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Great sound makes no noise¹ ---- Creeping Freedoms² in Chinese Press

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Introduction: "To change a brain"

In contrast to recent Western criticism of China's tightened social control and the crack-down on dissent, a liberalizing tendency has rippled in the most dangerous water in China: the press. ³The birth and growth of a freer press is inconceivable 10 years ago.

Since the spring of 1998, "a quiet revolution" is undergoing in the Chinese media, which some describes it as "in the face of a communist regime that runs a closed society and a censored press, more modern, lively newspapers are drawing in readers."⁴

As China is embracing a free market economy, its press begins to embrace a new journalism, which is not a planned move on the agenda of China's reform. This new trend has been largely ignored by both the western scholars of China studies. The new journalism is becoming a media for the communications of news and formations of new ideas. The rise of such a new journalism and its influence on Chinese society and China's politics cannot be ignored. The creeping freedoms, which have slowly come into being in radical economic and social changes in China, can also be seen as the inevitable and unplanned results of social and economic forces unleashed by the Chinese Communist Party itself. In a sense, they are not simply to add spice to the dull format and content of the party media or to meet insatiable demand for information from the public. By analyzing their content and studying their effects, we will discover that they are functioning as media of mass communications, unlike the party journalism as mean of mass propaganda

We need a realistic picture of what the Chinese press is like today. Not an abstract or foggy views of the Chinese press. We can neither idealize nor belittle or even ignore such a dramatic change. There are really a lot of nuances than a simple still picture of the Chinese press nowadays. We must try to avoid subjective analysis of the press reform in China. You may well use the "bird cage" metaphor invented by a Chinese professor to describe the press freedoms in China: a substantial freedom within a limited space.

If we want to see the reality of Chinese press today, we should not discuss it in the frame of Tiananmen. When we examine the change of the Chinese press, we should go beyond the frame of Tiananmen and the pre-existing knowledge of a communist nation. Based on their familiar historical and conceptual knowledge, many people in the West are expecting a bad communist, never expecting a good communist. They do not expect anything positive or progress can take place under the rule of communists because if anything good happening in a communist country, that means the government is more confident and is gaining trust of the people and their rule going to be enhanced instead of being weakened. The public feels upset of disclosure and news reports of such positive changes. All they expect is a cruel, ruthless government on the brink of collapse. But in an informed and knowledgeable academic discussion, we must avoid analysis based on narrow preexisting values and conceptual knowledge. And if we limit our sources to some biased media and publications it only reinforces stereotypes and we will never be able to see what Lushan Mountain really looks⁵ -- the true face of the Chinese press, politics, the society and the people.

Commenting on Chinese press today, Professor Orville Schell of California University, Berkeley, says recently, "Megaphones for the party or free-standing independent watchdog? In China it's now a real mish-mash. And no one dares to even talk about it in public because such

discussion can only get on in trouble. So China just sort of muddles along with a very murky, incomplete conception of what its ideals are."⁶ This statement is typical of many American researchers who are out of touch with the Chinese reality today. This could be caused partially by language problem of reading Chinese publications or partially caused by a negligence of Chinese publications⁷,

As a matter of fact, most Chinese journalists understand it very well in what direction they are pushing the press reform. While many Chinese journalists agree that one of the landmarks of modern civilization is pushing political democracy through supervising by public opinions and "supervising by public opinions has become the leading power of maintaining a benign political and economic cycle of society. A society is not a healthy society without supervising by public opinions. Supervising by news reporting and opinions has become a social checking power as important as government, laws and morality,"⁸

My method of writing this paper is to try seeking truth from facts. Serious researchers are not Hollywood film producers who tend to see the Chinese as hapless victims or lawless villains. Academics are not media people whose are manipulated by a down-market. In our discussion, I will try to avoid two falsehoods in my observations of Chinese press. First, we cannot examine Chinese press within the still picture of Tiananmen: secondly, we should avoid another false impression that the Chinese press is moving toward American-style freedom. Using American yardstick to measure Chinese press freedom could be misleading.

The conventional wisdom that a communist government would not loosen control of press is not supported by the empirical evidence in this paper. As a Chinese journalist notes, the control of the media in China has shifted from a "visible hand" to "an invisible hand." "As a reflection of market economy by the means of news, the gravity of news media is shifting from a government behavior to a market behavior, from the area of production to the area of circulation. The news media emphasize more on serving the society, serving the market and serving the masses. In a market economy, in order to guarantee a rational use of resources, an important link is information gathering, communications and their applications. As a result, the main function of news media has evolved from releasing government information to that of gathering and spreading information, communications and providing services to the society. Comrade Deng Xiaoping has asked the Chinese officials at all levels to 'have a change of brain' in order to adapt to the new situation of China's reform and opening to the outside world. An updating of our thoughts of journalism is actually 'a change of brain' for press thinking, for news topics, for news structure and for news style. If we do not change for a new brain and do not update our concepts, we will by no means push forward the press reform in China." "Updating concepts is the pilot of behavior. Updating our press thought is the key link to implement a smooth press reform and to set up a new press system and a new journalism model which will be consistent with the socialist market economy"⁹

So, in this paper, I will try to use a new brain to look at the change of the Chinese press today.

I. A Pretty woman is a bad woman"

Before delving into the new journalism, I will take you to have a look at the propaganda journalism China has practiced over the past decades. We will not see a clear picture of China's

burgeoning freedoms of press without a brief retrospective look of China's press over the last decade. We cannot start a serious discussion of China's new journalism without considering the role played by the party propaganda and press policy in the past and today. It may not be "new journalism" by western standards. But it is "new" in China considering the decades of dominance of propaganda journalism.

First let us read a story told by columnist Ma La:

After the Spring Festival, I saw my neighbor's daughter, who is a first year pupil, reciting her Chinese textbook. Lesson One is "I am a Chinese." Lesson Two is "I love teachers." Lesson Two is "I love daddy and mom."

But 30 years ago, when I was her age and opened my first Chinese textbook: Lesson One was "Long Live Chairman Mao;" Lesson Two was "Long Live the Chinese Communist Party;" Lesson Three was "Long live the undefeatable Mao Zedong Thought." These three slogans were pasted all the way long my road to school. I heard the comrade heroes shouting the three slogans in movies and on stage. When I moved to higher grade, I read in my textbook a lesson of a hero of people's commune. My lady teacher wrote on the blackboard the central idea of the story: The hero defeated attacks of money, pretty women and sugar-coated bullets launched by the class enemies. At that time, even though were all poor children, we all understood the meaning of "money." Growing up with little red book, we all had vague ideas of "class enemies" and "sugar-coated bullets." But "pretty women" is a new phrase to us. A bold classmate shouted to the teacher, "what is " pretty women?" The lady teacher dumbfound for a moment, then replied, "Pretty women is a bad women."

In 1980, I went to college in Sichuan. In my Chinese textbook, there was a romantic poem titled "the light in the office of Premier Zhou" which sings sentimental praise of the hard-working spirit of the Chinese leader. On our campus, I met an American teacher at a restaurant. He said, "Why did your country's poet write poems about your government leader? In the United States, it is unthinkable for romantic poets to write eulogies praising the hard-working sprit of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The Secretary of State probably worked very hard and sometimes forgot turning off the light. But wasn't he a top public servant? The poets in your country are beyond my understanding. The Sichuan girls are so pretty and there are so many pretty women here. Why don't you write for a pretty woman instead of writing for the premier? Since you already know your premier does not have time turning off light, how could he find time reading your poem?"¹⁰

The story illustrates vividly how the country's propaganda worked for the best part over the last half a century. The wry propaganda model which still persist in some of the party papers has much to do with a language environment many of old generation of the Chinese journalists grew up with.

For most part of the last 50 years, not only newspapers and broadcasts were under the strict control of the state, the public did not even have the right to read newspapers and listen to radio freely. Before 1978, the Chinese public listened to news from loud-speakers which were set up to transmit news and circulars at certain time of the day and night. It was a crime of "counterrevolution" if you tuned to broadcasts from *Radio Moscow*, *VOA*, *BBC* and Taiwan over a radio. And on Saturday afternoons, cadres, farmers, workers, students, soldiers would be organized into different political study groups reading newspapers. Reading and listening to news was not a personal choice. It was "a grave issue of right or wrong" and "a problem of your political attitude towards to the party and the government.

For many years in China, covering difficulties and problems of the country was a taboo for journalists. When the media reported that "the overall situation is good", it really meant "the situation is grave." When the media reported "a prosperity of market," it really meant "a shortage of materials." At a meeting of a selection committee for the best news photos of 1979, there were three pictures showing the poor housing conditions of a primary school. Some members of the selection committee opposed, "No, it is not appropriate to let so many dark-side pictures get the prize?" In those days of lying, of empty words and high-sounding slogans, an editor would kill a photo if he saw a person in rags or a farm cattle in the picture. He would regard this kind of picture was a damage to the image of socialism. "There was absolute no way at all to report the sufferings of the common folks. At that time no one had the gut to speak the truth. But once you were bitten by a snake, you will be cared by a rope in the following 10 years. After 20 years of reform, a huge change has taken place in Chinese press. But old frame comes back to us from time to time. To photo journalists, the liberalization of thought will always remain a fresh topic."¹¹

Frustrated with the absurdities of propaganda journalism, a Chinese poet publishes a satire titled *The Headlines of Big News* on the January issue of the state-owned monthly journal *Poems* in 1999.¹²

*There have been no bad train accidents
The public servants has not taken bribes in recent years
The farmers have sown seeds in time
All the harvested grain have been stored in the barn
The drug stores do not sell fake drugs
The medical doctors do not take tips(bribes)
The government pays teachers' salaries on time and pay farmers for their grain with cash
Daughter-in-laws are fetching water for their mother-in-laws
College graduates take whatever job the state assigns them to do
The embezzled public money are being returned
And the Chinese people do not have to kneel down before foreigners*

The long-practiced propaganda is characterized by a writing style which is known as "good news is news, bad news is not news" and "always making bad news look like good news." The following paragraphs in a column article appeared on *Southern Weekend* in the summer of 1998 really hits the nail on the head: ¹³

I often read such a news story: a natural disaster takes place somewhere whether it is an earthquake, a flood or a fire. The local government tirelessly organizes rescue work and arrange the life of disaster-stricken people, who have survived despite of all those sufferings, said gratefully, "It is the party and the government who have saved me. Socialism is good." Such reports are frivolous.

For many years, there has been a pattern in news reporting which writes little about the cause of disaster, descriptions of the disaster scenes, casualties of people, loss of properties. All the sources, quotes and focus in these reports seem to be an endless verifications of the truth that "socialism is good."

The same pattern are also followed in such news reports: public security department rescues kidnapped women; social welfare department extend regards to poverty-stricken families; government official hands out alms to laid-off worker

Day after day our media never feel tired of using shallow cases to prove a deep truth. Isn't it too artificial? Nowadays, the public, who are well-informed and vastly knowledgeable. will likely to question the logic of such reporting: Can it be that the governments in the capitalist countries would leave things as they are?

Facing a natural disaster, both the socialist and the capitalist countries will spare no efforts in disaster relief. Particularly with the developed countries who have a strong economy and advanced technologies, in some cases

they could do better than what we are doing here. But I have never heard the media in there run such reports quoting a tearful and grateful citizen as saying "Capitalism is good."

Regrettably, some of our propaganda departments are fixed in their way of thinking, a legacy of the extreme leftist period, which considers "anything good is socialism and anything bad is capitalism."

This is a graphic description of what news the Chinese had been reading, watching and listening from the Chinese media over the past decades.

Even after the end of the Cultural Revolution and China decided to reform and open up to the West, the traditional press policy of treating the media as part of the revolutionary machinery has remained almost unchanged.

"Positive propaganda" is supposed to be the guiding principle of action for all Chinese journalists. This propaganda and press policy has remained unchanged almost half of a century, not even an insignificant deviation from the pronounced policy.

Outlining the press and propaganda work of 1999, Xu Guangchun, vice-minister of the propaganda department of the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party told a national meetings of the editor-in-chiefs of provincial party papers,¹⁴ "You must give prominent coverage of the differences between old China and new china, give prominent coverage of the achievements under the rule of the communists, give prominent coverage of the advantages of the socialist system. You must sing a loud song of the motherland, sing high praise of the socialism, sing high praise of the reform and opening to the outside world and make them become the keynote of the whole press propaganda. "All news organizations must strictly follow the party's political disciplines and propaganda disciplines. (You) must actively dig and timely spread correct news and opinions. (You) must seriously prevent and overcome irresponsible news and opinions. (You) must firmly wipe out and resist harmful news and opinions. (We) will never allow publication of an opinions which are in conflict with the central(committee's) spirit.(We) will never allow the spread of any kind of rumors, never allow the opinions which violate the party's basic theory, basic line and basic guidelines to appear on the front of our press.""(You) must observe disciplines. Any critical reports involving big problems must seek the opinions of the department in charge. Those problems which are not proper to be reported to the public can be solved through internal publications.""(You) must handle carefully the relationship between reform, development and stability. (You) must maintain stability and unity. (You) must help, not to add troubles."

If you follow closely the party media's coverage of China's battle of the country's worst floods in decades in 1998¹⁵, you will see a clear picture of how the propaganda journalism and the new journalism work differently.

Speaking to a national meeting of the country's propaganda chiefs, Ding Guangen, minister of the propaganda department of the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party, instructed the major media of the party and the government to place the coverage of battling flood as top priority. "You must follow the request of the party central committee and the state council, report the flood- control-related decisions of the central committee timely and accurately, reporting the information released by the central flood control headquarter, publicizing the heroic deeds of the unity between the army and the people and their hard struggle against the floods. The coverage must firm people's confidence, boost their fighting spirit. It must provide a powerful opinion support to the overall victory in the war against floods."¹⁶

It will be more illustrative if we make a comparative study on how the propaganda journalism "providing opinion support to the war against the floods" and how the new journalism

expose corrupt party and government officials abusing power in the floods; how the propaganda journalism glorifies the victory over the floods; how the new journalism exposes the suffering of the flood victims; how the new journalism differs from the communist-hero image-building in party press.

First let us have a brief look at 16 editorials of *People's Daily* during the crucial period (August 9 - August 24) of the war against the floods:

1. *"The Single Most Important Thing"* reads like a mobilization order issued by the party central committee, calling people to protect the safety of the dyke of Yangtze River at whatever costs. It is a lead article on the front page;
2. *"A Severe Test"*, calling on communist party members to "defeat this floods of century with the fearless sprit of a communist party member;"
3. *"To Firm Confidence of Victory"* details the basis and sources of the confidence of victory over the floods;
4. *"Arm to Arm, Army and People Together Build a Great Wall"* lauds the efforts of the army and civilians to battle the natural disaster;
5. *"One Region Suffers, the Whole Country Offer Support"* sings high praises of the superiority of socialist system;
6. *"A Loving Concern Means A Huge Encouragement"* describes Chinese president Jiang Zemin's "inspection tour in person of the front of the flooding area" on the previous day as "has inspired millions of soldiers and civilians deeply;"
7. *"Perseverance Is Victory"* urges soldiers and civilians to "fight to death" to win the final victory over the floods;"
8. *"General Mobilization for the Moment of a Decisive War"* explains the meanings of President Jiang's speech during his tour of the flood-fighting front, and highly praises "the revolutionary heroism, collectivism and patriotism displayed by the soldiers and civilians in their battle against the floods;"
9. *"Ask Merits for Our Son-and-brother soldiers"* states that "a voice is growing louder among the people and masses: please give merits to our son-and-brother soldiers. "The article expresses deep respect to the army men fighting at the flood front;
10. *"The Situation As a Whole is Above Everything Else"* praises the residents disaster- stricken areas for sacrificing their land and houses to save larger parts of the country from being flooded. "this shows that these people are politically mature;"
11. *"Severe Test"*, repeating title of the previous week's editorial, calls on people in northern China to guard against coming floods;
12. *"Make Sure No Plague After Big Disaster"*
13. *"Defend to Death, Swear to Victory"*
14. *"Solidarity is Strength"*
15. *"Lead men in Battle: the nature of a public servant"*
16. *"Show Genuine Concern to the Livelihood of Disaster-stricken People"*

But now let have a brief look at how *the Southern Weekend* covers the floods during the same period:

1. *"Harnessing Flood! Harnessing Flood!"*(August 18): , the feature article discloses the debate among the policy-makers about how to control floods in China. The article criticizes the ministry of water power's inefficiency in preventing floods and inaccuracy in long-term weather forecasts;
2. *"A Night of Fighting Floods"*(August 14), the feature article gives graphic accounts of soldiers, farmers, labors including prisoners forming a human wall against the huge tidal waves while exposing the apathy attitude of the local party secretary Chen Meikun towards the sufferings of the flood victims. The story has such touching scenes: of a screaming wife seeking husband washed away with their cows; a 70-year-old couple crying with their three grandchildren over

the body of their drowned son.

"*Natural Elements and Human Disaster -- an Interview with water power scientist Lu Qinkan*"(Sept. 4), which blames human factor instead of the natural elements for the cause of the floods. It criticizes both central and local government's failure to construct flood control projects over the last 20 years;

3. "*The force of Floods*"(Sept.4). The op-ed makes blistering attacks of those local cadres who demand eating tortoises (a popular Chinese dish) during their inspection tour of flood-stricken areas. The story exposes that some officials who were supposed to guard the dyke played mah-jong when the flood was coming while praising a private businessman sinking his 2,000-ton coal ship to protect the dyke.

4. "*A Furious Slap*"(Sept.4). The op-ed angrily attacks a deputy-director of a government department playing mah-jong while he was supposed to be guarding the dyke. It also exposes a state grain barn selling poor-quality rice to rescue team and the washed away dyke was actually constructed by shoddy and poor-quality construction materials. It concludes that "The tragedy of this year's floods was a consequence of human destruction: deforestation and turning lake into farmlands."

5. "*Yangtze, I Cry for You*"(Sept.14).The op-ed deplores the fact that the ecological destruction has caused the disaster: forestry falls from 22 % to 10% just over the last three decades;

6. "*Where is the Lake Dongting?*"(Sept.18), which describes Lake Dongting as the largest lake in China before 1949 and an important source of absorbing floods from the Yangtze River. The story condemns the government's efforts of turning the lakebed into farmlands in 1950s, 60s and 70s. It concludes "The disappearance of Lake Dongting will lead the plains along Yangtze River into a lasting nightmare."

7. "*Lake Dongting: Story of Water*"(Sept.18), an account of how they farmers cry for the loss of their farmland cause by the floods. But the author points out that the loss was actually caused by the damming efforts by the local government 25 years ago;

8. "*The last moon festival at Shenhuangzhou*"(Oct.9), an account of the family of 35-year-old Meng Fanying who living in Shenhuangzhou town, which is going to be abandoned by the flood victims, spending their last moon festival on this lake-turned land. The family was having a festival without port, chicken, liquor, only with a little plate of tiny fish..

By this comparison, we can see clearly that *the People's Daily* editorials have toed the party line very closely while most of the articles of *the Southern Weekend* glorify little of "the social justice, the great flood-fighting, the great patriotism, collectivism, socialism and revolutionary heroism"¹⁷ which the top Chinese propaganda official has called for.

At a national meeting of propaganda officials on February 26, 1999, President Jiang Zemin elaborates the image-building role of Chinese official media as displaying to the world an image of a socialist modernization; an image of reform and opening to the outside world; an image of a peace-loving Chinese people; an image of struggling for stability, unity and prosperity; and an image of a democratic and legal country.¹⁸

Jiang's idea of building an image for China is actually a reflection of many Chinese intellectual journalists over the last 100 years. Ever since the beginning of the 20th century, threatened by western powers the last imperial dynasty was on the brink of collapse, many patriotic and freedom-loving intellectuals have been looking for a new identity of China. They have used such imageries like "New China," "a chaotic country," "a civil village," "a morning

mist" and "a sleeping lion" in their writings. During the May 4 Movement of 1919, Hu Shi, a leading intellectual of that period described China as "a sleeping beauty," meaning that she is so pretty and so weak that she needs to be waken up by a Western warrior. Lu Xun, a leading writer of that time, uses such metaphors as "a nightmare" and "an iron house" to imply China's decadent image. Guo Moruo, a writer of the same period, compared China to "a young girl" to express his passionate love toward his home country. In 1930s and 1940s, most Chinese intellectual were disappointed with the country's development and they used such phrase like "dead water" to describe China. But in 1950s and 1960s, the Chinese found a new point of imagination and they use the images of "railroad" and "coal mines" to display the country's efforts of nationalization and industrialization. China-image building has been a tradition of Chinese intellectuals.¹⁹

But today, some China intellectual and journalists have realized that a complete and accurate China image can only be reflected from a mirror and the mirror is its image in the eyes of the western world. The classical image of China in the Chinese eyes before the Opium War of 1840 was a glorious image of being the center of the world. But after the classical mirror was broken by the Western powers, China is searching for a new mirror to reflect its modernity.

II. Creeping Freedoms

First let us have a look at where did such a political climate tolerating a liberal media come from.

In early 1990s after the turmoil of 1989, an opposition force to stop China's reform and opening up appeared to be getting momentum. Some die-hard propagandists and ideologues in meeting and media directly or indirectly blamed Deng's reform for the Tiananmen event and called the country to be vigilant against "peaceful evolution." The anti-reform force was so strong in Beijing that Deng Xiaoping had to travel to the south to counterattack this opposition force.

In late January and early February of 1991, at the age of 87, Deng went to Shanghai to spend the holidays of the Chinese New Year. He spoke to the local entrepreneurs and officials, "We cannot stop talking reform and opening up. Our party must talk about this for many decades ahead. There must be some different opinionsI cannot talk alone. Our party must speak out." "Opening up must be firm. We are facing several obstacles ahead." Deng urged the Shanghai people "to further liberate their mind, be bolder and take a bigger step forward." He told them encouragingly, "you must get rid of the overcome the word 'fear.' You must have courage. There must always be someone to take the first step in order to open a new path."

In January and February of 1992, Deng Xiaoping went to the south again and made several speeches during the trip, in which he points out, "some theoreticians and politicians always use big hat to scare people. What we have is not rightist problem but leftist problem. Deng Xiaoping's speeches during his south China tour in early 1990s was another drive for emancipation of minds and finally settled disputes over whether development was on a socialist or capitalist road and laid a theoretical basis for China to shift from the command economy to a market economy.

On May 29, 1997, three months after Deng Xiaoping's death, Deng's successor Jiang Zemin made a landmark speech to a meeting of provincial and ministerial officials at the central school of the Party in Beijing. Jiang in his speech said that China is still in the "initial stage of socialism," a buzz phrase used in the late 1980s to justify a wide

range of economic and political reforms. In using the phrase and abandoning more dogmatic language, "Jiang echoed the man he replaced as party chief, Zhao Ziyang, who was ousted during the turmoil in 1989.

Analysts say Jiang's speech showed that he felt safe from threats to his power, especially from the fading 'left' wing of the party, made up of Marxist ideologues who worry that economic reform is loosening the party's iron grip.²⁰

After another three months of rhetoric and press campaign for his "initial stage of socialism," Jiang presided the opening of the 15th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in September, which set force political, economic and cultural agenda for the preliminary stage of socialism. Jiang in his political report to the congress says, "A supervision inside the party, supervision by the law and supervision by the masses must combine together to give play the role of supervision by the public opinions."²¹

But the current liberal mood in press has never been promoted publicly in any party and government decisions and resolutions. In recent decade, the Chinese press has never got any direct or indirect hints which you can interpret as encouragement from the party and government to move in the direction of a freer press. Until recently, what people can read and hear from the party media about the party propaganda line are the party's top propagandists' speeches, which are by no means encouragement of a new openness of the press and a frank writing about the country's problems. But where did the political tolerance come from?

Many observers believe that the current political openness appears to have started in the spring of 1998 when the Chinese media and academics marked the 20th anniversary of the publication of a theoretical article by a Chinese philosopher:

Nanjing University Professor Hu Fuming, 62, never expected that the article he drafted in a hospital bed some 20 years ago would once again emerge as a hot national political topic.

On May 11, 1978, Professor Hu bravely published an article entitled "Practice is the sole Criterion for Verifying Truth" in a national newspaper. The article challenged leftist thinking centered on the "Two whatevers," or "resolutely upholding whatever policy decisions made by Chairman Mao and unswervingly following whatever instructions issued by the late leader."

The Chinese press has described the professor as one of the pioneers advocating China's emancipation of minds in the late 1970s and noted that his article helped Chinese people escape the blind worship and rigid thinking modes characteristic of the "Cultural Revolution" period(1966-1976).

Hu has spent the period leading up to the 20th anniversary of publication of his article in the Guangming Daily in his office in Nanjing, east China's Jiangsu Province, fully occupied with interviews and writing essays for a dozen-odd news and theoretical magazines.

After the a whole bunch of events in major media and universities marking the 20th anniversary of the publication of Hu's article, the summer and fall of 1998 saw a liberalization of thought and a prosperity of publications looking for new ideas and ways to push forward China's political and social reform.

On October 8, most of Chinese newspapers breached the propaganda journalism's ranking rule by placing Premier Zhu Rongji's visit to *CCTV* prominently on the front pages, overshadowing many of the news about his colleagues from the

political bureau. In the afternoon of October 7, 1998, the Chinese premier dropped by CCTV and had a chat with the editors and reporters from the show of *Daily Focus*.²² He told them that media's watchdog role is crucial to the building of China's democratic and legal system.

"Through media supervising, the press can help us correct our mistakes and listen to the public opinion." He called on Chinese journalists be the "throat and tongue of the masses, mirror of the government and pioneer of the reform." "I'm also qualified to be the target of your investigation, right?" he said, half joking and half seriously.

Zhu's speech has boosted the combative morale of the young generation of journalists but has confused the old generation who had been taught for almost half a century that "news media" were nothing other than the "throat and tongue" of the party and being a journalist you are nothing other than a screw of the party.

The People's Daily in a commentary hailed Zhu's remarks about supervision by press as "having a big impact on the median and the society as a whole." The commentary notes, "supervision by public opinions will promote democratic and legal system while democratic and legal system will guarantee supervision by public opinions." "It is a pity that the leading department and their leaders in some places have regarded news media as tool of self-glorifying, self-boasting and self-protecting. In front of supervision by public opinions, they are scared from head to tail. Some of them even shelter and cover up corruption and unlawful conducts from being uncovered, which in a sense is a deprivation of news media's right to supervise."²³

When the winter came in 1998, some Western journalists feel a little chilly by hearing the Chinese president Jiang Zemin's vow never to copy western-style democracy in a speech marking the 20th anniversary of China's reform at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on December 18. Jiang in his speech warned "to nip any destabilizing factor in the bud."

Despite the Chinese president's warnings, the Chinese publications, independent bookstores and reading salons continue their prosperity and journalists are digging hard like an American journalist the dirt of official corruption. Some western observers described the Pattern of China's freedom: two steps forward and one step backward. "China today supports a bizarre mixture of freedom and repression, of Mao suits and miniskirts, manacles and mobile phones."²⁴

Since China started economic reform and opening up to the outside world in 1978, the government's control over press and publications has been largely weakened and the impact of the society on press and publications are growing. Today, it is the market force that has been playing an increasing role in the birth, survival and development of the press. "With the deepening of reforms, a democratization of Chinese people's reading life, and a guarantee and the exercise of the public's right to read freely, the role played by the society in Chinese press will get stronger and stronger."²⁵ Reading, watching and listening news have become part of people's private life.

1. To make money

The leading forces behind the liberalizing press in China is the freedom to make money.

With the deepening of economic reform and emerging of a market economy, the government finds itself not having the money to support the survival and development of a large number of media in China. The media have to survive by selling newspapers and advertisements.

²⁶ Before China's reform, "distribution of newspapers had been subsidized by state coffers and monopolized by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications until 1985 when newspapers were allowed freedom to market their products in ways they deemed suitable."²⁷ On January 28, 1979, the state-owned Shanghai TV aired the very first commercial in China since 1949. On April 17 of the same year, *the People's Daily* began publishing commercials, indicating official approval of advertising as a way to promote China's economic development. In 1995, media advertisements had an income of 1.68 billion US dollars.²⁸

China's transition to a market economy is pushing official media organizations to promote reforms in content, style and management. Press reform is underway in China's mass media at all levels in response to the market economy, and in the hope of attracting a wider audience with a new face. Advertisements began to appear in the mass media after China began focusing on economic development in 1978, and now the Chinese media presents its readers and viewers with dynamic choices, from matchmaking to the stock exchange, and from street gossips to academic opinions. Market forces also call for the role of a watchdog and muckraking reportage.

Most editors of Chinese media have focused their interest selling newspapers and advertisements, which almost means a single-minded pursuit of journalism while the journalism has a clear-cut defined function: a strong sense of propaganda responsibility to reinforcing the leading position of the party. "Commercialism is eroding the traditional supremacy of the party press."²⁹ As Jaime A. FlorCruz, Beijing bureau chief for *Time* magazine observes, "Continual market reform over the past decade has eroded the dominant position of the official media. As the media have become increasingly open and responsive to public demand. To the people in China, the press and broadcasts are now a real source of information and food for thought, rather than a skimpy compendium of sterile polemic abstruse dogma. The vibrancy, diversity and enterprise of newspapers, magazines and television shows reflect growing pluralism -- and Beijing's inability to control it."³⁰

Now let us discuss the interrelationships between economic of the newspapers and the news consumption of the public.

Before 1978, all news organizations in China are under a completely control of the party and the government. The management of a news organization had little power from personnel to finances. But since 1980s, the government has reduced and gradually stopped subsidies to most of the news organizations, allowing the news organization to undergo a structural reform which has made most of the news organizations to be economically independent, which means the newspapers have to feed itself. As a result, the news organizations have gained the power personnel and finances from the government. But an unintended consequence of this reform is that the news organizations must actively respond the demands of audiences. Otherwise, it will be dead.

In the meantime, the market has weakened government's effective editorial control of the press. The reason is simple: 1) The government want to control press; 2) the government refuses to give money to the press but let the press to make money from the market; 3) the market shares the control of the press.

After 20 years of reform, a substantial change has taken place in the government's monopoly control of the publishing industry. The control power of publications is being invisibly and irreversibly shifted to the public. Today, the government and the readers have shared the control power of the publishing industry. Of course, the foundation and means for the government and the readers to exercise are vastly different. The power foundation of the government is state machine while the power foundation of the reader is the market. The

government governs the publications through punishment and encouragement while the readers promote the publishing industry through appreciation. In the market of press, you need to sell your papers and make a profit in order to survive. A newspaper or the government cannot force newsstands and readers to sell and buy a certain newspaper or force people to watch a certain TV show (but this was true during the Cultural Revolution). And they cannot force a businessman to buy an advertising page from a certain paper. The profits come from readers and advertisers. As a result, the top priority of a newspaper or a TV station is to meet the interest and inclinations of the audiences. Under such a circumstance, many Chinese newspapers have no choice but to print detailed and even graphic reports of Clinton's sex scandal, the death of Pol Pot, the real situation in North Korea and the killing of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia despite the unhappiness of some government officials. The newspapers and TV stations understand it very well that "the audiences have no duty to let their reading interest to follow an administrative order from a government department. A blind command often means heavy economic losses. And at this moment, a resistance from the controlled is inevitable."³¹

A close look at the process of the marketization of Chinese press and the reform of Chinese media's personnel system, financial management, journalists' income system and ownership structure "suggest that the Chinese press is undergoing a liberalizing experience in some areas, which serve to dilute its mouthpiece function."³²

In China today, 2,163 daily newspapers, 1,416 radio stations, 943 TV stations, 1,270 cable TVs and thousands of magazines competing for readership and advertisements throughout the country.

Heated competition has resulted in the emergence of media conglomerates with economic clout and a wide range of business interests. "Fierce news competition is pushing Chinese press, including party newspapers to develop in the direction of quality, efficiency and industrialization," Yu Youxian, director of the State Administration of the Press and Publications.³³ By 2010, Chinese newspapers will have formed some conglomerates and some of these will join in the international news competition, according to the administration. As an observer notes, the Chinese media are changing "from the propaganda organs of the Chinese communist party into modern firms."³⁴ The latest statistics show that the number of news groups has grown from six in 1998 to 11 of March of 1999. The most successful news firms among them include the *Southern News Group* and *Guangzhou Daily News Group* in Guangdong province, the *Jiefang Daily News Group* in Shanghai, the *Economic Daily News Group*, *Beijing the Youth Daily News Group*, *Beijing Daily News Group* and *Guangming Daily News Group* in Beijing, *Harbin Daily News* in northernmost province Heilongjiang. Observers believe that this is likely to be just the beginning of a trend.³⁵

"It is not accidental that news groups are emerging in the frontiers and highly developed province of Guangdong. Some news organizations are starting to register like an industrial and commercial enterprises like a state-invested news corp. In theory and principles, these news organizations have become different from the old news organizations. It shows that it is a trend of marketizing Chinese press and to turn them into enterprises,"³⁶ comments Zhang Jian, a journalist from *Xinhua*.

Li Zhuren, senior editor of *Xinhua News Agency*, writes that despite of the attempt by the party and government to have a tight grip of the news organizations, "they are at the same time to operate the same way as business entities. Even the state-run *Xinhua* now runs a string of companies including China's second largest advertising company, and is covering 40 percent of its own operational expenses."³⁷

With the marketization, journalists with the popular newspapers and TV shows, such as *Beijing Youth Daily*, *Southern Weekend* and *Daily Focus* are well paid and they become respect for their bylines. So they have motivation to pursue their trade.

In brief, this freedom has been realized by focusing more on bottom line than on party line.

2. To Serve the People

In the journalism schools in Chinese universities, the first lesson is to tell the students that all journalists should be loyal to the party. In a recent letter replying a young Chinese journalist's question on "How a journalist should take the first step in his long career path", Fan Jingyi, former editor-in-chief of *People's Daily* wrote to him, "Being a young man and a green hand, you are already seriously thinking about how to walk the road of being a journalist. I was both impressed and delighted by your question" "There are many demands for being a quality journalist. But above all, it is your responsibility to the cause of the party and the people. Having this sense of responsibility, you will never forget for a single moment to hold a correct orientation of opinions." "The first step of being a journalist is to take a correct road and continuously cultivate and raise the sense of social responsibility as your ultimate goal of your life." "The era of reform and opening to the outside world has opened a broad arena for young journalists to display talents." "At this moment, you should all the more treasure the opportunity and take the correct direction of march and devote your beautiful youth selflessly to our life-long cause of the party journalism." ³⁸

Describing the experiences of reform and development of China's national TV network over the past two decades, Yang Weiguang, president of CCTV, wrote that his network "has always taking Deng Xiaoping's theory and the party's basic line as the guidance. In politics, in thinking and in action, we have conscientiously and highly accurately toed the line of the party central committee, enhanced consciousness of political and overall situation and sense of responsibility. We have consistently played a correct role of guiding of public opinions." ³⁹

But the rise of a market economy has forced the Chinese media to accept a firm belief of serving the people. Arguing of putting serving audience as top priority, Chinese journalist Ding Baishuan writes⁴⁰:

Audience is the basis for the survival of the media. How can a media stand firm on its feet without an audience? And what will be the value for the existence of a media without an audience? You can imagine the embarrassing situation of an audience-less media in a market. The less audience you have, the less incomes from advertisements. As a result, you will have less money run you media let alone to expand it. The absence of a sense of serving the audience has been the legacy of the command economy, but it is still playing some role in some areas.

The 15th party congress urges journalists to "adhere to the principle of party spirit, stick to seeking truth from facts and guide the public opinions correctly." But an effective guidance of the audience depends on an effective influence of the audience, which is preconditioned by an acceptance by the audience.

We must admit a worrisome situation that some media are yet to have a firm sense of serving the audience: First, between the leaders and ordinary audience, the media do not put audience on a priority position. We are not running a newspaper or a TV station simply for the satisfaction of leaders. We must satisfied the masses of the people. The satisfaction of the latter is absolute important can never be ignored;

Secondly, there has been a strange phenomena in some media: what excites the audience fails to excite the media. Or in another word, the exciting point of the media cannot excite the audience. For example, some of the news reports on the front page of newspapers or broadcast in the prime time of TVs are not newsworthy at all and not related to the life of the audiences in any sense;

Thirdly, the news reports of some media are dull in content, identical in topics, exaggeration in style, which keep people away from reading or viewing them. It will not be a mistake of concluding this phenomena as "a party face." The audience-less "party face" is not accepted by the audiences.

To overcome the above problems, we must have a firm sense of serving the audience and be audience-centered. The audience must always be in the center of communications. The audience will live without a media but a media cannot survive without an audience.

Some party newspapers propose "Running newspapers for the masses and by the masses." "For the masses" is the goal of running a media while "by the masses" is the ultimate way out for running a good media.

"The market-driven media boom has given rise to a new breed of journalists -- younger, well traveled, better educated and less bound to political missions than profit or professional integrity. They run the media like enterprises, responsible for their profits and losses, and hold themselves answerable to readers and advertisers. Increasingly, it is the market, not the Communist Party, that drives the media. Publishers think not only in term of politics, but of advertising, making them more responsive to their audience's changing tastes and expectations."⁴¹

A recent survey shows that the Chinese journalists has given priority to serving the people in their judgement for the importance of a piece of news:

Table 1: The Chinese journalists's judgement of news in term of importanceT

1. Relevant to people's life
2. Timeliness of events
3. New developments of the story
4. Impact of the event
5. Exclusive story
6. Extent of probing corruption
7. The influence and social status of the person covered
8. The attractiveness of the story

A recent poll in Beijing⁴² shows that 3.18 million of the local residents between the ages of 14 to 70 are reading newspapers daily. The decisive factors for them to buy or subscribe a newspaper is the following:

Table 2: Factors which make Beijing residents to buy a newspaper
(Chose no more than 5 items)

Its closeness to life.	68.8%
It contains a large amount of useful information.	67.0%
It reports social problems.	56.1%
Its articles are amusing, interesting and readable.	43.4%
Its opinions are sharp, incisive and new.	33.5%
It often runs some exclusive stories.	28.0%
It contains rich knowledge and worthy clipping.	27.8%
It meets readers' expectation.	26.9%
Its price is relatively low.	15.6%
It follows fashions and trends.	15.0%
It is worthy its price.	12.1%
Its ads are useful and orientated to readers.	10.0%
Its design and layout are attractive.	6.7%
Others	0.7%

Source: *Chinese Newspaper Industry*, January and February issues of 1999, Beijing

Table 3: The best-selling newspapers in Beijing

1. The top four newspapers which are closest to the needs of readers:
 - 1) *Beijing Evening News*
 - 2) *Beijing Youth Daily*
 - 3) *Best Shopping(weekly)*
 - 4) *Life Times*

2. The four newspapers which are the boldest in reporting social problems:
 - 1) *Beijing Youth Daily*
 - 2) *Beijing Evening News*
 - 3) *Southern Weekend(weekly)*
 - 4) *Chinese Youth Daily*

3. The four newspapers which best meet your emotional expectations:
 - 1) *Beijing Youth Daily*
 - 2) *Beijing Evening News*
 - 3) *Life Times*
 - 4) *Writer's Digest(weekly)*

4. The top four newspapers which are most readable and presentable:
 - 1) *Beijing Youth Daily*
 - 2) *Beijing Evening News*
 - 3) *Writers' Digest(weekly)*
 - 4) *Southern Weekend(weekly)*

5. The top four newspapers which follow social fashions and trends most closely:
 - 1) *Beijing Youth Daily*
 - 2) *Best Shopping(weekly)*
 - 3) *Beijing Evening News*
 - 4) *Southern Weekend(weekly)*

6. The four newspapers which offer most useful information:
 - 1) *Best Shopping(weekly)*
 - 2) *Beijing Evening News*
 - 3) *Beijing Youth Daily*
 - 4) *Reference News*

Source: *Chinese Newspaper Industry*, January and February issues of 1999, Beijing

To the dismay of the propagandists, none of the top four state newspapers or mainstream newspapers including *People's Daily* (owned by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party), *Guangming Daily*(owned by the propaganda department of the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party), *Liberation Army Daily*(owned by the general political department of People's Liberation Army) and *Economic Daily*(owned by the propaganda department the party's propaganda department) are on the best-selling list of newspapers in Beijing.

Ironically, most of the readers of the popular of some of the bold and popular newspapers are none others than the government and party officials themselves. A recent survey of *China Economic Times* indicates that most of the readers of this fearless and liberalizing newspaper are party and government officials as well as managers of state-owned enterprises.

Table 4: Survey of readers' occupation by China Economic Times(1998)

Affiliated with	number of people	percentage
Government	721	42.6
Sate-owned Enterprises	460	24.5
Universities and research institutions	174	9.3
Financial institutions	138	7.4
Private enterprises	79	4.2
Collectively-owned enterprise	77	4.1
Joint ventures	51	2.7
Others	99	5.3
Total	1877	100.0

Source: *China Economic Times*, <http://www.info@cet.com.cn/>

The survey also reveals that 88 % of its readers are under 55 years old and college educated, which implies that the core readership of the newspapers are well-educated and are among the middle and high-level in the intelligentsia of the Chinese society. "These readers have a strong sense of social responsibility and a sense of justice. They are keen on social problems as well as events of national or even international significance."⁴³ The survey also indicates that the new journalism meet the demands of a new generation of communist officials and party members. The fresh blood absorbed by CPC since 1978 are not only educated, but many of them are top students at school or outstanding scientists, professors and managers in various institutions and organizations. They are the backbone of China. Any predictions of China's future would be meaningless if their role is overlooked in a changing China.

3. To report bad news

For many years, the quality of the air the Beijing residents were breathing in had been a "government secrete"⁴⁴ to them and they were denied of being informed of the real situation of the pollution of the city. Some government officials worried that there would be chaos if the local residents learned about the worsening environment they were living with. But since 1998, the municipal government releases in details about the quality of the air every week and all the local press carry the news release in details. "The regular release about the air quality did not cause an unrest under the heaven," columnist Yang Dongping writes for the *Southern Weekend*, "quite unexpectedly, it has greatly mobilized the enthusiasm of the public to take part in protecting and cleaning the environment."

"What we desperately need in our daily life is simply two characters 'gong kai' (openness), " Yang writes, "What the concept of *gong kai* embodies first of all is the fundamental right of citizens -- the right to be informed. Absolute power means corruption and absolute powerless also means corruption because the latter will ultimately make the majority members of the society ignorant, low efficiency, lack of awareness of participation and a poor ability to participate. As a result, the society will become a stagnant and smelly water. As Lu Xun analyses that the apathy and callousness of the Chinese people have been the consequence of a closed society and a obscurant policy. This consequence in turn has become a reason for restricting further opening of the society. The low quality of the citizens looks like a practical reason for

them to be denied of the right to be informed. But this reason confuses right and wrong and calls white black. As environmentalist Dr. Li Hao points out, 'the quality of the Chinese citizens are not poor at all. The sticking point is that they are not informed.'⁴⁵

Commenting about '*gong kai*' (openness), two journalists from the Legal Daily, organ of the central political and legal committee of the Chinese Communist Party, writes, "the media has always identified itself first of all with factual reporting. But we think that the number one identify of the press should be its *gong kai* (openness) or exposure of the factual situation. The hearsay spread from mouth to mouth cannot be called news. And the factual reports printed on the internal publications or documents are not news either. The factual report can only be called news once it is published in the press. The power of news does not rest with its accuracy but with its exposure"⁴⁶

Even Zhao Qizheng, the minister of information of the State Council, calls for "*tou ming*" (transparency) in *the People's Daily*, "Under today's situation, the best method of letting the people of the world to have a timely and correct understanding of China is to enhance the accuracy, transparency and timeliness of our news reporting. The live coverage of US President Clinton's visit to China have won wide applause from home and abroad."⁴⁷

The new journalism stresses that bad news is news, problems are news and selling points are news while the propaganda journalism stresses progress is news, good news is news. Progress reports and positive coverage are what the propaganda journalism exists for while problem and negative stories are what the new journalism survive for.

In the past people look for hints and cues in propaganda journalism for important signs of political changes and even for crop failure and natural disasters. For many years, the coverage of crimes, AIDS, prostitution, government corruption, pollution, homosexuals, protests of farmers and workers and other touchy but newsworthy social issues had been taboos for propaganda journalism. It has been the new journalism launched by such bold newspapers such as the *China Youth Daily*, *Beijing Youth Daily* and the *Southern Weekend*, which are run by a new generation of journalists, that has uncovered the social evils and uglies in China. A comparative study of the propaganda journalism and the new journalism indicates substantial quantitative and qualitative differences both in content and presentation style.

"*Who Poisons the College Girl?*", an investigative report by Yu Jiadi, *China Youth Daily*, June 22, 1995, was among the earliest stories of the new journalism. It is a story about Miss Zhu Ling, a third-year student from China's prestigious university Tsinghua University, went into a lasting coma caused by some unknown poison. In the exclusive report, the reporter interviewed dozens of people including medical doctors, her schoolmates, her teachers, her family and police, trying to find out what poisons her and who poisons her. After more than a month of investigation, the doctors with the help of international scientists through Internet, have determined that she was poisoned by thallium, a rare but a deadly chemical. Although the killer is still at large and the police is continuing search for him or her, the story has brought a nationwide sympathy to the girl and her costly medial expenses about \$250,000 were eventually covered by the social donations.

The propaganda journalism would never write and publish an investigative story about an unsolved murder, which is considered a damage to the image of socialism. If something unhealthy had to be reported, it must serve the purpose of approving Chinese socialist system and disapproving Western capitalist system; it must serve the purpose of praising the Chinese lifestyles and criticizing decadent Western capitalist lifestyles. The Chinese press has long been influenced actually by a bizarre combination of Marxist ideology, Chinese traditional values and

Western concepts. A telling example is the coverage of AIDS. The Coverage of AIDS was another forbidden zone for the Chinese media. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Chinese press largely viewed the disease as something accompanying Western lifestyles and through the prism of Chinese morals and Chinese traditions of communication.⁴⁸ There had been an apathy and even a hostility towards the patients of AIDS. It was not until the late 1990s that the Chinese press began to report sympathetically about AIDS victims.

Observers agree that publishing stories exposing worsening pollution problems, failures of government policy and sometimes even stories embarrassing episodes in the history of communists may sound unflattering to the government but it serves the ultimate goal of maintaining political stability as such exposes serve as social safety valves.

Why does the official propagandists show their tolerance of negative reporting?

A senior party propaganda official admits that the public are getting frustrated with "positive reporting" and the party is worried about the negative effect caused by "positive reporting." "Xu Guangchun, vice-minister of the propaganda department of the Chinese Communist Party explains in an article titled "Pay attention to the negative effect of positive propaganda:"⁴⁹

The readers are frustrated with the press when it "does not report what the readers want to know and always report the readers do not want to know." The readers are thinking they are being fooled by the press. For example, facing a profit-losing enterprise and the laid-off of workers, the readers are very concerned about the reviving of the state-owned enterprises. But, if some newspapers sticking to positive propaganda display only the achievements of some state-owned enterprises or repeatedly reports the stories of the few enterprises with brand names, the readers will raise a question: why can't we get our paycheck when the situation of the state-owned enterprises is so good?

A few years ago, there was a flood in Sichuan which washed away a village. An army officer jumped into the flood and rescued several people including old and young. The deeds of the army officer caught the attention of the party organization which requested the press to publicize his lofty characters. A journalist came to take a picture of the scene showing the officer saving people. The journalist brought an old man from the village. The reporter asked the officer to carry him across the river while he was taking a picture. The picture was published in some of the national newspapers. When it was exposed that it was a fake, the reporter was condemned by readers. As a consequence, the heroic image of the army officer was severely damaged, causing a grave negative effect.

Due to high economic growth, Guangzhou municipal government announced raising the salaries of university teachers by several times. This is worthy of being publicized on the local news media of Guangdong and Guangzhou. But a negative impact will be produced if such story is publicized on national news media. Teachers will ask for an increase of wages nationwide, which will make the party and government leaders fidget in other part of the country .

Another example is our propaganda of the deeds of the outstanding returned students from abroad. Such news articles spare no ink and brush describing how the overseas students refused high payment job abroad and came back China to work in makeshift laboratories or even set up a lab in a lavatory getting very low payment. This kind of propaganda has displayed a spirit of patriotism and enterprising, but it has caused a negative consequence in the meantime. As a chemical professor of Beijing University told reporters, "the more propaganda like this, the less good students we will have."

4. To Write probing stories

The lead story of *CCTV's* prime time news in the evening of May 22, 1998: escorted by a large team of provincial, municipal and county party and government leaders, Chinese Premier Rongji visited a state-owned grain barn in Nanling county, Anhui province. He was impressed by the sacks of grain stocking from ground to ceiling in the barn. "Premier Zhu gave his full approval of the province achievements in grain work," the television reported.

The lead and the only story of *CCTV's* most popular show "*Daily Focus*" in the evening of November 12, 1998: the Chinese premier is sucked. The "harvest scene" had been a specially-arranged showcase and the sacks of grain he saw in the barns had borrowed by the local government to impress him. After the premier left, the grain was shipped back to their lenders. Premier Zhu was made look "very awkward" by this cheating. ⁵⁰

*"I now feel like it's a dream when I look back at a piece of tape I've made and hear my commentary criticizing a local government, or a public security bureau, a procuratorate. I never dreamed of commenting on government only a few years back," says Fang Hongjin, the host of "Daily Focus" on China Central TV network.*⁵¹

As a popular program attracting 300 million viewers every night and getting over 1,000 phone calls from the audience every day, Fang believes that his show "has spoken the true words of the common people." Both the public and the Chinese leaders believe that media supervision of government is the best way to curb corruption. A few years ago, it was unthinkable to read extensive and detailed exposes of high-level party and government officials in the Chinese media. Such exposes would be banned by some propagandists because they believe such writings damage the image of the party. The party would not allow negative stories about the upper echelons of power, such as official at ministerial or provincial governor level.

In a commentary about how could the local government cheat the premier in such an style? *Beijing Youth Daily* writes, "Before the premier's arrival, there had been 'early warnings' and 'emergent mobilization' from the local government. Most of the local leaders were following around the premier during his entire inspection tour and they have arranged a special person on the scene "to answer leading chief (premier)'s questions.' After the premier left, people were freed of 'alarm' and the leaders held a summing-up and commending meeting for the successful inspection tour of the premierIt was a well-rehearsed theatrical performance. " "In the mind of the 'directors' of this performance, they never think of serving the farmers and be responsible to the public. There are only two things that worry them most: 1) how to keep their position by decorating their wrong-doings; 2) how to get promoted by flattering the superiors." "What they believe is nothing else but to serve their superiors whole-heartedly and they do not show the slightest concern of the sufferings of the people."⁵²

Chinese journalist Zhang Chaohong tells a story of his experience⁵³:

Since the day I worked as a reporter, I have been trying to find an answer to this question: who is most eager to be propagandized? Based on my years of experiences of reporting and observations, I have got a surprising answer to this question: the guy who is most eager to be propagandized is the guy we should give least propaganda.

A good example is Hu Jianxue, former first secretary of Tai'an municipal party committee of Shandong province. He was recently sentenced to death with a suspended execution of the sentence.

When he was in power, he acted wildly against law and public opinions by falsifying facts, selling official titles and accepting an average of several hundreds of yuan of bribe daily. This "dreg of officials" had a strong appetite for being seen in the headlines of newspapers and magazines. Only three months before he was arrested, a well-known literary journal run a lengthy reportage singing high praise of him.

Why the guy we should give least propaganda is always seeking to propagandize himself? In my opinions, most of these kind of people are always doing ugly, bad and evil things. So they always live in fear and trembling of being uncovered. They will make every effort to cover up by confusing right and wrong so as to mislead the public. In their eyes, the media is the best bleach for them to wash out their dirties. They are always racking their brains of "leaving their names on newspapers, their voice on radio and their images on TV." Since they have never done any good things to be propagandized so they have to falsify facts and make up stories.

In the latter years when Hu Jianxue was in power, he allocated millions of yuan to the propaganda department of the municipal party committee as a budget for doing "public relations" with the press.

China is a nation which treasures human relationship and face. It puts high priority of the feelings of blood link and family link. For thousands of years, the Chinese follow the Confucius teaching that "Son hides for father and father hides for son." If father steals neighbor's sheep, the son must help him cover up. Otherwise the son would be despised as "not being upright." This practice of "not washing linen in the public" is in its deeper level a reflection of selfishness or "interest group."⁵⁴ Based on such observation, a Chinese writer says, "For the sake of maintaining genuine stability and an eternal improving of people's life quality, we must forever seek selfless social justice, not the interests of an individual or a certain group. This has been the intrinsic forces behind the history."⁵⁵

Observers believe that such exposes serve as social safety valves that release pent-up frustration.

An American observer notes, "Westerns often decry human rights conditions in China, citing political restrictions on writers and intellectuals in the large cities. But for hundreds of millions of ordinary Chinese who live in towns and villages, it is the unrestrained authority of a local party chief that is usually most oppressive."⁵⁶ The Chinese press is moving into this uncharted water: to dig dirt of local government officials.

In September of 1998, China's two most influential media outlets, the *People's Daily* or organ of the ruling communist Party, and the *China Central Television(CCTV)*, have worked out a plan to jointly criticize government corruption. Reporters from the two press organizations will probe into hot topics and difficult issues and report them simultaneously in an effort to arouse greater attention from top leader and the public.⁵⁷ As a trial run, the two media giants report on a serious case on September 16 in their "*Society Weekly*" and "*Daily Focus*" segments, respectively. The case concerned illegal fund raising activities during the law enforcement process at a local anti-corruption bureau in Fuzhou Prefecture in east China's Jiangsi province. "This cooperation demonstrates our determination to carrying out supervision of the government in an all-round way and at a higher level," says Sun Jie, producer of the "*Daily Focus*". Li Youcun, director of the Public Opinions Department of *People's Daily*, says that as the party's organ, the paper's function of supervising the government has not yet been fully displayed, and its operation with *CCTV* will help push the paper's reform in this respect.

Lu Mingjun, a *People's Daily* reporter participating in the joint project, notes that the media usually encounters many obstacles created by various sectors and persons when they

prepare to criticize a government department for its wrong doing. "The cooperation between several news organizations will undoubtedly strengthen their ability to endure the pressure."

As early as in the spring of 1998 when the National People's Congress convenes its annual meeting, many deputies call for stronger supervision of the government by the media to eradicate corruption and ensure that the country is governed by law. Top Chinese leaders have recently repeatedly urged that media watch be enhanced, particularly, cooperation between news organizations to create a healthier social environment.

Researchers believe the survival and development of the exposing stories in Chinese press has been the consequence of moving towards a democratic society. "The supervision of the government by the media has become a megatrend of the Chinese press and China is entering a period of stronger confidence, freer speech and more transparency. However, the media is not the solution to every problem. What we need most is a more tolerant social atmosphere as well as a more open and law-abiding system," comments Yu Guoming.⁵⁸

Looking at the prosperity of probing stories in Chinese press, an editorial of a Guangzhou-based newspaper writes, "This has been a natural consequence of a market economy. A newspapers must change their role of "a government institution" to the role of an enterprise. Otherwise, it will be eliminated by the market. People buy the newspaper because it prints what people love to read, it speaks the mind of the people and it attacks the persons and the things the people hate. And the newspaper gets a market. When the newspaper gets a market, it will become bolder."⁵⁹

While many Chinese journalists agree that one of the landmarks of modern civilization is pushing political democracy through supervising by public opinion and "supervising by public opinions has become the leading power of maintaining a benign political and economic cycle of society. A society is not a healthy society without supervising by public opinions. Supervising by news reporting and opinions has become a social checking power as important as government, laws and morality,"⁶⁰ Some journalists look the prosperity of probing stories of government officials as a consequence of the development of a news market. As *Xinhua* reporters Fu Xingyu and Ji Kaixing observe:⁶¹

The audience spends money, time and energy to support the news market because there is a supervision by public opinions. Before news reporting becomes a media for mass communication, it is a difficult thing to start supervising by public opinions. The marketization of news in China has turned the role of news reporting as a political propaganda tool to that of industrialization and popularization. With the increase of personal news consumption a decline of news consumption using public money, it will become a life or death question if a news media does not serve the economy and the society, if it does not care about ordinary people's economic and spiritual life, if it does not meet the demands of the market and the audiences. Economists and journalists have agreed that any news organization will be washed out if its news reporting does not meet the taste of the audiences. The press era of relying on the financial support of political parties and government will be gone very soon.

Talking about the quality of probing stories, the two journalists describes them as "being too frivolous"⁶²:

- 1) *There are too few stories that "will hold the balance;"*
- 2) *There are few stories probing the top hierarchy;*⁶³
- 3) *There are still many forbidden zones;*
- 4) *Criticism of government, officials and their work are the weakest;*
- 5) *Too much resistance and control from above;*
- 6) *There is no law to protect the journalists' rights of supervising by news reporting and opinions.*

Fan Songqin, A reporter from the People's Daily does not sound optimistic either when he comments on the current prosperity of expose journalism. He describes the current expose journalism in China as "five too many, and five too little:⁶⁴"

- *Too many exposes of non-significant problems, too little exposes of big and significant problems;*
- *Too many problems of grassroots problems, too little exposes of leadership;*
- *Too many exposes of the problems related to the ordinary people, too little exposes of the leading officials;*
- *Too many exposes of others, too little exposes of our own, particularly those problems related to our superiors;*
- *Too many "exposes" after they were sentenced by the court, too little exposes of what is happening; In masses have described the expose journalism as "beating too many flies but few tigers; beating too many dead tigers, but few living tigers."*

Explaining the reasons for the problems he has listed above, Fan explains that there are many reasons for weakness of supervising by news media, which include a lack of legal guarantee, the press reform lagging behind of economic reform and the old-fashioned professional quality of the practitioners. But the main obstacle for supervising by news media comes from people's thought.⁶⁵

"Some people take the excuse of 'positive propaganda' to attack supervising by news media. They think news media is the "throat and tongue" and opinion tool of the party, and the media can only do positive propaganda and will ban any critical expose; Some people use "image-damaging" to attack supervising by news media. They believe that media's criticism of corrupt and their exposes of social uglies are bringing shame to the party and the government, which will lead the society to 'chaos' and affect stability and unity."

"But as a matter of fact, the biggest destabilizing factor is corruption and poverty. People will get extremely frustrated and angry if press propaganda sing high praises to a corrupt government when people live in poverty.

Fan criticizes some leading officials in the party and government departments have little sense of democracy and are not used to be supervised by the media. They regard the corruption in their department as "family scandal" and they don't want to wash the linens in the public. Fan urges the media to expand the width and depth of media supervising. "No matter how high his position and how big contribution he has made to the country, the media must courageously expose him if he is corrupt."

In responding to recent media's increasing calls for a watchdog role of government, some people are calling for gingeriness for carrying out this supervising role. Xu Xun, a reporter from *the Central People's Radio* says boldly in a front-page report of *the Legal Daily*, organ of the Central Political and Legal Committee of the Chinese Communist party, "Under a market economy, the number one important role of news media is satisfy the public right to be informed and the right of free speech through communication. But this has been largely ignored. When the role of the media is still largely regarded by some people as 'guiding opinions', media must be very careful in using this kind of effect on society. The news media must have a high sense of social responsibility and every one of us must act with great caution to protect the achievements we have made by our painstaking and step by step efforts in recent years. We cannot afford to ruin them."⁶⁶

In August of 1998, the Chinese Association of Journalists set up a committee to protect the rights of those engaged in investigative and encourage them to be more courageous in media watch, amid a background of growing libel cases and calls for a press law to determine how far the media could go. Statistics show that since 1994, there have been at least 100 libel cases each

year. It is a high figure considering the fact that there were only 180 libel cases between 1983 and 1994 nationwide.⁶⁷

To define how far the media probing and critical reporting could go, the Chinese Supreme Court on August 31, 1998 announced an interpretation defining what constitutes a libel. Under the interpretation, a libel is committed when a news story simultaneously commits a false report and a slander that maliciously damages a person's reputation. Under this legal interpretation, a false report against ordinary citizens constitutes a libel. But a false report does not constitute a libel against government officials and public figures until it is committed maliciously to injure their reputation. Under the interpretation, criticism and opinions do not constitute a libel as far as they do not "insult someone maliciously."⁶⁸ Most of Chinese journalists welcome this interpretation and regard it as "backbone" in their probing report. But they are still pressing for the making of a press law in China as soon as possible.⁶⁹

Just two months after this landmark interpretation by the Supreme Court, Lu Yuegang, an investigative reporter from *the China Youth Daily* received a court decision by the High Court of Shanxi Province, which says that the trial of the libel suit against Lu Yuegang and his newspaper for carrying an exposing story of the retired vice-mayor Wang Baojing of Xianyang will be moved from Xi'an (capital city of Shanxi province) to the immediate court of Xianyang city.

Lu wrote an investigative report critical of then vice-mayor Wang Baojing and his son Wang Nongye. The report, which appeared on *the China Youth Daily* of August 8, 1996, disclosed that Wang Nongye destroyed a woman's face by sulfur acid. Wang and his son since then started a libel suit against Lu and his newspaper.

"The amazing thing of the court decision is that the trial will be held wherever is helpful to the Wangs. I am shocked that a retired vice-mayor like Wang Baojing has such a magic power to manipulate the court.," Lu told *Southern Weekend* angrily.⁷⁰

Facing the increasing pressures of supervising government by public opinions, some local governments have tried to take restrictive measures to cope with the investigative reporters. The provincial party committee of Hainan has set up an office called "center for supervising by news media" headed by the propaganda chief of the provincial government. According to news reports, the task of the supervising center is to "unifying news topics, unifying guiding thoughts, unifying steps and methods and unifying actions." This governmental measure of greeting press supervision has angered senior journalist Fan Er, who writes that any exposing article through the coordination of such supervising center will become stinky because of its "false, lengthy and empty contents". Fan tells a frustrating experience of a journalist who went to Wanning City to investigate the corruption of the city's police. The police chief said that he could be interviewed only if the reporter carried an introduction letter from "the center for supervising by news media." "Such a center for supervising by news media, which controls not only media of its own province but also rejects probing from out-of-province journalists, should be renamed as 'center for supervising news media.'"⁷¹

Outraged by the frustrations and even physical abuses the Chinese journalists have gone through during their covering of social uglies and governmental scandals, Wan Hongjin and Lu Yuanqiang, reporters from *the People's Daily*, call for legal protection of watchdog role of press. They write, "Journalists need some special rights in performing their job and they must be given special protection under civil law. As the tool of realizing the freedom of expression of the citizens and the right to be informed, the news media has the responsibility to spread big

social event as soon as it happens. The timeliness of news media determines that they cannot be as accurate as the judiciary in every single detail. "⁷²

Western observers believe that Chinese press' newly-found role of exposing corruption "sits uneasily with the traditional Marxist view of the media as a propaganda tool in the hands of the ruling class."⁷³ But Li Jiang, a Beijing lawyer describes this newly found freedom of the Chinese press as coming from the wish of the people. He says in a front-page news report of *Legal Daily*, an organ of the Central Political and Legal Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, "The check of modern democratic politics on power requires the public power be open and transparent. On the other hand, people will participate in the state politics and supervising the public power with un-deprivable rights of being informed and freedom of speech. Supervising by public opinions is the choice of a democratic political system. The problem we are facing now is how to legally investigate and prosecute the unlawful officials uncovered by the media while the freedom of press is guaranteed."⁷⁴

5. To Publish Unflattering Opinions

The propaganda journalism claims to be a bridge between the party and the people. But propaganda journalism normally does not advocate different opinions. It is a gazette and publishes only the news that the propagandists deem as useful or at least not harmful to their interests. Traditionally, the propaganda journalism publicizes a strong voice of the authorities and no different voices from the official line is allowed. But new journalism seems to disseminate not only news, but most importantly, opinions and views of groups of different interests.

A well-known example is the big debate of the draft marriage law in 1998.

One day in the summer of 1998, Ni Siyi, a *Xinhua* reporter covering the National People's Congress (parliament) came back from a session of its standing committee and told his editor that the government-backed All China Women Federation had appointed a drafting group to amend a 18-year-old marriage law behind the door. The next meeting of the National People's Congress was to revise the law to make divorce extremely difficult and extramarital affairs a criminal act.

"Can I write a story about this?" He asked.

The editor was immediately alarmed by the reporter's briefing, which reminded him of the 1960s and 1970s when people had almost no control of their private life and divorce, and sometime even their marriage. For the best part in those years, there had been a saying "the revolutionary feeling is deeper than the love feeling" and "To love or not, it is to love your class brothers." Divorce was considered an "immoral behavior, "causing a humiliation to the family, a black mark on his political and personal file and even a demotion of his work. With the openness and individual freedom the Chinese people have gained in 1990s, many of stories like this have become laughing stocks in TV talk shows.

"Sure, we must make the viewpoints of the drafting group known to the public because the words they are going to spell out are going to control the love and passion of the 1.3 billion people for many years to come. We cannot afford to let it pass without knowledge in the public," the editor said.

"This is the first time for many years that we are reporting the content of a draft law to the public before its approval. We must make our story balanced by reflecting different opinions equally," he added..

Ni's story titled "*Plan to Amend Marriage Law Causes Debate*" was dispatched on August 14 disclosing for the first time that the marriage law is being revised, indicating it would be approved by the congress if it was presented for deliberation at the next meeting of the congress. The story is like a bomb sparking a remarkably fiery public debate among opinion leaders and ordinary citizens on the proper role of government in the bedroom.

Encouraged and emboldened by the *Xinhua* story, many of the liberal newspapers like *the Southern Weekend* and *Beijing Youth Daily* acted swiftly to open special debate pages to voice various opinions about the amendment. "*Open the Marriage Law Revision to the Public*" pleaded *the Beijing Youth Daily*.

"The topic clearly touched a nerve and the media have been given a long leash to explore the issues, often carrying heavy criticism of the new proposals,"⁷⁵ *the Washington Post* comments.

Most of the opinions argue strongly against the draft amendment. "Official newspapers have printed more dissenting voices about this legislation than about any proposed law in the history of Communist China."⁷⁶ *The Washington Post* describes the proposed divorce law as "a throwback to Mao era."⁷⁷

The New York Times comments, "Proposals to make divorce more difficult and to punish adulterers have stirred a rare and passionate public debate here, with opinions clashing in newspapers, radio call-in shows and television specials around the country."⁷⁸ "Under an onslaught of criticism, the authors of the proposals have hunkered down, complaining, rightly, that news accounts have often oversimplified their ideas. Several declined to be interviewed."

The Associated Press reports, "The efforts have split China's feminist community and spurred the staid state-run media to run a lively, unprecedented debate on a law being drafted, as usual, behind closed doors."⁷⁹

Under the draft amendment, a couple need to provide a physical evidence that they have lived in different beds for at least three years before they can get a divorce. An investigation would precede many divorces and the court would look at evidence provided by family members and neighbors when deciding whether to grant divorces. But due to China's shortage of housing, sometimes even the divorced couple has to live together. "The women's advocates have been bitterly split by the proposals, with some calling them needed protections for women but many younger feminists and sociologists calling them a regressive move in a country where the Communists have a history of paternalistic meddling," *the New York Times* writes.

"The unusual debate itself has given Chinese a vivid glimpse at democratic discourse," *the New York Times* comments. The newspaper quotes a Chinese young lady Ms. Chen as saying, "I feel this debate is not simply about the particular issues. It's also about how to deal with the thousands of years of tradition we have in China, a tradition of intolerance and lack of respect for individual freedom."

In the following months, the press gave broad coverage of debates about two other draft amendments: one was to introduce a fuel tax and the other one was to subject democratic-elected village committees to local government control. The legislators rejected the two draft laws.

It is rare for Chinese press to report a diversity of viewpoints about a government proposal. It is even rare that the Chinese press gives such prominence to arguments against pending legislation in the National People's Congress. Under China's constitution, the National People's Congress is regarded as the highest body of decision-making and law-maker of the country. But for a long time in the past, the congress had been labeled by the western media as a "rubber stamp" because most of the important decisions were produced by the party and the

Congress only say yes by pressing the button of voting. But since the summer of 1998, the congress has become a forum where different opinions have been encouraged to be debated and media have been encouraged to report such debates

Commenting on the law-making role of the people's congress, *the People's Daily* writes⁸⁰ that the people's congress has the right "to pass a draft law or to vote against it. It plays a role by passing the law and it also plays a role by not passing the proposed law." "Foreign news media and some people describe China's people's congress system as "a rubber stamp." Some of the criticism are malicious attacks while some of them are goodwill misunderstanding. But, the people's congress and their delegates' failure to play a role in some places has been an undeniable fact." "The fact that our country does not copy the model of western political system does not mean that China should not develop the political system of people's congress." "If China does not copy western political model on the one hand, and pays no attention to play the role of the people's congress on the other hand, the efforts of strengthening socialist democratic and legal construction will become an empty sentence. If the power of the state does not get an effective supervision and necessary check, the war against the corruption will be like a theatrical performance in the end."

The impact of this emerging diversity of opinions in public is as a Westerner observes in Beijing, "As many citizens and even government officials will tell you, Chinese today can think what they want and say what they want so long as they do not organize against the Communist Party. First-time visitors, having read about repression here, are often surprised at how ordinary things appear: lively newspapers and magazines, fast-paced television news programs and endless commercials for cosmetics and electronic gear. Severe repression singles out a small number of people, and most of the rest accept the Party's limits, with little apparent pain."⁸¹

But since the Four Cardinal Principles⁸² which is the backbone of the rule of the communists, has been written in the constitution, few newspaper are bold enough to question and debate the one-party rule, even though some newspapers like the *Guangdong-Hong Kong Information Daily* and *Southern Weekend*, debate it in a subtle, guarded, satirical, symbolical, theoretical and philosophical way. For example, the *Guangdong-Hong Kong Information Daily* devoted a full front page denouncing "Asian Values" and "Asian dictatorship" for the sufferings of the Asian people.⁸³ *The Southern Weekend* is full of book reviews, interviews and op-ed lauding Western-style democracy and freedom of press. The newspaper always writes a flattering commentary whenever the US takes a military in the world. For example, the *Southern Weekend* published an editorial late in 1998 when US started air strike against Iraq:

"*Dictatorship is the Root Cause of Regional Unrest and Conflicts.*" The Beijing Youth Daily carried full pages of photographs of Kosovo Albanian refugees fleeing their country early 1999.

In short, the new journalism does not criticize the country's top leadership directly, but its criticism targets almost all levels of governments.

6. To Run Tabloids and Unofficial News Services

What the future holds for China's liberalizing trend of press? "The reform of party newspapers are the toughest and the most meaningful,"⁸⁴ Zhou Mingrong says frankly. Zhou is the editor-in-chief of *Xinhua Daily*, organ of the Jiangsu Provincial Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

"The party papers are in a difficult situation and faces a bigger difficulty of reforming itself," he says in an interview with a reporter from People's Daily in a freezing night in December of 1998.

"The 20th century is passing away and it has been 20 years since China's reform and opening to the outside world. Socialist market economy is developing rapidly. Facing a changed environment and a changing readership, party papers must their way of running newspapers. We must adjust ourselves to the new situation, to be close to the tide of history and making readers feel that a fresh air of a new era is breezing in," he says.

The last 20 years, particularly the last seven years, have seen a sharp increase of the number of local and non-government and non-party newspapers while the number of titles of the party and government newspapers remain almost unchanged.(Table 5)

The statistics in Table 5 and Table 6 show that while the per capita newspaper in China has remained almost unchanged. The number of newspaper titles of newspapers have grown by over 1000 percent at the sacrifice of the steady dropping of the circulation of party newspapers at the national and provincial levels. This indicates that the voices from the non-governmental newspapers and local newspapers are growing louder and louder. The following table shows a steady decline of the circulation of *the People's Daily*:

Table 7: **The circulation of the People's Daily**⁸⁵

Year	circulation
1979	6.2 million
1980	5.4 million
1982	4.2 million
1986	3.78 million
1989	2.9 million
1994	2.32 millin
1999	2 million ?

Source: Li Zhuren(1998, Beijing)

Government subsidies to state-run media organizations are coming to an end and the public money to subscribe the party papers are also drying up. The party papers "depend almost exclusively on subscriptions with public money. Under the party's rule, each party cell is obliged to subscribe to one cope of the *People's Daily* and one copy of the local party newspaper. There are surveys indicating that 90 percent of the subscriptions to *the People's Daily* are paid with public money."⁸⁶ But in recent years, most of the party and government offices, organizations, enterprises have allocated less and less fund for subscribing to newspapers of any kinds. With the limited money for newspapers, more and more of the party and government organizations are subscribing popular newspapers instead of party newspapers.

This embarrassing situation for the party newspapers has forced the state-run media such as People's Daily to has to change its style and content in order to stabilize its readership. The president of the *People's Daily* Shao Huaze reveals that the government "has almost stopped subsidies to the newspaper and we have started managing the newspaper like running an enterprise. "Currently, most of the paper's income comes from advertisements.

"In a time of heated media competition, the *People's Daily* must become more reader-oriented, while maintaining its authority as a party newspaper," he says, "the People's Daily is expanding its retail network nationwide, and readers will be able to buy it at newsstands in all of

China's major cities."⁸⁷ But for a long time in the past, the largest newspaper in China with about two million daily circulation by virtue of the fact that all government offices and work units have to subscribe to it. Over the past five years, the newspaper has expanded from 8 to 12 pages, with East China and South China editions. The paper's newly launched electronic edition attracts about 2 million visitors a day on the Internet. The paper has introduced a new column monitoring government activities at different levels. "The party's newspaper experts realizes that the party newspaper might have a weakened influence on the people if it does not follow the rules of mass communications," said Yu Guoming, director of the Public Opinion Research Institute of People's University. But the boss of *the People's Daily* Shao Huaze notes that as "throat and tongue, eyes and ears of the central committee(of the party), it will not fully depend on the market, because the paper's most important characteristic is its incomparable authoritativeness."⁸⁸

The editor-in-chief of an influential provincial party paper *Xinhua Daily* argues against Shao's view on authoritativeness, "Authoritativeness does not come naturally with the birth of party papers. Authoritativeness is not self-appointed and you are nothing if the readers do not recognize your authoritativeness." *Xinhua Daily* starts to have a facelift as early as 1995 when it decided to cut three pages of party propaganda down to two pages and devotes a whole page to focus on the problems and hot issues the public are concerned. The new page with an attractive design and layout is named "Focus" and emphasizes new political ideas, new social phenomena and the problems arisen from during the social transitional period. In the meantime, the newspaper launches a front-page column "Our Observer" which publish articles frankly discussing political, economic and social issues. Early in 1998, the paper takes another big cut of party and government news on its front page and bans the coverage of all working conferences of government departments. To discourage reporters from covering local party and government meetings, the newspaper decides that the reporters who cover the official meetings get only 70% of the average monthly bonus and their stories must be limited under 600 words. But Zhou admits that all of his press reforms are under the condition of "playing no political edge ball and playing no pornographic edge ball." By "political edge ball" he obviously that his paper will never be bolder enough to question the monopoly of power by the communist party.

The case of *Xinhua Daily* shows that the marketization has led to an interesting phenomena: the party newspaper has to increase its pages of real news and genuine opinions in order to attract readers and ultimately to increase advertising income. The divorce between ideological dependence on the party and financial independence has led to the reduction of party propaganda pages. In this sense, even the party organs are becoming true profit-making enterprises that will ultimately weaken the function of throat-and-tongue of the party press.

But before they take a giant step of liberalizing their flagship newspapers, some of the leading party newspapers have taken a sidestep of approaching a freer press: launching weekend edition, weekly specials or simply daily tabloids.

The good thing about the tabloids is that they do not look the same in topic, in style and in content. They attempt to diversify, pluralize and decentralize the Chinese press, particularly, they are adventurous to tread where the party press dare not go. But the bad thing about the tabloids is that they tend to sensationalize stories and use screaming headlines.

With the development and fierce competition of Chinese news media, A number of non-governmental news services have emerged in recent years. *Xinhua* no long monopolizes the news release market today.

These news services which are owned and run jointly by some newspapers who have bold vision of what the Chinese press will be like in the future. They are bringing an entirely new face

to the Chinese press today. Through link of computer, they provide each other direct, complete, precise, targeted and timely news stories about fast-breaking local, national, and international events. Some researchers refer it as "a united press", but people who are running the service call themselves "little *Xinhua*."

The following are some of the leading non-governmental news services:

1. *China Evening News Network*: was started by 19 evening newspapers country in 1997. Now it has a membership of 125 newspapers, who jointly owned the news net. Its daily operation is run and managed by *Tonight*, an evening newspaper in Tianjin. The purpose of the news net is to share news resources. Being a member of the network, a national evening newspaper is required to provide no more than 5 stories to the net every day, a provincial evening newspaper is required to provide no more than 3 stores and a city evening newspaper is required to provide no more than 2 stories. The requirement for the stories "they must be the top-quality stories in politics, economy, culture and society." As a result, a member newspaper has a choice of between 200 and 300 stories to chose every day. Among its members are national evening newspapers *Beijing Evening News*, *Yangcheng Evening News* (Guangzhou) and *Xinmin Evening News*(Shanghai). Most of its members are provincial evening newspapers. Only five county evening have joined the network. Statistics show that more than half of the stories of the some of the leading evening newspapers come from the net. In the meantime, many of the newspapers pay a high price to buy exclusive international feature articles, investigative reports, and good photos from other newspapers and magazines before they are published. They even pay a good price to pay for a clue to an exclusive news report."It is the only way to keep their readers and their share of the market."⁸⁹
2. *Provincial Evening News Exchange Net*. It was launched at the end of 1996 by 14 evening newspapers. Now its membership has grown to 20 evening and city papers(only one evening newspaper from each province is allowed to join this news net.) including such influential evening and city papers as *Chengdu Evening News*, *Huaxi City Paper*, *Zhengzhou Evening News*, *Great River Daily*, *Xian Evening News*, *Sanqin Metropolitan News* and *Southern China Morning News*. Member newspapers of the net exchange both news stories, pictures, cartoons and graphics through a high efficient server and three high efficient work-stations. The rule for being a member in this net is: 1)all the capital from the net are the common property of all member newspapers; 2)all member newspapers have equal rights in decision making and voting; 3)all member newspapers have equal right to share the information from the net;4)any member newspaper is not allowed to sell its stories to any other newspapers; 5)each member is required to provide at least five hard news stories to the net every day and two feature stories every month; 6)any member newspaper who violates the rule will be expelled from the net and the net has the right to develop a new member from that region(or province).
3. National City TV News Exchange Center. The center now has about 50 members and its daily operation is run by the news department of Guangzhou TV. Every week, its member TVs provide to the center more than too stories and each member TV choses more than 100 stories from it. Many of its member TVs have opened a daily program showing stories they get from the center.

Explaining the reasons for the prosperity of the "news services," Wen Lu, a researcher from the Institute of Journalism of Xinhua News Agency says, "It is its closeness to the public and the people. The stories from the news nets have covered the difficult and touchy problems, which are the common concerns of the public."⁹⁰

With the emerging of this "united press", Wen believes that China's official news agency is facing an obvious challenge. "The challenges come from two side: 1)competition for information sources. Before the emergence of the 'united press', the information for the most of the Chinese news media came either from Xinhua or gathering by themselves;2)the 'united press' has met all kinds of demands from the news clients and has filled the blanks left by Xinhua. As a matter of fact, they have become the potential competitor of Xinhua in developing clients."

According to Wen, there were some opposition to the set-up of news exchange nets at the very beginning. "What is why those far-sighted people don't use the name 'news agency' or even 'united press' to describe them. They just use 'news exchange net.' 'evening news network' and 'news exchange net.' But after a years of development, what we see today is only an ever growing momentum."

But many journalists in China still believe that thanks to its government status, in the foreseeable future, Xinhua will continue to monopolize such breaking news reporting such as the death of Deng Xiaoping, the summit between President Clinton and President Jiang and Premier Zhu.

7. To Have a Website

On May 10, 1999(Beijing time), the internet edition of the People's Daily reported the first apology made by President Bill Clinton for NATO bombing of Chinese embassy only one hour after the American president made the statement.

On June 1, 1999, China's first non-governmental TV station -- China Bridge Net TV (www.bridge.net.cn) went into operation.

For many years, Chinese people get used to read, listen and watch news stories that are gathered, edited and carried on the government-run newspapers, radio and TVs. But last October, an Internet company began to challenge this tradition. Here is the story⁹¹:

In the afternoon of August 23,1998, 23-year-old Wang Han was killed in her hotel room in southern China's city Shenzhen. The police a reward for any clue leading to the capture of the killer.

On October 12, Wang Han's sister Beibei asked Shenzhen Wanyong Information Network, the largest internet service provider of Shenzhen, to report the killing of her sister on the internet.

Huang Cinan, editor of the company, accepted the assignment. "This assignment is of historical significant. It shows that people are beginning to realize that Internet is a mean of communications."

In the night of October 16, an in-depth "A lawsuit of Crying and Blood" appear on the homepage of Shenzhen Wanyong.

In two days, over 6,000 people visited the web site and more than 400 people published their comments on the case on the web site.

Most of the letters expressed their sympathy to the family. Some expressed their anger about the poor security of the hotel. But quite a few readers expressed their strong support to the Wanyong company for its new role in news reporting.

"The Wanyong report marks the beginning that a China's Internet company is reporting news like a new mean of communications. I hope Wanyong will start a news column and persist with news reporting of its own," Bai Lei write in his email.

As an editor of Wanyong, Huang says, "It was the first time I went out interviewing people and gathering information. It was also the first time we did independently a piece of story."

In the past, Huang and his colleagues always get their stories from newspaper and magazine clippings.

But Huang and his colleagues encountered a big headache in writing their story about the killed girl. When they called the hotel manager for an interview, the manager refused to talk to them because they were not from a news media.

The killing story by Shenzhen Wangyong Net has surprised many Chinese journalists who all agreed that Internet is posing a serious challenge to Chinese traditional news media. "It is of extremely enlightening significant to voice people's concern and demands on the Internet."⁹²

Today, with the major Chinese newspapers opening a web site and an instant access to the homepages of many Chinese newspapers in Hong Kong and Taiwan, the Chinese press, the public and the policy makers have formed different opinions about this new challenge to the traditional media. Sun Baochuan, chief engineer of *Xinhua* says, "this is a severe challenge to the traditional press, but it is also a rare opportunity." He describes the Internet press as "my newspaper." Professor Zhou Guangzhao, vice-chairman of the standing committee of China's National People's Congress predicted that the impact of the Internet press will surpass that of the traditional press in the next 10 to 20 years.⁹³

More people believe Internet press will help the public join the debate and supervising of government work. For example, last November, *the People's Daily* opened a forum about a proposed policy of abolishing the system of providing cars for leading government and party officials. In just 12 days, 17,200 people voiced their opinions on the forum.⁹⁴

"Beijing's official corps of censors, who control every word in newspapers and on television, have finally met their match with the Internet," a Western observer says.⁹⁵ Some Western people accuse China of building up a degree of Net surveillance, "but the success is limited. With thousands more websites added to the Internet every day, and millions of email messages swirling through cyberspace, censors have no hope of keeping up."⁹⁶

At a national meeting of editor-in-chiefs of party newspapers early 1999, Xu Guangchun, vice-minister of the propaganda department of the party's central committee disclosed that 69 Chinese newspapers have electronic editions on the Internet. But he warned, "Now some news organizations do not follow the procedure of application and approval and open their websites without permission. Some news organizations print freely the news stories they get from the websites of foreign news organizations, which has played a misleading role in propaganda."⁹⁷

Despite of the warnings from the senior propaganda official, most of the senior editors of Chinese press regard the joining the trend of Internet as a historic tide which you can do nothing but to follow it and join it. As Xiao Pei, former editor-in-chief of Beijing Youth Daily and now editor-in-chief of Beijing Evening News, the largest newspapers in Beijing, says,⁹⁸ "The Internet is both a channel of information and a source of information. It has provided the newspapers with the fastest channel for spreading information and the broadest source for gathering information." Under the management of Xiao, Beijing Youth Daily has successfully launched several Internet columns which include "Interview through Internet," "Information from Internet," and "Chat in the Net." Reporters from the newspaper have interviewed people almost from all corners of the world for all kind of stories.

The Beijing Youth Weekly published a survey among Beijing residents in April 1999, which shows that 25% of the city residents get their international news from Internet:

Table 8: **Beijing residents and international news**

1. What international news is most interesting to you over the last year?
 1. World Cup:33.6%
 2. Iraq crisis: 22.1%
 3. Sex scandal of President Clinton: 19.3%
 4. The launch of Euro: 12.9%
 5. The cloning technology: 12.1%

2. Where do you get international news from?
 1. CCTV's 7 o'clock evening news: 48.6%
 2. Internet: 25%
 3. Radio: 9.3%
 4. *Reference News* (a daily tabloid of translated foreign newspaper stories): 7.9%
 5. *Beijing Youth Daily*: 4.3%
 6. From chatting with people: 2.9%
 7. *Global Times*: 2.1%
 8. Hearsay: the rest

Source: *Beijing Youth Weekly*, April 12, 1999

During the annual sessions of the National People's congress (NPC, the Chinese parliament) in 1998, major newspapers including *the People's Daily*, *Beijing Youth Daily* ran forum or special on-line columns, such as "*Citizens Ask and Delegates Answer*" and "*Citizens' Questions Answered at the NPC Session.*" During the meeting time of the annual NPC of 1999, almost all the major newspapers in Beijing have opened a web site for the citizens to voice complaints. The top question *the People's Daily* posed to its readers is: "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the Chinese government?" It was unthinkable and politically risky in the past for a press to ask its readers such a question. It was equally politically dangerous for a reader to write directly to the media and criticize the government.

With approximately 10 million computers in China, more and more Chinese now enjoy full access to the Internet. In 1994, China started to connect its computers to the Internet and, since then, the number of users has been skyrocketing. According to the Internet Information Center of China, the number of Internet subscribers had reached 2.1 million by the end of 1998, up from only 40,000 in mid-1990. Many accounts were shared by more than one person. Millions of more "netizens" are browsing through the worldwide web at universities, news organizations, government offices, at home and even remote regions like Xinjiang and Tibet. It is expected that the next three years will see an increase to 10 million surfers in China.

Most Chinese dial telephone to connect to a server. By the end of 1998, there are 69 telephones for every 100 residents in the city of Beijing. And to encourage people's to link up with Internet, the municipal government of Beijing announced early in 1999 that installation will be free is a family requires to install a second telephone.⁹⁹

Scholarly studies are yet to be done to pinpoint how Internet affects the Chinese press. But one thing is certain: that is, the authorities have keenly felt the need for the state-run press to improve their services in order to counter what is seen as negative to China in the hostile propaganda pouring in from Internet.¹⁰⁰

But the biggest obstacle for Chinese to link up with world wide web does not come from the government or some ideologues. The biggest discouragement is the keyboard of the computer. Learning the technique of in-putting Chinese characters through an English keyboard is no less easy job than an American learning the skill of writing Chinese characters. Further

more, less than one in 10,000 Chinese speak English while more than 99 percent of the Internet content are in English. That is why only 8% of Chinese families in the cities have computers and only 19% of these computers are linked up with Internet.¹⁰¹ Today, many government offices have been equipped with computers, but most of them are used as typewriters. Most government officials get information from newspapers and TV instead of from Internet. "For some government leaders, computers are a kind of decoration in their office."¹⁰²

III. Who will run Chinese press tomorrow?

As Chinese press moves towards more operational freedoms and political openness under the pressure of its marketization and industrialization and "some of the ideas presented are daring and controversial, apparently with the acquiescence of government officials. But while the papers are under the party's control, there is a constant question over how far they can go. Some have raised a skeptical question: "how long this fresher outlook will continue while the media remains in the firm grip of the party apparatus, which swings with the political pendulum."¹⁰³

Ou Si, a Chinese journalist warns in an article in *the Press News*,¹⁰⁴ "News reporting and editing is like walking on a thin ice. You don't know when you are going to step on a 'mine' and do not know when you are to sink into a 'trap'. These are the words from the deepest feelings of the responsible comrades of the news organizations. They have made many editors and reporters eat bitterness and some editor-in-chief lose their black gauze caps. we must watch our step whenever and wherever we go."

Observers believe that the Chinese press is still expected to be at the propaganda service of the party and the government and will encounter ideological and operational dilemmas of press reform. For example, the aging propagandists are nowadays most worried about the dramatic changes of the press. The press' growing concern with the bottom line other than the party line and its tendency to the liberal thoughts have alarmed the propagandists and ideologues. As a propaganda officials writes:

*Now, there exist a variety of erroneous opinions on journalism. for example, some views are against the principle of party spirit, against being throat and tongue of the people, against the policy of positive propaganda. They advocate absolute "freedom of press."..... Today, the old generation of journalists are retiring one batch after another. Young journalists are joining the press corp. one batch after another. These young journalists have many good points. But some comrades among them do not have deep understanding of the fine tradition of our party's press work. They know little of Marxist journalism theory. If we do not strengthen academic work of journalism by arming their brain with Marxist theory of journalism, they will not pull through with the test of winds and tides. They will lose their sense of direction at the turning point of history and commit big mistakes..... We must highly keep vigilant against the Western countries' attempts to "westernize" and "divide" our country.*¹⁰⁵

Why is the old generation so upset by the young generation of the country's journalists? Let have a look at a survey of the working journalists in China.

There are 550,000 journalists employed by 2,163 newspapers, 1416 radio stations, 943 TV stations and 1270 cable TV stations.¹⁰⁶ According to a recent survey by jointly conducted by the Opinion Research Institute of China Renmin University and China Association of Journalists, The survey, which was conducted among 1,649 journalists from 183 news organizations throughout China, offers us a clear picture of those people who are running Chinese press today:

Table 9: Who are running Chinese press?

Number of journalists: 550,000
 Sex: 67.1 % male; 32.9% female
 Average age: 37.4¹⁰⁷
 Average years of being journalist: 10.7
 Education: 93.2% college-educated
 Communist members: 53.1%
 Communist Youth League members: 19%
 Non-communist: 25.8 percent

Source: The Journalist Monthly, March 1998, Beijing

This survey shows that the new generation of journalists who are young, highly educated and more professional. The old generation of media work almost exclusively for the propaganda media while the young generation of media, who are almost completely open to new and alternative ideas, work for both the new journalism and the propaganda journalism media. You may be struck by the fact that 72.1% of Chinese 550,000 journalists are affiliated with a communist organization. But this is a new generation of communists who have grown up after the Cultural Revolution and went to college after Chinese campuses opened to the Western thoughts¹⁰⁸ Their formative age concur with China's reforming years and social changes. They are characterized by a pluralism of values:

Table 10: Fundamental Values of Chinese Journalists

Value	no	no answer	yes
1. To bring change to society	0.8%	6.4%	91.8%
2. To report people's sufferings	1.9%	9.5%	87.7%
3. To be fearless against hierarchy	1.5%	11.8%	84.6%
4. To be a screw of the Party	4.1%	19.3%	73.9%
5. To be independent of any interest groups	19.1%	19.0%	57.0%

Source: The Journalist Monthly, March 1998, Beijing

If this poll was published 10 years ago or even a few years ago, the party propagandists would be very much alarmed. As Shao Huaze, the editor-in-chief of *People's Daily*, notes, "There is a viewpoint that news media is the 'fourth power' in supervising the government and placing itself above the government..... This is a harmful viewpoint."¹⁰⁹ Lin Feng, a retired senior editor of *Xinhua* also criticizes this tendency among journalists, "Critical reports and supervising by public opinions can only be strengthened by sticking to the nature of throat and tongue and sticking to positive propaganda as the priority. The situation of the 10 years of press reform shows that some comrades have emphasized the supervising role of public opinions to an inappropriate step. If supervising by public opinions become the number one function of journalism cause, it will disturb people's thinking and make people sap morally, which will be harmful to the stability of the state and the cause of the socialist construction."¹¹⁰ But a Chinese academic argues that more than half of Chinese journalists agree to be "above and independent of all interests groups" indicate that the Chinese journalists are not bending or blindly follow the

pressures of various kinds of interests groups in a market-economy. "It also indicates their relatively independent awareness of demanding a larger space to practice their job."¹¹¹ Commenting on the recent changes in China, even Andrew Nathan, a professor of political science at Columbia University in New York, has made this remarks, "These were all important steps, but I think they were misinterpreted by dissidents and by many in the outside world. They decided that initiations for change could come from outside rather than inside the Communist Party. But that was never true"¹¹²

"To be a screw of the party" has been a propaganda slogan that is said to be invented by the late communist hero Lei Feng in 1960s. It means that the party is the screwdriver and as a screw you faithfully following whatever the party orders. This "screw mentality" is a self-control of individual freedom, which was identical to Confuciusism, which asked everybody to keep to his place in the hierarchy. The consequence of urging journalists to be a screw of the party has inevitably led them to a shortage of originality in writing, thinking and selecting topics.

Another survey among the Chinese journalists show that while they do not place watchdog role as the number one function, they do not emphasize throat-and-tongue role at all:

Table 11: Chinese journalists' views about media functions (percentage)

Functions	not important	important	very important
1. providing information to the public	1.5	7.2	91.2
2. informing people of government policy	2.8	9.5	87.4
3. reporting latest events	1.8	11.4	86.6
4. supervising by public opinions	3.8	10.2	85.6
5. guiding public opinions	3.6	11.6	84.4
6. pushing social changes	2.9	12.3	83.8
7. be throat and tongue of people	5.2	12.4	81.2
8. to stop rumors by reliable information	5.0	14.7	79.7
9. reporting news which interest largest majority	5.7	17.9	76.0
10. Analyzing complicated problems	5.8	18.9	74.8
11. Interpreting government policies	6.9	18.1	74.1
12. Raising public knowledge level	8.9	26.6	63.9
13. Debating government policies	12.2	29.2	57.1
14. Providing entertainment to public	16.3	35.8	47.2
15. Expressing support for public welfare groups	19.7	34.4	43.8
16. Questioning and criticizing enterprises	28.2	32.6	34.9
17. Questioning and criticizing government officials	32.1	27.8	34.5
18. Questioning and criticizing social organizations	32.6	33.1	29.1

Source: *The Journalist Monthly*, March 1998, Beijing

Table 12: Major factors affecting news judgement of Chinese journalists

Factors	little	average	great
1. Journalism education	5.7%	15.3%	77.8%
2. feedback of audiences	8.5%	21.2%	68.8%
3. Articles of <i>People's Daily</i> and <i>Xinhua</i>	9.8%	20.9%	67.4%
4. polls of the audiences	10.5%	23.1%	64.0%
5. opinions of direct superior or leaders concerned	19.5%	27.2%	51.7%
6. sources	23.7%	36.3%	38.1%
7. handling of same topic by other media	26.1%	42.7%	28.2%
8. colleagues	35.9%	41.1%	21.3%
9. friends	48.5%	33.9%	15.9%

Source: *The Journalist Monthly*, March 1998, Beijing

The survey shows that journalism education, feedback of audiences and the model role of *People's Daily* and *Xinhua* have major impact on the news judgement of most of the Chinese journalists.

Table 13: The major media Chinese journalists read, view and listen

1. <i>CCTV</i>	87.8%
2. <i>People's Daily</i>	45%
3. <i>Central Radio</i>	30.2%
4. <i>Reference News</i>	21%
5. <i>Economic Daily</i>	15%
6. <i>Chinese Youth Daily</i>	14%
7. <i>Beijing Youth Daily</i>	11%
8. <i>Yangcheng Evening News</i> (Guangzhou)	11%
9. <i>Xinmin Evening News</i> (Shanghai)	9%
10. <i>Beijing Evening News</i>	8%
11. <i>Southern Weekend</i>	5%
12. <i>News Digest</i>	2%
11. Overseas newspapers (Chinese, English)	5.9%

Source: *The Journalist Monthly*, March 1998, Beijing. Note: Since only 4.7% of the Chinese journalist speak a foreign language, only 1.3% of them watch CNN regularly.

Another big change in Chinese press is that at least 200,000 freelance writers and TV producers are working independently in this country nowadays. These self-employed people are not affiliated with any "unit" or news organization and have no fear of being fired. The only fear they have is that their works could not sell well at market. So, the bottom line is: it is the will, feelings and demands of the readers and audiences that decide the eventual economic benefits of a journalist. And the will, feelings and demands of readers and audiences are expressed by spending time and money to read or watch their writings and their shows.

The liberalizing press in China is an unintended but unavoidable consequence of china's economic reform. The purchasing behavior and reading habits will cultivate a mature market for the press. The economic benefits will lead the press to develop in the direction to meet the demands of the public. But in the meantime, this new generation of journalists who are liberal, open-minded and have diversified world outlooks will in return bring new thoughts to the society by producing something which will influence the readers' ideas, behaviors and eventually have an impact on the process of China's economic and political reforms. "Changes in the Chinese media today indicate that China is stepping into a more open and confident age," commented Yu Guoming, director of the Public Opinion Research Institute of People's University of China.¹¹³ "More and more organs (of the party) are waking up like sleeping lions. And once they wake up, they will fiercely grab and penetrate into the space where they refused to enter earlier. And it is expected in the future a fierce competition will take place between the mainstream press (party organs) and the alternative newspapers. If these alternative newspapers continue to stay away from big hard news and big opinions, they will in the eyes of the society forever remain outside the mainstream press it is time now for the alternative press to take the duty of covering everything in your eyes."¹¹⁴

It seems to be a conundrum: the new journalism pursues a freer press while they have to survive by reflecting party line in some of the politically sensitive stories or editorials. But today,

more and more government and party officials have realized that the public mood needs a prosperous new journalism and the Chinese government understand it very well that the mean of propaganda could not achieve the effect information of the mass communication. There will be a competition between orthodox journalism and new journalism. The emerging Chinese press reform needs new ideas and ways to move forward while avoiding both die-hard propaganda journalism and blind adulation of the American-style press freedom.

There is not a system of censorship in China. But a party-imposed propaganda and press discipline would have a self-censorship impact on the media. Undeniably, the new journalism is subject to the limits of official press and propaganda policy and keep silent in some of the highly political sensitive subjects Undeniably, there is a kind of self-limit in the process of news assignments, gathering, writing and editing. But by no means the Chinese press should be labeled as a muzzled press simply because the press and the Chinese public are indifferent and show no interest in the activities of a handful of political dissidents. This is reflecting a new mood of the public: Chinese do want to enter a modern society with Internet, private housing and private cars but without a Russian economic collapse and a Yugoslavian bloodshed. As an American journalist observes, "Americans here sometimes have a hard time understanding how many Chinese can simultaneously appreciate the freedom of the West -- a growing number of professionals have studied in the United States -- and readily dismiss the dissidents as foolish idealists. The vast majority feel they are finally getting a chance to savor freedom in their personal lives and work, and they want to enjoy the fruits of modern society. The last thing most of them want is upheaval¹¹⁵ as a recent survey of public opinions by Chinese social scientists:

Table 14: The Chinese views of views of the pace of reforms

1. The pace of reforms too fast:	47%
2. The pace of reform appropriate:	26.5%
3. The pace of reform too slow:	25.6%

Source: China Youth Daily, April 8, 1999. The survey was carried out among 2,430 households in 53 cities in November 1998. .

The results show that the majority of the public think the country's reforms are going too fast. That is why in answering another question of the survey, 73.% of the answers demand a safer and stable social living environment. They believe the three big problems that worry the Chinese people most are: unemployment, being ill and being hospitalized and unable to meet the ends of living.

Many of Chinese journalists and intellectuals assume that the society will eventually have to liberalize. The biggest threat to their personal freedoms, many say, would be a souring of Chinese-American relations that might strengthen conservative forces here. It may be true that social evolution, propelled by economic and technical change, will eventually bring a free and democratic China, though there is no sign this will happen any time soon.¹¹⁶ People must understand that rule of the Communist Party is written into its constitution. According to the newly amended Chinese constitution, the Chinese people must "uphold the leadership and the Chinese Communist Party and guidance of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory, the people's democratic dictatorship, the socialists road and reform and opening to the outside world." And the press cannot violate these cardinal principles. It would be naive or even ignorant to expect more dramatic or even upheavals, such as challenge the monopoly of leadership by the Chinese Communist Party in the Chinese media in the near future.

President Jiang Zemin proclaimed that challenges to Communist rule would be "annihilated in the early stages." China is undoubtedly moving toward a more open society, it is not necessarily toward Western democracy. When people in the west discuss press freedom in China, they tend to assume press freedom goes hand in hand with a multi-party system. But that's not true in China.

Looking at the future development of the Chinese press, Zhang Jian, an editor of *Xinhua News Agency*, writes in a recent article,¹¹⁷ "Despite of the increasing competition, the Chinese press competition is far from fair and open, There are too much monopoly in Chinese press industry." "There are no independent media, no pure media enterprises in China today." "Market economy requests above all a relatively free access to market. But the press industry today 'opens door' only to party and government organizations." "For the important national media (e.g. TV and radio), no one else is allowed to run except by themselves. Most of the local media actually falls into the category of the party papers.. Even those well-run newspapers, e.g. the newspapers group in the south are able to take off simply by their previous monopoly of the press. Our press competition is only a 'limited competition.'

Comparing with the state-owned enterprises in China, Zhang says that the situation is much worse with the press industry in term of the separation between government and enterprises. "The government and the media have almost become one family. Considering our country's national conditions and the special characteristics of press industry, this situation will be maintained for a long time in the future, particularly with the party and government organs. But, within the current framework, it is feasible for most of the media in China to be run like an enterprise."

"Honestly, considering the special characteristics of press, its reform is much tougher than the ordinary state-owned enterprises. The completion of its reform and transition cannot take place overnight. And furthermore, the reform of press must proceed stage by stage and level by level (e.g., the difference between the party and government press and the ordinary popular newspapers). The reform also depends a healthier legal system and the gradual making of press-related law in China."

Despite of all of these mentioned above, Zhang says, "One thing is clear: it has become an inevitable trend for the press to be industrialized and turned into enterprises. Under framework of present system and the policies, law and party line, the problems related to the press and the market should be solved by means of market. In addition to adhering to political principles, we must do our best to follow the economic principles as well."

The new journalism newspapers like *Beijing Youth Daily*, *Southern Weekend*, *China Economic Times*, are not simply a reflection of consumers' taste, they are also a reflection of the interests of a mushrooming civil society which is composed of civil servants, professionals, environmentalists, workers, farmers, housewives, entrepreneurs, private businessmen, returnees from abroad, consumers groups, and, even fans of private cars and internet, who are clamoring for a bigger slice of the pie and ushering a cultural and political pluralism at the same time.

With this emerging new journalism, Chinese people for the first time read a newspaper where there is a genuine picture of "a hundred thought contend" and "a hundred flowers blossom". The Chinese intellectuals from universities, social organizations and government for the first time dare to write something creatively and with some novel ideas for the press But in the past, everyone must parrot what the official line in the newspapers, which had been the mentality of "being the screw of the proletarian revolution."

In 1978, when China started reform and opening up, a group of Chinese intellectuals shouted to the society: "Reading knows no taboo"¹¹⁸. Twenty years later, a new generation of Chinese journalists is trying to shout another wakeup call: "Writing knows no taboo." I am not sure if they will be able to break all the taboos. But I do agree with what a Chinese writer writes, "With the coming of the new century, our young cadres must throw away 'official languages and cliches" like used shoes.

¹ It is translated from *Dao De Jing* by Chinese philosopher Lao Zi(604-531 BC).The original Chinese sentence reads "*Da Yin Xi Sheng*"

² Under the current constitution, China guarantees freedom of expression. Article 35 states, "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration."But article 51 also restrict absolute freedom by stating, "Citizens of the People's Republic of China, in exercising their freedoms and rights, may not infringe upon the interests of the state, of society or of the collective, or upon the lawful freedoms and rights of other citizens. "

³ There is no press law in China. But under Chinese press regulations, private ownership of press is banned and all media must normally owned by a "zhuguan bumen"(a responsible organization), which can be either an organization affiliated with government or a NGO organization. People cannot publish a newspaper or a journal without getting from the government an authorization number, which is to be printed on all issues. Chinese press can be thus classified as the following:

- Newspapers owned by NGO: China Youth Daily, Beijing Youth Daily, etc Newspapers owned directly by a communist party committee: People's Daily, Southern Daily;
- Newspapers owned by other newspapers: Southern Weekend; Beijing Morning News, Beijing Evening News, Harbin Daily, Global Time, etc. But many of them are soft-news evening news and weekend editions of mainstream dailies;
- Newspaper owned by a government department: Guangdong and Hong Kong Information Daily, Science Times, etc;
- Web news run by hundreds, maybe thousands of internet service providers in addition to hundreds of internet editions of newspapers throughout of China;

⁴ Olive Chou, *Guangdong papers press for change*, South China Morning Post, March 22, 1999, Hong Kong

⁵ This is a line from a poem by Su Shi of Chinese Song Dynasty in the 11th century. The Lushan Mountain is an allusion to the truth of a matter.

⁶ *Learning and Teaching*, Media Studies Journal, winter 1999, p.94, New York

⁷ A Harvard student told me that a prestigious law school in U.S. bans its students and even scholar from quoting directly from Chinese sources because they doubt Chinese credibility. When I ask what sources they use. "American researchers," she replies. "What sources do the American researchers get from?" "Another American." "Where does the another American get their source from?" "From Another American."This has clearly shown an alarming research circle in China studies: most of the china studies done in U.S. never gets out of the circle.

⁸ Fu Xingyu and Ji Kaixing, *the Market Meaning of Supervising by Public Opinions*, Youth Newspaper Study, No.3, 1998, Beijing, p.13

⁹ Shen Shiwei, Reform, *Opening up and Updating of Journalism*, News Front, December issue, 1998, Beijing

¹⁰ Ma La, *Our Chinese Textboo*,Southern Weekend, September 11, 1998, Guangzhou

¹¹ Jiang Duo, *Photo Journalism and Thought Liberation*, News Front, December issue, 1998, Beijing

¹²Gao Ping, *The Headlines of Big News*, Shikan(Poems) , January 1999, Chinese Association of Writers, Beijing

¹³ Chen Zhijun, *Frivolous Propaganda*, Southern Weekend, June 5, 1998, Guangzhou

¹⁴ Xu Guangchun, *Sing the Keynote Loud and Engage an Active Battle*, News Front, March issue, 1999, Beijing

¹⁵ The floods have affected more than 200 million people. A quarter million soldiers, more than 5 million militiamen and reservists have been sent to the flood areas, moving 4.2 million people to safty nationwide, according to the Washington

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- ¹⁷ *Glorifying the Great Flood-fighting Spirit*, People's Daily, October 7, 1998, Beijing
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- ²³ Wei Wei, *Supervision by Public Opinions and the Democratic and Legal System*, People's Daily, October 27, 1998
- ²⁴ South China Morning Post, February, 1999
- ²⁵ Liu Dehuan, Kang Xiaoguang, etc, *A Study of Chinese Reading Life Between 1978 - 1998*, Nanning, Guangxi Education Press(1998, p.71)
- ²⁶ Before 1980, advertisements in China were regarded as capitalist practice. It was not until 1980 the first ad appeared on a TV station in Shanghai.
- ²⁷ Li Zhuren, *Popular Journalism with Chinese Characteristics -- from Revolutionary Modernity to Popular Modernity*, a research paper, 1998, Beijing
- ²⁸ Wang Hui, *Advertising Thriving in China*, China Features, 1997, Beijing
- ²⁹ Jaime a. FlorCruz, *Chinese Media Influx*, Media Studies Journal, winter 1999, New York, p.45
- ³⁰ Jaime a. FlorCruz, *Chinese Media Influx*, Media Studies Journal, winter 1999, New York, p.43
- ³¹ Liu Dehuan, Kang Xiaoguang, etc, *A Study of Chinese Reading Life Between 1978 - 1998*, Nanning, Guangxi Education Press(1998, p.123)
- ³² Huailin Chen and Chin-chuan Lee, *Press Finance and Economic Reform in China*, 1998 AEJMC convention Paper Abstracts, www.aejmc.sc.edu
- ³³ *People's Daily to Accelerate Its Reform*, Xinhua, October 6, 1998
- ³⁴ Oliver Chou, *Guangdong papers press for change*, South China Morning Post, March 22, 1999, Hong Kong
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- ⁴⁰ Ding Baishuan, *Establishing a Firm Sence of Serving the Audience*, the Chinese Journalist, January issue, 1999, Beijing, p.13-15
- ⁴¹ Jaime A. FlorCruz, *Chinese Media In Flux*, Media Studies Journal, Winter 1999, p.44
- ⁴² The polls were conducted by the Research Institute of Public Opinions, China Renmin University, in Beijing, August 1998.
- ⁴³ China Economic Times, <http://www.info@cet.com.cn/>
- ⁴⁴ Yang Dongping, *Openness Is Top Priority*, Southern Weekend, September 11, 1998, Guangzhou
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- ⁴⁸ Naiyu Zhang, etc., *The Long March: Coverage AIDS In Chinese Newspapers*, AEJMC, 1997 Conventions, www.aejmc.sc.edu/aejmc/icdiv
- ⁴⁹ Xu Guangchun, *Pay Attention to the Negative Effects of Positive Propaganda*, Proceedings of 97' National Conference on Journalism, Chongqing Press, 1998, Chongqing, p.16-22
- ⁵⁰ *Why Was Premier Sucked?* Beijing Youth Daily, November 15, 1998
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- ⁵³ Zhang Chaohong, *An Unexpected Answer*, the Chinese Journalist, January issue, 1999, Xinhua News Agency, Beijing, p.22
- ⁵⁴ Wang Dehou, *Father Does not Cure Son*, Beijing Daily, September 3, 19998
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