. 16, 1985, P.77

China in the 1980s was in a unique mood in its thirty-year Communist history, "To be rich is glorious" had become the Party's key slogan and through its media, the idea was rapidly amplified to the whole country. Being rich in the 80s means making a great amount of money and possessing luxurious living materials, particularly Western products. H. L. Stevenson, a corporate editor with Crain Communications, Inc. and publisher of *Advertising Age*, was "stuck instantly" by the absence of the huge portrait of "a benevolent-looking Mao Zedong", when he arrived at the new Beijing airport terminal, since for years Mao's picture had "gazed out at every arriving passenger".¹⁰ Instead, billboards full of foreign and domestic advertisements were seen everywhere in the airport. "Where there is a road," one of Toyota's huge billboards boasted, "there is a Toyota." This, became the first impression of many arriving passengers.

Yet, the concept of a consumer society is a still new and complicated idea for the Chinese news media. Mao's world was basically an egalitarian society, although poor, where there was no big gap between rich and poor. In such a social setting, Chinese Communist news media enjoyed a simple lifestyle. The priority of Mao's news organizations was to propagate Party's lines and policies, supervise and report any wrongdoings by Party cadres and governmental officials, represent the voice of the masses, and finally to participate in all the social activities. Because China was not a consumer society, the functions of informing the public of consumer products and connecting manufacturers with retailers, etc. had never been on the agenda of any Chinese news institution. In

¹⁰ H. L. Stevenson, *Advertising Age*, Nov.11, 1985. Vol.56.

addition, the institutions had never been interested in any competition to make more money by appealing to more audience -- there is no such need. The Party-state journalism was the first and the only media operator in the country until 1979 and without a rival, there was really no worry about survival.

Before 1949 the ultimate victorious year for his revolution, Mao's Communist news media was primarily based in one of the poorest areas in the country. Outside Mao's various bases, the then mainstream news media, ranging from the Nationalist governmental press to foreign capital-supported urban press, made a living by depending heavily on advertising for its revenues. After entering cities, Mao's journalists started replacing the old Chinese commercial media with a Marxist-Maoist news media system. The awesome task took several years for the entire nation including journalists, producers, viewers, readers and listeners to adjust to the transformation. From a consumer society to an advertising industry, Mao's revolutionary media made it clear to the Chinese people that the new system didn't need them at all. For example, the pioneer group of the *People's Daily* driving a captured Nationalist convertible military jeep, entered Beijing on the same day with the People's Liberation Army in January, 1949. Based in the abandoned building of former Nationalist *Huabei Ribao* (*North China Daily*), Mao's revolutionary journalists showed the whole society their competency by publishing the very first national Communist newspaper in just two days. Also in order to maintain the pure revolutionary spirit, the pioneer team turned down the invitation to a feast prepared by the old Nationalist journalists and ate corn bread instead, which they had brought with them

from the village where they used to stay.¹¹ Inspired by a heroic idealism, the young Communist propagandists tried to establish a brand-new media system in front of the world similar to the one they had been running in their bases and what the Soviets did in 1917.

The picture in Mao's young journalists' head was a public media system operating without private commercials. They didn't know anything about the gimmicks of advertising and they didn't have much desire to learn. The distrust and disgust of any capitalist management were the result of a longtime Marxist-Leninist-Maoist revolution in China, which taught them the negative side of capitalism. The state-of-the-art of media operating in their red bases was all they had for preparing for a new national system. After all, what they needed to learn was to organize and mobilize one billion people of the country, which was obviously much tougher to handle than their little red bases.

For thirty years, the Chinese Communist communication system found itself a solid niche in the country's political and social structure. The mechanism of the structure ensured it a powerful social status and a peace of mind forgetting about advertising at all. It wasn't even included in the media's professional vocabulary. As a matter of fact, a great number of words related to consumption and market, such as bonds, credit, check-book, and bankruptcy, etc. were seldom part of an individual's life. Generally, China's socialist development, including the media's economics, had been guided by a single

¹¹ Wang Jing & Chen Hong, "A new newspaper of the Great Transformation", *Memoirs of People's Daily*, Beijing: People's Daily Publications, 1988, p.78.

model -- self-dependence and self-reliance with the least commercial activities. Or more precisely, it was a combination of Marxist critique on bourgeois free market and Chinese peasantry's simplicity and frugality.

The principle wasn't much revised when Khrushchev proposed his "potato plus beef" Communism in the 1960s, nor were the Chinese persuaded by Brezhnev and his "advanced Communism" in the 1970s. Mao's journalism, solely dependent on the state budget itself, again and again denounced the slightest appreciation of any consumer goods, while showing contempt for any ads. This national attitude towards consumption reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution when the national colors were revolutionized to only military green and Mao's blue. Almost every foreign visitor who was brave enough to tour the country during the Cultural Revolution turmoil was stunned and confused by the "national color". And later on, some of their abroad published articles would be soon translated into Chinese and issued in *Reference News*, an internally circulated tabloid edited and published by the New China News Agency. Interestingly, the stories about their "national colors" entertained hundreds and thousands of Chinese readers. The Chinese, then, didn't see anything wrong with their color blue or green, nor their attitude towards consumerism and advertising.

Advertising was reintroduced into the society after Mao's death as part of the economic reform package offered by the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Party Committee in late 1978. Unlike the suspicious liberal rhetoric from scholars such as Max Weber and John S. Mill, advertising won the heart of both Chinese reformers and

conservatives by showing them its marketing power and money-making capacity. To the surprise of the West, the often gloomy and distrustful Politburo members cheered the "magic quality" of advertising. For example, in the Third World Advertising Convention held in Beijing in 1987, Wan Li, state deputy secretary, addressed the opening ceremony and praised advertising as "an important medium conveying information and fostering exchange and cooperation", "the bridge connecting production and consumption" and playing an "unignorable role " in the economic development of the Third World.¹² Another indicator of the importance of advertising was the meeting of Chinese president Li Xian-nian with the delegates. Unable to attend the convention, then Prime Minister Zhao Zi-yang also sent a written message, adding a political tone to advertising. Zhao praised the contribution that advertising made to the cooperation between North and South as well as to the dialogue between North and South.¹³

Four months after the convention, the State Council issued Advertising Administration Rules -- the new regulations on advertising -- which apparently promoted a policy of *Laissez Faire*, and announced that there would not be any limit on space, time and the price of advertising. State award-winning liquor and cigarettes may advertise in the media. New regulations also allowed any private Chinese individual to operate an advertising business as long as he or she was not a criminal. Most importantly, according to the new regulations, no ad, domestic or foreign, would be accused of being "counter-

¹² 1988 *Almanac of China's Commerce*. Beijing: China Commerce Publication, 1988, p.149.

¹³ *Ibid*.

revolutionary". However, what needs to be pointed out here is that neither the convention nor the newly issued law began advertising in China -- it merely officialized the already existing blooming advertising industry and made it legal. Within ten years between 1979 to 1989, the number of advertising agencies in China had grown to 11,142 in 1989 from 10 in 1979, while the business volume of China's advertising had reached nearly two billion yuan or approximately two million U.S. dollars, with an annual growth rate of 30-50% since 1979.¹⁴

In the 1980s, advertising, along with Western technologies, investments and entrepreneurship, became the central themes of a socialist China. Yet, neither the advertiser, the agent nor the journalist really knew the nuts and bolts of it. For Western multinational corporations, an open China was an uncharted sea. Knowing business but not knowing the country still couldn't have kept things going. Therefore, Western corporations's priority was not to be so greedy and aggressive as to offend the regime which just opened the door or the people who were "still very suspicious of fast-talking foreign salesmen". After all, it is not a conventional operation to advertise in a non-traditional society.

For the agencies, the country was a jungle where there were no sophisticated written rules to follow, or to break. Plus, the foreign advertising agencies had to compete with

¹⁴ Li Xingjian & Curtis Smith, "Ad expansion sees problems", Beijing Review, May 15-21, 1989, vol.32, n.20; Marshal D. Rice & Zaiming Lu, "A content analysis of Chinese magazine advertisements", Journal of Advertising, Vol.7, No.4, 1988.

the newly emerged native agencies, which had the least experience and capital but had the advantage of connections and language. It was time for China's young entrepreneurship to grow. It had been a normal scene in China's big cities that several buddies established an agency by simply "hanging up a sign, casually bringing together a few employees, and be able to make a fortune."¹⁵

Yet, in an emerging advertising age of China, the first and foremost institution that was relevant to advertising was China's news media. But it seemed a very confusing idea for the Party's journalism to run a profitable advertising department annexed to a Communist news media. Some journalists did not even want to think about it, it was too contradictory. First, it could be awkward to explain to the masses how and why a Marxist-Maoist journalism, which was supposed to advocate all the glorious ideas such as Communist ideology, anti-bourgeois liberalization campaigns and any current Party lines and policies, should join in the promotion of cosmetics, bulldozers and Kodak film. The only handy explanation was that it was a "new era" and it was legal and appropriate to forget about the old "ultra-left" rules. "To get rich is glorious". The question that remained was then how much the media should charge its clients, so it won't be cheated nor the clients overcharged.

The country's communication system didn't take advertising seriously at first. Rather, it took a benevolent attitude towards advertising as a needy and timid partner. For

¹⁵ R. Stross. P.499, note 36 of Stross.

instance, the media provided time and space for advertising, which was a big favor in the late 70's and early 80's, because by doing so, the former promoted the latter to a legitimate and very prestigious position, when an ad appeared in the top Party's organs. On the other hand, Chinese journalists praised it as "socialist advertising", "serving the four modernizations" and went even further by integrating it into the Party's propaganda framework, intimately addressing it as "advertising propaganda."

But before long, to the astonishment of some staff writers of the press, commercialization invaded their workplace. Advertising agents wearing three-piece suit and ties knocked at their door, "Can we have a deal?"-- the legend of getting rich just didn't want to pass the media. But the media didn't know how to "make a deal". They had never done that before. What the Party's propagandists saw was that all of a sudden, the old hands dug up from their grave were allying with some new adventurers who wanted to make a fortune out of the reform. In the 80's, pseudo-advertising companies boomed along streets of inner cities and tried to act as the middleman between the Party's news apparatus and manufacturers, domestic or foreign. The situation scared and disgusted the country's major media institutions. Since they themselves had the strongest capital, resources, knowledgeable and intelligent staff, why couldn't they have their own advertising companies?

Thus, New China News Agency organized the country's first media-run advertising agency, China Globe Advertising Corporation. It was an in-house ad agency in the early 1980's, selling to any advertiser space in its publications. "The Corporation", the

corporation claimed, " has advertising pages in the following magazines, such as *Banyue Tan (Fortnightly Chat)*, *Huanqiu (Globe)*, *Sheying Shijie (Photo World)* and *Zhongguo Shangpin (China Commodity)*, etc, which were edited by Xinhua News Agency and its subordinates."¹⁶ The advantage of dealing with the in-house agency was, the corporation pointed out to the still blindly hunting advertisers, that clients could "directly print" any ads, since these magazines were owned by the corporation.¹⁷ In the same way, such national media houses as the *People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, *China Youth*, etc. followed up, establishing their own advertising companies.

The transformation from a Communist pressman to an advertising businessman was no easy thing at all. After media institutions figured out that it was all right for them to sell space and time slots for money, or foreign currency as long as the client was foreign, the next headache was how much they were supposed to charge. And how much was too much, or too little? There were not many records around for references, even if there were, they would be too outdated to be used as a guidelines. The problem has remained confusing and unsolved since then.

In 1990, American marketing experts were surprised at the still unbelievably low rate of Chinese media. Of course meanwhile they felt extremely lucky. "By U.S. standards," *Forbes* wrote, "the media costs are virtually zero. For instance, a 30-second commercial in a province like Sichuan, which has a population of 105 million, costs about 200

¹⁶ *Zhongguo Guanggao Shouce*. 1985.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

dollars."¹⁸ The price seemed almost immorally low because in New York city which has only 8 million people, "a prime-time 30-second commercial will cost about 25,000 dollars."¹⁹ It was not until 1989 that the Chinese media published standard rates of advertising through a Hong Kong-based British publication firm. The statistics showed that Shanghai Television, for example, only charged 1,000 dollars for a 30-second prime-time commercial, when it claimed that the station could reach an audience of 70 million in the most industrialized area of the country. Even China Central Television (CCTV), the largest and only national network in the whole nation, asked for only 5,000 dollars for a 30-second weekend prime-time commercial.²⁰ Even the foreign advertisers were uneasy when they preyed on the fledgling Communist advertising industry.

Moreover, much to the surprise of the Party media, the traditional evaluation of itself had all turned upside down in the eyes of clients. Who could charge the highest price in the ad market did not depend on how strictly the medium follows the Party line. The price of advertising relied on circulation and size of audience. Thus, popular publications and TV programs felt more confident in charging higher prices. For instance, *Dazhong Diarying (Popular Film)* asked for 39,000 yuan for its back cover and *Qingnian Wenzhai (Youth Digest)* 12,000. The price difference was based on their respective circulation: the former had a readership of 2 million Chinese, while the latter 1 million.²¹

¹⁸ *Forbes*. August 1990.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *China Media Book*. Anglo-Chinese Publications. Avon: U.K., p.148, p.67.

²¹ *China Media Book*.



Red Flag, the theoretical journal of the Central Party committee, sadly watched itself become the most hard-to-sell commodity in the business, compared to its splendid past in the Cultural Revolution when *Red Flag*, together with the *People's Daily* and *Liberation Army Daily* acted as the flagship in commanding the country's public opinion for a whole decade.

In 1979 and 1980, the advertising conducted on mainland China was characterized by a propagandistic style. Getting the proper image of a company across was much more important than making few fast bucks. Advertisers, advertising agencies and the Party's media were all flying their own pilot balloons to test their consumers, clients, readers and audience, since none of them really knew how to properly approach the other in conducting advertising business in a country which was just newly opened. For instance, contrary to the hard core of making money, almost all the parties pronounced their concerns with the country's "modernization", "friendship", "sharing and exchange", etc.. In 1979, Shanghai Advertising Corporation (SAC) proclaimed that its goal was to "exchange views, techniques, news, and products" and it was "not interested in fees", though, SAC earned 650,000 dollars from its foreign clients that year. Foreign advertisers, Isuzu, for example, tried to win the friendship and trust first, not the sale and the market. The automobile giant said intimately in its ads carried in the *People's Daily* : "There is one thing which should not be forgotten -- the close tie between you and Isuzu cultivated through the passing years. Yes! Because of this, we would like to contribute to the realization of your 'four modernizations' with our wholehearted gratitude." Smart Japanese advertisers

didn't use breathtaking beauty and scenic drives to lure potential Chinese customers. It was still too early to promote any Western values. The individualism and consumerism were still very vague in the country; more of all, people were amused by ads mostly out of curiosity than need. They were looking into the future. One of the American advertising giants, a Doyle Dane Bernbach official predicted, "There would be nothing for the first five or ten years. It's a long-term investment and this is step one."²²

As far as propaganda was concerned, the Chinese Communist news organizations did not find any big difference between its style and that of advertising company. Many Western multinational corporations actually used the same vocabulary as the Party journalism did to convince general public of their kindness and friendship. For example, for a Japanese company, step one was to promote respect and understanding between the two countries rather than to make money. Because of the unhappy episodes during WW II in the two countries' history, Japanese ads were protested by many older generation Chinese. The initial opposition to foreign ads, Japanese ones in particular, was shown by denouncing big-character posters put over Beijing store windows displaying Japanese washers, refrigerators and TV sets, charging the Beijing Advertising Corporation with treason.²³ This reminded the foreign adman that some Chinese didn't forget about the country's humiliating past in the last one hundred years.

²² Michael Anderson, p.281.

²³ Li Xingjian & Curtis Smith, "Ad expansion sees problems", Beijing Review, V.32, N.20, May 15-21, 1989, P.13

Thus, the early ads, in print or on the television, tried to use some propagandistic methods to wash the unpleasant memory away. The Party's journalism called for hard work for the "four modernizations" and the ads would claim the advertisers' good intention in helping. "This is our highest honor and the largest joy!" the Japanese manufacturers tried to let the Chinese believe that this was not an economic invasion but a modern form of friendship. The editorial of *Wen Hui Bao* claimed the purpose of advertising was not anything but "to convey knowledge and help people as well as to establish and cement the ties between the people and the departments responsible for the production and sale of commodities."²⁴ At this moment, a Communist media did not see a fundamental difference between an ad in press or on screen done by an advertiser and a piece of propagandistic report or commentary done by the news media.

However, the sophistication of the ads made by developed capitalist countries soon showed their superiority, not only because of money which affluent corporations could use to lubricate the ad, but also the way in which the message was conveyed. The early domestic advertisements which appeared in the Chinese media were hardly able to be called commercials. For instance, a Chinese adman would spell an English title into "Beijingexpressaircargodeliveryservice" based on the form of traditional Chinese reading.²⁵ Also the advertising heavily focused on non-everyday products, which were advertised by either state-run or private enterprises at TV pick-time and top Communist Party

²⁴ *Beijing Review*, March 9, 1979.

²⁵ Lynne Reaves, "China: A new frontier for advertisers", *Advertising Age*, Vol.56, Sep.15, 1985, p.74.

and state news media. They targeted workers, peasants, students and working women who obviously composed of 90% of the audience. The Party-journalists-turned admen were trying to employ the old method to handle the new tricks -- advertising. For example, a great number of the domestic ads were about heavy machines, such as bulldozers, cranes and factory assembly lines. By 1987, eight years after the re-establishment of TV and print commercials, machinery and other means of production related ads still counted for 29.93% of the total annual ad expenditure, with household goods for 22.4%, food 7.34% and medicine only 6.3%.²⁶

Besides, the early-time Communist ads painfully went into details concerning various sizes, models, maintenance, and even Latin names. The ads crowded every possible space in order to get the best use of the money. And they were non-personal -- most of them were addressed to people like manufacturers and big organizations. Most of them were boring in wording which was full of industrial jargons. For example, "XS-Zy-125G Plastic Molding Machine are used for heat plastic --polystyrene, polythene, hard polychloroprene..." or "Still available also are 'CSF-3A model 500W, CSF-1A model in 250W and BCQ-1 (half-automatic)model in 250W."²⁷ The critics said that the Chinese display of advertisements was a "dense, black mass".²⁸

²⁶ Tang Zhong Pu, "A brief account of China's advertising media", *China Media Book, China's advertising rates and media, 1988/89*, U.K.: Anglo-Chinese Publications.

²⁷ *The People's Daily*, May 21, 1979.

²⁸ R. Stross.

The problem was that in the propagandists' mind, propaganda, as a form of communication was probably the only thing which worked in the country. For forty years, through dozens of political and economic campaigns, propaganda has been proven to be the most effective way to mobilize one billion Chinese, to distribute information, to interpret state policies, to promote a project, and to destroy or restore a political rival's reputation. Propaganda has functioned, not only as a political weapon but also as a way of life. In China, propaganda could mean anything. There are occasions, it is true, in which common folk mock certain things as "merely propaganda", which means boring, empty, hypocritical and untrustworthy. But a lot of times people simply use the term to mean distributing news, spreading gossip or making the message heard by people on a larger scale. At least one million people in the country have chosen propaganda as their lifetime career-- working as propaganda cadres. The position is regarded as a high-profile job both in terms of political privileges and financial gains. Because as part of the country's political power structure, the propaganda cadres are always the official interpreters of the Party's lines and policies, and the most informed insiders. Before the focus of the CCP shifted from ideology to economy in 1979, propagandists played a prominent role in China's political and social life. It is hard to imagine any political campaigns without the devoted and zealous work of those players. When the American representative of the Great Wall Hotel, a Sheraton-five-star joint venture with China and the best hotel in the country, tried to explain the whole unfamiliar concept of public relations to his new Chinese employees, because even as a term, public relations just doesn't ring in their ears, one Chinese jumped up in the middle and said, "Oh! I got it! You mean

propaganda!"²⁹

Since the late 1970s, a lot of things have been changed. For example, the Responsibility system replaced Mao's People's Communes in the countryside and urban reform was much under way. But not propaganda. Instead, the old propagating apparatus has geared up to push the liberal line across the nation in a very similar way it did in the past, such as in the Cultural Revolution and the Anti-rightists campaign.

It, at first, denounced Lin Piao and the "Gang of Four", blaming them as the cause of the collapsing economy and degenerated Party morals. (The propaganda machine also once attempted to challenge Mao and his non-Marxist behavior in the past thirty years, but did not go very far before it finally gave up. It was too complicated to do so, especially when many of his comrades-in-arms and proteges are still alive and in power.) The mode of the nation's communication wasn't "modernized", or "Westernized" very much up until the mid-80s, compared with the economy and social life, which tried very hard to mix themselves with five-star hotels, Maxims restaurant, European fashions, or just simply "to get rich".

Continuing to act as the crucial crusaders of the CCP's domestic policies, the propaganda system actively participated in the most magnificent campaign in China's communist history to promote "*gaige*" (reform) without providing the common folks with much room to debate it, let alone the inner- and outer-Party opponents. The principle has

²⁹ Schell, p.117

been and still is that the propaganda system has to ensure that the reform keeps on the orbit designed by the Politburo members and operates at an acceptable speed. The bottom line of a pro-reform media was to glorify the old truth, which was that it was again the Party's wise decision of reform that would save China, as what had happened before, i.e. the CCP saved China from being the pray of imperialism and the KMT regime; from being pray of the Rightists in 1957; from being confused by the ideological betrayal of the Soviet revisionism headed first by Khrushchov in 1960s and later on by Brezhnev in 1970s; and from being guided towards capitalism propagated by Liu Shao-qi and Deng Xiao-ping in the Cultural Revolution.

Through the sweeping editorials, articles, lectures, meetings, etc., hundreds and thousands of propagandists, agitators, and journalists eventually made the reform the primary subject of the country in the 80s and manipulatively presented it in alignment with the CCP's requirements. In the field of communicating ideas, opinions and facts, nothing had been fundamentally altered, either theories or the practice. Now, it was going to handle advertising in the same way it did on any propaganda projects before. Can it accomplish the task? Why not? If it did a good job in the past, it must work well today. After all, the Party's journalism has the sacred mission to "educate", "agitate", and to "organize" the masses, don't they? The Party journalists, or "propaganda cadres" as what they sometime call themselves in another way, are the priests, if not the God.

With the propaganda experience in their minds, the ad managers, who were yesterday's propagandists and Party cadres, started their new job without losing any time.

This, in fact, sounded pretty scary to foreign clients who certainly admired the media's world-record circulation and had the intention of running ads in the country's Party propaganda apparatus. According to Western standards, the business in China was anything but professional, with only 25 to 30 "corporations" out of 4,000 that bore some resemblance to a Western agency.³⁰ Artists, writers, producers and editors who have been raised up and trained in a social environment where propaganda had been part of their normal lives, had a hard time understanding the essence of capitalist spirits.

For instance, Ogilvy & Mather, a Madison Avenue ad giant, was informed by the *People's Daily* in 1988 that its full page ad had to be chopped to half a page, because the only content of its ad was just a "single question mark – a typical adman's tactic to grab attention." When the multinational corporation dispatched its representative to Beijing to explain the whole process of how "nothing" could be "something" in advertising, the paper ad manager still thought that his paper had been "wasted".³¹ The clash here is nothing but the old Communist communication principle, i.e. to guide masses through clear instructions. According to the tradition of Communist journalism, the contents of a message should be "clear", "straightforward", and serve as the "guidance" to common people. Media had the obligation to teach the readers "how to think" and "what to think". A commentary which appeared in the the *People's Daily* in 1986 admitted that "For a

³⁰ H.L.Stevenson, "Shanghai agency taking its own great leap forward", *Crain News Service*, Advertising Age, Vol 56, Nov.11, 1985.

³¹ Li Xingjian & Curtis Smith, "Ad Expansion Sees Problems", *Beijing Review*, May 15-21, 1989.

very long time, our newspapers basically did the work of 'single-traffic lane driving', constantly teaching people how to think, how to do, but rarely fostering any confrontation of different opinions."³² It would become a disaster for the Party organ's in-house ad manager to tolerate any ambiguity aroused by any subtly delivered ads, e.g. "a single question mark".

This educational principle of Mao's journalistic practice penetrated the early stage of domestic advertising. One of the critics of Chinese ads complained about the demanding nature of ads and suggested that, "...consumers should be allowed to draw conclusions by themselves", when criticizing the design of the ad "crammed full with detailed explanations of a product".³³ Another Chinese journalist complained about billboards to his American colleague, "Our billboards have too many words," obviously weary from reading them to the American. And "our billboard makers should use short and active words."³⁴ Even foreign advertisers were warned by their agencies to "keep advertising straightforward, factual and single-minded. Interpretation of advertising is extremely literal and it is not desirable to attempt analogy, or humor of any kind."³⁵ Obviously, the agencies learned something about the statement-of-the-art of propaganda.

However, it didn't take a long time for the country's communication system to find out that the Communist communication style was just not a universal equivalent for

³² Cao Huan, "Don't take newspapers as documents of the Party's policy", Nov. 1, 1986, p.3.

³³ Randall Stross.

³⁴ H. L. Stevenson.

³⁵ Lynne Reaves.

everything including advertising. In fact, advertising as both a concept and practice, had its own laws and can not be run in a manner of traditional propaganda. People found that they might need a reform within the system to make it compatible with the operation of advertising. The two so far were on the different tracks. First, advertising is a business, yet the media in China was classified as non-profit political and cultural institutions, not enterprises, let alone a profit-making industry. By this concept, media was supposed to be ideologically and organizationally commanded by the country's public opinion headquarters -- Propaganda Department of the Central Party Committee.

2. Expansion Of The Press And Bankruptcy Of The Party

A great change had taken place in the Chinese communication system in 1980s, which was the rapid growth of both print and electronic media. According to the statistics of Chinese researchers from 1980 to 1985, a new newspaper was born for each day and a half.³⁶ In 1988, wire radio service that mainly benefits peasants in rural areas could cover 70.6% of china's population.³⁷ In 1988 color TV saturated big cities and the national TV audience had reached in 1987 55%.³⁸ This increase in the media had a dual impact. On one hand, it provided the Chinese public with more information and entertainment in the 80's than in Mao's era. On the other hand, however, it became a heavy burden to the

³⁶ *Zhongguo Xinwen Nianjian 1990.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *1987 Quanguo Dianshi Guanzhong Chouyang Diaocha.*

economic capacity of the Party-state. The old communication model suddenly found that the limited financial power it had could no longer meet the needs of such a large media. As a result, in the late 1980s, advertising was employed by most of the Chinese news institutions as their financial support.

Let us look at the *People's Daily* first. For over thirty years since 1949, the director of the *People's Daily* had never worried about his paper's economy. The paper was, and still is, a Communist Party's organ and because of this political status, the Communist Party should be responsible for all of its financial problems. In fact, in Mao's era bankruptcy was not part of the media vocabulary, which was true for the Chinese news media in general, and the *People's Daily* in particular. All the expenditure, such as staff salaries, office buildings, printing equipment, raw material costs were completely the concern of the Party and the state. Even the toilet paper was covered and was literally distributed monthly to the desk of each editor and reporter. Female staff members could ask for a special kind of feminine paper. This situation was described by Andrew Walder as Communist "neo-traditionalism" which refers to an egalitarian life style similar to the old days'.³⁹ The "commercial relationship" of the American media, i.e. "broadcasting morning news and selling household detergent"⁴⁰ was virtually non-existent in China. The whole media system operated according to its own logic and own pace within its own realm.

³⁹ Andrew Walder, *communist Neotraditionalism*.

⁴⁰ D. Hallin.

This kind of economic pattern might work in Mao's time when the central planning economy could manage the supply and demand. But not in Deng's time. The rapid growth of the Chinese news media and the strong demands for staff salaries, benefits, overhead, etc. went far beyond what the Party could afford. One thing we have to understand about the emergence of advertising in the Chinese news media is that it happened not because commercialization was trendy or exotic. It was more than that. The situation in the 1980's was unfortunately adverse towards a poorly-supported media system based on public funds. In fact, the news media of China was told by their long-time political and financial sponsors -- the CCP and the Chinese government-- that they were no longer able to support the media anymore. In other words, the Party abandoned them.

The gloomy economy in the late 1980s was obvious and the Party decided not to take the responsibility for the bankruptcy of the media. Inflation was out of control and everything from newsprint to groceries cost more than before. The budget for the overhead of TV program production and press coverage kept going up. During the reform, the Chinese government raised the price of newsprint, thus the more a newspaper printed, the deeper it was in debt. When the directors of newspapers complained to their superiors, they were simply told, "Go home and be ashamed of yourselves, if you can't survive!"

Also in the 80's, with more and more Western technology pouring into China, journalists and producers got very interested in using these foreign gimmicks. The illusion about the computerization of print media and the dream of getting more advanced video

and audio equipment and satellite service pushed the media budget up to 570 million yuan (around 114 million dollars) in the seventh Five-year Plan (1986-1990), only conservatively calculated. Nevertheless, the central government, trapped in an extremely tight economy, sent out a clear message to its media, indicating that all of the money which could be allocated to the media was 50 million yuan (around 10 million dollars), less than 9% of the funds needed. Moreover, the promised money had to be distributed within five years and only a handful of national media organizations were eligible as beneficiaries.⁴¹

One of the ironies of the 80's was that the Chinese journalists, the crusaders of the new economic policy "breaking the iron rice bowl", a rural and urban reform policy aimed at reducing the state's responsibility for citizens' job security, saw with their very eyes that their own bowls were broken too. But, it was one thing to break other people's bowl, and it was entirely another thing to see one's own bowl being broken. Losing financial security had serious psychological and political consequences. It gradually shook up the classical relationship of the CCP and the country's news media. (I will come back to this point later in this chapter.) In addition, journalists had witnessed and reported so many self-made Chinese millionaires who had suddenly bean-sprouted from every corner of the society. Not only were they getting rich, but also they were getting independent. This new entrepreneurship, which to some extent, inspired journalists.

⁴¹ Hao Jian-zhong, "Review of the debate on press management", 1987 China Journalism Yearbook, Beijing: China Social Sciences Publication, 1987, p.97.

Under these circumstances, advertising became one of the hopes that the Chinese news media could embrace to establish its new financial base.

In the last several years, more and more news institutions from national televisions to local county papers turned to advertising for help. Take Shanghai Television as an example. As one of the largest of China's state-run television stations, with a claimed audience of 70 million, the station had been proud of itself for being the first TV station to broadcast commercials in the country's television history and continued to do so since then.⁴² The predicament of the station in the 80's was primarily money. The funds coming from the state for radio and television in 1986, which was the highest in the 80's, was 19 million yuan (about 9.5 million dollars). The meager amount of money only counted 0.039% of the city's yearly GNP. After sharing the money with the city's radio stations, Shanghai TV collected the leftover 7.34 million yuan (about 0.37 million dollars).

According to the appraisal of the Institute of Shanghai Radio and Television, the station at least had to spend 70,000 to 100,000 yuan per day to maintain an average program schedule. Therefore, the annual state fund could support the production of programs for merely two to three months. In the late 80's, Shanghai station each week aired five imported foreign films, dubbed or not, seven home-made TV movies or mini-series, two shows and other station-produced programs. To the managers and producers of the

⁴² China Media Book, p.138. Shanghai Cultural Yearbook, 1987, p.133. Also see Yu Jinglu, "The structure and function of Chinese television", *Voices of China*, edited by Chin-Chuan Lee, New York, London: The Guilford Press, 1990, p.69-87. In light of Yu's observations, the first tv commercial was actually "a slide show of an herbal wine."

station, the only way to keep the station alive was to turn to advertising. In fact, it worked out successfully.

For the nine years since 1979, the station's commercial billing had increased from 0.49 million yuan in 1979 to 15.6 million yuan in 1987, with an average annual increase as high as 60%. In 1979, the revenue brought in by advertising was equal to 20% of the state funding of the year, while in 1983, the percentage reached 48%. But the great victory of advertising was claimed in 1986, five years after the try-out of this capitalist strategy: the commercial turnout was 3.6 times more than the official funds. The researchers of the Institution optimistically predicted that after a few years, the station would "not need any state funding and will totally depend on advertisements to maintain and develop the television business."⁴³

The unprecedented experience in profit-making and the possible financial independence in the future thrilled the whole Chinese journalistic community. Most print press, broadcasting stations and television stations, except a few elite ones which still enjoyed the full financial sponsorship from the Party, welcomed the idea and practiced it with great enthusiasm. Advertising had since been extolled as one of three significant economic pillars of the media, with the other two cited as the printing and publishing business. It magically came to the rescue of financially weathering Chinese news organi-

⁴³ Lou Shi-fang, "The Business management of television as an institution", *1987 National Television Audience Survey Data*, Beijing: China Broadcasting and Television Publication, 1988, p.152-157.



zations.

It is especially true with the regional and county media which had been living at the mercy of a collapsing provincial and district finance for a very long time. *Yanpei Daily*, located in the northern part of Shanxi province, is a regional paper which had been stingily subsidized by the local government for 15 years. Lacking economic independence, the humble daily never dreamed of enlarging its circulation, updating facilities, or improving the paper's shabby offices. Since 1986 when the daily was allowed to take care of its own business, it chose the advertising and printing business as its first priority. Of course, the daily began to get better off financially. The editorial board declared after the first taste of advertising and printing business, that they were "determined to walk along the road of commercial management", besides serving as an ideological guide to the locals masses.⁴⁴

In addition to coming to the rescue of the bankrupt state-run media, advertising also proved to be an alternative to the country's infant private press. *World Economic Herald*, the first privately-run Chinese weekly in the post-Mao era and the most liberal and high-brow newspaper of the nation, simply started from scratch with only 20,000 yuan (about 5,000 dollars) ad money in the editor's pocket.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ (p.118, yearbook, 1987)

⁴⁵ Hsiao Ching-chang & Yang Mei-rong, "Don't force us to lie': the case of the *World Economic Herald*, *Voices of China*. p.114.

Up to the end of last decade, advertising finally secured its foot in the door of China's news institutions. By the mid 80's, 80% of the Chinese print press obtained their financial independence, with the majority of them as non-Party organs.⁴⁶ Whether or not a news organization was engaged in advertising, the business became one of the criteria for judging a news institution's performance. Du Zuliang, executive editor-in-chief of *Economic Information*, one of the top ten information papers of the country, put the concept in this way, "After all, economy is the material basis of a newspaper. How can we run a paper without taking care the (press) economy and go bankrupt?" His view of the duty of an editor-in-chief was that the man should use one of his hands "to grasp economic efficiency" and the other "newspaper professionalism".⁴⁷ Knowing advertising business and management, besides other media operations, became the symbol of modernity. The people who tried to degrade advertising were criticized by the new generation of Chinese journalists as "old-fashioned", while profit-making through advertising management was admired as a "new science" for the Party's news media operators to learn.⁴⁸

3. Restructuring The Party-Press Relationship

Silently, and finally, the Maoist traditional Party-press relationship in China lost its

⁴⁶ Hao Jian-zhong.

⁴⁷ p.117, yearbook, 1988.

⁴⁸ p.116, yearbook, 1988.



original Marxist economic basis. The relationship which was cultivated during Yanan era in the 1930's and 1940's felt a chilling final judgement in Deng's rapid reform in the 1980's. The publicly owned, state-subsidized news institutions had fallen apart. During the process of making advertising an indispensable ingredient of the media structure, the relationships among the Party-state, the Party press, and the general public, were forever restructured.

Yet, the melting of the press and advertising was not a willing choice for the press in the first place. Adopting commercials as a financial backup was out of an economic pressure rather than a conscious demand for a political and economic independence from the Communist Party. In other words, the Chinese print and electronic media didn't step into the commercial era voluntarily. In fact, they had to do so in order to survive. Therefore, the attitude of Communist journalism toward the commercialization of itself was as pragmatic as that of the CCP toward the economic reform as a whole.

In the 80's, Deng's motto was very popular in the country, "A cat, white or black, will be a good cat as long as it catches mice." The Chinese media community often used Deng's "cat theory" to justify the adoption of advertising in the Communist news media institutions. So far the theoretical explanation of it has been positive. The major argument on the return of advertising in the Chinese communication system was that the media was supposed to be "self-reliant" and "independent". And that was exactly what Yanan spirit meant in the 30's and 40's. While the Party-state could not support a fast growing media, it should be the responsibility of the media itself to find some other

financial resources so as to lessen the economic burden of the central government.⁴⁹ Another similar stance taken by the Chinese media scholars was that the press had to learn how to operate in a commercial economy, since the free market had been officially accepted by the Party Politburo. Employing advertising should be considered as a routine operation instead of a tentative measure. Not only advertising, the argument claimed, but also other kinds of business activities such as xeroxing and publishing, should become part of the agenda of media management.⁵⁰ Also, the critics argued that excluding advertising from a regular media operation in China in the last forty years was really a shame and an expensive mistake.⁵¹

The booming business of advertising in China's news media, however, means more than just a financial responsibility and Yen-an spirit. In my opinion, the political implications of advertising in a Communist press are too important to ignore. First, the significance lies in that advertising has transformed an orthodox Marxist communication system into a nontraditional one. In this way, the old Maoist press has become an institution which is publicly owned but privately financed. On one hand, it is a profit-seeking business, committed to sell Snow Lotus sweaters and Gillette blades to its "dear consumer". This character has little difference from its capitalist counterpart. On the other hand, the system is still officially owned by the people of China. In other words, the

⁴⁹ Guan Zhen-dong, "Reform on press management", *1987 China Journalism Yearbook*, Beijing: China Social Sciences Publication, 1987, p.95

⁵⁰ *Zhongguo xinwen Nianjian 1988*. p.126.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*



Chinese news institutions, big or small, are public property. They will not be sold from one owner to another.

Secondly, advertising caused the restructuring of the media as a "Party organ". It has been and still is the CCP's, the autocratic political Party's instrument. It has the obligation to indoctrinate millions of Party members, cadres, devoted followers, and the masses. However, the political organs in the 80's were financially supported not by the Party-state's money, but by private business'. The bankruptcy of the CCP and the Chinese central government in the 80's compelled their own public opinion leader-- the news media-- to operate financially on its own at the mercy of foreign investment and newly-born domestic capitalism. This cruel reality forced the Chinese Party-state communication system turned to look for an economic partner. It was a chance in a life time for the news media to secure its economic independence. It became the media's luck in the 80's and twisted its character: a political public organ depending on private support.

It would be interesting to compare the commercialization of the Chinese Party press with that of the U.S. news media. The path through which the Communist journalism pursued its financial power differs somehow from that experienced by the American penny press in the 1830's. The penny press, considered as the forerunner of the American modern commercial news media, has been researched regarding its political and social consequences. The leading theories hold that the rise of commercial mass media "democratized the market for newspapers" and "rationalized the economic structure of newspaper publishing".⁵² In his popular book *Discovering the News*, American sociologist

⁵² D. Hallin and M. Schudson.

Michael Schudson argues that "sources of income that depend on social ties or political fellow feeling were replaced by market-based income from advertising and sales.... Advertising, as well as sales, took a more democratic cast."⁵³

At this point, the commercialization of Chinese Communist news media had a similar effect to the penny press. The Communist Party's media was open to all kinds of advertisers for their sources and with very little discrimination -- money talks. Chinese private enterprises, together with Western ones, paid for the ads appearing in the Chinese Party media. In this way, capital investment automatically guarantees the access to a traditional Communist turf: the Party news media. "...the penny press," Schudson wrote, "appealed to the equal right of any advertiser to employ the public press, so long as the advertiser paid....They proudly denied their own authority or responsibility for exercising moral judgement in advertising matters and denied this position, without embarrassment, as consistent with their self-interest."⁵⁴

To the Chinese Communist press, from the *People's Daily*, the country's most political and authoritative newspaper which claimed a circulation of five million, to *Yanbei Dali*, a struggling local paper with a circulation no more than 200,000, political judgement of their ads simply doesn't exist. As long as the multinational corporations did not advertise capitalist slogans and any anti-Communist ideology, as long as the ad did not challenge the "four cardinal principles" (the leadership of the CCP, Marxism-Leninism,

⁵³ M. Schudson, p.19.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the socialist model), there was no reason for the Party media to shut the advertisers out. So far, the "four cardinal principles" had been proven to be an easy test -- almost all of the advertisers were interested in selling their consumer products, not in selling ideology. Thus they passed the test easily and felt more than welcomed by their host.

Advertising brought the Chinese press more freedom and independence. Most of the time, for the Party press managers, it was much easier to deal with advertisers than with their Party bosses regarding getting financial aid. When the media was financed by the Party and state, the managers had to go through a very difficult time to find money from the Party's pocket. They still remembered the soap-opera-like negotiations between them and their Party superiors on financial issue. They had to appeal, petition, beg, sometimes even threaten their Party bosses for more funding. Now, all of these pains were peacefully replaced by "advertising and sales". (Since in China the subscription fee is very low, the sale could be neglected.)

But there is a very crucial difference between the commercialization of the American press and that of the Chinese Party press. The economic independence of the Party journalism has not yet brought the consequential political independence to it, which was what happened to the penny press. So far there hasn't been any scene indicating a separation", i.e. the advertising money pulled the political news media in the direction of being professional and autonomous. The press, the tube, and the radio are pretty much the same political weapons of the Communist Party, which is ready at any moment to destroy the

opposition. The Anti-spiritual Pollution campaign of 1983-84, the Anti-bourgeois Liberalization of 1987-88, as well as the political justification of the military crackdown of the 1989 democracy movement, occurred at the exact time when the commercialization of the media was on the way. The early economic detachment from the Party didn't seem to be leading to be a neutral public media, let alone a public forum for public debates. The transformation of the economic base, in this sense, merely provided an opportunity for Party journalism to obtain a pure economic independence.

When discussing the "paradoxical" political consequences of the American penny press, Daniel Hallin, a political scientist and communication scholar, points out the "ruptured" connection "between the press and an active public".⁵⁵ He argues that "it transforms the newspaper from a political message addressed from citizen to citizen, inviting the reader to participate in political debate or action, into an authoritative account of the state of the world, addressed to an audience whose own role in that world normally is not at issue."⁵⁶ The critique he offers to American political communication study is that "the modern news does not produce the kind of active, critical public debate, that the newspaper seemed to promise when it first emerged as an institution of the public sphere."⁵⁷ The prospect of the disappearance of an active arena ready for public debate did not bother the communist news media system at all, for the system never thought it was essential or indispensable for them to supply such an arena for the masses. In

⁵⁵ D. Hallin.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid. (P.140)

principle, Chinese communication is a participative communication model, which allows and encourages the wide participation of the masses in reporting and discussing information of public affairs. It is not a forum for political opponents to debate. Therefore, the disappearance of active political participation in the U.S. public would not happen in China, since there is never such thing as public debate. As long as the Party can command its news media, and journalists and the masses are willing to participate in the political campaigns led by the Party, the Chinese news media is still a political forum. Even the financial independence of the media won't change it.

Nevertheless, the adoption of advertising by a Communist media system, while it did not transform a politically active public into passive spectacular observers, has disenfranchised the paramount authority of the Communist party in front of millions of Chinese masses. The fact that the privileged, and financially-trouble-free news institutions have to share the limited space with vulgar and humble advertisements demonstrates the decay of an old political power structure. The channels used to disseminate the Party's spirit and instructions, which seemed so sacred to common folk, are now full of the captivating voices of manufacturers and merchants. Compared with seductive and smiling billboards and TV commercials, some of the Party news media's news reports and editorials just did not sound friendly and close. The propaganda of the latest political campaigns, such as Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization campaign in 1986-87, appeared unreal and empty to the masses. The revolution caused by advertising has undermined the God-like image of the Communist party and its old-fashioned propaganda.

It seems true that advertising finds itself in a more friendly and positive environment in China today than it did at any time after the 1949 revolution. But the problem remains: how long can a Maoist Party-press tradition go along with advertising, both are virtually incompatible in nature? So far, it is only a tentative "marriage". The advertising which had worked within a publicly owned, ideology-oriented and well-controlled media system, is now guided by its private and profit-making nature. But the system did not and will not give it much leeway to maneuver. Further, the corporate advertisers have to learn to deal with the stubborn Party propagandists who believe that the system is in good shape and the use of ads only makes it better. Therefore, for advertising to survive and succeed in a Communist media system, it has a long way to go.

The commercialization of the Communist propaganda system in the 1980's also raises many questions which go beyond advertising as a business. The Communist media researchers are concerned about advertising as a tool transforming the nature and performance of a long-time Communist communication pattern. One of the results can be that the commercialization became one of the key factors which caused the decline of the old Communication system. This commercialization tends to lead the Communist journalism to stop regarding itself as an ideological weapon ready to destroy "class enemies" or a "bourgeois headquarters", but one undertaking the everyday business of a secular society. As one of the initial steps toward a civil society, the political communication has to transform it from an old-fashioned demanding channel to a new, more opened-up one. In fact, it's not *the* Party's paper any more. Not that awesome, respectful, authoritative pub-

lic opinion leading institution, not part of the flesh and blood of the ultimate power of the country, it is something which could be touched, be negotiated and bought by money. For a couple of thousands of dollars, a half page of the Party's organ can be used, legally, to promote a baby shampoo or a five-star hotel. By allowing a businessman to smile at the public on the Party's television, the audience senses not only the voice of the Party, but that of the richest part of the population.

The trendy commercialization of the CCP's journalism gradually washed away the sanctity of the political institution. It also "eroded" the political responsibility the Communist journalists had had for a politically just cause. Actually, the reform, which tried to "rationalize" and "scientificize" very facet of the country's political and social life, witnessed something every different. The sacred ring around the Party journalism disappeared, not overnight, but dramatically enough. The media has turned into a sort of neutral domain where the political elite, including the Party cadres and Party journalists, operate side-by-side with the commercial sector of the society.

The public sphere which used to be represented by a politically active agency is selling space and time to private citizens and non-citizens, if they intend to advertise their material goods and can afford the price. The deals have been made in the principle of voluntariness and equality. It is very true that the commercialization provides common folks for the first time in the Chinese communication history, with the opportunity to use the political institution for commercial purposes. And the ticket for getting in is simply money. The space of the print media and the time slot of the electronic media can be

reached, more precisely, purchased through the highest bid. In other words, the political discrimination based on ideologies and political positions has been smoothed by economic capacities. The qualification of getting publicity, either nationwide or locally through media, has been quietly updated.

Although the Party and the Chinese government are still the largest users of the media, after all the media is their property and is structurally and financially connected with them, they are not the only customers of the news media. Advertisers also view themselves as other legitimate customers, as long as their pockets are deep enough to beat the rate. In this sense, the media as an arena presenting different voices and messages has undergone a profound transformation since 1979. The media is seeing the gradual retreat of the Party's monopoly -- the only God of the country, and the emergence of another powerful social authority -- the private section. The old, in fact, welcomed the new and through all of the social dramas, without seeing any bloodshed, a silent social revolution is expecting its victory.

CONCLUSION

Participatory Communication & Its Future in China

Political communication, which primarily deals with the "transmission" of messages involving the formation and distribution of power,¹ can be discussed at levels of all sorts. The political communication in China under the rule of the Communists has adopted a form and measures different from those exercised in the West. The role the Chinese news media has played in this process is unique too.

The fundamental character of the Chinese political communication is "participatory". By participating the political campaigns of the Party-state, channeling the public opinion to the ultimate power center, organizing and directing a diversity of ideas and opinions towards a unifies, safe direction, absorbing tens and thousands of common citizens into the journalistic work, etc. the Chinese Communist media assists the state power in maintaining a political stability. Also, the news media keeps the citizenry well informed of the Party-state policy.

Through being participating the distribution of messages to both ends of the channel, the Communist Party and the masses, the media naturally believes that it is not an "outsider". It has been taken granted among Chinese journalists that they are part of a

¹ Michael Schudson, "Toward a comparative history of political communication", Comparative Social Research, Vol.11, 1989.

great socialist cause which will ultimately bring prosperity and democracy to the country. Because of this innate sense of a political mission, most journalists participate in *Nei Can* writing, reporting the power abuse of lower-level officials and supervising the implementation of government policy.

They would also engage themselves in investigative work, which sometimes is the responsibility of administrations and a legal system. Their involvement in all kinds of civilian disputes and power struggles, however, often helps to solve the problem to a large extent. In return to the media's participation in the country's political power consolidation, the Communist Party and the state often grant Chinese journalists, especially those working in higher media institutions, some political privileges to ensure the effectiveness of their investigative work and their status quo.

The participative communication gives opportunity to the Chinese masses to voice their opinions in the country's political and social life. The involvement of worker-peasant correspondents in the professional journalistic writing and editing, helps the masses have a better understanding of the state's domestic policy. The masses, the peasantry in particular, thus enter a new world and improve their own quality.

Both working journalists and non-staff writers (worker-peasant correspondents) are "politicized" through the participatory communication. Generally speaking, Chinese are more politically informed and active in the public affairs than their Western counterparts. Chinese reporters, editors as well as worker-peasant correspondents have gone through at

least a dozen of stormy political campaigns since 1949, which require and improve their political consciousness and involvement.

The economics of the traditional Chinese political communication attempts to prevent the participative communication procedure from the manipulation of any private interests. The public ownership, before the 1980s' commercialization, theoretically, ensures a public forum for the masses to voice their opinion. Unfortunately, the forum had been manipulated by the Communist Party for many years.

The participatory communication gives the participants, from the Party, the state, the media to the masses, a well defined goal to try their best efforts. Since 1949, the goal has been "socialism". Despite the different versions of this socialism, apparently Mao's version differs a great deal from Deng's, the ideal unites all the classes of the country together and regulates their behaviors. The Chinese participatory communication style makes people informed of their individual role in the socialist building. With the collective efforts, contribution and sacrifice of the Chinese people, China became an independent nation in the world, and let the past nightmares gone forever.

Yet, there are some serious flaws of this participative communication. First and the foremost, it is a participation without power or influence. The power relationship during the information transmission is imbalanced. The input and output of each end varies according to its political position.

One of the most significant problems for Chinese journalists is the degree to which they can influence the state policy. Most of the time, their participation would have impact on individual officials who violate laws or state policy, but not the policy itself. Sometimes, the change or improvement of the policy is possible due to the reports accumulated by reporters. Still, writing *Nei Can* doesn't equal to sitting in on the Central Party Committee meetings.

This is the same problem facing the masses. Either as a worker-peasant correspondent or common citizen, voicing his opinion is much more complicated than just shouting revolutionary slogans and participating the political campaigns. The masses well perform the role as the eyes and ears of the state to spot corruption and power abuse. But it has been proven very difficult to voice dissents. And this frustrates the masses to take part in the communication process. If journalists don't have the power to revise the state policy, not mention the influence of the common citizenry.

In addition, the communication is not constitutionally protected. During the past forty years, the participatory communication had taken a form of a social movement, which required enormous political enthusiasm, consciousness, energy, sacrifice, and consistency, but did not offer any power or control to the participants. The rights of individuals such as freedom of speech and "agree to disagree", had not been truly constitutionalized. Neither the media nor the citizenry was an independent participant in the political communication. For Chinese journalists, writing *Nei Can* and the critical reports for the public media was out of their political commitment and sense of responsibility. It had

nothing to do with media as a profession, which regulated by laws. Same was with the masses. When they submitted their complains and suggestions, the masses viewed the action as a duty. In the words of a Chinese veteran journalist, the action showed that they were at the moment a "social activist". But all of this participative activities may be suppressed and criticized by the state the Party based on the political interpretation. Chinese media has been restructured many times since 1949 and a great number of media practitioners have been purged and expelled from the profession because they participated in the "wrong" place and at the "wrong" time.

The most significant flaw of this participatory communication is its ineffectiveness in managing social conflicts. The Tiananmen Massacre has often been explained as a political crisis in the 1980s. As a matter of fact, it is also a crisis of the communication in China. In nature, the participative communication appeals to harmony not conflict. It loves a paramount showdown of the massive participation of a society for a single goal. It also, most of the time, represents the power more than it does the powerless. The discovering, selecting, and conveying of information are, on a large scale, in accordance to the need of the Communist Party and state, not that of the masses. When playing a role in engineering and guiding a social movement or a political campaign, the Chinese media could be far more than being effective -- the overwhelming headlines, news reports, television programs, billboards, often create a very persuasive and compelling social environment.

But not in the social conflict. The democratic movement in 1989 functioned like a wakening-up call to Chinese news media. The media was very confused and frustrated at the beginning. In order to maintain the authority of the state and Party, and also the social harmony and stability, the media agreed not to voice the dissent opinions which called for more serious regulations on the organized state corruption and more freedom of speech. With the participation, more precisely, the co-operation of the press, the Communist Party and its government portrayed the student demonstration in front of the countrymen, as a deviance. The Beijing citizens, finding no channels to vent their frustration and anger, took to the street. The hunger strike and the street protests participated by millions of the Beijing residents in the pouring rain finally won over the hearts of the Party journalists. For three day from May 15 to 17, 1989, the first time in the Communist communication history a Party press rejected the directives of the Party and acted on its own. Not only did it give a full coverage of the demonstrations, but also Beijing journalists themselves joined the march. It was later remembered as the "freedom of speech of three days."

Nonetheless, owing to the deeply tangled connections with the Party and its decades-old propaganda tradition, the media quickly surrendered itself to the state. The news on the movement became a version handed down from the Party. And after the Beijing Massacre of June 1989, the media picked up its old role to eulogize the military soldiers who were killed by the Beijing demonstrators during the military conflicts as national role models.

The powerful political privileges of China's Party journalism, such as writing *Nei Can* and conducting investigations, could not facilitate the country's political discourse during the social upheavals and turmoil. The propaganda and advocacy functions are not designed to handle the confrontation of oppositions. The committed political involvement of Chinese journalists became a huge barrier for them to position themselves with the opposition.

The nature of a Communist political system certainly differs a great deal from a Western pattern. The facts that an electoral democracy has been underdeveloped and a press officially claims its affiliation with the Communist Party which holds the political monopoly of the country, actually determine the political communication in China would be much less election-campaign-related and diversity tolerated, as in most of the Western democracies. Generally speaking, a Communist press would do a better job in leading a single-goaled, well organized, massive social movement like what it did in the Cultural Revolution or other political campaigns; while the Western media often shows a better performance in dealing with a diversified one, like what it did in the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s in the U.S. . Of course, presenting different opinions by the Western media doesn't mean its unlimited autonomy and independence in power struggle. According to Hallin, the American media's coverage of the Vietnam War was very much influenced by the official interpretation for a long time and it was not until the public consent started challenging the state policy that the press gave a better coverage of the anti-war sentiment.²

² Daniel Hallin. *The "Uncensored War"*.

The participative communication in China has had a serious impact on the development of the Chinese news media. It means that the farther the devoted media walks further along the path of political commitment and participation, the the farther it will be from their professional objectivity. This loyalty and political commitment might be the last connection between the Party and journalists. Many Chinese pressmen, on the one hand are enchanted by the independence of the Western press, on the other hand, they felt empty not being with a state power which has granted them through the decades the political privileges and financial support. The tradition has also become a pressure to pushed journalists to advocate a political party's cause for granted. The involvement no matter what it is, political, economic or cultural, deprived the reporters of their professional independence. But after years of participation, the journalists would form and follow the participative pattern to fulfill their work. To a large extent, they are guided by this instinct. For example, a reporter has to been very politically conscious, aware and keen in order to participate in the decision-making process at all levels. Journalists who write *Nei-can* know clearly what they are doing. In their own words, they are not only *observing* the history, that is what their bourgeois colleagues usually do, they are *creating* it.

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