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The People's Daily: A longitudinal content analysis of editorials from 1977-2010

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The People's Daily:

A longitudinal content analysis of editorials from 1977-2010

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

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ABSTRACT

The People's Daily, the most widely circulated newspaper in China, has served as the central government's mouthpiece for decades. While its importance and its coverage of specific events have been studied extensively, little research has examined how its coverage has changed through history. Understanding the evolution of the newspaper, however, requires determining whether any differences in coverage have occurred over time.

This study aims to identify differences in topics, authorship, use of quotations, and critiques of the government as well as praise in editorials of the People's Daily from 1977 to 2010. By means of a longitudinal content analysis, it compares the frequency of use of aspects in 18 categories before and after 1989, a pivotal year in Chinese history. The results indicate government and party issues were fewer while other topics increased; government official authors were fewer while other author identities increased; and more quotations, more government criticism and more reforms were mentioned in the post-1989 period. These results indicate that the People's Daily's coverage did change significantly in many respects, although it is difficult to determine the causes of the changes—economic factors, reduced political control, social changes or globalization forces.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Social context and the People's Daily

The modern world is called a global village (McLuhan, 1992), a term that refers to an increasingly related and interdependent world, in which each individual country has constant connections to other countries and their people and cannot remain completely isolated.

Before 1978, China was strictly a Communist country. In the Cultural Revolution of 1976, the People's Daily gained a reputation as the central mouthpiece of CCP (Chinese Communist Party) and followed the Party's instructions whatever they might be. After the reform initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, the mouthpiece function of the People's Daily was retained and even enhanced to some extent (Chen et al., 1995). A famous story about the social importance of the People's Daily, tells how before 1978, farmers were not allowed to sell their crops on the open market, as it was part of the planned economy. However, when China initiated the new market economy policy in 1978, the People's Daily printed the policy explanations and guidelines on its front page; farmers would then take that day's edition of the Daily with them when they went to sell their produce.

Therefore, 1977 marks the year of recovery from the Cultural Revolution. The official reform was initiated in 1978, when Deng Xiaoping implemented market economy policies and ended the planned economy policy in China (McMillan, 1992). The Chinese GDP in 1978 was ¥364 billion, whereas by 2007 it had increased to ¥24953 billion. Today China is the second greatest economic power in the world, with the fastest annual economic growth in

the world, at a rate of about 9% per year (Zhang, 2008). Furthermore, the reform has touched almost the entire society. In the political arena life tenure in leading positions at various institutions was abolished, and the constitution was rewritten (Deng, 1984). In the education realm, the college entrance examination was restored, and family background-based enrollment was abolished (Pepper, 2000). The education reform has had a long-lasting positive effect on the whole country, as students now have a fair chance to compete on the basis of their knowledge, without worrying about their grandfathers' political activities.

As part of the reform, many newspapers, including the People's Daily, initiated a policy of corporation management, which served as the basis of institutional reorganization (Xu, 2004). Under the new policy, newspapers are still state owned but manage themselves as corporations (Hong & Cuthbert, 1991). This new type of ownership had brought about vast changes in China's state-owned mass media system, including extensive commercialization (Zhao, 2000). According to Majid (2004), the new commercial system allowed the "rise of semi-independent newspapers and broadcasting stations, the proliferation of private Internet content providers and unlicensed cable networks and increasing cross-investment by the media into other commercial enterprises," and it has proved that the country is becoming more open and progressive in reorganizing media ownership.

However, media reform was not as deep as the economic and education reform, as the mouth-piece function was still the major function of newspapers (Chu, 1994). Although the Party deliberately freed some media so as to allow some critical coverage of the government, the extent of this freedom is widely considered insufficient, especially when it comes to political issues (Tsui, 2003). Presumably, the country's fast economic growth and more

frequent international interaction made it highly unlikely that it could censor information about certain topics, yet China is one country that still does that. The Great Chinese Fire Wall (MacKinnon, 2009) for example, is still blocking YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and some other information sources both external and internal, mostly for political and ideological reasons. In addition, the Freedom House has always deemed China as one of the countries whose media is most censored (not free in 2012) (FH, 2012). This is hardly surprising, as historically, China was deemed not free from 1980 to 1993; with scores vary 80 to 89 in 1994-2010, and no clear indication of being freer in general. Therefore, complete freedom of the Chinese media cannot be assumed, and a closer look at the nuances of the coverage is needed in order to better understand the level of media freedom in this country.

Hence, an important question worth exploring is: Have the news media really become freer over time, and to what extent? Empirical data must be gathered and content analysis needs to be conducted in order to evaluate whether Chinese media are becoming freer.

Research focus

This analysis consists of a longitudinal examination of how much China's main newspaper has opened up, by appraising editorials rather than the news articles published in the People's Daily. Substantial changes in editorial content might be a testament to how the Party's policies may have served to open China up, as reflected on the pages of the People's Daily, the newspaper most closely associated with the CCP.

This study uses content analysis to try to assess the extent to which the People's Daily's has become freer from political control over the years. However, political freedom is abstract and hard to measure, except in terms of specific characteristics of media content.

Media content can be examined empirically on two levels—the level of article topic and the level of article content. The topic level refers to variations in the main focus of opinions in the Daily before and after 1989. The content level includes aspects of the article such as government critique and praise, author identities, and use of quotations. Rather than simply identifying positive or negative coverage, this study uses a more nuanced coding scheme in order to detect more subtle changes in media coverage.

As the People’s Daily still serves as the Party’s voice, it could conceivably be less critical of the government than are other Chinese newspapers, such as the “Southern series” (deemed the most critical media group in China, having been transformed from a regional Party newspaper since the reform in 1978) (Yang, 2008). It is also less likely to discuss more controversial topics such as corruption and human rights violations. Therefore, it is probably safe to assume that other Chinese newspapers will be at least as open as, and perhaps even freer than, the People’s Daily.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research on the People's Daily

The People's Daily has been researched and analyzed frequently for various purposes. Swanson (1996) indicated that advertisements in the People's Daily had increased since the reform, and the content had become more and more commercialized. Luo (2010) did a 10-year-period content analysis of articles about the rural-urban migration and concluded that the issue was salient and often covered as a by-product of China's reform. Hoddie (2009) conducted a 40-year content analysis of the People's Daily and demonstrated that the Daily favored the Party by emphasizing economic and social benefits enjoyed by minority group while neglecting the unfair relationship. However, no thorough and comprehensive research has examined the People's Daily's content changes in general and the relationship of these changes to political freedom.

A number of studies have focused on comparing the People's Daily with foreign newspapers, with emphasis on differences between the coverage in each. Gao (2007), for example, found that the narrative discourse in the People's Daily differs significantly from that in the New York Times. He concluded that the People's Daily is much more subjective and opinionated than The New York Times. Parsons and Xu (2001) made a comparison between the textual choices in the Daily and New York Times with regard to the embassy bombing event. Tan (1990) discussed various ways in which the Daily's editors struggled for partial independence from the central government, and pointed the differences between such rebellion and editors in foreign news agencies. Tse, Belk & Zhou (1989) performed a

longitudinal and cross-cultural content analysis on advertisements in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. They found the People's Daily ads "emphasize utilitarian appeals, promote a better life, and focus on state being as a consumption theme."

Economic development, political freedom and media freedom

The term "political freedom" is hard to define, but it has some endogenous characteristics, according to prior researchers. Typically, it relates to the assumption that at least several political players exist within a country (Tsebelis, 2002). Political freedom is associated with more civil rights (Puddington et al., 2007), free and independent elections (Niemi et al., 1991), higher levels of media freedom (Leeson, 2008), and more transparent government policy-making processes (Relly & Sabharwal, 2009). Therefore, as Przeworski (2000) indicates, a regime with higher political freedom is typically considered a democratic regime, although the extent of such freedom varies from country to country.

One of the main factors linked to political freedom is economic development, although the reverse relationship is not a given (Burkhart & Beck, 1994), this means that economic development would most likely lead to a democratic government, but democracy is not enough to cause economic development within a country. If we apply the same logic to China, and take into account its rapid economic development during the past 36 years, it may be reasonable to assume a higher level of political freedom at present than in the past.

In the United States, the impact of economic development on the media was commercialization, and this commercialization allowed US newspapers to distance themselves from political parties and to gain greater editorial independence (Alberg, Aslet & Curran, 2010). In light of the economic development in China and the increased

commercialization of the Chinese media, it is reasonable to assume less government and party coverage and fewer government affiliated authors.

On the other hand, although one cannot assume any causal relationship between political freedom and media freedom, it is likely that media freedom is enhanced and protected by a higher level of political freedom within a country (Emerson, 1979; Shirky, 2011; Leeson, 2008). Therefore, where there is a noticeable change of media freedom, it could be seen as a reflection of a change in general political freedom, at least to some extent.

McQuail (2000) described "media freedom" as involving two stages, the first stage being "certain independence" of the media and the second stage consisting of "a norm that opposes concentration of ownership and monopoly of control" (p. 144-145). As this study focused only on one state-owned newspaper, it is unlikely that it could test for the impact of media independence and ownership. However, it examined the changes in media topics, author identity, type and number of quotations, levels of criticism and praise, and reform, which taken together could be seen as proxies of media freedom.

One of the most commonly used media freedom indices, the IREX (International Research and Exchange Board), has set up several standards to measure the level of media freedom within a country. In these standards, they include (1) "multiple news sources" and (2) "level of editorial independence," which could serve as evidence of higher media freedom (Becker et al., 2004). By the same logic, this study focuses on several characteristics of media content as possible indicators of media freedom.

Impact of sources

News sources are very important to media, including newspapers, and have many functions. First, they provide information that journalists otherwise may not have access to (Lawrence, 2000). Second, sources add credibility to stories that journalists write (Manning, 2001). Third, sources contribute diverse viewpoints about issues and events, thus giving audiences more angles to consider (Comrie, 1999). Providing multiple viewpoints is crucial in terms of media independence and editorial freedom; it also allows journalists to remain neutral and build a public discussion of issues. In this way, sources could help keep journalists free from bias (Tuchman, 1978).

More importantly, news sources reflect the voices that are heard in news reporting. Although the sources journalists choose to use are not necessarily a political choice, they are likely to reflect the intention of journalists and editors and to allow them to frame the news stories (Entman, 2004). Different news agencies tend to frame stories differently, and different frames can bring about significant changes on how the public learns about a certain issue, and interprets this issue (de Vreese, 2003).

In the mass communication literature, official or elite sources are generally considered more credible than other sources (Manning, 2001). It is therefore reasonable that journalists prefer to use official sources to gain credibility. However, providing only official voices could lead to bias toward an issue. A study conducted by Dimitrova & Strömbäck (2009) found that U.S. newspapers used official sources more frequently than Swedish media did in coverage of the Iraq War, and that U.S. newspapers use ordinary citizen sources and expert

sources more frequently as well. Therefore, more diverse quotations in general could be an indication of a higher level of media freedom.

Editorials

Editorials are commonly used in content analysis research, especially those on controversial topics such as judicial issues (Richardson & Lancendorfer, 2004), health issues (Smith & Wakefield, 2005), or political issues (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006). This study chose to examine the editorial section of the People's Daily to determine whether the coverage of this section had changed between 1977 and 2010. The reason for choosing this section is that the ideas and opinions in the articles in this section could allow more leeway for the Daily publishers; because the paper serves as a mouthpiece for the central government, it is unlikely to adopt any dramatic changes in its main news article content, which tend to mirror the desires of Chinese political leaders and is widely accepted as an indication of the content they want the Chinese audience to focus on. Presumably, editorials are under less constraint in terms of their content and may be allowed more coverage of other topics and less coverage of government and party issues; fewer official authors, thus increasing the likelihood of other authors appearing on the pages of the Daily; more quotations; more government critique; and more frequent discussion of reform in general. It is also likely that editorials will be less complimentary of Chinese political leaders. One could argue that editorials may provide a relatively indirect way for citizens to criticize their government and also give Chinese journalists an alternative way to test the limits of media freedom in their country.

Indeed, research in other countries undergoing political and economic reform has shown that the most evident changes in media content happen in the editorial section. Dimitrova (1999), for example, who investigated the content of Russian editorials during the so-called *perestroika* period, found that topics that were largely missing from new and official government discourse such as food shortages and lack of basic goods were openly discussed in opinion editorials. Pietiläinen (2010) found that former Soviet journalists in 1989 were more likely to write about problems and “t[ake] the side of the readers... against the authorities” (p. 89). Additionally, Coyne and Leeson (2009) found “[t]he freed media critically reported on Soviet economic, political, and social circumstances” (p. 10). This means that critique is a vital factor in media freedom.

Comparison validity

The year 1989 will serve as the break point for comparison, for a number of reasons.

First, this is the year when Deng Xiaoping retired and was legally succeeded by Jiang Zemin; that it marks the abolition of life-long tenure. Deng is the first Communist China leader who retired rather than leaving office because of death or political persecution; thus his retirement is the starting point of legally and orderly succession in China (Chen, 1992).

Second, 1989 is the year of the Tiananmen Square event. In the late 1980s , college students in China began to advocate for faster political reforms, to embrace Westernization and to demand democratic elections in the country. The Chairman and Prime minister at the time, Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang did nothing to suppress such advocates, which allowed them to spread their ideas and grow their followings among the students (You, 1991). In May

1989, thousands of college students in Beijing gathered for a huge protest, reached Tiananmen Square and began a starving protest.

Some officials, led by Zhao Ziyang, proposed to compromise and talk openly to students, while the conservatives, led by Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng, wanted to suppress the protest and maintain the current political system. In the end, the conservatives took charge of the situation and decided to use military action to suppress the protest (Li et al, 2009). On June 4th, 1989, thousands of PLA (People's Liberation Army) soldiers were ordered to clear the protestors out of Tiananmen Square, and given permission to fire their weapons to eliminate any resistance. The soldiers carried out their order relentlessly. With the support of armored vehicles and tanks, soldiers quickly gained control of the situation, and when some of the protestors set an armored vehicle on fire and burned the soldiers inside, the soldiers fired their weapons on anyone who dared to oppose them, both bystanders and protestors. The exact number of casualties has never been revealed, but the estimate is about a thousand dead and injured (Wu, 1991). The CCP defined the event as a "well organized and planned anti-revolutionary and anti-Party conspiracy for the purpose of overthrowing the communism government" (Tan, 1990, p.165). Soon afterward, Zhao Ziyang was forced to resign and was replaced by Li Peng.

The event, considered a watershed event in Chinese history, had a number of negative impacts, as follows:

- (1) After the bloody suppression, people were afraid to speak up about political reform and structural change (Lui, 2000).

- (2) It caused a huge negative impact internationally. Western countries reacted with sanctions immediately, both on the military and the economic level. China was condemned worldwide for its suppression and use for force towards its own people (Schelle, 1995).
- (3) The Party tightened up media control for a while, and media were told to keep the same tone as the Central Propaganda Department on critical events (Liu, 1990).

The event also had some positive influence, however. After suppressing the protest via military force, the CCP realized that it must deepen the reform and initiated some changes designed to relieve the anger and frustration of the people, although the changes had to be controlled and regulated by the government.

As the mouthpiece of the central government, the People's Daily in the post-1989 period is expected to listen to more voices and have less government and party coverage, with more critique and reform coverage than in the pre-1989 period. Additionally, media commercialization in China may reduce the coverage of government and party issues and increase the coverage of other issues, such as cultural and societal issues. It may also include more editorials written by authors other than government officials.

Based on the preceding literature review, the following hypotheses are advanced:

Hypotheses

H1a: Government and party issues will decrease after 1989 while other topics will increase.

H1b: Government officials as author will decrease after 1989 while other author identities will increase.

H1c: Editorials will have more quotations after 1989 than before 1989.

News sources mostly present their unique points of view toward issues, and they provide different angles or approaches to the a given topic. The more sources quoted, the more likely it will be that an article reflects more dimensions of an issue, and with more angles covered, instead of a one-way reproach or criticism, the article is considered more comprehensive and reflexive.

H2a: Government critique will be more frequent after 1989 than before 1989.

H2b: Government praise will be less frequent after 1989 than before 1989.

China formerly implemented the Soviet/Communist Press Model, whereby the media are owned and controlled by the dominant political elites (Oates, 2007). Because the People's Daily served as the official newspaper of the CCP, it covered the government with compliments and praise. In 1978, Deng came up with his famous motto, "free the mind and respect the truth," and encouraged people to talk about the truth rather than doctrine obtained from books and leaders.

Additionally, media are considered "the fourth estate" (Schultz, 1998, p.1), and under the Libertarian Media Model they serve as a watchdog of the government, to correcting its wrongdoings and regulating its behavior (Authoritarian media model, Soviet Communist media model, Libertarian model, Social Responsibility model). Therefore, a healthy media system should be able to criticize government freely. When political freedom increases, it is likely that government criticism will also increase.

With increasing openness in the Chinese media system over time, praise of the Party is expected to be less than before, and the criticism of those in charge is expected to be more frequent, either toward certain branched or levels of government or with respect to specific issues of official misconduct. The watchdog function of the media cannot be implemented without criticizing the government, although some of the criticism may not be explicit.

H3: Reform will be more frequently mentioned after 1989 than before 1989.

The post-1989 period witnessed increasing changes in Chinese society. In order to increase economic development, the government of China had reformed itself on many levels since 1977. With the reform becoming more common after 1989, as well as also more frequently discussed in society, it is to be expected that editorials will mention all levels of reforms more frequently.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Unit of analysis

The study is based on a quantitative content analysis, using a longitudinal research design. The study focuses on the leading newspaper of China, the People's Daily. The study will focus only on editorials, which is the main unit of analysis in this study. As this is a longitudinal study, some changes in structure and layout of the People's Daily need to be taken into account. Therefore, clear criteria must be specified as to which published piece is an editorial and which is not. In this study, we will focus only on editorials that are clearly identified as such by the paper. First, the articles in the specified editorial page are deemed to be editorials. Second, articles with clear marks or columns indicating that the article is an editorial will be deemed editorials. Third, the theme or secondary theme of articles that contain the specific characters “评” “论” (comments, ideas) or “读者来信，反馈” (feedback from audiences) will be identified as editorials.

Sampling

The method used in this study is multi-stage sampling. The first stage involves systematic random sampling, which means the study will sample every three years from 1977 to 2010, starting with 1977; thus the study includes 12 years of publication (1977, 1980, 1983, 1986, 1989, 1992, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007, and 2010). In the second stage, the study uses a stratified sampling method known as the constructed week. For every year, two Mondays,

two Tuesdays, two Wednesdays, two Thursdays, and two Fridays are randomly selected, to produce two constructed weeks, a procedure recommended by Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2006).

The week days for each publication year were selected by means of a random generator, provided by www.random.org. The study first count the total number of weeks in each year, and then randomly generate a number between the first and last week. The number generated serves as the week that is sampled. Next, calendars are cross-referenced to arrive at the specific date used in a particular year. For example, there are 52 weeks in the year 1977; from 1-52, we randomly generated 42 and 25, which means the 42th and 25th Monday are included in the sample. Thus October 17th and June 20th are our sample dates for Mondays in 1977. The rest of the sample dates are identified by the same method.

Variables

Several variables of interest are included in the study, as follows: main topic of the article, number and type of quotations, author identity, government critique, government praise, and mentions of reform. The variables were chosen following an inductive approach. The categories were built by the author according to prior review of 20 editorials of the People's Daily. The conceptual and operational definitions of each variable are provided below.

1. Main topic of the article:

The topic of the editorial refers to the main overarching focus of the published piece. The dominant topic of an article should be relatively easy to identify, although it is possible that an article could contain more than one topic; for example, one article could discuss economic issues as well as government issues, and distinguishing them from each other is important. To decide which one serves as the

main topic, the researcher developed certain rules. First, the easiest and most common way to identify the main topic is to count the number of paragraphs devoted to that topic. If one editorial has seven paragraphs about economic issues, for example, but only one paragraph about government and party issues, then the main topic of this article is coded as economic. Second, the title of the article could help in identifying the main topic of the article. For example, if an editorial is titled “Deepen the economic reform and accelerate the growth,” it is not necessarily about an economic issue but rather about a government issue, as it is trying to urge the government to deepen the reform. Finally, an article could have an unusually long paragraph that focuses on one issue while other shorter paragraphs focus on another; in that case, the coder carefully reads through the article and determines which topic is the main one.

The main topic will be coded as 0 and 1, where 1 represents yes and 0 represents no. Options for this category include: policy explanation and instruction, scandal and corruption, government and Party issue, economic issue, societal issue, cultural issue, foreign issue, and other issue. The majority of those coded as “other issues” are sports and educational issues.

2. Author identity:

Author identity refers to the person or institution clearly identified in the article byline. The identity of authors does not overlap, but an editorial could have more than one authors, in which case, the identity of the lead author is used and the identity of co-authors is ignored. All identities are extracted from the editorials; if an article does not mention an author, then author identity is coded as “unknown,” and

the author name will be coded as “unspecified”. In some instances, the editorial is listed under 本报评论员(our editor). In that case, the identity of the author is coded as “professional journalist,” while the name of the author is still coded as “unspecified.”

The author identity is coded as 0 and 1, where 1 represents yes and 0 represents no. Options include professional journalist, individual, celebrity, official, expert, foreign author, and other author.

3. Quotations:

To capture the use of sources within articles, this content analysis includes two variables for in-text quotes. One is frequency of use. For each article, one citation from a particular type of source is deemed as having been quoted once, and the number of different quotations will be counted and coded. There are two types of quotations, direct and indirect. Direct quotations come with quotation marks whereas indirect quotations usually have no quotation marks but are led by a sentence such as “according to ...” Both types of quotation are treated equally in this study. This analysis also captures the type of source to whom the quotation is attributed. These include journalists, individuals, celebrities, officials, anonymous sources, experts, foreign news sources, and other news source. Quotations from criminals and suspects, as well as urban slangs and ancient Chinese idioms, are considered other quotation.

4. Government critique:

Article valence may be more challenging to capture. Therefore, we focus more specifically on the question of whether criticism of government is mentioned in the editorial. This can be consists of negative comments about a particular branch of

government or negative examples regarding a policy implemented by the local government. The critique must be straightforward and manifested in the editorial content. There must be clear attribution of responsibility directed toward either the central or regional government or towards some department, or branch of government. Phrases such as “[Someone] should beware of [what] happened” will not be coded as a critique, because although it serves as a reminder, it is not a critique. It is important to note that the critique must be domestic in focus. Critiques of foreign governments or any type of foreigners are not categorized as government critique.

Another important guideline here is that critique of certain individuals or groups of people is not coded as government critique, but rather as individual critique; the same applies to people who are deceased or who are no longer in power.

Government critique was broken down into four categories (central government, regional government, certain department of government, certain branch of government), to allow more fine grained coding. Each level of government could be criticized through nine types of critique: misconduct, corruption, bureaucracy, extravagance and waste, authoritarianism (e.g., top leader ignores the committee opinion), utopian government (e.g., blind optimistic decision without concrete research), utilitarianism (e.g., focus only on one’s official achievement without concern about environment protection or property rights), and lack of communism ideology (e.g., pessimistic about the future of China), and other. The presence of each type of critique for each branch of government is coded as 0 and 1, where 1 represents that it was mentioned and 0 represents that it was not mentioned. An

additive index summing these scores is calculated and is deemed the extent of critique for each article.

5. Government praise:

In addition to a variable for government critique, this study includes a variable for government praise. Any positive references that glorify Chinese political leaders, the party, or the government as a whole are coded as praise. For example, phrases such as “Under the glorious and righteous leadership of comrade Chairman...” or “The great policy of market economy has brought splendid achievements...” are coded as praise. Government praise will be measured by 0—no praise; 1—low praise; 2—medium praise; and 3—high praise. The measurement will be subjective. Details of praise (such as specific phrases used in praise) will not be evaluated.

6. Dimensions of reform:

Seven categories of reform can be mentioned an article, as follows: executive reform (e.g. more transparency), judicial reform (e.g., allow judges more power in inquisition, instead of being controlled by higher rank executive official) institutional reform (e.g., take more veto player into account in a certain committee), economic reform (e.g., economic policy change), social protest reform (e.g., show more tolerance and concession to public protest), media reform (e.g., free up the censorship to some extent), and other type of reform. The majority of other reforms are educational reforms and environmental reforms.

This variable is also coded as 0 and 1, where 0 represents not mentioned and 1 represents mentioned. The number of times that each type of reform mentioned is not measured in the content analysis.

Inter-coder reliability

The coders are two Chinese graduate students majoring in journalism and mass communication, including the author. Both coders received professional training before the coding process started.

The study used Krippendorff's Alpha test of inter-coder reliability, which is regarded as a stringent measure of coder agreement (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). Both coders coded 35% of the samples (109 out of 313 editorials) to test reliability. With all 62 variables coded, the average inter-coder reliability was 0.82. For four variables, inter-coder reliability was below 0.7: the professional journalist quotations variable (alpha=0.64), regional government corruption variable (alpha=0.60), specific individual ideology variable (alpha=0.52), and individual/group attribution of responsibility variable (alpha=0.56). However, these variables are not critical to the hypotheses in this study; therefore, their lower level of reliability does not influence the final results.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

General description

A total of 313 editorials were examined in this study ($N = 313$), with 107 from 1977-1989 (Period 1), about 2 editorials per day, and 206 from 1992-2010 (Period 2), about 3 editorials per day. The number of editorials per day varied between 0 and 6.

The number and authors of editorials published each year are shown in Table 1. The average length of articles is 8.03 paragraphs. A total of 223 articles specified author names, while the other 90 did not.

As Table 1 shows, editorials were distributed relatively equally over the sample years. In terms of author identity, in Period 1, more than half of the authors were unspecified (45.8%), with the lowest percentage being 19% in 1977. The situation was different in Period 2, with 84.5% of authors' named, reaching 95.7% at the highest percentage in 1995. The percentage of author names provided was 71.2% overall (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of Editorials and Author Identification

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of editorials</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Author ID provided</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1977	21	6.7%	4	19.0%
1980	24	7.7%	10	41.7%
1983	23	7.3%	9	39.1%
1986	21	6.8%	14	66.7%
1989	18	5.7%	12	66.7%
1992	20	6.4%	15	75%
1995	23	7.4%	22	95.7%
1998	32	10.2%	26	81.3%
2001	27	8.6%	23	85.2%
2004	34	10.9%	28	82.4%
2007	37	11.8%	31	83.8%
2010	33	10.5%	29	87.9%
Total	313	100%	223	71.2%

Hypotheses tests

H1a: Government and party issues will decrease after 1989 while other topics will increase.

Editorials cover eight main types of topics: policy explanation and instruction, scandal and corruption, government and party issue, cultural issue, societal issue, economic issue, foreign issue, and other issue. The majority of other issues are environmental, sports, and

educational issues. Because these issues are not the main focus of this research, they are put into the category “other”.

To examine the statistical significance of changes in the main topic, an independent samples t-test is used. The results across the two time periods show that government and party issues appear more frequently in Period 1 ($M = .38, SD = .49, N = 107$) than in Period 2 ($M = .24, SD = .43, N = 206$), $t(191) = 2.60, p < .01$, two-tailed. This indicates that government and party issues were less frequently the main topic of editorials after 1989. Also, foreign issues appear less likely to be the main topic of editorials in Period 2 ($M = .05, SD = .22, N = 206$) than in Period 1 ($M = .20, SD = .40, N = 107$), $t(138) = 3.57, p < .001$, two-tailed (see Table 2).

In contrast, editorials covered more cultural issues in Period 2 ($M = .09, SD = .28, N = 206$) than in Period 1 ($M = .01, SD = .10, N = 107$), $t(280) = -3.58, p < .001$, two-tailed. They also covered more societal issues in Period 2 ($M = .18, SD = .39, N = 206$) than in Period 1 ($M = .06, SD = .23, N = 107$), $t(305) = -3.66, p < .001$, two-tailed, and more other issues in Period 2 ($M = .15, SD = .36, N = 206$) than in Period 1 ($M = .07, SD = .25, N = 107$), $t(286) = -2.46, p < .05$, two-tailed. This suggests a significant shift in editorials' main topics in the People's Daily, where cultural issues, societal issues, and other issues significantly increased, while government and party issues and foreign issues significantly decreased in Period 1 compared with Period 1 (see Table 2). Therefore, Hypothesis 1a is partially supported.

Table 2: Editorials' Main Topic before and after 1989

<i>Main Topic</i>	<i>Periods</i>		<i>t value</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>Period 1</i>	<i>Period 2</i>		
	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>		
	(<i>N</i> = 107)	(<i>N</i> = 206)		
Policy explanation and instruction	0.10 (0.31)	0.09 (0.28)	0.45	311
Scandal and corruption	0.06 (0.23)	0.02(0.14)	1.51	146
Government and party issue	0.38 (0.49)	0.24 (0.43)	2.60**	192
Cultural issue	0.01 (0.10)	0.09 (0.28)	-3.58***	280
Societal issue	0.06 (0.23)	0.18 (0.39)	-3.66***	305
Economic issue	0.13 (0.34)	0.18 (0.39)	-1.26	242
Foreign issue	0.20 (0.40)	0.05 (0.22)	3.57***	138
Other issue	0.07 (0.25)	0.15 (0.36)	-2.46*	286

a. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

b. Independent samples t-test for number of editorial under each main topic by time period

H1b: Government officials as authors will decrease after 1989 while other author identities will increase.

The author of an editorial in the People's Daily can be identified as a journalist, ordinary individual, celebrity, official, expert, foreign author, other domestic media, unknown author, and other author. Among these identities, an independent samples t-test shows that government officials are more likely to be an editorial's author in Period 1 ($M = .21$, $SD = .41$, $N = 107$) than in Period 2 ($M = .10$, $SD = .30$, $N = 206$), $t(167) = 2.50$, $p < .05$, two-

tailed. Also, authors are more likely to be unknown during Period 1 ($M = .21$, $SD = .41$, $N = 107$) than Period 2 ($M = .11$, $SD = .31$, $N = 206$), $t(171) = 2.21$, $p < .05$, two-tailed (see Table 3).

In contrast, more ordinary individuals were authors after 1989 ($M = .20$, $SD = .404$, $N = 206$) than before ($M = .10$, $SD = .31$, $N = 107$), $t(270) = -2.48$, $p < .05$, two-tailed, more celebrity authors were identified after 1989 ($M = .04$, $SD = .19$, $N = 206$) than before 1989 ($M = .00$, $SD = .00$, $N = 107$), $t(205) = -2.88$, $p < .01$, two-tailed, and more expert authors were identified after 1989 ($M = .14$, $SD = .34$, $N = 206$) than before ($M = .04$, $SD = .19$, $N = 207$), $t(309) = -3.26$, $p < .001$, two-tailed (see Table 3). Therefore, Hypothesis 1b is partially supported.

Table 3: Editorials' Author Identity before and after 1989

<i>Author Identity</i>	<i>Period</i>		<i>t value</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>Period 1</i>	<i>Period 2</i>		
	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>		
	(<i>N = 107</i>)	(<i>N = 206</i>)		
Professional journalist	0.36 (0.48)	0.38 (0.49)	-0.49	311
Ordinary individual	0.10 (0.31)	0.20 (0.40)	-2.48*	270
Celebrity	0.00 (0.00)	0.04 (0.19)	-2.88**	205
Government official	0.21 (0.41)	0.10 (0.30)	2.50*	167
Expert	0.04 (0.19)	0.14 (0.34)	-3.26***	309
Foreign author	0.01 (0.10)	0.00 (0.00)	1.00	106
Other domestic media	0.07 (0.26)	0.03 (0.17)	1.62	152
Unknown identity	0.21 (0.41)	0.11 (0.31)	2.21*	171
Other author identity	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	NA	NA

a.* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

b. Independent samples t-test for author identity by time period

H1c: Editorials will have more quotations after 1989 than before 1989.

There are nine categories of sources that the editorials in the People's Daily usually quote: journalists, ordinary individuals, celebrities, government officials, anonymous sources, other domestic media sources, experts, foreign sources, and other sources. Quotations from criminals and suspects, as well as urban slangs and ancient Chinese idioms are considered "other".

An independent samples t-test shows that editorials contain significantly more quotations after 1989 ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 3.10$, $N = 206$) than before ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 3.59$, $N = 107$), $t(311) = -3.56$, $p < .001$, two-tailed (see Table 4). In Period 1, editorials contain 2.66 quotations per article on average; in Period 2, this figure rises to 4.05 quotations per article on average. Therefore, Hypothesis 1c is supported.

The difference in number of quotations is especially evident in five categories. Ordinary individual quotations are significantly more frequent after 1989 ($M = .41$, $SD = 1.05$, $N = 206$) than before 1989 ($M = .16$, $SD = .62$, $N = 107$), $t(306) = -2.63$, $p < .01$, two-tailed. Celebrity quotations are significantly more frequent after 1989 ($M = .22$, $SD = .65$, $N = 206$) than before 1989 ($M = .06$, $SD = .33$, $N = 107$), $t(310) = -2.94$, $p < .01$, two-tailed. Government official quotations are significantly more frequent after 1989 ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 1.92$, $N = 206$) than before 1989 ($M = 1.34$, $SD = 2.41$, $N = 107$), $t(311) = -2.14$, $p < .05$, two-tailed. Expert quotations are significantly more frequent after 1989 ($M = .35$, $SD = .82$, $N = 206$) than

before 1989 ($M = .18$, $SD = .66$, $N = 107$), $t(258) = -2.02$, $p < .05$, two-tailed. Finally, other quotations are significantly more frequent after 1989 ($M = .21$, $SD = .54$, $N = 206$) than before 1989 ($M = .06$, $SD = .43$, $N = 107$), $t(258) = -2.82$, $p < .01$, two-tailed (see Table 4).

Table 4: Editorials' Quotations before and after 1989

<i>Quotations</i>	<i>Period</i>		<i>t value</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>Period 1</i>	<i>Period 2</i>		
	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Mean(SD)</i>		
	(<i>N = 107</i>)	(<i>N = 206</i>)		
Professional journalist	0.05 (0.32)	0.13 (0.47)	-1.87	289
Ordinary individual	0.16 (0.62)	0.41 (1.05)	-2.63**	306
Celebrity	0.06 (0.33)	0.22 (0.65)	-2.94**	310
Government official	1.34 (2.41)	1.87 (1.92)	-2.14*	311
Anonymous	0.31 (0.84)	0.30 (0.66)	0.14	311
Other domestic media	0.12 (0.54)	0.22 (0.58)	-1.46	227
Expert	0.18 (0.66)	0.35 (0.82)	-2.02*	258
Foreign	0.40 (1.16)	0.34 (1.03)	0.45	311
Other	0.06 (0.43)	0.21 (0.54)	-2.82**	258
Quotation total	2.66 (3.59)	4.05 (3.10)	-3.56***	311

a. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

b. Independent samples t-test for quotations by time period

H2a: Government critique will be more frequent after 1989 than before 1989.

Government critique is of four types: central government critique, regional government critique, specific department of government critique, and specific branch of government critique. By a specific branch, we mean the legislative and judicial branch of the government.

Although China does not possess three clear branches of government, the legislative and judicial branches do have their own institutional function, and therefore it is important to distinguish them from the central government.

An independent samples t-test shows significantly more frequent government critiques in Period 2 ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 2.27$, $N = 206$) than in Period 1 ($M = 1.24$, $SD = 1.56$, $N = 107$), $t(287) = -4.29$, $p < .001$, two-tailed. (see Table 5) Therefore, Hypothesis 2a is supported.

Additionally, regional government critiques are significantly more frequent in Period 2 ($M = 1.03$, $SD = 1.24$, $N = 206$) than in Period 1 ($M = .72$, $SD = 1.12$, $N = 107$), $t(311) = -2.16$, $p < .05$, two-tailed. Specific department of government critiques are significantly more frequent in Period 2 ($M = .79$, $SD = 1.09$, $N = 206$) than in Period 1 ($M = .28$, $SD = .74$, $N = 107$), $t(290) = -4.85$, $p < .001$, two-tailed. Also, specific branch of government critiques are significantly more frequent in Period 2 ($M = .29$, $SD = .75$, $N = 206$) than in Period 1 ($M = .07$, $SD = .38$, $N = 107$), $t(310) = -3.39$, $p < .001$, two-tailed (see Table 5).

In addition, in Period 1, there are 1.24 government critiques per article on average, while in Period 2 there are 2.17 critiques per article on average.

However, although the number of government critiques has significantly increased from Period 1 to Period 2, we failed to see any significant difference in the central government critique variable.

Table 5: Editorials' Government Critique before and after 1989

	<i>Period</i>		<i>t value</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>Period 1</i>	<i>Period 2</i>		
	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>		
<i>Government Critique</i>	(<i>N</i> = 107)	(<i>N</i> = 206)		
Central government critique	0.17 (0.56)	0.07 (0.33)	1.63	144
Regional government critique	0.72 (1.12)	1.03 (1.24)	-2.16*	311
Department of government critique	0.28 (0.74)	0.79 (1.09)	-4.85***	290
Branch of government critique	0.07 (0.38)	0.29 (0.75)	-3.39***	310
Government critique total	1.24 (1.56)	2.18 (2.27)	-4.29***	287

a.* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

b. Independent samples t-test for government critique by time period

H2b: Government praise will be less frequent after 1989 than before 1989.

Praise of the government is measured on a scale that varies from 0 (no praise), 1 (low praise), 2 (medium praise), to 3 (high praise). An independent samples t-test shows that there is no significant difference between Period 1 and Period 2. Therefore, Hypothesis 2b is not supported (see Table 6).

Table 6: Editorials' Government Praise before and after 1989

	<i>Period</i>		<i>t value</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>Period 1</i>	<i>Period 2</i>		
	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>		
<i>Government praise</i>	(<i>N</i> = 107)	(<i>N</i> = 206)		
Government praise	0.96 (1.03)	0.75 (1.04)	1.73	311

a.* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

b. Independent samples t-test for government praise by time period

H3: Reform will be more frequently mentioned after 1989 than before 1989.

The editorials of the People's Daily usually mention seven types of reform: executive reform, institutional reform, judicial reform, economic reform, social protest reform, media reform, and other reform. Other reform involves mostly environmental and educational reform.

An independent samples t-test shows that reforms are mentioned significantly more frequently in Period 2 ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.45$, $N = 206$) than in Period 1 ($M = 1.4$, $SD = 1.25$, $N = 107$), $t(311) = -4.82$, $p < .001$, two-tailed (see Table 7). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Six out of the seven types of reform are mentioned significantly more frequently in Period 2 than in Period 1. Executive reform is mentioned more frequently in Period 2 ($M = .57$, $SD = .50$, $N = 206$) than in Period 1 ($M = .41$, $SD = .49$, $N = 107$), $t(311) = -2.65$, $p < .01$, two-tailed. Institutional reform is mentioned more frequently in Period 2 ($M = .48$, $SD = .50$, $N =$

206) than in Period 1 ($M = .34$, $SD = .48$, $N = 107$), $t(225) = -2.50$, $p < .05$, two-tailed.

Judicial reform is mentioned more frequent in Period 2 ($M = .18$, $SD = .39$, $N = 206$) than in

Period 1 ($M = .07$, $SD = .25$, $N = 107$), $t(296) = -3.17$, $p < .01$, two-tailed. Social protest

reform is mentioned more frequently in Period 2 ($M = .20$, $SD = .40$, $N = 206$) than in Period

1 ($M = .08$, $SD = .28$, $N = 107$), $t(285) = -2.96$, $p < .01$, two-tailed. Media reform is

mentioned more frequently in Period 2 ($M = .20$, $SD = .78$, $N = 206$) than in Period 1 (M

$= .03$, $SD = .17$, $N = 107$), $t(239) = -3.12$, $p < .01$, two-tailed. And Other reform is mentioned

more frequently in Period 2 ($M = .28$, $SD = .45$, $N = 206$) than in Period 1 ($M = .16$, $SD = .37$,

$N = 107$), $t(254) = -2.49$, $p < .05$, two-tailed (see Table 7).

Table 7: Editorials' Mention of Reform before and after 1989

<i>Reform</i>	<i>Period</i>		<i>t value</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>Period 1</i>	<i>Period 2</i>		
	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>		
	(<i>N = 107</i>)	(<i>N = 206</i>)		
Executive reform	0.41 (0.50)	0.57 (0.50)	-2.65**	311
Institutional reform	0.34 (0.48)	0.48 (0.50)	-2.50*	225
Judicial reform	0.07 (0.25)	0.18 (0.39)	-3.17**	296
Economic reform	0.34 (0.48)	0.35 (0.48)	-0.32	311
Social protest reform	0.08 (0.28)	0.20 (0.40)	-2.96**	285
Media reform	0.03 (0.17)	0.20 (0.78)	-3.12**	239
Other reform	0.16 (0.37)	0.28 (0.45)	-2.49*	254
Reform total	1.42 (1.25)	2.22 (1.45)	4.82***	311

a.* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

b. Independent samples t-test for reform mentioned by time period

Additional findings

The study also compared the frequency of use, before and after 1989, of five frames: *attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, ideology/morality, and economic consequences.*

Findings in these categories show that the human example provided in articles is significantly more common after 1989 ($M = .45, SD = .45, N = 206$) than before 1989 ($M = .17, SD = .38, N = 107$), $t(271) = -5.63, p < .001$, two-tailed, whereas the winner/loser in a conflict is less likely to be specified after 1989 ($M = .22, SD = .42, N = 206$) than before 1989 ($M = .41, SD = .49, N = 107$), $t(185) = 3.36, p < .01$, two-tailed. The editorials tend to have two or more sided coverage of a conflict after 1989 ($M = .51, SD = .50, N = 206$) than before 1989 ($M = .29, SD = .46, N = 107$), $t(233) = -3.91, p < .001$, two-tailed. Also, editorials mention traditional moral standards more frequently after 1989 ($M = .23, SD = .42, N = 206$) than before 1989 ($M = .09, SD = .29, N = 107$), $t(285) = -3.31, p < .01$, two-tailed (see Table 8).

Table 8: Frame References in Editorials before and after 1989

<i>Other findings</i>	<i>Period</i>		<i>t value</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>Period 1</i>	<i>Period 2</i>		
	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>		
	(<i>N</i> = 107)	(<i>N</i> = 206)		
Human example	0.17 (0.38)	0.45 (0.50)	-5.64***	271
Winner/Loser of conflict	0.41 (0.49)	0.22 (0.42)	3.36**	185
Two-sided coverage of conflict	0.29 (0.46)	0.51 (0.50)	-3.91***	233
Traditional moral standards	0.09 (0.29)	0.23 (0.42)	-3.31**	285

a.* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

b. Independent samples t-test for frame references by time period

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The study explored the changes in editorial content in the People's Daily from before to after 1989, a watershed year in Chinese history. The results overall identify some significant changes in the period between 1977 and 2010. In general, some noteworthy shifts occurred in the main topics of editorials in the People's Daily as well as their bylines. These changes may indicate partially more other kind of topics and authorship, with fewer government official topics and authors after 1989 than before 1989. Additionally, the number and type of quotations, frequency of government critiques, and mention of reforms significantly increased after 1989 compared with before 1989, while government praise did not change significantly during the same two periods.

Several points are worth mentioning with regard to the main topic of editorials. As shown in Table 3 (previous chapter), the editorials during Period 2 cover more cultural issues, societal issues, and other issues (sports, environmental, educational issues), with government policy explanation and instruction and foreign issues appearing less frequently. The situation of foreign issues is a particularly interesting finding, as the coverage seems to be following some kind of anti-internationalization trend, but when the details of these editorials about foreign issue are examined, they seem to be mostly critiques of the former Soviet Union, the United States, or Israel. This is particularly evident in 1977, when 11 out of 21 articles are critiques of the hegemonic behavior and ideological "mistakes" of the former Soviet Union.

The focus of the writing of foreign issues remains the same from 1977 to 2012, as the editorials on foreign issues are mostly critiques toward foreign governments; the only difference is that after 1989, they seem to focus more on domestic issues rather than criticizing foreign governments. This may be considered an improvement, as the editorials after 1989 put more emphasis on domestic Chinese issues.

Also, perhaps surprisingly, the earlier editorials cover more scandal and corruption issues than those of the more recent period; although there is more government critique and more reform mentioned, the People's Daily tends to give less coverage of the scandals and corruptions today. The reason for this could be sample bias, as there are only 9 editorials about the scandal and corruption topic out of 313 editorials (6 out of 107 and 3 out of 206). Such a small number of editorials on this topic indicate that some major corruption cases might have been missed. Another possible explanation is that, although the Daily may mention anti-corruption policies and discipline many times, it rarely names the corrupt official or describes the case in detail. They editorials tend to talk more about how to adopt anti-corruption measures rather than reporting the actual corruption cases.

Several changes in author identity for the editorials examined here are also observed. Taken together, the findings suggest that there are significantly fewer official authors and significantly more ordinary individual authors, more expert authors, and more celebrity authors after 1989, compared to before 1989. The most common authors of editorials are professional journalists. This could reflect a characteristic of the People's Daily, a considerable number of whose editorials are written by their own editors and journalists.

The results also show significant increases in writing of editorials by ordinary authors, celebrity authors, and expert authors in the more recent time period, along with a significant decrease in the number of anonymous authors and official authors. With the journalist author identity almost unchanged, this suggests a proportional redistribution from officials to ordinary people, celebrities and experts.

One thing worth noting in this section is that there are very few celebrity authors overall (none in Period 1) and almost no foreign authors (none in Period 2). The only editorial written by a foreign author appeared in 1983, authored by then-Prime Minister of Cambodia, who was attending a meeting in Beijing.

An important finding is the significant decrease in unknown authors of editorials in the People's Daily over time. Before 1989, editorials were put into a special column labeled "editorial section," with no author name given. The authors are unknown in one out of five editorials published before 1989. The situation changed significantly after 1989, when the name of the author would be provided inside the column, sometimes along with a tiny paragraph describing the author's occupation and field of research. Also, before 1989, many editorials were labeled as written by "our editor" but without the actual author name. Although these authors are categorized as professional journalists, their names would be coded as "unspecified." Before 1989, only 45.8% of authors' names were provided, a situation that became much better after 1989, when 84.5% of author's names were provided. This may represent, to some extent, a widening of the pool of authors allowed to publish editorials in the elite newspaper of the country. Although editorials still need to go through a

gatekeeping process, the paper appears to allow a higher percentage of opinion pieces to come from outside the paper.

The most interesting findings of this study are related to government critique. During Period 1, there are 18 central government critiques in 107 articles. This means the editorials criticize the central government only 0.17 times per article. During Period 2, there are only 15 central government critiques out of 206 articles, which come to an even lower number of 0.07 central government critiques per article. This is an example of the rarely used central government critique:

The central committee used to ignore the economic regularity, and arbitrarily insisted on a planned economy for years. This must be changed and a market economy must be initiated. Any linkage asserted between market economy and capitalism is wrong, the market economy is a tool...[that] can achieve economic development, and it is never labeled by capitalism ideology (People's Daily, Apr 14, 1980, page 1).

First, both numbers are extremely low, which means that critiques of the central government have never been very common; this is not surprising, considering the Chinese government model. However, somewhat surprising is another general pattern that emerges in the content analysis—editorials blaming a certain region or branch or department of government, or just an individual official for not following the central orders, or for implementing them incorrectly. While the frequency of such criticism is not overwhelming, it is noteworthy that this is taking place, and on the pages of the party newspaper no less. Here

are some examples of government critique targeted at a specific branch and a regional government:

The Party and government have always been caring about the teachers, and many policies are made to protect their rights...such a disrespectful behavior towards teachers reflects insufficient caring by the Department of Education and the regional government of Meizhou. They should arrest the wrong-doers and devote more effort to protecting teachers' rights (People's Daily, Feb 16, 2007, Page 8).

Ever since October (People's Daily, Mar 2, 1992, Page 3), the central Party had emphasized repeatedly on multi-stage and multi-dimensional economic development...[yet] the regional leaders of Pingding county ignored these orders and used authoritarian orders to force development. Such behavior has had bad consequences... not only on regional economic development, but also on people's trust of government policies.

Second, it is important to note that when central government critique is evident; it is mostly self-critique made by high officials. There are very few occasions on which an article would directly blame the central government for any wrongdoing.

One possible explanation is that the People's Daily has never been freed up enough to challenge the central government, not before 1989, and certainly not after 1989, because of the Tiananmen Square event. The country's reforms and ongoing changes are accomplished by following the steps set by the central government, and no critique of central orders and policies is allowed, at least not on the pages of the People's Daily.

This finding suggests that even today, instead of serving as an active challenger, the People's Daily serves more as a passive acceptor of the official voice. It implements the policy that the central government proposes, but has no intention of criticizing the central government. Therefore, the significant increase in regional government critique, specific department of government critique, and specific branch of government critique might represent a redirection of central government critique necessitated by lack of freedom. These lower-level government offices may simply take the bullets that are meant for the central government.

Another question posed in this study was how common discussion of reforms takes place in the People's Daily editorials. The results show that reforms are mentioned significantly more often regarding the executive level, institutional level, judicial level, social protest level, media level, and other reform (environmental, educational reform) level. Only economic reform is mentioned with the same frequency before and after 1989. Thus, one can conclude that there is definitely more discussion of most types of reform after 1989.

One thing worth noting is that although the editorials do mention media reform more after 1989, the tone they use is far from satisfying. Instead of asking that the media have more freedom, many editorials suggest reforming the media system so that media could cover certain topics more precisely and accurately. Some editorials even suggest strengthening media regulation and tightening up the media to prevent them from accidentally spreading rumors and untrue messages. Therefore, although media reform is mentioned more frequently, the specific suggestions for media reform are bringing China no closer to media freedom.

Along with the fact that China still prohibits Youtube and Facebook access within its borders, the results fit well with other information suggesting that China still has far to go in achieving media freedom. Even published editorials that mention the term “media reform” don’t necessarily refer to the kind of reform intended to lessen media control and to increase media independence. Furthermore, while all other reforms have a clear direction toward less concentration of power and more independence, media reform seems to be the only reform that has not a clear vision of where it is going.

Finally, compared with editorials published before 1989, those published after 1989 are less likely to provide winners or losers in an argument. Instead of indulging in harsh reproaching, they seem more willing to reason with readers and provide a two-sided view to persuade readers to accept their ideas. More human examples are also included in editorials to arouse the sympathy of readers, and less rough ideological preaching is evident. These changes might be present in the Chinese press as a whole (Majid, 2004). Also, these content changes may not be reflective of the coverage of other Chinese media, but of the People’s Daily only.

Implications

The results of the longitudinal analysis of editorials of the People’s Daily do suggest a certain degree of increasing media freedom. The decrease in government and party issues and increases in other issues indicates that the Daily is willing to cover a wider range of topics. The decrease in official authors and increase in other authors indicates that the Daily is willing to let different people’s voices be heard. The increase in government critique indicates that the Daily is more willing to tolerate criticism of the central government. Finally,

more coverage of reform indicates that the Daily is more willing to allow advocates of change in the current system to be heard. It is important to recognize, however, that the increased coverage of reform on the pages of the Daily may simply be a reflection of wider societal reforms taking place in the second time period examined here. In other words, the causes of the increase in reform coverage remain an open question that cannot be answered with a content analysis alone.

However, the decrease of central government critique along with no decrease of praise indicates the People's Daily is still strongly concerned about the invisible line set by the central government. As a state owned newspaper, the People's Daily seems to be trying constantly to educate people to behave as they suggest in their articles. Although the way in which the persuasion gets more humanized (more human examples and more two-sided argument), the education function seems little changes (no less conflict, always blame someone, always provide solutions). This indicates that the mouthpiece function of the People's Daily has not changed much. Therefore, the freedom increase is partial, not total.

The study demonstrated that there is at least a partial increase in media freedom in the People's Daily. More importantly, the study suggests that there may be a line between media freedom and political freedom, and that economic development might indirectly contribute to media freedom.

For journalists, there is a wider range of topic choices in place of a focus on one or two topics. Journalists could also focus on more domestic issues instead of criticism of foreign governments. Also, they are freer to criticize the government and officials to attempt to correct their wrongdoing, but not at the central government level. For ordinary individuals,

celebrities, and experts, there are more chances for their voices to be heard on the pages of the People's Daily; also, their words are more likely to be quoted in editorials.

Limitations

The categories for topics may not be completely representative because of the focus bias of this study. Some issues are not commonly talked about and thus are categorized as "other," while some issues this research intended to capture were too few to form an independent category. The categories for reform have the same limitation. Additionally, the categories of author identity deliberately neglected the circumstance of multiple author identity. Identities of co-authors are not included in this study. Some sources of quotation are also too few to form an independent category.

Again, the more frequent mention of reforms could be no more than a passive reflection of reforms taking place, not active initiation of these reforms. Also, the variety of topics covered by the Daily in the post-1989 period may be due to the increase in the number of editorials and may have little to do with media freedom. The causal link between these two seems likely but cannot be assumed without further investigation.

Suggestions for further study

The study can be beneficial to future scholars and media practitioners in several ways. It could serve as a baseline for future research on China's media and its freedom. The longitudinal analysis of the People's Daily could be useful when researchers intend to analyze official relationships between policies of the Chinese government and CCP. A

comparison could be made to detect a difference between the more liberated Chinese newspapers and the People's Daily, to identify the similarities and differences between various Chinese media outlets. The study could also be used in comparative research to explore the differences between the media of China and other countries.

As this study focused solely on editorials, news stories seem to be another field worth researching, to find out how news frames change over time. The difference between before 1989 and after 1989, in terms of what type of news is covered and what is not, would be worth researching not only the People's Daily but across different types of Chinese news media, including newspapers, television and established online sources.

Also, a wider range of years could be taken into consideration, with more recent years included. Greater differences may be found when very recent years are compared with even earlier years. Researchers need to keep in mind, however, that increasing the time period under examination may take place at the expense of getting more detailed information about media coverage at a specific point in time.

Finally, when media freedom is discussed, most indices and standards are set for media in general within a country, but what does a change mean in state-owned media? How can we tell if one newspaper is becoming freer or not? Further studies could develop more nuanced measures of media freedom and try to test for a direct relationship between changes in media freedom and changes in political freedom.

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APPENDIX 1

The People's Daily: A Longitudinal Content Analysis of editorials from 1977-2010

Code sheet

1 Coder Name: _____

2 Date of Publication: _____ (e.g. October 1th, 2010)

3. Archive ID: _____

4 Length: _____ (Paragraphs)

5 Article Headline:

6 Article Author: _____

7 Main topic of article (Check if applicable):

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| (1) Policy explanation and instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (2) Scandal and corruption | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (3) Government and Party issue | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (4) Cultural issue | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (5) Societal issue | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (6) Economic issue | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (7) Foreign issue | <input type="checkbox"/> |

(8) Other (please specify) _____

8 Author identity: (Check if applicable)

- (1) Professional Journalist
- (2) Ordinary individual
- (3) Celebrity
- (4) Government official
- (5) Expert/scholar
- (6) Foreign author
- (7) Other media (e.g. Xinhua Press)
- (8) Unknown
- (9) Other author identity (please specify _____)

9 News content Quotations (both direct and indirect):

- (1) Professional Journalist
Times quoted: _____
- (2) Ordinary individual
Times quoted: _____
- (3) Celebrity
Times quoted: _____
- (4) Government officer
Times quoted: _____
- (5) Anonymous source

Times quoted: _____

(6) Other domestic media source

Times quoted: _____

(7) Expert/Scholar

Times quoted: _____

(8) Foreign news source

Times quoted: _____

(9) Other source (please specify)

Times quoted: _____

10 Level and issue of critique (Current)

<u>Central government</u>	
Misconduct	Yes____ No____
Corruption	Yes____ No____
Bureaucracy	Yes____ No____
Extravagance and Waste	Yes____ No____
Authoritarianism	Yes____ No____
Utopian government	Yes____ No____
Utilitarianism	Yes____ No____
Ideological beliefs	Yes____ No____
Other(Please specify _____)	Yes____ No____
<u>Regional government</u>	
Misconduct	Yes____ No____

Corruption	Yes___	No___
Bureaucracy	Yes___	No___
Extravagance and Waste	Yes___	No___
Authoritarianism	Yes___	No___
Utopian government	Yes___	No___
Utilitarianism	Yes___	No___
Ideological beliefs	Yes___	No___
Other(Please specify _____)	Yes___	No___
<u>Specific department of government</u>		
Misconduct	Yes___	No___
Corruption	Yes___	No___
Bureaucracy	Yes___	No___
Extravagance and Waste	Yes___	No___
Authoritarianism	Yes___	No___
Utopian government	Yes___	No___
Utilitarianism	Yes___	No___
Ideological beliefs	Yes___	No___
Other(Please specify _____)	Yes___	No___
<u>Specific branch of government</u>		
<u>(Judicial, Legislative)</u>		
Misconduct	Yes___	No___
Corruption	Yes___	No___

Bureaucracy	Yes___	No___
Extravagance and Waste	Yes___	No___
Authoritarianism	Yes___	No___
Utopian government	Yes___	No___
Utilitarianism	Yes___	No___
Ideological beliefs	Yes___	No___
Other(Please specify _____)	Yes___	No___
<u>Specific Individual</u>		
Misconduct	Yes___	No___
Corruption	Yes___	No___
Bureaucracy	Yes___	No___
Extravagance and Waste	Yes___	No___
Authoritarianism	Yes___	No___
Utopian government	Yes___	No___
Utilitarianism	Yes___	No___
Ideological beliefs	Yes___	No___
Other(Please specify _____)	Yes___	No___

11 Specific phrases used in critique:

12 Government Praise

No praise High praise Medium praise Low praise

13 Reform mentioned

- (1) Executive reform
- (2) Institutional reform
- (3) Judicial reform
- (4) Economic reform
- (5) Social protest reform
- (6) Media reform
- (7) Other reform (Please specify)_____

14 Attribution of Responsibility

- (1) Does the article suggest that some level of government is responsible for the issue/problem?
Yes_____ No_____
- (2) Does the article suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?
Yes_____ No_____
- (3) Does the article suggest any individual or group is responsible for the issue/problem?
Yes_____ No_____
- (4) Does the article suggest the issue/problem requires urgent attention/action?
Yes_____ No_____

15 Conflict

- (1) Does the story reflect any differences between issue/individual/group/country?

Yes_____ No_____

(2) Does any side of conflict reproach another?

Yes_____ No_____

(3) Does the article refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the issue/problem?

Yes_____ No_____

(4) Does the story refer to winners or losers?

Yes_____ No_____

16 Human interest

(1) Does the article provide any human example on the issue/problem?

Yes_____ No_____

(2) Does the article emphasize how individuals/groups affected by the issue/problem?

Yes_____ No_____

(3) Does the article go into the personal lives of the actors?

Yes_____ No_____

(4) Does the story contain any visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy, sympathy, or compassion?

Yes_____ No_____

(5) Does the story contain any adjective narrations that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy, sympathy, or compassion?

Yes_____ No_____

17 Ideology/Morality

(1) Does the article contain any communism ideology/morality message?

Yes_____ No_____

(2) Does the story make reference to traditional (e.g. Taoism, Confucianism) morality?

Yes_____ No_____

(3) Does the story make reference to ideological moral standards?

Yes_____ No_____

(4) Does the article offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?

Yes_____ No_____

18 Economic consequences

(1) Does the article mention any financial losses or gains now or in the future?

Yes_____ No_____

(2) Does the article mention the costs/degree of expenses involved?

Yes_____ No_____

(3) Does the article refer to pursue or not to pursue a course of action?

Yes_____ No_____

APPENDIX 2

Sampled Years and Dates

1977									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
42	25	8	7	17	29	26	4	23	24
Oct 17	Jun 20	Feb 22	Feb 15	Apr 27	Jul 20	Jun 30	Jan 20	Jun 10	Jun 17

1980									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
23	15	16	13	46	48	9	36	52	4
Jun 9	Apr 14	Apr 15	Mar 25	Nov 19	Dec 3	Feb 28	Sep 4	Dec 26	Jan 25

1983									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
12	7	15	49	31	41	14	20	34	24
Mar 21	Feb 14	Apr 12	Dec 6	Aug 3	Oct 12	Apr 7	May 19	Aug 19	Jun 10

1986									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
8	41	29	40	7	21	52	19	7	38
Feb 24	Oct 13	Jul 15	Oct 7	Feb 12	May 21	Dec 25	May 8	Feb 14	Sep 12

1989									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
6	11	2	41	10	45	1	24	30	46
Feb 6	Mar 6	Jan 10	Oct 10	Mar 8	Nov 8	Jan 5	Jun 15	Jul 28	Nov 17

1992									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
9	21	2	18	22	40	52	20	51	38
Mar 2	May 25	Jan 14	May 5	May 27	Oct 7	Dec 31	May 14	Dec 18	Sep 18

1995									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
24	40	49	34	43	50	37	19	36	28
Jun 19	Oct 2	Dec 4	Aug 22	Oct 25	Dec 13	Sep 14	May 11	Sep 8	Jul 14

1998									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
44	51	49	1	41	17	10	45	43	38
Nov 2	Dec 21	Dec 8	Jan 6	Oct 14	Apr 22	Mar 5	Nov 5	Oct 23	Sep 18

2001									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
21	6	24	41	13	37	8	35	23	28
May 21	Feb 5	Jun 12	Oct 9	Mar 28	Sep 12	Feb 22	Aug 30	Jun 8	Jul 13

2004									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
8	29	20	10	2	36	27	26	13	19
Feb 23	Jul 19	May 18	Mar 9	Jan 14	Sep 8	Jul 1	Jun 24	Mar 26	May 7

2007									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
33	9	47	50	43	29	46	26	26	7
Aug 13	Feb 26	Nov 20	Dec 11	Oct 24	Jul 18	Nov 15	Jun 28	Jun 29	Feb 16

2010									
Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
42	50	39	16	31	36	13	24	12	25
Oct 18	Dec 13	Sep 28	Apr 20	Aug 4	Sep 8	Mar 25	Jun 10	Mar 19	Jun 18