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REPORTING THE NEWS IN CHINA: FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS AND CURRENT TRENDS

ROUNDTABLE

BEFORE THE

CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE COMMISSION ON CHINA

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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REPORTING THE NEWS IN CHINA: FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS AND CURRENT TRENDS

FRIDAY, JULY 31, 2009

CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE
COMMISSION ON CHINA,
Washington, DC.

The roundtable was convened, pursuant to notice, at 2:03 p.m., in room 628, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Douglas Grob, Cochairman's Senior Staff Member, presiding.

Also present: Lawrence Liu, Senior Counsel.

OPENING STATEMENT OF DOUGLAS GROB, COCHAIRMAN'S SENIOR STAFF MEMBER, CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE COMMISSION ON CHINA

Mr. GROB. Good afternoon, everybody, and thank you very much for attending the Congressional-Executive Commission on China's ninth public roundtable for the 111th Congress. I'd like to welcome you on behalf of Cochairman Sandy Levin, and for our Staff Director, Charlotte Oldham Moore, I'd like to welcome you on behalf of Chairman Byron Dorgan of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

We're very pleased to see you here today. The House and Senate, as you know, have been pulling very late nights preparing to go out of session, so that you would take your time at this busy juncture to be with us today is something that we're grateful for, and that speaks to the importance of the topic of our roundtable this morning: Reporting the News in China: Firsthand Accounts and Current Trends.

I'd like to, at this point, turn the floor over to Lawrence Liu, to my right, Senior Counsel with the Commission, and our staff specialist on free expression, free flow of information, and the Internet in China.

So, Lawrence, please.

STATEMENT OF LAWRENCE LIU, SENIOR COUNSEL, CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE COMMISSION ON CHINA

Mr. LIU. We are convening this roundtable nearly a year after China hosted the Olympics. The timing is significant because it was the Olympics that prompted Chinese officials to grant foreign journalists allowed into China new freedom to report.

This past year has been significant for domestic and foreign journalists in China for other reasons as well. Journalists have had to contend with covering news amid the global economic downturn

and concerns from Chinese officials over maintaining social stability.

2009 also contains a number of sensitive anniversaries in China, including the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen protests, the 50th anniversary of the Dalai Lama's flight into exile, and the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, to name a few.

The Internet continues to play a major role in shaping news coverage, and earlier this month protests and violence broke out in Xinjiang, testing the Chinese Government's commitment to openness and transparency. We are lucky today to have a group of panelists who can offer both a first-person perspective and a broader analysis on the impact of these events on reporting the news in China and what the last year has meant for press freedom.

Before introducing the panelists, I want to take this brief opportunity to let you know how the Commission has been covering these issues. In connection with this roundtable we have put out a quick brief that provides an overview of press freedom issues in China. We publish ongoing analysis on our Web site in a periodic newsletter. We recently wrote several pieces analyzing the Chinese Government's attempts to require all computers sold in China to come pre-installed with the Green Dam filtering software. Finally, we will be issuing our 2009 Annual Report this October.

Now I would like to introduce the panelists. Sitting to my left is Jocelyn Ford, a Beijing-based multimedia journalist. During her eight years in China she served as Bureau Chief for U.S. Public Radio's Marketplace, and you may have heard her on other public radio shows such as Studio 360.

From 2007 to 2009, she chaired the Media Freedoms Committee at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China. She also has the unique perspective of having worked for the state-run China Radio International. She is currently working on her first documentary about a widowed Tibetan migrant worker.

Also sitting to my left is Kathleen McLaughlin, the Beijing-based China correspondent for BNA, where she writes about legislative and regulatory affairs in China. She is currently head of the Media Freedoms Committee for the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China. She has spent most of the past decade covering news in China, and you may have seen her articles also in the Far Eastern Economic Review and Christian Science Monitor, including a recent piece on Uyghur workers from the toy factory that sparked recent protests in Xinjiang.

And finally, sitting to my right is Ashley Esarey, a Visiting Assistant Professor of Politics at Whitman College in Washington State. In June, he completed the An Wang Post-Doctoral Fellowship at Harvard, and previously was a professor at Middlebury College. He has done extensive research on China's media and Internet, including for, Freedom House, and we have made copies of two of his pieces available at the door. He is currently working on a book: "The Challenge of Truth: Media and Power in Contemporary China."

Mr. GROB. Thank you, Lawrence.

I'd just like to note that, unfortunately, James Fallows, whom we had hoped to have with us today, has taken ill, we learned this morning, and is unable to join us.

Also, I'd like to just mention, before I turn the floor over to Jocelyn Ford for her remarks, that we'll proceed as follows: our panelists will give brief statements, after which we will open the floor to questions from the audience. We are creating a transcript of this event to be published on our Web site, so when we come to the Q&A we will have further guidelines on how the Q&A will proceed.

But without further ado, I'd like to ask Jocelyn for her remarks.

STATEMENT OF JOCELYN FORD, 2007–2009 CHAIR OF MEDIA FREEDOMS COMMITTEE, FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' CLUB OF CHINA; FREELANCE RADIO AND MULTIMEDIA JOURNALIST

Ms. FORD. Thank you for the introduction and thank you for inviting us here.

Thank you, the audience, for your interest in this subject. As China becomes more influential in the world it is increasingly important for the world to have access to accurate and timely information out of China. Unfortunately, China's advances in openness have lagged behind its economic advances. So, I'm glad that you all have an interest in this topic.

Today I will introduce the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China, tell you what reporting was like before the Olympics as well as how the Olympics changed reporting conditions for foreign correspondents, and outline obstacles and issues we still have to deal with.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China [FCCC], as we know it today, was started around 1981. Today's membership includes about 260 journalists from countries all over the world. We also have associate members from embassies and companies. Our activities are open to Chinese nationals, but we do not have Chinese members. Chinese authorities consider the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China an illegal organization.

As some of you may know, the Chinese Government requires nonprofit associations and organizations to register. However, the FCCC board has been told we are not welcome to register. To register, we would need a government organ to support our request and no government office is willing to do so.

First, let me give you the big picture about the Olympics. If you talk to foreign correspondents who have been in China, say, since the 1990s—I arrived in 2001—they will tell you that reporting conditions are pretty good today. From a long-term perspective, China has moved in the right direction.

Did the Olympics help improve working conditions for foreign media faster than would have happened had China not hosted the Games? Definitely yes. But the government is not making its best effort to make good on the Olympic promises it made to foreign media and on information openness. It would be unrealistic to expect conditions to improve dramatically overnight. Change does not happen that rapidly in any country, and certainly not in China.

But in China, too often regulations and laws are often not enforced. Sometimes it feels like we've gone two steps forward, one step backward, two steps forward, and maybe three steps backward. In general, China is moving in the right direction, but it is important to remain vigilant. One example I hope concerned parties will keep an eye on is the revised State Secrets Law, which was recently opened for comment.

So what was it like reporting before the Olympics? Officially, according to the rules, foreign correspondents were required to get permission every time they wanted to leave their home base, which in my case, as I was registered in Beijing, would be Beijing. So if I wanted to go across the country to interview somebody, according to the rules, I needed to get permission.

Now, of course, when reporters try to cover a topic the government wants to keep hushed up, say AIDS villages in Henan Province, they will not be granted permission. So, as a result, reporters played cat-and-mouse. The reporter might travel in the middle of the night to the village, wrap up reporting by 2 o'clock in the morning, and leave, hopefully while the officials were sleeping.

Reporting sometimes felt like cloak-and-dagger work, without the daggers, of course. For example, in 2002 I went to cover unrest in a northern oil town. Every time there was a knock on my hotel door, my colleague feared it would be the authorities who had come to detain us for being in the city without permission. At the time, it was fairly safe to report openly on non-controversial issues, even without permission, but reporters covering stories the local or central government regarded as "sensitive" would need to take extra precautions to avoid being discovered and detained.

In the run-up to the Olympics, the Foreign Correspondents' Club sought to lobby the Chinese Government to change some of these restricting rules, and in 2006 three of us had an informal meeting with a Foreign Ministry official. Remember, we're an illegal organization, so we met as "friends," not as representatives of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China.

In that meeting we said that we would like to see scrapped the rule that limits our ability to travel, and the official said, "Well, how about if, instead of getting permission to go, you just sent a fax in advance announcing you are coming?"

Presumably under such a system the sources the journalist wished to interview might be barred from meeting the reporter. So we said, if the fax notification was voluntary, that would be fine. But it shouldn't be required.

The official, at that meeting, told us that the government was serious about its Olympic promise to allow unrestricted media coverage and that it planned to have rules in place a year in advance. We were very pleasantly surprised when those rules came into play on January 1, 2007, a year and a half ahead of the Games, and they went further than we had expected. They did not require fax pre-notification. Basically the new rules, which were called "temporary rules" for the Olympics, allowed foreign correspondents to interview anybody who agreed to be interviewed. Tibet was still off-limits, but otherwise we could, according to the regulations, roam the country freely. This was progress. Of course, as I said earlier,

in China implementation of laws and regulations is often a problem, and the "free reporting" regulation is no exception.

After the regulation was brought into force in January 2007 there were a number of high-profile news stories, including the Tibet unrest in March 2008 which Kathleen will be talking about. In 2008, the FCCC confirmed 180 violations of the regulation. We did not have the manpower to follow up on each incident we were informed of, and I am sure there were many more we didn't even hear about.

Foreign correspondents didn't know what to expect after the Olympics were over. But the FCCC was pleased when the temporary regulation, after a few amendments, was made permanent in October 2008.

As can be expected, there are a lot of outstanding problems, but overall correspondents feel empowered by the regulations. When traveling around the country and officials say reporters are not allowed on their turf, we can now say, "Yes, we are, and here's the regulation." Sometimes it works. Sometimes they say, "Oh, okay, we can't disturb you." Sometimes, if reporters threaten to call the Foreign Ministry to report local authorities are harassing them in violation of the rules, the locals will back down. Other times they say "We don't care," or cite a local regulation restricting reporting, which usually they can't present on paper.

We have surveyed our members over the years. A year ahead of the Olympics, so about half a year after the new rules had been implemented, about half of the respondents said that the reporting environment was improving. We sent out a survey this year, and the response was about the same. But obviously there is also a lot of dissatisfaction. We asked how many thought reporting conditions in China meet international standards, and something like 95 percent of respondents said they do not think China's reporting conditions are up to international standards.

The Olympics appear to have been a catalyst for the Chinese Government to overhaul its approach to information control. Instead of restraining foreign correspondents as they did under the old rules, they now try to control our sources. The intimidation has shifted from stopping correspondents from conducting interviews, to stopping Chinese citizens from speaking to us. The end result is we are still not able to report freely.

Harassment of interviewees is our top concern. Treatment of Chinese national news assistants who work for foreign organizations is also a big concern. Kathleen will fill you in on the details.

Before I close, I would like to mention some positive changes that are worth noting but haven't received a lot of attention. Chinese authorities are becoming more proactive, for example, by holding more press conferences and media tours. Though too often these events are used to push soft stories, and reporters often do not feel they get adequate answers to their questions, still, this is a step in the right direction. It also suggests the Chinese Government believes it can achieve its goals more effectively by controlling or influencing the narrative, rather than by silence. Its practices are moving closer to those in other influential countries.

The Olympics were also used to educate local officials nationwide on new principles of openness. I had access to an internal police

circular for the Olympics with instructions for handling foreign correspondents. The police were told not to interfere when foreign correspondents interview religious groups, activists, environmental organizations, or other groups the government traditionally sought to silence.

The directive, which I presume has expired with the Olympics, however, said if the interviewee was a Falun Gong practitioner, a Tibetan activist, a Uyghur or talking about Taiwan independence, the correspondent should be allowed to conduct the interview, but afterward the police should blacklist the journalist and deal with the interviewee in accordance with the law. Some news sources have been arrested and put in jail, following trials that included "speaking to a foreign correspondent" as evidence of wrongdoing.

But I've also been pleasantly surprised to find awareness of the new policy of "openness" has reached some remote areas. Last month I was attending a wedding in a small town in the northeast corner of Inner Mongolia. I ran into a local court official at the celebration, who was happy to describe activities at his courthouse. I asked if I could do a video interview with him for a story I was working on about rural land disputes. He said, I could interview him since "China has media freedom [*Xinwen Ziyou*]," but I would need to ask his boss. His boss said I would need to apply to officials in the next town over. I didn't have time. Still I was surprised to hear him talk about media freedom, and he did let me film the inside of the courthouse. When I first arrived in China in 2001, I don't think I would have heard the term, especially not from a low court official in a remote corner of the country. So I do think the message is seeping down to some people at lower levels in China. I think that is a very positive Olympic result that doesn't get highlighted a lot.

With that, I'll turn it over to Kathleen, who will give you the details of what happens in the field.

Mr. GROB. Thank you very much, Jocelyn. Kathleen? Please.

STATEMENT OF KATHLEEN E. McLAUGHLIN, CHAIR, MEDIA FREEDOMS COMMITTEE AND SECRETARY, FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' CLUB OF CHINA; CHINA CORRESPONDENT FOR BNA, INC.; AND FREELANCE JOURNALIST

Ms. MCLAUGHLIN. Thank you. Thank you for inviting us here, and thank you for coming. We appreciate it.

So, Jocelyn has kind of taken you through the history of where we've been as foreign correspondents in China, and now I'd like to give you some examples of what's been happening lately and give you some ideas of what we're concerned about into the future. In particular, I want to make clear that we believe Chinese assistants and Chinese sources are coming under increasing pressure, which is a real roadblock to free and open reporting.

I also want to speak about the importance of free media for global economic issues and how China's information controls make it difficult for foreign correspondents to cover everything, including the economy.

So let me start with a little story about something that happened a couple of months ago, and this might give you an idea of the new kind of interference and pressure we're facing as journalists.

On June 3 and 4, Beijing's Tiananmen Square was filled with hundreds of people. Walking onto the square, it appeared that 80 to 90 percent of the people were actually plainclothes police and army. Nearly all of them carried umbrellas, and at first glance it seemed the umbrellas were to block the hot sun overhead. As the hours wore on and foreign journalists appeared on the square to report about the 20th anniversary of the crushing of the Tiananmen movement, it became clear that the hundreds of umbrellas were there to serve a dual purpose: they were used to physically block journalists and cameras from filming on the square.

So while from a distance it appeared the square was full of tourists with umbrellas, in fact, it was clear that something else was going on. We didn't have any reports of journalists being detained or arrested on the square that day, but we had a lot of calls from people who had their pictures ruined by plainclothes police with kind of pretty little parasols.

I think this is a good example of this sort of soft harassment we've begun to see more of in recent months. It's less dangerous and less direct than what we saw in the past, but it's no less effective in preventing us from doing our jobs.

Now, as Jocelyn mentioned, the Foreign Correspondents' Club is in the midst of a new members' survey, and the results we're getting are telling. Now, keep in mind we're not a polling firm so these aren't scientific results, but they give us an idea of the issues that are important to individual members.

As Jocelyn said, about half of the members who've taken the survey so far do believe the reporting climate in China is improving and it's heading in the right direction, and that's consistent with what we've heard from the beginning.

Still, many are concerned about current issues. About two-thirds of the correspondents have had some kind of interference in doing their daily work, and more than two-thirds who work with a Chinese research assistant say their employee has been hassled or summoned for questioning by authorities in the last year. We've also had several reports of sources facing repercussions after talking to foreign journalists.

Now, with that, to give you an idea of how things might be changing, let's go back to Tibet in March 2008. In the days following the Lhasa riots, foreign correspondents were shut out of Tibet. It's always been difficult for us to report in that region given that entrance to Tibet requires a special permit. All foreigners are required to get that permit, but journalists are scrutinized pretty closely and often denied. Last spring after the riots, foreign correspondents were not only shut out of Tibet, but repeatedly detained, harassed, and sometimes forcibly prevented from doing their jobs across the Tibetan plateau. The FCCC took more than 40 cases in which correspondents were prevented from working.

Outside of Tibet proper, the area that technically doesn't require the special permit, foreign news crews were blocked and Chinese staff intimidated, and in at least one case a driver was threatened with arrest. So you can see it's not just foreign correspondents being harassed, but also the Chinese nationals involved in our work. And these are the people for whom this kind of interference could have life-altering consequences. So soft harassment, for ex-

ample, where a police officer inserts himself into an interview, making it clear there may be consequences for the interviewee, has become fairly routine.

In July 2008, I was the first American journalist allowed to travel independently to Lhasa. I was allowed to move relatively freely throughout the city. If anyone was following or listening to me I didn't see them, but the city was so full of police and military, the main obstacle I had is that most residents, both Tibetan and Chinese, were simply too afraid to talk to me. Access to Tibet and the region remains a problem to this day for foreign correspondents.

Now, let's jump ahead to more than a year later, when we faced something similar with the uprising in Xinjiang on July 5. As you know, nearly 200 people were killed when Uyghur protests in the capital, Urumqi, turned violent.

What we saw in the days after marked a dramatic departure from the government's closed-door policy toward foreign journalists in Tibet. Journalists were immediately allowed into Urumqi, and by most accounts they were given freedom to interview and move about. There were some logistical problems with the Internet and telephone access, but the general climate marked a significant change.

We'd like to hope that the government recognized the value of allowing foreign correspondents to report on the ground and to see things with their own eyes. Covering Xinjiang, however, was not without problems. Urumqi was relatively open, but the far western city of Kashgar was, by all accounts, completely closed. Officials denied the closure, but we've heard from several journalists who traveled there that they were intercepted and ordered to leave.

Also, 2,000 miles away in Shaoguan, the site of the toy factory murders that sparked the Xinjiang riots, one local driver of a foreign reporting crew was called in for police questioning after the reporters left town. So, you can see there was a spread on that issue, very different things happening in Kashgar and Shaoguan than happened in Urumqi, which was quite open. After covering and writing about Xinjiang, two correspondents received anonymous death threats.

Now, given the shift and the fact that foreign journalists were allowed to report rather openly in Urumqi, we do see a real potential for change, but there are still these trouble spots and continued problems. As the Chinese rules have more aligned with international reporting standards, harassment and intimidation may be going underground. By that, I mean the pressure is falling more often on vulnerable Chinese sources and staff.

Now, in recent months we have encountered a new couple of trouble areas. At the beginning of the year, registered Chinese staff of foreign news bureaus in Beijing were called in for formal meetings and training, and potentially were lectured by officials, who threatened them with revocation of their accreditation, possibly losing their jobs. The new rules that were issued at that time urged the news assistants to promote positive news stories about China within their organizations. Additionally, they were instructed that it was illegal for them to conduct independent reporting activities.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club believes that this new code of conduct discriminates against Chinese news assistants. Foreign

companies in other industries can freely hire PRC citizens as full-fledged employees. In addition, the code is a business restriction that places foreign media at a competitive disadvantage. Chinese journalists in most developed nations can hire local staff without these kinds of restrictions. In China, foreign media are obliged to hire staff through the government's Personnel Services Corporation, which then directs their activities and holds regular meetings with the assistants, I believe, to talk about how they conduct their business.

Now, another troubling development comes in the financial news sector. There is an area of tension that may stem from foreign financial news services competition with China's home-grown financial news wires. While political news is generally considered more sensitive, financial news is coming under greater scrutiny. Most financial indicators are widely circulated before being officially released.

In the past, the leaked figures would often find their way into Chinese and foreign media, but foreign media organizations have now come under pressure, including an implicit threat to be investigated under the state secrets law, for publishing data that hasn't been officially released.

The tightening of these restrictions dates from the fall of last year and the global financial crisis. At that point, Chinese economists were urged to conform to the mainstream view on the economy and speak less to the media. Controls over publishing-leaked information were also tightened. This is a situation we're watching closely because we're not quite sure what direction it's headed in, but there is definitely an increased pressure on foreign financial news wires operating in China.

I will conclude my remarks now. So as you can see, we have made a lot of gains in recent years and we still face some critical issues, namely, trying to maintain the safety of Chinese sources and staff while doing our job, and also pressure over information that might present competition to Chinese media, as well as the ongoing interference and harassment of the kind we've seen for a number of years.

Thanks. I look forward to your discussion.

Mr. GROB. Thank you very much, Kathleen.

I'd like now to turn the floor over to Professor Esarey.

[The prepared statement of Ms. McLaughlin appears in the appendix.]

STATEMENT OF ASHLEY ESAREY, VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF POLITICS, WHITMAN COLLEGE

Mr. ESAREY. Thanks very much for inviting me. It's a great pleasure to be here. Doug, thanks for moderating this panel; Lawrence, thanks for making everything happen.

My remarks are going to be directed toward Chinese journalism, which is the subject of my research. The first thing I think you should know is that Chinese governments have been controlling political information of a wide variety of sorts for at least 1,000 years. So we're not talking about a new phenomenon, we're talking about new ways to control information in China. The primary way that you can control information in this modern age is by controlling the

mass media, by controlling the Internet, cell phone text messages, and so on.

The Chinese Government now faces a dilemma. The Chinese Communist Party wants to modernize the country. It wants to develop. In order to do so it has to allow some freedom of information. However, by allowing freedom of information it risks empowering critics; it risks giving activists a chance to use blogs to launch social movements. In short, the Party risks its unchallenged hegemony on political power. That's what is at stake.

We also know, based on social science scholarship, that if you allow media openness, it is likely to empower social organizations, whether they are legal or illegal, and it's often conducive to democratization. These are both things the Communist Party is fighting very hard to stop.

A little bit of history: At the founding of the People's Republic on October 1, 1949, the Chinese Communist Party made a marked departure from all other Chinese governments in the past in that it sought to control all political information in its society. It sought a totalitarian model in which the Party controlled the education system. Media organizations were controlled. The Communist Party nationalized all foreign and privately owned media; all so-called imperialist and antirevolutionary/counterrevolutionary literature was seized by the police and the postal service—what a scholar named Peter Kenez has called the propaganda state was largely established by about 1956.

There have been some exceptions in terms of the ways in which information and the media have been controlled. The 100 Flowers Campaign and the Cultural Revolution are two exceptions, but by and large the Party's ability to dominate the media and political information have allowed it to get the public to support its plan to radically change the Chinese into a Socialist society.

Now, fast-forward to the death of Mao in 1976. Reformers, led by Deng Xiaoping, were able to emerge and they were very concerned about the media because, during the Cultural Revolution, a very tumultuous period, media had been shut down; the Party lost control of media, and media had become boring. Deng and others believed that media could be commercialized and propaganda could be repackaged to make it more attractive; ultimately, the media commercialized sufficiently so that they could be largely self-supporting. As the Party media commercialized, its incentives began to change.

Commercialization of the Chinese press has led to a couple of noteworthy developments. Although when we consider liberalization in the Chinese media over the last 30 years, we're not going to be talking about journalists challenging President Hu Jintao about his policies or the nation's policies toward Xinjiang. That sort of thing does not occur in the Chinese press. Chinese leaders are never criticized by name. With commercialization, however, media now care about the public and they want to please consumers. That means that while they must serve the Party and state organizations that control them, they're also interested in investigative journalism when they can make it happen. There have been interesting examples of that. I'll just cite a couple.

One was reporting in 2003 about the murder of a graphic artist, Sun Zhigang, in a detention center in Guangzhou. This then led to a major change in national policy vis-a-vis migrant workers. In 2007, there was a story done by Hunan Dianshi, Hunan television, that led to the release of people being held in slavery, as many as 600 people who were held in slavery in brick kilns in Shanxi Province.

The most interesting example of media freedom, if you will, in China, occurred after the Sichuan earthquake last May, when the Communist Party Propaganda Department that guides media content ordered media—local media, provincial media, municipal media all around the country—not to go to the disaster area and report on location. These orders were widely defied and media went and reported on this very important news. That, I think, many scholars saw as a breakthrough, because it was the first time that we had seen widespread noncompliance with bans for politically sensitive media coverage since, perhaps, the Tiananmen demonstrations in 1989.

Windows of freedom have opened for Chinese media, but they do not last long. They're often closed by the Communist Party's Propaganda Department, when it's able to do so, or when the government is able to portray its efforts as having effectively dealt with the problem.

What about the Internet? How is that affecting things now? Well, the Internet, as many of you know—I see there are a lot of younger people here today—has lots of applications and China is following the United States and other advanced countries very rapidly in terms of its adoption of all sorts of applications for using the Internet. Blogs are extremely popular. There are 300 million Chinese Internet users. This is an old statistic. It's a statistic from January of this year. I say "old" because the number of Internet users increases so rapidly that statistics are quickly out of date.

China has 300 million Internet users and 160 million bloggers. That is a tremendous amount of bloggers. And these bloggers are writing in ways that are totally different from the mass media. They advocate democracy and political reform, freedom of speech, and all sorts of other concepts that you just can't see in the mass media. We've got good quantitative data to demonstrate this.

These new media have been used by members of the middle class in cities like Shanghai and Xiamen to organize protests. Often cell phones are used to circulate messages very rapidly. There are 650 million cell phone users in China. That is, again, a statistic from December of last year.

So, Chinese use cell phones to access the Internet, messages are circulated, and demonstrations can be organized. The Chinese Government has maintained that ethno-nationalists in Tibet, and certainly Xinjiang, have used this new media to a very deadly effect. That has been the sort of critique of new media power that we have seen by the central government mouthpiece, Xinhua News Service.

My argument at the outset was that the Chinese Communist Party has a dilemma, and the dilemma is: it must allow information freedom if it wants to develop, yet if it allows information freedom it risks losing power. I think the sorts of measures that Kathleen was talking about—new ways to keep foreign journalists

from being very active, new ways of harassing assistants who work for foreign journalists—these measures indicate that the old measures for information control aren't working; they show us that the state believes that new measures are necessary.

For the Internet, one of these new measures has been the Green Dam software that the government tried to get installed on all personal computers sold inside China. There was push-back from the U.S. Government and, more quietly, from the business community, but the largest push-back, at least public push-back, came from Chinese Internet users themselves who felt that this software represented an invasion of privacy, and the government did suspend its attempt to impose this software on all machines sold in China.

In China, we are seeing what David Shambaugh has argued is a daily battle waged between state and society over what is fit to know. Commercialization has changed the incentives of the media. They must now please consumers to survive. Media that were once the mouthpieces of Mao Zedong's government now perform their propaganda role unwillingly. Commercial media would like to compete with blogs and social networking sites for the attention of the public, however, party restrictions bar the media from doing this and sometimes this leaves journalists as uncomfortable as a cat in a bag.

Ultimately, tight control over media content, in the context of Internet freedom, contributes to disbelief, even cynicism, toward state propaganda. The Chinese Communist Party may control the messages in media reports, but this no longer means the public believes the message.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Esarey appears in the appendix.]

Mr. GROB. Thank you, Ashley, for your remarks. I'd like to thank all of our panelists for some very illuminating and stimulating comments.

I'd like now to open the floor to questions from the audience. If you have a question, please, if you would, raise your hand, wait to be recognized, and wait a moment for the microphone to come to you, or feel free to come to the microphone.

I'll repeat that we are creating a transcript of this event, which will be posted on our Web site, so, for that reason, I'd like to ask that, if you do have a question, to identify yourself. If you do not wish to identify yourself and wish to be identified in the transcript only as "audience participant," that's fine. Just indicate that you do not wish to identify yourself and we will respect that desire.

With that, questions, please? Yes, sir.

Mr. WIDES. Thank you. I'm Burt Wides. Until January, I was, for many years, a congressional staffer. Now I'm a private citizen. A question basically for Kathleen and Jocelyn. You've talked about a lot of modernizing. I've seen a lot of articles about protests about houses being seized, democracy protesters, lawyers. But the big lacuna is stories about Falun Gong in the U.S. media.

Jocelyn mentioned that interviewers of the Falun Gong were blacklisted or the interviewees were arrested. Well, we know that many Falun Gong gravely risk both arrest and torture to protest, so the fault must be on the U.S. media side. When there are occasional stories, they seem compelled to give equal time or treat

equally the Chinese propaganda, which is contrary to what the United Nations, the United States, all the human rights groups have said.

So my question is: why isn't U.S. headquarters, the bureau, the individual journalist, concerned? Does blacklisting mean they would be kicked out of the country? What is the reason for that, in your view, and what can be done about it?

Mr. GROB. Thank you.

Ms. MCLAUGHLIN. I can't speak from personal experience on that because I haven't covered Falun Gong myself. I also don't know of any reporters who have been thrown out of China for writing about it. There certainly is pressure on it. I have heard of cases of journalists being called in by the Foreign Ministry after writing about Falun Gong, but I can't really answer why these reporters would approach the story the way they do. I think it's an individual basis and it's probably their own news judgment. Jocelyn may have more personal experience with it, so I'll turn it over to you.

Ms. FORD. I have not covered any stories directly. I have discussed this with some journalist colleagues, and all I can say is that I think there are a lot of editorial-room decisions or individual decisions by journalists. In the past there have been journalists who were evicted from China. I believe the most recent case, though, was around 1999. Since I arrived in China in 2001, I am not aware of any journalists who have been kicked out.

However, the government does put pressure on media groups by withholding or delaying visas. Of course, this can be difficult to pin down. But I am aware of journalists who were told by the Foreign Ministry their visa was being delayed because the Chinese Government was unhappy someone in their organization had interviewed the Dalai Lama or then-president of Taiwan Chen Shui-Bian. I don't think this is a new form of pressure.

Mr. WIDES. Do you think print or TV organizations have reached agreements with Beijing——

Ms. FORD. I don't think so, personally. I have seen no evidence of that.

Mr. GROB. Okay.

Ms. FORD. As some of you may know, petitioning is quite common. In China, if somebody has a grievance, and the Chinese court does not solve it for them, often they will call journalists and petition or harass the journalist, expecting the journalist to help deliver justice. People who behave in this way often do not get coverage. This is based on conversations with other journalists. I have not received this kind of harassment myself.

Mr. GUERRA. Good afternoon. Thank you for convening this event. My name is Robert Guerra. I'm the project director at Freedom House's Internet Freedom Project, and for the last, about, year and a half we've been covering the issues of Internet freedom, and to do a report on China, have been following very closely both the issues related to the Internet in China, but also trying to find ways to get first-hand reports of what Internet policy is like in China and trying to have people there participate more effectively. It's good to hear that bloggers and the use of the Internet are increasing. Recent conversations and dialogues with people in China really

show that that's really a medium that's really being used to bypass a lot of the blockages, both technological, to get news across.

I have, kind of, probably two parts of questions. There seem to be organizations that cover traditional media, but I'm curious if there's anything that includes kind of the new media and if there is anything that bloggers' organizations or news organizations are trying to maybe help their Chinese blogging colleagues somehow, because just as it said that bloggers might present a new window, there are reports over the last week or so that a lot of the bloggers and other Internet activists who were involved in the Green Dam push-back are now being visited, are maybe having computers seized, and whether that's a result of that or other repression that's been taking place over the last two weeks with other lawyers being arrested, kind of gets me to the question, well, what can be done and how can the traditional media maybe work with this newer media, given that in Chinese it's the space that there is a window of possible openness, but also, as some other colleagues say, that if there are things that develop in China to control it, that might then move itself to other parts of the world. So, China might set a standard or might set—so I'm just curious what your thoughts are. I would have thought to hear a little bit more about the Internet, but then again, I follow it closely, so that's maybe more of a passion. So I'm curious. And again, thank you for convening this event.

Mr. GROB. Thank you.

Any takers?

Mr. ESAREY. Sure. I'm a scholar, so when you ask, are there organizations, the first thing that comes to mind are scholarly organizations. This may be of little help to you, but there's an organization called the Conference for Internet Research in China and they have annual conferences and they follow Internet developments very quickly, pretty well, and they have some things. But you're looking for organizations of bloggers in China. They have begun working together both inside and outside China. The blog is a distinctive personal medium and it's one that allows a lot of inter-linkages to other blogs and other Web sites that a blogger wants to affiliate him or herself with.

So you do sort of see these organic communities emerging. For example, there's a blogger named Ai Weiwei, who has been trying to document the number of children who died in Sichuan as a result of faulty construction of schools. He has encountered all sorts of difficulties from the government. His blog postings have been erased, his blogs have been shut down, he's been harassed, he's monitored, his volunteers are harassed. So, you do have that sort of a thing, but other bloggers follow his activities and say, wow, that's interesting, and sometimes link to his blog and give his blogging significance through the larger inter-linkages on the Internet.

But the main difference between a blogger and, say, a journalist in China is that journalists are dependent upon their activities to pay the rent, pay their mortgages, send their children to school. They can be fired if they don't do what their bosses or the Communist Party Propaganda Department wants them to do. Bloggers

aren't like that. They don't depend on their blogs for any source of personal income, so they have a lot more freedom.

They don't get instructions from the Propaganda Department about what they can say and what they can't say. They may look online to see what other bloggers are writing by doing some searches, but they are much more free. They're just qualitatively vastly freer in the way that they express themselves. And they privately own their medium. So there may be a way to work with bloggers or to help them, but it's unclear how international organizations could maybe work with bloggers in ways that don't lead them to receive more scrutiny and more harassment and result in the more rapid shut down of their sites.

Mr. GROB. Jocelyn?

Ms. FORD. I'll just add to that. Are you familiar with [deleted]? Okay. So he has an annual blogging conference that you're probably familiar with.

Mr. GUERRA. That's the one to which I was referring.

Ms. FORD. Okay.

Mr. GUERRA. Unless you mean the one in China that he's held at Hangzhou and other places in the past.

Ms. FORD. Yes. Yes. That's the same.

Mr. GUERRA. I think he's one of many sponsors.

Ms. FORD. Right. He's one of the organizers of that.

Ms. MCLAUGHLIN. From the foreign media perspective, I can tell you that the Chinese Government Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not yet approved any journalist accreditations for online media, and I know there have been some applications. So it's a new world for them from that aspect as well. No one has told me the reason on the record for that, but I'll just tell you that they're not accrediting any online-only media at this point.

Mr. GROB. Yes, sir?

Mr. GIBSON. Jeff Gibson, Georgetown University. I have two questions for our distinguished practitioners and scholars, one political, one demographic. The demographic. You all mentioned that China has more than 300 million-plus Internet users and close to 700 million cellular phone users, our panelists told us. Looking 10, 20 years down the line, what do you think the implications of that connectivity, that's more than three times the U.S. population, is?

There was an interesting article in, I think it was Global Times a couple of months ago called "The Alternative Cyber-Universe," and it talked about how Tudou and other Chinese Internet sites may not even be known by the majority of Americans, but have more users than like a Facebook or a Twitter. So that's my demographic question.

The political one is: have you all seen an increasing sophistication in state media messaging? I'm curious, looking back at the Sichuan earthquake, last winter's cold snap, the Tibetan riots, and most recently the Xinjiang riots. Thank you.

Mr. GROB. Thank you.

Ms. FORD. Sophistication? Absolutely. Ogilvy and Xinhua have opened an education program to help teach the government how to spin in a more sophisticated way. When I worked for China state radio in 2001, the policy was to promote "happy" news, or positive feel-good stories. These would account for at least 80 percent of the

stories. I think we've seen a shift in that. I believe the government propaganda strategists think if they allow enough negative news through, the positive news will enjoy greater credibility. That's my own interpretation. I have not confirmed this with policymakers.

I think China's news business is becoming increasingly sophisticated in this way. I don't know if any of you are familiar with the new English-language publication, the Global Times, which is published under the People's Daily umbrella. They are moving much closer toward Western-style journalism than the China Daily, the English-language daily based in Beijing. The editors say their goal is to be a watchdog, to the extent possible. I've been impressed that they seek to provide balance and to fill in the holes in news stories. They will report when officials decline to reply. They are reporting more diverse views, and views that oppose some government policies. Some stories, however, do not meet the same standards, and may serve propaganda purposes.

Mr. ESAREY. Yes. I'd just like to say something in regard to Mr. Gibson's first question about demographics, which I think is really a political question: how are the demographics that we're seeing now in terms of Internet use and cell phone use going to play out down the line when the trajectory of usership continues to climb? In maybe 5 or 10 years, almost every Chinese will have a cell phone. Instead of 20 percent of the population being online, we'll see 40 percent, or 50 percent, or 60 percent. How is that going to change things? Nobody has good answers to this question.

I think I would make two observations, because no one can predict the future, right? At least not very reliably most of the time. My observations are that if you've got a lot of freedom on the Internet, despite blockages on sites and harassment of bloggers and so forth, bloggers are still very free, compared to a tightly controlled traditional media—newspapers, magazines, television stations, and so forth. People are going to tune out official media sources. They're going to tune them out and they're going to go to the Internet for what they consider to be the unvarnished truth, or at the very least, for information that's unmediated by the state.

If the traditional media does not respond by liberalizing its content, it's going to lose market share. Believe me, they don't want that. So I think you'll see more push-back from journalists who want to report the kind of news Chinese consumers would like to see.

Mr. GROB. Let me jump in and ask a point of clarification, drawing on Jocelyn's point about liberalization on the one hand, and sophisticated creation of the illusion of liberalization, on the other. Do you have any thoughts on what might trigger one versus the other?

Mr. ESAREY. Oh, I think the regime has been trying to create sophisticated illusions of freedom for a long time, really since the founding of the country. Making media interesting has been a priority since the early 1950s. It has just been very difficult to achieve with party committees controlling all the media. But some Chinese journalists have said the investigative journalism that we're seeing is really like opium. One Chinese journalist used this expression, "it's opium," because investigative journalism makes people believe

that there is freedom, when in fact there isn't very much in the media today.

Mr. GROB. Yes, sir? Just as a reminder, since time is running short, if I could ask you to keep your questions to one question, and to make sure it is a question and not a comment. Thank you.

Mr. AUSBUCK. My name is Dave Ausbuck. I don't know if this is related, but I thought it was, so I'd ask it. Next year, the Chinese are hosting a major World's Fair exhibition in Shanghai. The theme is "Better Cities, Better Life." So I guess the question I have for you is, have you detected any sense of they're going to allow—if you know what a World's Fair is, it's all the countries, and even the nongovernmental organizations, even religions, come by and have pavilions and are free to put out their own content. This seems to me the first time I've ever heard about a World's Fair being hosted in a non-democratic, authoritarian country.

The question I have: do you know of any plans to censor? Most exhibits there are in the form of videos about these countries. They're celebrating cities which are traditionally known for more freedom of expression and diversity and tolerance.

So do you know of any plans to censor the exhibits there and the expression there at the expo that you know of, or have you detected any sense that they will be more tolerant of freedom of expression there at the World's Fair next year?

Mr. GROB. Thank you. That's an excellent question. Maybe, Kathleen? Thank you.

Ms. MCLAUGHLIN. I don't have a great answer for you because I haven't heard about any—it's a great question. It wouldn't surprise me if there were some censorship because there was during the Olympics last year, as you know. Messages about Tibet, Tibetan flags, things of that nature were barred from the Olympics, so it wouldn't surprise me if the same sort of thing happened. But I haven't heard of it as yet. So, something to watch out for.

Mr. LIU. Let me just ask as a followup to that question, because you raised this very interesting notion of the significance or the distinction in media coverage in cities versus in less urban areas and the notion that a city is—in some sense it's of necessity, in some sense by design—more diverse, more tolerant.

To what extent have our practitioners seen any noticeable or detectable difference along the urban-rural divide in the coverage of stories in China or how the media operate, or the rules that apply, or the Party and the government's approach toward journalists along spatial lines, specifically urban and rural?

Ms. MCLAUGHLIN. I can just speak from my own experience on that. It is oftentimes easier to report in rural areas because people tend to be economically less well off and therefore have less to lose, so they will be more honest with you. However, the flip-side is, local officials and local governments tend to be more restrictive, maybe not as aware of the new regulations, so there's a little bit of a dichotomy there. People would be more open, but at the same time local officials might be more closed. That's just my own personal experience.

Ms. FORD. My experience in talking with Chinese colleagues is that, yes, it's much easier to push the envelope in urban areas than in rural areas. Maybe some of you have lived in China. I often feel

like I'm time traveling when I leave Beijing and get off the beaten track. I feel like I am going back 5 or 10 years. The government mentality often, as Kathleen said, is from a different era. But recently I've become more optimistic. I mentioned the example from Inner Mongolia. I was very surprised that, in a tiny town, a local court official was parroting something about media freedom. "Wow!" I thought, "This is progress." At least he knows the terminology. Thanks.

Mr. GROB. Yes, ma'am?

Ms. EARP. Madeleine Earp, Committee to Protect Journalists. My question for the panel is: What advice would you give, or do you give, to foreign journalists who are navigating this new environment of soft harassment that you mentioned? Should they continue to approach sources and news assistants if there's the potential for there to be retribution from officials afterward? Thank you.

Ms. FORD. The question was for pressure on assistants specifically, or in general?

Ms. EARP. Assistants and sources.

Ms. FORD. Assistants and sources. Okay. It's very important that journalists understand the risks and are able to read the tea leaves because regulations and laws are spottily enforced. I feel strongly that reporters should not assume the source is aware of the various risks. Correspondents should evaluate the risk and make sure their sources are willing to shoulder them. Of course, journalists also may not be aware of the risks.

I was fortunate to be able to hire an assistant who not only was extremely savvy about risks, but also had a relative who was in a position to help her out should we run into trouble. I felt more comfortable when I was going into risky territory because I didn't need to worry about her so much. But you can't always have that.

I think it's very important that correspondents discuss the risks with assistants and evaluate what the assistants are willing to do. I want to be clear there are many stories that aren't sensitive.

It is also important to discuss communications. I assume that all phone calls could be intercepted and listened to. It doesn't mean the authorities are listening to every phone call, but if I am calling a sensitive source I assume that the source's phone is being listened to and therefore I will be followed and watched after I have contact with that person. The FCCC actually has some guides online and we've printed wallet cards about what to do, how to protect yourself and how to protect your sources.

A lot of people forget that managing communications carefully is extremely important. Sources have been arrested, detained, or questioned because of what was said on a telephone.

Mr. GROB. Let me just ask a followup to some of the things you just said that also go back to the prior question. That is, displaying my own ignorance here, just to put China in perspective internationally, what do we know about other authoritarian states—do some have a less heavy-handed approach toward the media? Can we get some broader, either historical or global context here, and how do we place China along a spectrum in that regard?

Ms. FORD. I'm sure the Committee to Protect Journalists is in a better position to address that, but let me take a stab. I often open talks by saying that though correspondents in China face many ob-

stacles, it is a lot safer to report in China, for example, than, say, in the Philippines. Most foreign correspondents, I believe, assume the worst that will happen is they could get kicked out of the country. The greater danger, of course, is for our sources. But the reporters in China—again, other people have the statistics—may be more likely to be jailed than in many countries. I think it's important to keep this in perspective.

Having said that, though our lives are not as much at risk as journalists in other countries like the Philippines and Iraq, we all want you to pay attention to the issues we're concerned about.

Mr. GROB. Yes?

Ms. VANDENBRINK. Rachel Vandenbrink, Radio Free Asia. Could you please perhaps explain why reporters haven't been able to get access to interview Uyghurs in order to get an accurate casualty count in the recent protests? Also, how did the blocking of Internet and phone access to Xinjiang affect the reporting environment for foreign reporters?

Ms. MCLAUGHLIN. I can try and take that. You're talking about a casualty count in Urumqi, correct? I wasn't in Urumqi. I can't tell you who was or wasn't interviewed. I assume that, you know, just a random sort of Uyghur that you could interview on the street wouldn't be able to give you a verifiable, confirmed casualty number. So I think you're relying on official statistics there. That's my best guess.

And what was your second question? I'm sorry.

Ms. VANDENBRINK. About the blocking of Internet access and telephone access.

Ms. MCLAUGHLIN. Right. So Internet access was cut completely, is my understanding. Telephone access was very spotty. What the local government did for foreign journalists was set up a media center and gave them Internet access, so that's how they were able to access it there. A lot of people were filing via satellite phones, which I believe are not technically legal. Is that right?

Ms. FORD. That's my understanding.

Ms. MCLAUGHLIN. Right. But they were allowing the foreign journalists to use satellite phones, so there was a lot of that going on. I can tell you my own experience reporting in Shaoguan, the toy factory murder site. It wasn't possible to interview Uyghurs because they were completely restricted from access. We couldn't talk to them. The interview requests were denied. They were not out walking on the streets. We couldn't ask them how many people were killed in the toy factory because they just weren't there. I think the situation is a lot different in Urumqi proper because it would be difficult to get one single person who could give you a verified casualty count.

Mr. GROB. Jocelyn?

Ms. FORD. Perhaps a clarification. I think international phone calls were blocked, but local——

Ms. MCLAUGHLIN. Local phone calls were spotty.

Ms. FORD. Okay. Spotty. But international—some people were sending the message off to somebody else who did have Internet connection and would post something online. So, there was sort of a relay.

Mr. LIU. I just want to follow up with another question about the role that the U.S. Government may, or may not be able to play in terms of supporting the ability of foreign journalists in China to report freely. When there have been restrictions in the past, the U.S. Government has at times made statements in support of allowing journalists unfettered access to certain areas that had been closed off. Have you found those statements to be at all helpful? If you have any suggestions as far as what role the U.S. Government can play, that would be helpful, bearing in mind that we also, I imagine, do not want to be seen as interfering as well in terms of the sort of separation between the state and the press. Yes?

Ms. FORD. Thank you for that question. I'm sorry. I have been on vacation so I haven't been paying so much attention to the news. But I regard the open comment period on the state secret regulation as a very positive move. I don't know if the U.S. Government made a comment. But I think encouraging open comments on regulations regarding media and then actually participating in the process and encouraging an opening up of the process is very positive.

China ratified the U.N. Covenant on Civil and Political Rights but did not pass it. I just want to say, if there's one thing you walk out of here with, it's this: as long as Chinese citizens are not free to talk to foreign correspondents, we are not free to report.

So I think the issue really is, how can we encourage a situation where Chinese citizens are free to speak to us without retribution. Ratification—again, not everything is implemented perfectly, but ratification—encouraging ratification of international agreements, I think, is a positive step. At least it gives us more to fight with.

When I created the wallet card outlining legal rights of foreign correspondents in China, I sought advice from a number of lawyers. We're not always aware of changing laws, and we don't try to use them. To the best of my knowledge no foreign correspondent has ever sought to sue government authorities for rights violations, or for compensation for injuries suffered at the hands of authorities who tried to stop legal reporting activities. Regardless of whether the journalist is likely to win such a case, a lawsuit would generate a headline, and draw attention to illegal actions on the part of authorities.

I do think the U.S. Government could engage in more dialogue with China on how to balance national security interests and freedom of information. The FCCC is seeking to promote a gold standard for international reporting conditions. All we can do is express our views and hope that the Chinese Government takes them into consideration and looks for the best international practices.

So, I think any sort of exchange on these issues, especially protection of sources, would be worthwhile. About 130 countries around the world have some sort of protection, legal or otherwise, for news sources. You cannot have a free media without protection of sources. So, I think encouraging this kind of dialogue with China would be useful. Any activities that promote the view that the free flow of information can help solve social problems, such as unrest, would be worthwhile. It's important to reiterate the view that nations that respect and protect the free flow of information are more likely to enjoy wide international respect.

Mr. GROB. On that note, if you had the ability to recommend a single coordinated message that Members of the Congress and administration officials could deliver regarding press freedom to Chinese officials, say, during visits to China, whether it be to officials at the central level or at the local level, what would be the one-sentence message that they could deliver that you think would be most important, most effective? And I'm talking about both in public and private conversations, that would be most important or most effective in terms of advancing press freedom and media freedom in China. Anybody?

Ms. FORD. You're challenging. If I could do a one-sentence message I'd probably be working for a PR firm and be making a lot of money. I usually get 40 seconds on the radio, so can I do 40 seconds? In all seriousness, I think encouraging the idea that diversity of views, tolerance of different views, and discussion of different views is a way to solve problems. It is not what creates the problems.

In China we often hear the argument that open discussion leads to social unrest, hence the controls. I think it would be useful to promote case studies from other countries where dialogue with an ethnic group that felt it was being unfairly treated helped reduce tensions. Does that help answer your question?

Mr. GROB. Yes. Thank you.

Ms. FORD. So I can get that PR job? This is on the record. I should be careful, huh?

Mr. ESAREY. I have a one-sentence comment. That is improve journalistic professionalism. I mean, by supporting the training of Chinese journalists and inviting them to come to the United States to work in the U.S. media organizations and learn about our values concerning the news and strategies for reporting the news; improving journalistic professionalism could also occur through better training for the U.S. journalists who go to China. This goes back to Madeleine Earp's question, which is, how do you avoid this reliance on assistants?

Well, one way is to really bone up on your Chinese language ability to read and speak fluently enough to do a lot of your own reporting. I think probably half, if not more, of the foreign journalists working in China are not truly fluent in Chinese. That's something that could be improved with more training, more journalistic professionalism of a different sort, I suppose.

Ms. FORD. May I comment? There is often a division of labor between assistants and foreign correspondents. I don't have an assistant now. When I worked with an assistant, we analyzed every situation and discussed whether an individual or organization was more likely to open up to a foreigner or more likely to open up to a Chinese national. The language issue is not the only consideration here. Sometimes, it is safer for the source to speak to a Chinese. Being seen with a foreigner would be more risky. Some Chinese feel more comfortable speaking to foreigners about sensitive issues. I agree training is important, but training should include how to deal with delicate situations, and how to make prudent decisions when there are no clear rules, because, of course, rule of law is not implemented to the degree that one would like.

Ms. MCLAUGHLIN. While we are concerned about harassment of assistants, really the other core issue is harassment of sources. That is happening where the correspondent is completely fluent in Chinese. Maybe he's even ethnically Chinese. You have sources being harassed and suffering repercussions for talking to foreign journalists, and that just shouldn't happen.

Ms. FORD. Sorry. May I add one more thing. In fact, foreign journalists of Chinese descent often face very different pressures from foreign journalists who look like me—and since the audio is being recorded: I don't look Asian. So I think that one needs to have a very broad understanding of how to get information safely and all the tactics go into the toolbox. Reporters need to be prudent in choosing a strategy. Of course, the ideal situation would be to have laws fully enforced and the new regulations for foreign journalists and the constitutional right to freedom of speech upheld. If this were to happen, I think a lot would be solved.

Mr. GROB. Questions? Yes, sir.

Mr. MARTIN. I'll try to speak up. Michael Martin from the Congressional Research Service. Ashley, earlier you mentioned about the cynicism of the public in China toward the state-run media. There is a growing non-state run media in China. Caijing magazine recently featured in the New Yorker, for example, is one source. Then, also, you have the Western media that is also operating inside China. There are some indications that cynicism is bleeding over to the private and to the Western media—for example, the anti-CNN Web page which is out there—and critiquing Western coverage of events in China. I was wondering if the panelists would like to comment on cynicism and the view inside China toward media in general, and how much they discriminate against state-run, the domestic private, and then the Western media sources. Thank you.

Mr. GROB. Wow. We have six minutes left and that could be another panel. But Ashley?

Mr. ESAREY. Sure. Michael, thanks very much for your question. Caijing is an excellent magazine. It's technically registered with a state organization, although it has shareholders and it operates like a private corporation. Its reporting is definitely fueled by the motivation to make a profit. But I think the keys to its success have been excellent political savvy, tremendous management, and paying journalists good salaries, as opposed to the more common practice of rewarding only the reporting that is politically acceptable.

The anti-CNN situation is pretty complex. There is a lot of information available about the people who are involved in this movement, if you can call it that. Some of them have now rejected the movement and left it. There is definitely some dissension among the people who are involved.

Does that reflect a sort of cynicism? I think anti-CNN is more related to the manifestation of nationalism on the Chinese Internet today. The anti-CNN thing was about Jack Cafferty, a commentator for CNN, who made a deprecating remark about the quality of Chinese leaders. The Chinese state actually kicked into gear its Party operators. They're called the 50-Cent Party, *wumao dang*. These people posted nationalistic comments attacking CNN on lots

of Web portals, according to research by David Bandursky in Hong Kong. So I think the anti-CNN situation is complex.

As far as the mainstream media goes, Party media will lose circulation unless it commercializes and caters to nationalist tastes. Often within media groups you have Party media that are broadcasting more propaganda and commercialized media that are trying to raise revenue through reports that please consumers in various ways.

Ms. FORD. A quick question and a comment. I do believe the anti-Western media campaign has had a tremendous and long-lasting effect. I often hear from Chinese now that foreign reports are not so credible. Before, Western media was the golden city on the hill and some Chinese thought they could believe everything that appeared in overseas media, which is probably not quite accurate either. It wasn't just one mistake that led to this distrust of Western media on certain issues.

I think the message many Chinese took home was that the foreign media is against China. I don't think that was the reason most of the mistakes were made, but foreign media did little to explain or provide context.

There should've been more reports analyzing why the mistakes were made. Having worked as a foreign correspondent and having fought against stereotypes held by my U.S.-based editors regarding countries I've reported from, I can say China is not the only country that suffers from inaccurate reporting. Yes, the media also needs a watchdog, or an ombudsman. Nobody is perfect in the world. Inaccurate reporting is not exclusively a China problem. There was also little mention at the time that reporting is likely to be more accurate if reporters have access to news sites, and sources are free to talk without intimidation or fear of reprisal. The accuracy of reporting would also be helped if China stopped manipulating its media for propaganda purposes.

Mr. GROB. Thank you.

Any more questions? [No response].

Mr. GROB. Well, let me just put this question to our panelists. Members of Congress and administration officials travel to China. They interact with the Chinese media, they interact with the foreign media while they are in China. I know that some Members and administration officials—for instance, Speaker Pelosi, Secretary Clinton—have even engaged in Web chats and other sorts of online activities during trips to China. What advice would you give to a Member of Congress or an administration official who is about to head to China for even just a short trip? What's the most important thing that they would need to keep in mind, that they might not ordinarily know about, regarding how to interact with the media in China, and how to prepare for their encounters with the media in China?

Ms. FORD. May I? I actually have an interesting anecdote about Speaker of the House Pelosi's visit. I received a call from a journalist in southern China who wanted to interview her. The journalist told me she thought she needed a connection to get the interview, and she thought I had connections at the embassy. I said, she could go talk to the embassy directly, that's the way America worked. Well, I don't know how true this is. But in America, at least the front

door should be open so they should try a front-on approach. I think outreach by American Senators and Members of Congress to local journalists would be very well received.

Again, recently the same person said she felt that there were fewer controls on what they could do as a local newspaper with international reporting. She really wanted to beef up her team and she was asking me how to do that. So, I think there are tremendous opportunities. I suggested she write an e-mail. By the time she sent the e-mail Pelosi's visit was almost over. She never got a response. So, I think if American delegations are open to all media, and not just the most famous outlets, they may find a lot of interest.

Mr. GROB. Thank you very much.

Kathleen, did you have something to add?

Ms. MCLAUGHLIN. I guess my advice would just be to be open and honest and don't censor yourself when you're in China. I'm not accusing anyone of having done that, but I think it's helpful if people speak out about what they believe in when they're there.

Mr. GROB. And for the last word, since it is 3:29 p.m.

Mr. ESAREY. I would just urge our elected representatives to recognize that their public remarks can very easily be misconstrued in a media that is subject to close scrutiny and tight political control. So try to be sure—I would urge them to try to be sure that the message they want to get across gets across and to actually read the Chinese press coverage that results from their visits, and complain if they feel like their remarks were not properly translated. Of course, the ideal scenario would be for our representatives to bring their own translators. That leaves a lot less room for things to kind of go sideways in terms of communication. But if they're trying to get information, I think the best way is informal interaction—dinners, the fun stuff.

Mr. GROB. Well, the fun stuff. On that note, we'll end this fun stuff. It's 3:30.

I thank you all very much for attending our roundtable today. I thank our panelists for some outstanding insights, and some wonderful, illustrative anecdotes, and some real concrete recommendations and thought-provoking ideas to take with us going forward.

I'd like to thank our Senior Counsel, Lawrence Liu, for putting this together, and our staff, for your logistical support.

With that, the ninth CECC roundtable of the 111th Congress is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 3:30 p.m. the roundtable was concluded.]

A P P E N D I X

PREPARED STATEMENTS

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KATHLEEN E. MCLAUGHLIN

JULY 31, 2009

Good afternoon. Thanks for inviting us to talk about this important issue. Jocelyn has taken you through where we've been as foreign correspondents in China, and I'd like to take you forward with the issues we continue to face. In particular, I want to make clear that we believe Chinese assistants and sources are coming under increasing pressure, a real roadblock to free and open reporting.

I also want to speak about the importance of free media for global economic issues and how China's information controls make it difficult for foreign correspondents to cover everything, including the economy.

TIANANMEN 20TH ANNIVERSARY: THE UMBRELLA MEN

On June 3 and 4 this year, Beijing's Tiananmen Square was filled with hundreds of people. Walking on to the square, it appeared that 80-90 percent of them were plainclothes army and police. Nearly all carried umbrellas, at first glance, to block them from the hot sun overhead.

As the hours wore on and foreign journalists appeared on the square to report about the 20th anniversary of the crushing of the Tiananmen democracy movement, it became clear that the hundreds of umbrellas served a dual purpose. They were used to physically block journalists and cameras from filming on the square. So, while from a distance, it appeared the square was full of tourists, up-close, it was clear that something else was going on.

I think this is a good example of the kind of "soft harassment" we've begun to see more of in recent months. It's less dangerous and less direct than what we saw in the past, but no less effective in preventing foreign correspondents from doing our jobs.

CONTINUING AND NEW HURDLES

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China is in the midst of a new member survey right now and the results we're getting are interesting. The results are not scientific, but give us an idea of what individual members face:

About half of members who've taken the survey so far think the reporting climate in China is improving, which is consistent with when we first started asking this question. Still, many are concerned about pressing issues. About two-thirds of them have had some kind of official interference in their work over the past year. More than two-thirds of those who work with a research assistant say their employee has been hassled or summoned for questioning by authorities. We've had several reports of sources facing repercussions.

PROBLEMS IN COVERING TIBET IN 2008

To give you an idea of how things might be changing, let's go back to Tibet in March of 2008. In the days following the Lhasa riots, foreign correspondents were shut out of Tibet. It's always been difficult for us to report in that region, given that entrance to Tibet requires a special permit. All foreigners are required to get a permit. Journalists are scrutinized more closely and often denied.

Last spring, foreign correspondents were repeatedly detained, harassed and sometimes forcibly prevented from doing their jobs across the Tibetan plateau. The FCCC logged more than 40 cases in which foreign correspondents were prevented from working. Outside of Tibet proper—the area that technically doesn't require special travel permits—foreign news crews were blocked and Chinese staff intimidated, and in at least one case, threatened with arrest.

So you can see, it's not just foreign correspondents being harassed, but also the Chinese nationals involved in our work—people for whom police action can have life-altering consequences. We seem to be witnessing a trend toward harassing and intimidating these people more—blocking them from talking to us, warning them against helping us. Soft harassment, for example, where a police officer inserts himself into an interview, making it clear there may be consequences for the interviewee, has become fairly routine.

In July of 2008, I was the first American journalist to travel independently to Lhasa, I was allowed to move freely throughout the city. If anyone was following or listening to me, I didn't see them. But the city was so full of police and military,

the main obstacle I had is that most residents—both Tibetan and Chinese—were too afraid to talk to me.

Access to Tibet and the region remains a problem to this day.

XINJIANG RIOTS AND COVERAGE

More than a year later, we faced something similar with the uprising in Xinjiang on July 5. As you know, nearly 200 people were killed when Uighur protests in the capital Urumqi turned violent. What we saw in the days after marked a dramatic departure from the government's closed-door policy toward foreign journalists in Tibet.

Journalists were immediately allowed into Urumqi, and by most accounts, given freedom to interview and move about. There were logistical problems, but the general climate marked a significant change.

We'd like to hope the government recognized the value in allowing foreign correspondents to report on the ground.

Covering Xinjiang was not without problems. While Urumqi was relatively open, the far western city of Kashgar was closed. Officials denied the closure, but we've heard from several journalists attempting to travel to there, who were intercepted and ordered to leave.

Also, 2,000 miles away in Shaoguan, site of the toy factory murders that sparked the Xinjiang riots, the local driver of one foreign reporting crew was called in for police questioning after the reporters left town.

Additionally, two correspondents received anonymous death threats after writing about the Xinjiang unrest.

Given the shift and the fact that foreign journalists were allowed to report rather openly in Urumqi, we do see real potential for change. But there are trouble spots and continued problems.

As the rules have more aligned with international reporting standards, harassment and intimidation may be "going underground. " The pressure seems more often directed at vulnerable Chinese sources and staff.

EMERGING ISSUES, PRESSURE ON CHINESE STAFF

And in recent months, we've encountered a few new trouble areas:

At the beginning of the year, registered Chinese staff of foreign news bureaus in Beijing were called in for official meetings and training. New rules were issued to the assistants about proper behavior, including urging them to "promote positive stories about China" within their organizations. They were instructed that it was illegal for them to conduct independent reporting.

We believe this new code of conduct discriminates against Chinese news assistants. Foreign companies in other industries can freely hire PRC citizens as full-fledged employees. In addition, the code is a business restriction that places foreign media at a competitive disadvantage. Chinese journalists in most developed nations can hire local staff without such restrictions. In China, foreign media are obliged to hire staff through the government's Personnel Services Corporation.

FINANCIAL NEWS SERVICES

Another troubling development is ongoing pressure on foreign financial news services—an area of tension that may stem from competition with China's homegrown financial news wires.

While political news is generally considered more sensitive, financial news is coming under greater scrutiny. Most financial indicators are widely circulated before being officially released. In the past, leaked figures would often find their way into Chinese and foreign media. But foreign media organizations have come under pressure—including an implicit threat to investigate under the state secrets laws—for publishing data not yet officially released.

The tightening of restrictions dates from the fall of 2008, and the global financial crisis. At that point, Chinese economists were urged to conform to the mainstream view on the economy and speak less to the media; controls over publishing leaked information were tightened.

CONCLUSION

So as you can see, while we've made significant gains, we still face critical issues: Namely Trying to maintain the safety of sources and Chinese staff, pressure over information that might present competition to Chinese media, and ongoing interference and harassment of the type we've seen for years.

Thanks and I look forward to your questions.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ASHLEY ESAREY

JULY 31, 2009

I am delighted that the Congressional Executive Commission on China has organized a panel to discuss how the news is reported in China by Chinese and American journalists.

China has a tradition of state censorship that goes back more than 1000 years. The current political regime, led by the Chinese Communist Party, has controlled political information far more effectively than any government in the country's history. Yet Beijing's rulers face a dilemma. On the one hand, freedom of information is invaluable for making business decisions in the global economy, technological transfers, and scholarly exchange. On the other hand, media freedom has facilitated democracy movements in countries such as Mexico, Hungary, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Czechoslovakia. Media freedom is good for China's economy and public welfare but likely to weaken the CCP's political hegemony, as journalists expose policy failures and political activists use the Internet to organize demonstrations. The CCP controls Chinese media because its primary objective is to remain in power. In the last three decades, however, media commercialization, the growth of journalistic professionalism, cell phone use, and the Internet have made information control more difficult than ever.

MAO-ERA MEDIA

Since the founding of the People's Republic on October 1, 1949, the CCP has sought to dominate all forms of political communication. The Central Propaganda Department of the Communist Party guided policies that placed media under party leadership, nationalized privately owned media, and divested foreign newspapers of the right to publish in China. Police, customs agents, and postal workers confiscated "imperialist" and "counter-revolutionary" literature.

In the early 1950s, the People's Daily newspaper emerged as the mouthpiece of the Communist Party Central Committee and bellwether for the views of Mao Zedong and other national leaders. Xinhua News Service assumed a central role in disseminating carefully vetted reports around the country. Media at central, provincial, and municipal levels became "mouthpieces" of the CCP. Working though the State Press and Publications Administration, the Central Propaganda Department orchestrated the closure of media that did not comply with party directives. By 1956, China had established what Peter Kenez has called a "propaganda state," with the country's entire media industry and education system firmly under party control. Mao's media proved to be effective tools for mobilizing the public in support of China's socialist transformation. While the stability of China's propaganda system was punctuated by events, such as the Hundred Flowers Campaign (1956–57), and the chaos of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), leaders with the upper hand in Chinese politics have tightly controlled media content and operations.

MEDIA COMMERCIALIZATION IN THE REFORM ERA

The death of Mao made possible the ascent of reformers, led by Deng Xiaoping. Far from an advocate of media freedom, Deng supported measures to commercialize the media industry so as to make it profitable and more attractive to consumers. The goal of commercialization was to revitalize media's propaganda role by repackaging the news. Party and state institutions retained power over commercial media by controlling ownership, personnel appointments, and cracking down on media that failed comply with content directives issued by central and local branches of the Propaganda Department. The result was a media system that combined the characteristics of Soviet-style media with Western media management strategies. My analysis of the newspaper content from 1980 to 2003 has shown that commercial media, in some cases, grew freer to criticize minor political problems, without jettisoning their propaganda role or challenging party leaders with substantial power to repress offending journalists.

Media commercialization during the Reform Era (1978–present) changed the incentives for media, which recognized that freer, less doctrinaire reporting appeals to the public. When opportunities appeared, greater media freedom has emerged, although local, rather than central, officials are the targets of critical news reports. In colloquial parlance, Chinese media "swat flies" but do not "hit tigers." Powerful political and economic interests can coerce or bribe media to abandon potentially embarrassing stories.

Nevertheless, studies by Chinese communications scholars have documented a new ethos of professionalism among Chinese journalists. Strict adherence to the party line does not always trump the public's right to know about a natural disaster

or the spread of a disease. Journalists who believe in their professional obligation to inform the public have found work in media, such as the Southern Metropolitan News, Southern Weekend, or Caijing Magazine. These media have encouraged reporters to push the limits of central government restrictions. Notable examples of investigative stories with a national impact have been reporting on the 2003 murder of graphic artist Sun Zhigang in a detention center for migrant workers, the 2007 exposure of slavery in brick kilns in Shanxi Province, and reports about the shoddy construction of school buildings that led to the deaths of thousands of children during the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. In the latter case, journalists from around China refused to comply with bans against going to Sichuan to report on location. Windows of freedom, so to speak, have been flung open and media have challenged the actions of local government before the Propaganda Department could regain control.

The government at all levels is concerned with public opinion and seeks to conceal interventions in news reporting. Those who reveal acts of censorship take great risks in doing so. With few exceptions, media respect government bans on reporting certain stories; journalists eschew politically sensitive reporting. Rife corruption among journalists and a salary scale that rewards reporters for politically correct reports contribute to self-censorship.[1] Nonetheless, a few journalists have succeeded in shedding light on isolated problems and acts of injustice; this has been done by reporting the news before the government issues a ban.

THE INTERNET AND MEDIA FREEDOM

The growing wealth of Chinese citizens has given hundreds of millions of people the means to acquire new information and communications technologies for personal use. At least 650 million Chinese use cellular telephones—and more than 100 million use cell phones to access the Internet. Three hundred million Chinese have gone online, a number equivalent to the population of the United States. There are now over 160 million bloggers in China, according to Chinese official statistics released early this year. Content analysis research has shown that political expression in Chinese blogs is much freer than mass media; debates among "netizens" (*wangmin*) pertain to a variety of politically sensitive issues. The number of blog sites that mention keywords, such as "democracy" and political reform" or "freedom of speech" and "the Internet" has increased exponentially over the last five years. The organizers of social movements by members of the middle class in Shanghai and Xiamen or the ethno-nationalists in Tibet and Xinjiang have utilized blogs, emails, instant messaging, and cell phone text messages to rally support for causes domestically and internationally. These actions have made the CCP fear the power of new media.

The Chinese Propaganda Department, the Ministry of Information Industry, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of State Security have been at the front line of governmental efforts to control the Internet through the promulgation of restrictive laws, the use of computerized filters to eliminate content, and monitoring by the police. While the government has supported e-commerce and e-government, it has also trained party operatives to post content in online spaces, with the goal of "guiding public opinion."

In June 2009, the central government announced a regulation requiring personal computer manufacturers to install software that restricts Web access on all computers sold in the People's Republic. Called "Green Dam Youth Escort," the software aimed to plug leaks that have spouted in the Great Firewall of China, the moniker for country's elaborate system of Internet controls. "Green Dam" was designed to censor pornography and politically sensitive content, but could also be used to collect data on individual Internet users.

Chinese media reported the software had been installed on more than 50 million machines. Complaints by Chinese users of the software, bloggers and Chinese media, however, were strident: The software, some argued, was a rushed job that had not been adequately tested and might make computers vulnerable to hackers; others expressed dismay about the invasion of privacy or worried they might have to pay user fees in the future. Pushback by the United States Commerce Department and the international business community may also have influenced the Ministry of Information Industry's June 30 decision to suspend mandatory installation of the software. At a July 1 celebration by activists who had opposed the software,

[1] Ashley Esarey, "Speak No Evil: Mass Media Control in Contemporary China", Freedom at Issue: A Special Freedom House Report, February 2006, http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special—report/33.pdf.

artist and blogger Ai Weiwei called the government's change of heart a "victory for public opinion."[2]

SUMMARY

In the words of David Shambaugh, "a daily battle is waged between the state and society over 'what is fit to know.' This contest reflects and constitutes a central contradiction in Chinese politics—between the needs of a rapidly modernizing economy and pluralizing society on the one hand and the desire by the party-state to maintain absolute political power on the other."[3] The outcome of this contest remains to be seen. In the near term, pressures are mounting for more information freedom. Chinese citizens, as resistance to Green Dam shows, have become more assertive in protecting the power they have gained from new communications technologies.

Commercialization in China's media industry has created the imperative for media to please consumers in order to survive. Media that were once the mouthpieces of Mao Zedong's government now perform their propaganda role unwillingly. Commercial mass media would like to compete with blogs and social networking sites for the attention of the public. Party restrictions bar media from doing so, leaving journalists feeling as uncomfortable as a cat in a bag. Tight control over media content, in the context of Internet freedom, contributes to disbelief, even cynicism toward state propaganda. The CCP controls the message in media reports, but this no longer means the public believes the message.

[2] Kathrin Hille, "Chinese Bloggers Hail Green Dam Victory," Financial Times, July 1, 2009.
[3] David Shambaugh, "China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficiency," The China Journal, No. 57, January 2007, p. 25.

SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMES FALLOWS, NATIONAL CORRESPONDENT, THE ATLANTIC MAGAZINE

JULY 31, 2009

My name is James Fallows; I am a national correspondent for the Atlantic Monthly, returned two weeks ago to Washington, DC after a three-year assignment in China. During that time I wrote many articles about China as well as a book, and had experiences dealing with both public and private organizations in China as a reporter. I am sorry that a sudden case of flu and laryngitis prevents me from making my comments in person today. Instead I will send a brief statement covering the points I intended to make. I would welcome an opportunity to answer any further questions or to join you another time.

In my introductory statement I intended to make three points about the current state of reportage and public discussion in China. In addition, I have supplied to the Commission staff reprints of two relevant articles I wrote for The Atlantic while in China. The first, called "The Connection Has Been Reset" (March 2008), was about the technological and political underpinnings of the system of Internet control known informally as "the Great Firewall." The second, "Their Own Worst Enemy" (November 2008) examined the reasons for the Chinese central government's often self-defeating attempts to control the way it is portrayed in international media.

The three points I offer for discussion are these:

(1) The Chinese system of media control, as it affects foreign and domestic reporters working inside the country and the information available to the Chinese public about their country and the outside world, should not be thought of as consistent, airtight, centrally coordinated, or reflecting a carefully thought-out long-term strategy. Instead it should be understood as episodic, hit-or-miss, rigid in some places and lax in others, and highly variable by region, time, and personality of those in charge.

Anyone who has worked in China has illustrations of apparently illogical or inexplicable variations in media control policy. One day, a set of web sites with information about "sensitive" subjects will be blanked out by the Great Firewall; the next day, they will be available. During the violence in Tibet in 2008, CNN coverage was generally cut off as soon as anyone mentioned the word "Tibet"; meanwhile, similar BBC reports were through unhindered. During that same period of violence, Tibet was generally closed to foreign correspondents; this year, during the violence in Xinjiang, the government organized press tours for international reporters.

The Beijing Olympics was replete with such contradictory episodes, the most famous of which involved the "authorized" protest zones. (As was widely reported around the world, the central government set aside zones for authorized demonstrations and protests during the Games, as a sign of its openness and international spirit; then, local security authorities turned down all requests for authorization and arrested some people who applied.) In my own case, I dealt frequently with government officials who were fully aware that (for no apparent reason) I had been denied a regular journalist visa and was working as a journalist in China on a variety of "business" and educational visas. The inconsistency was fine, as long as I wasn't otherwise in trouble.

Of course central guidance does come down about media and Internet censorship; of course there is some coordination. My point is that outsiders sometimes miss the irregularity and oddities of the "control" system, which make press coverage both easier and harder. It is easier in that there is often a side door when the front door is closed. It is harder in that uncertainty about what might cause trouble leads people to be more careful than they might otherwise be. If you never know where the line is, you take care not to cross it.

(2) The government is most successful in justifying its media controls when it positions them as defenses against foreign criticism of China as a whole. This approach is of course not unique to China or its government. But in my experience it is particularly important to bear in mind there, because the theme comes up so often in the foreign reporters' work within China and is always a potential factor.

For reasons familiar to all of us, daily life in modern China doesn't naturally support strong feelings of nationalistic unity among the highly diverse and often fractious billion-plus people of the country. People are focused on their families, their businesses, they regional or local rivalries or ambitions. It is easiest to make people feel and at as "we Chinese" in response to the idea of being disrespected, unfairly

treated, or victimized by the outside world. Again, unity in response to foreign challenge is hardly unique to China. But the role of the Western press is unusually important here, since in my experience it is one of the most reliable levers the government can pull to induce nationalistic solidarity. (The other reliable lever is anti-Japanese sentiment, but that's a problem of its own.)

I believe that every foreign reporter working in China has had the experience of crossing a certain line in reaction from the Chinese public—especially from the "netizen" part of the public with recourse to blogs and email. If discussion of certain problems in China is seen as "pro-Chinese," in the sense of helping Chinese people deal with local pollution issues (or unfair labor practices, or water shortages, etc.), that is fine. But at a certain point, discussion of problems can shift to being seen as "anti-Chinese" or, in the famous epithet, "hurting the feelings of the Chinese people." This is obvious in starkest form in the organized effort against CNN because of its coverage of the Tibetan violence and the disruption of the Olympic torch relay. I believe awareness of potentially hostile and voluminous reaction from web-based *fenqing,* the much discussed "angry youth," is somewhere in the consciousness of most foreign reporters working in China—along with the numerous friendships and supportive relationships most foreign reporters make with individual Chinese people.

I mention this phenomenon because of the unusual public-private interaction it seems to represent. When web-based campaigns against foreign reporters or news organizations flare up in China, they seem genuinely to involve private individuals or informal bands of netizens. But clearly the government plays a crucial role in setting the conditions for this reaction: in its control of information and media, for instance in the educational program which gives nearly all citizens of the PRC the same understanding of the history of Tibet; in the version of the news that comes through the officials newspapers and broadcast channels; and in the "hurting the feelings of the Chinese people" denunciations it issues of the foreign media.

The most recent illustration of this pattern is domestic discussion of the H1N1 "swine flu" issue. China's quarantine policy is far stricter than that of any other country, and out of line with what the WHO and other organizations have recommended. But I found that when I pointed this out in dispatches for the Atlantic, I was deluged with complaints from Chinese netizens about "disrespect" for a government that was being far more scrupulous with its public health preparations than was the lax Western world.

In short, the Chinese public is highly intelligent, argumentative, eager to gain and exchange information. But it operates in circumstances that favor the government's ability to shunt the discussion away from criticism of its policies.

(3) The spread of the Internet through China has made it both harder and easier for the government to keep discussion within limits it desires. I know that other witnesses intend to address this issue, and I discuss it at length in my "Connection Has Been Reset" article that I have submitted. I believe that the outside world is well past the period in which people automatically assumed that the spread of information technology would undermine authoritarian regimes. The additional point I'd made about press coverage is that the same dual aspect affects foreign reporters' work in the country. It is vastly easier to make connections and find information now, because of the Internet and related technology, than it was in the mid-1980s when I first worked in East Asia. But now reporters have the complication of knowing that their work is being read not simply by government minders but by large number of Chinese readers, some of whom know just enough English to misunderstand what a report is saying. This is a complex phenomenon that I'll be happy to discuss in other circumstances.

There are many more aspects of this complex topic to examine. I am sorry not to be able to join you in person today, but I look forward to another opportunity.

NOVEMBER 2008

AS CHINA PREPARES to take its place as the world's dominant power, it faces confounding obstacles: its insularity and sheer stupidity in delivering the genuine good news about its own progress.

by James Fallows

Their Own Worst Enemy

AFTER TWO YEARS in China, there are still so many things I can't figure out. Is it really true, as is always rumored but never proved, that the Chinese military runs most of the pirate-DVD business—which would in turn explain why that business is so difficult to control? At what point in Chinese culture did it become mandatory for business and political leaders to dye away every gray hair, so that gatherings of powerful men in their 50s and up are seas of perfect pitch-black heads? How can corporations and government agencies invest huge sums producing annual reports and brochures and advertisements in English, yet manifestly never bother to ask a native English speaker whether they've made some howler-style mistake? (Last year, a museum in Shanghai put on a highly publicized exhibit of photos from the Three Gorges Dam area. In front, elegant banners said in six-foot-high letters THE THREE GEORGES.) Why do Beijing taxi drivers almost never have maps—and almost always have their own crates or buckets filling the trunks of their cars when they pick up baggage-laden passengers at the airport? I could go on.

But here is by far the most important of these mysteries: How can official China possibly do such a clumsy and self-defeating job of presenting itself to the world? China, like any big, complex country, is a mixture of goods and bads. But I have rarely seen a governing and "communications" structure as consistent in hiding the good sides and highlighting the bad.

I come across examples every day, but let me start with a publicly reported event. Early this year, I learned of a tantalizing piece of news about an unpublicized government plan for the Beijing Olympics. In a conversation with someone involved in the preparations, I learned of a brilliant scheme to blunt potential foreign criticism during the Games. The Chinese government had drawn up a list of hotels, work spaces, Internet cafés, and other places where visiting journalists and dignitaries were most likely to use the Internet. At those places, and only there, normal "Great Firewall" restrictions would be removed during the Olympics. The idea, as I pointed out in an article about Chinese controls ("'The Connection Has Been Reset,'" March *Atlantic*), was to make foreigners happier during their visit—and likelier to tell friends back home that, based on what they'd seen on their own computer screens, China was a much more open place than they had heard. This was subtle influence of the sort that would have made strategists from Sun Tzu onward proud.

The scheme displayed a sophisticated insight into outsiders' mentality and interests. It recognized that foreigners, especially reporters, like being able to poke around unsupervised, try harder to see anything they're told is out-of-bounds, and place extra weight on things they believe they have found without guidance. By saying nothing at all about this plan, the government could let influential visitors "discover" how freely information was flowing in China, with all that that implied. In exchange, the government would give up absolutely nothing. If visiting dignitaries, athletes, and commentators searched for a "Free Tibet" site or found porn that is usually banned in China, what's the harm? They had seen worse back at home.

When the Olympics actually started, things did not go exactly according to plan. As soon as journalists began checking in at their Olympic hotels, they began complaining about all the Web sites they couldn't reach. Chinese officials replied woodenly that this was China, and established Chinese procedures must be obeyed: Were the arrogant foreigners somehow suggesting that they were too good to comply with China's sovereign laws? Unlike the brilliant advance scheme, all this was reported.

After huddling with officials from the International Olympic Committee, who had been touting China's commitment to free

information flow during the Games, the Chinese government quietly reversed its stance. For a few days, controls seemed to have been lifted for Internet users in many parts of Beijing—in my apartment, far from the main Olympic areas, I could get to usually blocked sites, like any BlogSpot blog, without using a Virtual Private Network (VPN). Eventually the controls came back on for everyone except users in the special Olympic areas. By then the Chinese government had turned a potential PR masterstroke into a fiasco. Now what the foreign visitors could tell friends back home was that they knew firsthand that China's Internet is indeed censored, that its government could casually break its promise of free information flow during the Games, and that foreign complaints could bully it back into line.

From the outside, this blunder might not seem noteworthy or surprising, given the dim image of the Chinese government generally conveyed in the Western press. It might not even be thought of as a blunder—rather, as a sign that the government had, for once, been caught trying to sneak out of its commitments and repress whatever it could. To me it was puzzling because of its sheer stupidity: Did they think none of the 10,000 foreign reporters would notice? Did they think there was *anything* to gain?

The government's decision was more complicated but even more damaging in another celebrated Olympics case, this one the most blatantly Orwellian: the offer to open three areas for "authorized protests" during the Olympics—followed by the rejection of every single request to hold a demonstration, and the arrest of several people who asked. It's true that even if China is wide-open in many ways, public demonstrations that might lead to organized political opposition are, in effect, taboo. But why guarantee international criticism by opening the zones in the first place? Who could have thought this was a good idea?

Such self-inflicted damage occurs routinely, without the pressure of the Olympics. Whenever a Chinese official or the state-run Xinhua News Agency puts out a release in English calling the Dalai Lama "a jackal clad in Buddhist monk's robes" or a man "with a human face and the heart of a beast," it only builds international sympathy for him and members of his "splittist clique." A special exhibit about Tibet in Beijing's Cultural Palace of Minorities this year illustrated the blessings of China's supervision by showing photos of grinning Tibetans opening refrigerators full of beer, and of new factories including a cement plant in Lhasa. Such basic material improvements are huge parts of the success story modern China has to tell. But the exhibit revealed total naïveté in dealing with the complaints about religious freedom made by the "Dalai clique." It was as if the government had hired *The Onion* as its image consultant.

Let's assume for the sake of argument that reporters are viewed with suspicion or loathing by the political or business leaders they cover. That doesn't keep governments in many countries from understanding the crass value of cultivating the press. Anyone with experience in neighboring South Korea, Taiwan, or Japan knows how skillful their business-governmental establishments are at mounting "charm offensives" to make influential foreigners feel cosseted and part of the team. Official China sometimes launches a successful charm offensive on visiting dignitaries. When it comes to dealing with foreign reporters—who after all will do much to shape the outside world's view of their country—Chinese spokesmen and spinners barely seem to try. Maybe I'm biased; my application for a journalist visa to China was turned down because of "uncertainty" about what I might be looking for in the country (I have been here on other kinds of visas). But China's press policy seems similar to, say, Dick Cheney's (if without the purposeful stiff-arming) and reflects the same view—that scrutiny from the Western press is not really necessary. I'm convinced that usually these are blunders rather than calculated manipulation.

This is inept on China's part. Why do I consider it puzzling? Because of two additional facts I would not have guessed before coming to China: it's a better country than its leaders and spokesmen make it seem, and those same leaders look more impressive in their home territory.

Almost everything the outside world thinks is wrong with China is indeed a genuine problem. Perhaps not the most extreme allegations, of large-scale forced organ-harvesting and similar barbarities. But brutal extremes of wealth and poverty? Arbitrary and prolonged detentions for those who rock the boat? Dangerous working conditions? Factories that take shortcuts on health and safety standards? Me-first materialism and an absence of ethics? I've met people affected by every problem on the list, and more.

But China's reality includes more than its defects. Most people are far better off than they were 20 years ago, and they are generally optimistic about what life will hold 20 years from now. This summer's Pew Global Attitudes Project finding that 86 percent of the Chinese public was satisfied with the country's overall direction—the highest of all the countries surveyed—was not some enforced or robotic consensus. It rings true with most of what I've seen in cities and across most of the country's provinces and autonomous regions, something I wouldn't have guessed from afar.

Americans are used to the idea that a country's problems don't tell its entire story. When I lived in Japan, I had to reassure fearful travelers to America that not every street corner had a daily drive-by shooting and not every passing stranger would beat them up out of bigotry. When foreigners travel or study in America, they usually put the problems in perspective and come to see the offsetting virtues and strengths. For all the differences between modern China and America, most outsiders go through a similar process here: they see that China is a country with huge problems but also one with great strengths and openness.

It's authoritarian, sure—and you put yourself at great risk if you cross the government in the several areas it considers sacrosanct, from media control to "national security" in the broadest sense. (The closest I have come to trouble with the law was when I stopped to tie my shoe on Chang'an Boulevard, near Tiananmen Square in Beijing—and obliviously put my foot on what turned out to be a low pedestal around the main flagpole at Xinhua Gate, outside the headquarters of the country's ruling State Council. Three guards rushed at me and pushed me away to end this sacrilege.) But China is full of conflicting trends and impulses, every generalization about it is both true and false, and it is genuinely diverse in a way the Stalin-esque official line rarely conveys.

One other Olympics example: the opening ceremonies paid homage to China's harmonious embrace of its minority peoples with a giant national flag carried in by 56 children, each dressed in the native costume of one of China's recognized minority groups, including Tibetans, Mongolians, and Uighurs. Contrary to initial assurances from Chinese officials, it turned out that every one of the children was from the country's ethnic majority, Han Chinese. This was reminiscent of Western practices of yesteryear, as when Al Jolson wore blackface or the Swedish actor Warner Oland was cast as Charlie Chan in 1930s films. And it was criticized by the Western sensibilities of today.

Another element of the mystery is the deftness gap. Inside the country, China's national leadership rarely seems as tin-eared as it is when dealing with the outside world. National-level democracy might come to China or it might not—ever. No one can be sure. But from the national level down to villages, where local officials are now elected, the government is by all reports becoming accountable in ways it wasn't before. As farmers have struggled financially, a long-standing agricultural tax has been removed. As migrant workers have become an exploited underclass in big cities, *hukou* (residence-permit) rules have been liberalized so that people can get medical care and send their children to school without having to return to their "official" residence back in the countryside. Whenever necessary, the government turns to repression, but that's usually not the first response.

The system prides itself on learning about problems as they arise and relieving social pressure before it erupts. In this regard it learned a lesson earlier this year, when its reaction to the first big natural disaster of 2008 turned into its own version of Hurricane Katrina. Unusual blizzards in central and southern China paralyzed roads and rail lines, and stranded millions of people traveling home for the Chinese New Year holidays; the central government seemed taken by surprise and was slow to respond. That didn't happen with the next disaster, three months later. When the Sichuan earthquake occurred, Premier Wen Jiabao was on an airplane to the stricken area the same afternoon.

So I return to the puzzle: Why does a society that, like America, impresses most people who spend time here project such a poor image and scare people as much as it attracts them? Why do China's leaders, who survive partly by listening to their own people, develop such tin ears when dealing with the outside world? I don't pretend to have a solution. But here are some possible explanations, and some reasons why the situation matters to people other than the misunderstood Chinese.

There is no politer way to put the main problem than to call it "ignorance." Most Americans are parochial, but (surprise!)

most Chinese and their leaders are more so. American politicians may not be good at understanding foreign sensitivities or phrasing their arguments in ways likely to be effective around the world, as foreigners have mentioned once or twice in recent years. But collectively they understand that America is part of an ongoing, centuries-long, worldwide experiment and discussion about political systems and human values, and that making their case well matters.

After the 9/11 attacks, America went through a round of "Why do they hate us?" inquiry. Whether or not that brought the United States closer to understanding its problems in parts of the Islamic world, it did represent a more serious effort to understand how the country was seen than anything I have heard of in China. When the Olympic torch relay this spring was plagued by boos and protests over Tibet in places ranging from France to the United States, the reaction at every level of the Chinese system seemed to be not just insult but genuine shock. Most Chinese people were familiar only with the idea that China has always been a generous elder brother to the (often ungrateful) Tibetans. By all evidence, no one in command anticipated or prepared for this ugly response. The same Pew survey that said most Chinese felt good about their country also found that they thought the rest of the world shared their view. That belief is touching, especially considering how much of China's history is marked by episodes of its feeling unloved and victimized. Unfortunately, it is also wrong. In many of the countries surveyed, China's popularity and reputation were low and falling. According to a report last year by Joshua Cooper Ramo of Kissinger Associates, most people in China considered their country very "trustworthy." Most people outside China thought the country was not trustworthy at all.

"The underlying problem is that very few people in China really understand how foreign opinion works, what the outside world reacts to and why," Sidney Rittenberg told me. Rittenberg is in a position to judge. He came to China with the U.S. Army in 1945 and spent 35 years here, including 16 in prison for suspected disloyalty to Chairman Mao. "Now very few people understand the importance of foreign opinion to China"—that is, the damage China does to itself by locking up those who apply for demonstration permits, or insisting on "jackal" talk.

During the Chinese Communist Party's rise to power and the civil war against Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists through the 1940s, the coterie around Mao knew how to spin the outside world, because they had to. One important goal was what Mao called "roping the whale": keeping the United States from intervening directly on Chiang's side. The future prime minister and foreign minister Zhou Enlai was especially skilled at handling foreigners. "He laid out battle plans and political strategies, in advance, with remarkable clarity," the muckraker Jack Anderson, who was a cub reporter in China, said of Zhou in his memoirs. "These truths made him so believable that a reporter would be inclined to accept his assurances, too, that the Chinese Communists weren't really Communists but just agrarian reformers."

Of course, most official voices of China now have the opposite effect. Their minor, provable lies—the sky is blue, no one wants to protest—inevitably build mistrust of larger claims that are closer to being true. And those are the claims the government most wants the world to listen to: that the country is moving forward and is less repressive and more open than official actions and explanations (or lack of them) make China seem. Many Chinese who have seen the world are very canny about it, and have just the skills government spokesmen lack—for instance, understanding the root of foreign concerns and addressing them not with special pleading ("This is China...") but on their own terms. Worldly Chinese demonstrate this every day in the businesses, universities, and nongovernmental organizations where they generally work. But the closer Chinese officials are to centers of political power, the less they know what they don't know about the world.

Even as the top leadership tries to expand its international exposure and experience, much of the country's daily reality is determined by mayors and governors and police. "It's like the local sheriff in the old days in South Carolina," said Sidney Rittenberg, who grew up there. "He'd say, 'They can talk and talk in Washington, but I'm the law down here.'" Thus one hypothesis for the embarrassment of the "authorized" protest sites during the Olympics: Hu Jintao's vice president and heir apparent, Xi Jinping, was officially in charge of all preparations for the Games; hobnobbing with the IOC, he would see the payoff to China of allowing some people to protest. But the applications went to the local police, who had no interest in letting troublemakers congregate. A similar mix-up may well have led to the embarrassment over whether to open the Internet during the Olympics, and could also explain many of the other fumbles that get so much more attention than the news the government wants to give.

The Communist Party schools that train the country's leadership are constantly expanding their curricula to meet the needs of the times; but for advancement in party ranks what matters is loyalty, predictability, and party-line conformity. The United States saw just how well a similar approach paid off in worldwide respect and effectiveness when it staffed its Embassy in Baghdad's Green Zone mainly with people who followed the party line in Washington.

The damage China does to itself by its clumsy public presentation is obvious—though apparently not yet obvious enough to its leadership. For outsiders, the central problem is that a country that will inevitably have increasing and perhaps dominant influence on the world still has surprisingly little idea of how the world sees it. That, in turn, raises the possibility of blunders and unnecessary showdowns, and in general the predicament of a new world power stomping around, Gargantua-like, making onlookers tremble. The world has known this predicament before. It is what the previously established powers have feared about America, starting a hundred years ago and with periodic recurrences since then, most recently starting in March of 2003. Maybe that puts America in a good position to help China take this next step.

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China's Great Firewall is crude, slapdash, and surprisingly easy to breach. Here's why it's so effective anyway.

by James Fallows

"The Connection Has Been Reset"

Illustration by John Ritter

Many foreigners who come to China for the Olympics will use the Internet to tell people back home what they have seen and to check what else has happened in the world.

ALSO SEE:
INTERVIEW: "PENETRATING THE GREAT FIREWALL"
James Fallows explains how he was able to probe the taboo subject of Chinese Internet censorship.

The first thing they'll probably notice is that China's Internet seems slow. Partly this is because of congestion in China's internal networks, which affects domestic and international transmissions alike. Partly it is because even electrons take a detectable period of time to travel beneath the Pacific Ocean to servers in America and back again; the trip to and from Europe is even longer, because that goes through America, too. And partly it is because of the delaying cycles imposed by China's system that monitors what people are looking for on the Internet, especially when they're looking overseas. That's what foreigners have heard about.

They'll likely be surprised, then, to notice that China's Internet seems surprisingly free and uncontrolled. Can they search for information about "Tibet independence" or "Tiananmen shooting" or other terms they have heard are taboo? Probably—and they'll be able to click right through to the controversial sites. Even if they enter the Chinese-language term for "democracy in China," they'll probably get results. What about Wikipedia, famously off-limits to users in China? They will probably be able to reach it. Naturally the visitors will wonder: What's all this I've heard about the "Great Firewall" and China's tight limits on the Internet?

In reality, what the Olympic-era visitors will be discovering is not the absence of China's electronic control but its new refinement—and a special Potemkin-style unfettered access that will be set up just for them, and just for the length of their stay. According to engineers I have spoken with at two tech organizations in China, the government bodies in charge of censoring the Internet have told them to get ready to unblock access from a list of specific Internet Protocol (IP) addresses —certain Internet cafés, access jacks in hotel rooms and conference centers where foreigners are expected to work or stay during the Olympic Games. (I am not giving names or identifying details of any Chinese citizens with whom I have discussed this topic, because they risk financial or criminal punishment for criticizing the system or even disclosing how it works. Also, I have not gone to Chinese government agencies for their side of the story, because the very existence of Internet controls is almost never discussed in public here, apart from vague statements about the importance of keeping online information "wholesome.")

Depending on how you look at it, the Chinese government's attempt to rein in the Internet is crude and slapdash or ingenious and well crafted. When American technologists write about the control system, they tend to emphasize its limits. When Chinese citizens discuss it—at least with me—they tend to emphasize its strength. All of them are right, which makes the

government's approach to the Internet a nice proxy for its larger attempt to control people's daily lives.

Disappointingly, "Great Firewall" is not really the right term for the Chinese government's overall control strategy. China has indeed erected a firewall—a barrier to keep its Internet users from dealing easily with the outside world—but that is only one part of a larger, complex structure of monitoring and censorship. The official name for the entire approach, which is ostensibly a way to keep hackers and other rogue elements from harming Chinese Internet users, is the "Golden Shield Project." Since that term is too creepy to bear repeating, I'll use "the control system" for the overall strategy, which includes the "Great Firewall of China," or GFW, as the means of screening contact with other countries.

In America, the Internet was originally designed to be free of choke points, so that each packet of information could be routed quickly around any temporary obstruction. In China, the Internet came with choke points built in. Even now, virtually all Internet contact between China and the rest of the world is routed through a very small number of fiber-optic cables that enter the country at one of three points: the Beijing-Qingdao-Tianjin area in the north, where cables come in from Japan; Shanghai on the central coast, where they also come from Japan; and Guangzhou in the south, where they come from Hong Kong. (A few places in China have Internet service via satellite, but that is both expensive and slow. Other lines run across Central Asia to Russia but carry little traffic.) In late 2006, Internet users in China were reminded just how important these choke points are when a seabed earthquake near Taiwan cut some major cables serving the country. It took months before international transmissions to and from most of China regained even their pre-quake speed, such as it was.

Thus Chinese authorities can easily do something that would be harder in most developed countries: physically monitor all traffic into or out of the country. They do so by installing at each of these few "international gateways" a device called a "tapper" or "network sniffer," which can mirror every packet of data going in or out. This involves mirroring in both a figurative and a literal sense. "Mirroring" is the term for normal copying or backup operations, and in this case real though extremely small mirrors are employed. Information travels along fiber-optic cables as little pulses of light, and as these travel through the Chinese gateway routers, numerous tiny mirrors bounce reflections of them to a separate set of "Golden Shield" computers.Here the term's creepiness is appropriate. As the other routers and servers (short for file servers, which are essentially very large-capacity computers) that make up the Internet do their best to get the packet where it's supposed to go, China's own surveillance computers are looking over the same information to see whether it should be stopped.

The mirroring routers were first designed and supplied to the Chinese authorities by the U.S. tech firm Cisco, which is why Cisco took such heat from human-rights organizations. Cisco has always denied that it tailored its equipment to the authorities' surveillance needs, and said it merely sold them what it would sell anyone else. The issue is now moot, since similar routers are made by companies around the world, notably including China's own electronics giant, Huawei. The ongoing refinements are mainly in surveillance software, which the Chinese are developing themselves. Many of the surveillance engineers are thought to come from the military's own technology institutions. Their work is good and getting better, I was told by Chinese and foreign engineers who do "oppo research" on the evolving GFW so as to design better ways to get around it.

Andrew Lih, a former journalism professor and software engineer now based in Beijing (and author of the forthcoming book *The Wikipedia Story*), laid out for me the ways in which the GFW can keep a Chinese Internet user from finding desired material on a foreign site. In the few seconds after a user enters a request at the browser, and before something new shows up on the screen, at least four things can go wrong—or be made to go wrong.

The first and bluntest is the "DNS block." The DNS, or Domain Name System, is in effect the telephone directory of Internet sites. Each time you enter a Web address, or URL—www.yahoo.com, let's say—the DNS looks up the IP address where the site can be found. IP addresses are numbers separated by dots—for example, TheAtlantic.com's is 38.118.42.200. If the DNS is instructed to give back no address, or a bad address, the user can't reach the site in question—as a phone user could not make a call if given a bad number. Typing in the URL for the BBC's main news site often gets the no-address treatment: if you try news.bbc.co.uk, you may get a "Site not found" message on the screen. For two months in 2002, Google's Chinese site, Google.cn, got a different kind of bad-address treatment, which shunted users to its main competitor, the dominant Chinese search engine, Baidu. Chinese academics complained that this was hampering their work. The government, which

does not have to stand for reelection but still tries not to antagonize important groups needlessly, let Google.cn back online. During politically sensitive times, like last fall's 17th Communist Party Congress, many foreign sites have been temporarily shut down this way.

Next is the perilous "connect" phase. If the DNS has looked up and provided the right IP address, your computer sends a signal requesting a connection with that remote site. While your signal is going out, and as the other system is sending a reply, the surveillance computers within China are looking over your request, which has been mirrored to them. They quickly check a list of forbidden IP sites. If you're trying to reach one on that blacklist, the Chinese international-gateway servers will interrupt the transmission by sending an Internet "Reset" command both to your computer and to the one you're trying to reach. Reset is a perfectly routine Internet function, which is used to repair connections that have become unsynchronized. But in this case it's equivalent to forcing the phones on each end of a conversation to hang up. Instead of the site you want, you usually see an onscreen message beginning "The connection has been reset"; sometimes instead you get "Site not found." Annoyingly, blogs hosted by the popular system Blogspot are on this IP blacklist. For a typical Google-type search, many of the links shown on the results page are from Wikipedia or one of these main blog sites. You will see these links when you search from inside China, but if you click on them, you won't get what you want.

The third barrier comes with what Lih calls "URL keyword block." The numerical Internet address you are trying to reach might not be on the blacklist. But if the words in its URL include forbidden terms, the connection will also be reset. (The Uniform Resource Locator is a site's address in plain English—say, www.microsoft.com—rather than its all-numeric IP address.) The site FalunGong .com appears to have no active content, but even if it did, Internet users in China would not be able to see it. The forbidden list contains words in English, Chinese, and other languages, and is frequently revised—"like, with the name of the latest town with a coal mine disaster," as Lih put it. Here the GFW's programming technique is not a reset command but a "black-hole loop," in which a request for a page is trapped in a sequence of delaying commands. These are the programming equivalent of the old saw about how to keep an idiot busy: you take a piece of paper and write "Please turn over" on each side. When the Firefox browser detects that it is in this kind of loop, it gives an error message saying: "The server is redirecting the request for this address in a way that will never complete."

The final step involves the newest and most sophisticated part of the GFW: scanning the actual contents of each page—which stories *The New York Times* is featuring, what a China-related blog carries in its latest update—to judge its page-by-page acceptability. This again is done with mirrors. When you reach a favorite blog or news site and ask to see particular items, the requested pages come to you—and to the surveillance system at the same time. The GFW scanner checks the content of each item against its list of forbidden terms. If it finds something it doesn't like, it breaks the connection to the offending site and won't let you download anything further from it. The GFW then imposes a temporary blackout on further "IP1 to IP2" attempts—that is, efforts to establish communications between the user and the offending site. Usually the first time-out is for two minutes. If the user tries to reach the site during that time, a five-minute time-out might begin. On a third try, the time-out might be 30 minutes or an hour—and so on through an escalating sequence of punishments.

Users who try hard enough or often enough to reach the wrong sites might attract the attention of the authorities. At least in principle, Chinese Internet users must sign in with their real names whenever they go online, even in Internet cafés. When the surveillance system flags an IP address from which a lot of "bad" searches originate, the authorities have a good chance of knowing who is sitting at that machine.

All of this adds a note of unpredictability to each attempt to get news from outside China. One day you go to the NPR site and cruise around with no problem. The next time, NPR happens to have done a feature on Tibet. The GFW immobilizes the site. If you try to refresh the page or click through to a new story, you'll get nothing—and the time-out clock will start.

This approach is considered a subtler and more refined form of censorship, since big foreign sites no longer need be blocked wholesale. In principle they're in trouble only when they cover the wrong things. Xiao Qiang, an expert on Chinese media at the University of California at Berkeley journalism school, told me that the authorities have recently begun applying this kind of filtering in reverse. As Chinese-speaking people outside the country, perhaps academics or exiled dissidents, look for data on Chinese sites—say, public-health figures or news about a local protest—the GFW computers can monitor what they're

asking for and censor what they find.

Taken together, the components of the control system share several traits. They're constantly evolving and changing in their emphasis, as new surveillance techniques become practical and as words go on and off the sensitive list. They leave the Chinese Internet public unsure about where the off-limits line will be drawn on any given day. Andrew Lih points out that other countries that also censor Internet content—Singapore, for instance, or the United Arab Emirates—provide explanations whenever they do so. Someone who clicks on a pornographic or "anti-Islamic" site in the U.A.E. gets the following message, in Arabic and English: "We apologize the site you are attempting to visit has been blocked due to its content being inconsistent with the religious, cultural, political, and moral values of the United Arab Emirates." In China, the connection just times out. Is it your computer's problem? The firewall? Or maybe your local Internet provider, which has decided to do some filtering on its own? You don't know. "The unpredictability of the firewall actually makes it more effective," another Chinese software engineer told me. "It becomes much harder to know what the system is looking for, and you always have to be on guard."

There is one more similarity among the components of the firewall: they are all easy to thwart.

As a practical matter, anyone in China who wants to get around the firewall can choose between two well-known and dependable alternatives: the proxy server and the VPN. A proxy server is a way of connecting your computer inside China with another one somewhere else—or usually to a series of foreign computers, automatically passing signals along to conceal where they really came from. You initiate a Web request, and the proxy system takes over, sending it to a computer in America or Finland or Brazil. Eventually the system finds what you want and sends it back. The main drawback is that it makes Internet operations very, very slow. But because most proxies cost nothing to install and operate, this is the favorite of students and hackers in China.

A VPN, or virtual private network, is a faster, fancier, and more elegant way to achieve the same result. Essentially a VPN creates your own private, encrypted channel that runs alongside the normal Internet. From within China, a VPN connects you with an Internet server somewhere else. You pass your browsing and downloading requests to that American or Finnish or Japanese server, and it finds and sends back what you're looking for. The GFW doesn't stop you, because it can't read the encrypted messages you're sending. Every foreign business operating in China uses such a network. VPNs are freely advertised in China, so individuals can sign up, too. I use one that costs $40 per year. (An expat in China thinks: *that's a little over a dime a day*. A Chinese factory worker thinks: *it's a week's take-home pay*. Even for a young academic, it's a couple days' work.)

As a technical matter, China could crack down on the proxies and VPNs whenever it pleased. Today the policy is: if a message comes through that the surveillance system cannot read because it's encrypted, let's wave it on through! Obviously the system's behavior could be reversed. But everyone I spoke with said that China could simply not afford to crack down that way. "Every bank, every foreign manufacturing company, every retailer, every software vendor needs VPNs to exist," a Chinese professor told me. "They would have to shut down the next day if asked to send their commercial information through the regular Chinese Internet and the Great Firewall." Closing down the free, easy-to-use proxy servers would create a milder version of the same problem. Encrypted e-mail, too, passes through the GFW without scrutiny, and users of many Web-based mail systems can establish a secure session simply by typing "https:" rather than the usual "http:" in a site's address—for instance, https://mail.yahoo.com. To keep China in business, then, the government has to allow some exceptions to its control efforts—even knowing that many Chinese citizens will exploit the resulting loopholes.

Because the Chinese government can't plug every gap in the Great Firewall, many American observers have concluded that its larger efforts to control electronic discussion, and the democratization and grass-roots organizing it might nurture, are ultimately doomed. A recent item on an influential American tech Web site had the headline "Chinese National Firewall Isn't All That Effective." In October, *Wired* ran a story under the headline "The Great Firewall: China's Misguided—and Futile—Attempt to Control What Happens Online."

Let's not stop to discuss why the vision of democracy-through-communications-technology is so convincing to so many

Americans. (Samizdat, fax machines, and the Voice of America eventually helped bring down the Soviet system. Therefore proxy servers and online chat rooms must erode the power of the Chinese state. Right?) Instead, let me emphasize how unconvincing this vision is to most people who deal with China's system of extensive, if imperfect, Internet controls.

Think again of the real importance of the Great Firewall. Does the Chinese government really care if a citizen can look up the Tiananmen Square entry on Wikipedia? Of course not. Anyone who wants that information will get it—by using a proxy server or VPN, by e-mailing to a friend overseas, even by looking at the surprisingly broad array of foreign magazines that arrive, uncensored, in Chinese public libraries.

What the government cares about is making the quest for information just enough of a nuisance that people generally won't bother. Most Chinese people, like most Americans, are interested mainly in their own country. All around them is more information about China and things Chinese than they could possibly take in. The newsstands are bulging with papers and countless glossy magazines. The bookstores are big, well stocked, and full of patrons, and so are the public libraries. Video stores, with pirated versions of anything. Lots of TV channels. And of course the Internet, where sites in Chinese and about China constantly proliferate. When this much is available inside the Great Firewall, why go to the expense and bother, or incur the possible risk, of trying to look outside?

All the technology employed by the Golden Shield, all the marvelous mirrors that help build the Great Firewall—these and other modern achievements matter mainly for an old-fashioned and pre-technological reason. By making the search for external information a nuisance, they drive Chinese people back to an environment in which familiar tools of social control come into play.

Chinese bloggers have learned that if they want to be read in China, they must operate within China, on the same side of the firewall as their potential audience. Sure, they could put up exactly the same information outside the Chinese mainland. But according to Rebecca MacKinnon, a former Beijing correspondent for CNN now at the Journalism and Media Studies Center of the University of Hong Kong, their readers won't make the effort to cross the GFW and find them. "If you want to have traction in China, you have to *be* in China," she told me. And being inside China means operating under the sweeping rules that govern all forms of media here: guidance from the authorities; the threat of financial ruin or time in jail; the unavoidable self-censorship as the cost of defiance sinks in.

Most blogs in China are hosted by big Internet companies. Those companies know that the government will hold them responsible if a blogger says something bad. Thus the companies, for their own survival, are dragooned into service as auxiliary censors.

Large teams of paid government censors delete offensive comments and warn errant bloggers. (No official figures are available, but the censor workforce is widely assumed to number in the tens of thousands.) Members of the public at large are encouraged to speak up when they see subversive material. The propaganda ministries send out frequent instructions about what can and cannot be discussed. In October, the group Reporters Without Borders, based in Paris, released an astonishing report by a Chinese Internet technician writing under the pseudonym "Mr. Tao." He collected dozens of the messages he and other Internet operators had received from the central government. Here is just one, from the summer of 2006:

> 17 June 2006, 18:35
>
> From: Chen Hua, deputy director of the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau
>
> Dear colleagues, the Internet has of late been full of articles and messages about the death of a Shenzhen engineer, Hu Xinyu, as a result of overwork. All sites must stop posting articles on this subject, those that have already been posted about it must be removed from the site and, finally, forums and blogs must withdraw all articles and messages about this case.

"Domestic censorship is the real issue, and it is about social control, human surveillance, peer pressure, and self-censorship,"

Xiao Qiang of Berkeley says. Last fall, a team of computer scientists from the University of California at Davis and the University of New Mexico published an exhaustive technical analysis of the GFW's operation and of the ways it could be foiled. But they stressed a nontechnical factor: "The presence of censorship, even if easy to evade, promotes self-censorship."

It would be wrong to portray China as a tightly buttoned mind-control state. It is too wide-open in too many ways for that. "Most people in China feel freer than any Chinese people have been in the country's history, ever," a Chinese software engineer who earned a doctorate in the United States told me. "There has never been a space for any kind of discussion before, and the government is clever about continuing to expand space for anything that doesn't threaten its survival." But it would also be wrong to ignore the cumulative effect of topics people are not allowed to discuss. "Whether or not Americans supported George W. Bush, they could not *avoid* learning about Abu Ghraib," Rebecca MacKinnon says. In China, "the controls mean that whole topics inconvenient for the regime simply don't exist in public discussion." Most Chinese people remain wholly unaware of internationally noticed issues like, for instance, the controversy over the Three Gorges Dam.

Countless questions about today's China boil down to: How long can this go on? How long can the industrial growth continue before the natural environment is destroyed? How long can the super-rich get richer, without the poor getting mad? And so on through a familiar list. The Great Firewall poses the question in another form: How long can the regime control what people are allowed to know, without the people caring enough to object? On current evidence, for quite a while.

Freedom At Issue
A Freedom House Special Report

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Speak No Evil

Mass Media Control in Contemporary China

Ashley Esarey

Preface

In the present era of globalization, access to information and the technology for disseminating it are taking enormous leaps forward. These profound advances, embodied in the Internet, have enabled millions of average citizens, businesses, and nongovernmental organizations to share ideas in a manner unthinkable even a generation ago.

At the same time, the democratization of information and the democratizing power of information have not gone unnoticed by governments intent on controlling both access to media and their content. The application of 21st century technology—especially its ability to connect people and share ideas—has provoked a variety of responses from dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. The friction between ordinary people's desire for diverse sources of information and opinion and the effort of states to assert control over the press, the Internet, and other sources of information is now coming to a head in a number of important countries.

In no country is this clash between the free flow of information and state control more vividly on display than in China. At once economically dynamic and ruled by a government unaccountable to public opinion, China represents a crucial test case of political control of mass media. The leadership of the Chinese Communist Party has embarked on a wide-ranging economic reform campaign that exploits the benefits of the information age as an important engine for growth. The Chinese authorities have at the same time devoted vast energies to creating sophisticated ways to control information they deem politically undesirable. Whether the Chinese Communist Party can maintain its monopoly on power, suppress press freedom, and also achieve its ambitions of economic modernization over the longer term is open to serious question.

In order to acquire a deeper understanding of the forces at work in China's information sector, Freedom House commissioned Ashley Esarey, an expert on Chinese media, to author a detailed examination of the contemporary tools used by the Chinese authorities to control mass media. This report offers an inside look into the elaborate machinery of censorship and control the Chinese authorities have developed to maintain political hegemony against the forces of commercialization and globalization, and their citizenry's demand for more freedom.

This report is groundbreaking in its precise and detailed description of the instruments of censorship in a complex and changing society. The censorship system described in

this report shows how a system of control that originated under classic totalitarian conditions is being adjusted, refined, and modernized to meet the needs of a political leadership that wants to enjoy the benefits of the global economy without jeopardizing its complete political domination.

Among the current challenges confronting the Chinese authorities is a society more and more willing to protest and express grievances. In combination with other potential salutary impacts, a more open media could represent a crucial valve in releasing societal pressure. The government is walking a delicate line as it calibrates how much information to allow China's restive society. As the report's author suggests, the choice now confronting the Chinese Communist Party leadership is an unpleasant one: More freedom, or more repression? Both alternatives pose hazards to the party's monopoly on power.

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Introduction

When U.S. President George W. Bush visited Kyoto, Japan, in November 2005 and lectured China about the need to improve religious and political freedoms, his comments went unreported in the Chinese media. There was no live news coverage at the press conference following Bush's meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao in Beijing; subsequent Chinese news coverage of the Bush visit was restricted to carefully censored wire reports, reprinted verbatim in official media. Such censorship of news that challenges the official ideology of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is standard practice in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

More flagrant examples of suppression of news freedom abound, and by all accounts have increased since Hu Jintao came to power in 2003: In recent months, to keep tourists from avoiding the city prior to the Olympic Games to be held there in 2008, the government has ordered a media blackout on a spate of murders of taxi drivers in Beijing. In March 2003, the spread of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in China went largely unreported until the disease reached dozens of countries and the central government was forced to admit the severity of the epidemic. For hours after the September 11 attacks, Chinese media were barred from covering the story while Beijing debated its response to the tragedy. The CCP exerts near complete control over the country's 358 television stations and 2,119 newspapers—the primary media available to more than one billion Chinese citizens.

In the People's Republic, there are no Chinese-language news media that are both widely accessible and independent of the CCP. While available to more than 100 million users, the Internet is closely monitored by the state; access to politically threatening Internet sites and web logs is blocked; uncensored satellite television is not legally available to the general public; foreign radio broadcasts are scrambled; and the sale of publications with content critical of the regime is restricted.

Chinese Communist Party control of the media is deeply challenged by the pressures of commercialization, journalistic professionalization, and globalization of information flows. For this reason, the CCP under the leadership of President Hu Jintao has increased monitoring of media personnel and news content, discouraged traditional media from joint-ventures with foreign firms, tightened controls over the Internet, and resorted to more frequent coercion of journalists reporting on politically sensitive topics.

In order to explain the puzzling success of state control over China's commercial news media in the age of globalization, it is essential to consider the effects of party monitoring of news content, legal restrictions for journalists, extra-legal forms of coercion, and the role of financial incentives for self-censorship. This special report examines the systematic restrictions imposed upon the news media

and then considers the manner in which journalists are provided with financial incentives for self-censorship.

Keeping "Watchdogs" on the Party Leash

The principal mechanism for forcing media organizations to comply with CCP wishes is the vertically organized nomenklatura system of appointments granting the party power to hire and fire party leaders and state officials, including those in charge of the media industry and top media managers. Since the early 1980s, the system of appointments for radio and television media has officially been a "one level down" system: The Organization Department of the CCP confirms appointments at the central and provincial levels, the provincial party committee approves appointments at the city level, and the city level oversees appointments at the county level. However, consultation between the central party leadership and lower levels of the state hierarchy is often pro forma. The majority of decisions concerning provincial media managers are made at the provincial level; similarly, at the city and county levels, party and state leaders appoint media managers at the same level, rather than for media organizations one level down in the bureaucracy.[1]

The Central Organization Department and the Central Propaganda Department directly appoint managers of national media, such as the television station CCTV, *People's Daily,* or Xinhua News Agency. For local media appointments (provincial level and below), the Central Organization Department of the CCP appoints provincial party secretaries and deputy provincial heads (or mayors and vice mayors of directly administered municipalities). These party appointees cooperate with the CCP Central Propaganda Department to select the managers of media organizations. Thus while the central party leadership does not appoint the heads of local media organizations directly, it exercises power over personnel through appointments of leaders of administrative districts, who determine and supervise subordinates.

Media managers appointed by the party are entirely responsible for the news content of the media organizations they oversee. They are expected to censor content deemed unfavorable or divisive to political unity or seen as a threat to social order. Media managers who fail are replaced; the party can transfer them to another post or remove them without recourse to legal procedures. Successful managers are promoted, occasionally to positions within the Propaganda Department, but also to posts within other party or government institutions.

Prior to the formation of newspaper conglomerates in the mid-1990s and broadcast media groups in the 2000s, the managers of each media organization—whether newspaper, radio station, or television station—were party appointees. At present, media organizations within newspaper or broadcast media conglomerates have fewer political appointees than in the past. However, the reduction in the number of media managers who are appointed has yet to prove a liability in terms of the party's ability to control news media operations and news content.

Monitoring Media Personnel

The Central Propaganda Department of the Communist Party is the most important institution for monitoring media personnel and controlling the content of television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and film. The Central Organization Department selects the leadership of the Propaganda Department with guidance from the "Thought Work Small Group" (thought work is the term used in China to describe the task of shaping the views of the public) under the direct leadership of CCP chairman and PRC President Hu Jintao and the Politburo Standing Committee member responsible for the media, Li Changchun. Local branches of the Propaganda Department work with lower levels of the party-state hierarchy to transmit content priorities to the media. For example, the Shanghai bureau of the Propaganda Department interacts with the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee, the provincial branches of General Administration of Press and Publications (GAPP), and State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) to coordinate guidance for the Shanghai media.

At each level of government, the Propaganda Department plays a major role in the monitoring of editors and journalists through a national registration system and mandatory participation in ideological training sessions, in which the conduct of media professionals is evaluated for loyalty to the party. In 2003, the Central Propaganda Department, along with the GAPP and the SARFT, required Chinese

journalists to attend nearly 50 hours of training on Marxism, the role of CCP leadership in the media, copyright law, libel law, national security law, regulations governing news content, and journalistic ethics prior to renewing press passes (the identification journalists display when on assignment). Additional political indoctrination occurs at periodic training retreats to study party political ideology and through attendance at regional or national meetings stressing the important role of the news media in thought work.

Membership in the Chinese Communist Party is of crucial advantage for journalists seeking promotions to leadership positions in the media. In Shanghai, all top media executives are members of the CCP and nearly all of the executive directors of television channels and radio stations and key newspaper editors are party members. While party members may have diverse political opinions, the party carefully considers the views of people who apply to join the CCP in a rigorous vetting process likely to weed out the vast majority of those who admit to holding politically controversial views.

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The Central Propaganda Department, with assistance from local branches, determines national standards of acceptable news content. Content requirements are outlined in propaganda circulars (PCs): documents containing specific instructions for the media nationwide. The content of PCs is drawn from what are informally called *chuifenghui* or "wind blowing meetings," which are attended by top leaders, including those in the Central Propaganda Department. The Central Propaganda Department synthesizes the essence of each *chuifenghui*, adds instructions for handling sensitive topics or specific news stories, and distributes these instructions via facsimile as PCs to local branches of the Propaganda Department, which then send PCs to all Chinese media. PCs may require media to use reports by national media organizations such as Xinhua News Agency, *People's Daily*, or CCTV.

The primary function of PCs is to indicate news stories that should not appear in reports and provide guidance for treatment of certain news stories. For instance, in the fall of 2003, the price for rice in major urban centers rose by nearly 100 percent within one week. In Shanghai, rice prices rose from around 27 cents per kilogram to 49 cents per kilogram. Prices for pork and soy products also rose conspicuously. Prior to the price increases, the Propaganda Department sent PCs to media warning them not to file reports on price increases out of fear that such reports could lead to social instability. Instead, the media were given permission to write about the rise in rice prices over the course of several months, with the effect that news of price increases did not seem to indicate a sudden development.

Another example of nervous intervention in news operations by the Propaganda Department occurred prior to the 100th anniversary of the birth of Deng Xiaoping, on August 22, 2004. For many Chinese, Deng Xiaoping represents the leader responsible for ushering in an era of prosperity unprecedented in Chinese history. However, there are chapters in Deng's life that are distinctly embarrassing for the CCP, most notably the period of time during the Cultural Revolution when Deng was accused of being a "capitalist roader" and sent to work in a tractor repair factory in Jiangxi Province. A second embarrassment was Deng's role in giving the order for the People's Liberation Army to use force to clear Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989. Thus, prior to the 100th anniversary of Deng's birth, the Propaganda Department sent out PCs that took pains to explain why these chapters in his life could not be mentioned in news reports.

It is common practice for local branches of the Propaganda Department to adapt the content of the Central Propaganda Department's PCs for "local conditions." The document that began as a central-level PC may contain considerable differences when it reaches the lower end of

the administrative hierarchy. Usually a PC acquires additional restrictions with each successive layer of bureaucracy, as lower levels of government try to ensure media will cooperate with all central and local priorities for news content.

The person (or people) responsible for monitoring content varies considerably by media organization. Normally, editors and the program producer scrutinize news produced by CCTV and send it to the deputy head of CCTV for confirmation of acceptability. However, particularly sensitive reports can be sent to central leaders or other state institutions for review. During this process, reports can be delayed, revised, or cut completely. Typically for television stations in the Shanghai Media Group, so-called responsible editors are in charge of content; they discuss concerns with the station general manager. If the general manager is uncertain about the advisability of airing news on a topic, he or she contacts the media group's programming department, staffed by in-house monitors who often have close ties to the Propaganda Department. The programming department serves as the distributor of PCs within the media group, interpreting their meaning for station managers and determining whether politically sensitive material can be broadcast. For newspapers, senior editors are responsible for certain types of content, corresponding to topical sections within the newspaper—i.e. politics, finance, or literature—or in the case of the *People's Daily,* to departments in the newspaper.

In addition to sending PCs, the local Propaganda Department communicates with media managers in telephone conversations or by meeting with top editors, who subsequently relay content directives to lower-ranking editors and journalists in editorial meetings. Content directives for extremely sensitive topics—coverage of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2003, for example—may be transmitted in meetings or through telephone calls to eliminate written evidence of suppression of a story.

Senior cadres employed by the Propaganda Department monitor compliance with the party's ideological position at both the central and provincial level. These senior cadres, who are selected for their conservative political views and political reliability, monitor television and radio programming as well as the contents of daily newspapers and magazines, and file monthly reports critiquing "harmful" content. At the central level, these reports are called the "Central Propaganda Department's monthly evaluation." In 2004, the Shanghai Propaganda Department established a secondary media content monitoring institution composed of more than 20 senior journalists and editors, who receive salaries from media organizations with which they formerly worked. This institution, called the Monthly Evaluation Small Group, files roughly 2.5 reports per month on important or problematic trends in broadcast and print media content. These reports are distributed to all Shanghai media managers. The fact that such an institution was founded is indicative of the increasing challenge of monitoring diverse news content. Print and broadcast media also maintain in-house monitoring organizations that are staffed by trouble-shooters who monitor potentially harmful content.

The Price of Non-compliance with Party Content Requirements

When a media organization disregards a PC or produces content seen as undesirable by the Propaganda Department, it does so at the risk of facing disciplinary action. PCs have no expiration date and thus, over time, represent a body of instructions for specific treatment of controversial topics that differs for media in different administrative districts. Disputes occasionally arise when programmers attempt to sneak a controversial report past censors by ignoring the instructions of dated PCs.

When reporting elicits the wrath of the party, the Propaganda Department or local party leaders (party committee members at the same administrative level as the media organization, for example) will notify the media organization's CEO or publisher (the party-appointed manager of the media organization). The media manager may ask the editors or journalists responsible to write a "clarifying" report reversing the previous position or changing the angle on an event.

Sharp criticism by the Propaganda Department can lead to the cancellation of rebroadcasts of television news programs or the dismissal of individuals associated with a certain article or series of articles, as was the case in the 2001 and 2003 firing of editors at the influential Guangdong Province weekly, *Southern Weekend.* In 2001, *Southern Weekend's* in-depth coverage of the crimes of Hunan

gangster Zhang Jun raised veiled accusations that the party was partially to blame for the political climate that led to his greed and violence. These reports prompted the Propaganda Department of Hunan Province to send a formal letter of protest to the Central Propaganda Department in April 2001, claiming the articles in *Southern Weekend* were detrimental to the party's efforts at good governance. The Central Propaganda Department exerted pressure on the Guangdong Provincial Propaganda Department and, in May 2001, the Guangdong Propaganda Department removed the newspaper's editor-in-chief Jiang Yiping, Chief Editor Qian Gang, News Director Zhang Ping, and an editor and a journalist who contributed to the articles. In the spring of 2003, in a different flap, editorial positions were shuffled at *Southern Weekend* due to reporting on the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that proved too politically sensitive for the party to accept. A cadre from the Guangdong Propaganda Department, Zhang Dongmin, was made editor-in-chief of the *Weekend*. At that point, several journalists resigned or went on strike to protest excessive party involvement in newspaper operations. However, these actions did little to impede the party's move to increase control over the *Weekend*.

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In extreme circumstances, the Propaganda Department cancels the license of a media organization, putting the organization's staff out of work, or imprisons the editors or journalists in question. The *21st Century World Herald* was closed down in March 2003 for a series of controversial articles, including one interviewing Li Rui, a former secretary of Mao Zedong, who advocated democratization of the CCP leadership structure. In March 2004, *Southern Metropolitan Post* General Manager Yu Huafeng and Vice President Li Minying were sentenced to 12 and 11 years respectively for alleged corruption concerning the distribution of bonuses by the editorial board. In an appeal trial on June 7, 2004, Yu's sentence was reduced to eight years and Li's to six years. During the investigation, *Southern Metropolitan Post* editor-in-chief Cheng Yizhong was arrested, detained for five months, and then released. Cheng lost his position at *Southern Metropolitan Post* and has since gone to work for *Southern Athletic Newspaper*, a newspaper in the Southern Daily Group devoted to sports coverage.

According to a statement by Cheng Yizong's defense lawyer, top executives of the Southern Daily Group approved distribution of the bonuses. The Guangzhou Municipal People's Court ruled the bonuses were a form of corruption, because they passed through private bank accounts. (As a subsidiary paper of the Southern Daily Group, the *Southern Metropolitan Post* did not have its own corporate bank account.)

For many Chinese journalists, the arrests were seen as retribution for the newspaper's hard-hitting reporting of SARS and of the murder of Sun Zhigang, a graphic artist beaten to death in a Guangzhou prison in March 2003. Investigation of financial misconduct at *Southern Metropolitan Post* began in July 2003 in the aftermath of the SARS crisis and Sun Zhigang exposé. It was assumed that the local party leadership wanted to punish the newspaper and send a warning to Guangdong media to deter similar reporting.

Legal Regulations Governing Freedom of Speech and Media Content

Article 35 of the 1982 Constitution guarantees citizens of the PRC "freedom of speech, publishing, assembly and the right to establish organizations, movement and protest." These freedoms are, however, circumscribed by four articles in the constitution: Article 38 mandates that the reputation

of PRC citizens cannot be compromised by humiliating or libelous statements; Article 51 states that citizens cannot, in the exercise of their freedoms, harm the collective interests of the nation, society, or the freedoms enjoyed by other citizens; Article 53 calls for all citizens to "protect state secrets, cherish public assets...respect public order and social morals"; Article 54 states that citizens have the duty to protect the "security, honor and interests of the motherland" and that to do otherwise is prohibited. In practice, these articles have been manipulated by a self-interested post-totalitarian regime to suppress politically undesirable forms of information. Until recently, however, few scholars have maintained that the Constitution is enforceable in a court of law.

In addition, a host of other criminal and administrative regulations guide media operations. Foremost of the criminal regulations is the PRC "Protection of National Secrets Law" promulgated in May 1989. This exceptionally broad law applies to media reports on military affairs, projects for "economic and social development," technological development, criminal investigations by national security agencies, or other subjects determined by state institutions to be "secret" in nature.[2] Similar sentiment is echoed in the June 1992 "Regulation on the Protection of Secrets for News and Publication." When in doubt about the status of information sources, journalists are to check with the "related government agency" and gain permission prior to publication after negotiating conditions for the release of information. This leads to the suppression of much information by government agencies, or slower release of potentially valuable information. Commercial media organizations are doubly cautious because financial responsibility for the costs of withdrawing or cessation of publications that reveal state secrets is determined by the "related government agency."

State secrets laws prohibit the publication of explicitly classified materials and, occasionally, information that is already public if the recipient is a foreign individual or organization. Any information can be classified as a state secret if its release is determined by enforcement agencies to have harmed state interest or state security.

Judicial powers capable of sentencing journalists for criminal offenses in the 1997 Criminal Law further inhibit media freedom. This law makes it a crime for any individual or organization to "divide the nation" or "destroy (national) unity," an offense punishable by three- to ten-year prison sentences. Journalists directly responsible for publishing political opinions threatening the welfare of the nation or humiliating ethnic minorities, in severe cases, may be sentenced to three years in prison.[3]

State secret laws have been used to suppress journalists with greater frequency in the last two years. In September 2004, *New York Times* researcher Zhao Yan was imprisoned in an investigation about whether he leaked state secrets concerning former President Jiang Zemin's impending resignation from the important party Military Affairs Commission. Zhao was formally indicted on charges of leaking state secrets in December 2005. In April 2005, Hong Kong correspondent for *The Straits Times*, Ching Cheong, was detained in Guangzhou on suspicion of harming state security by working as a spy for Taiwan. Ching's wife has said he was working on a story involving the purged general secretary of the CCP, Zhao Ziyang. Zhao Yan and Ching Cheong remain in custody and are expected to receive prison sentences in February 2006.

In November 2004, Shi Tao, a journalist with *Contemporary Business News* in Hunan Province, was arrested for violating state secrets laws, after emailing a one-page document to the New York-based website Democracy Forum, in which he outlined party propaganda requirements for suppressing information on the 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown. On April 27, 2005, Shi Tao was sentenced to 10 years in prison for illegally providing state secrets to foreigners. Particularly troubling to many foreign observers was the fact that information leading to Shi's conviction was provided by Yahoo Holdings Ltd. in Hong Kong (Shi Tao sent the fateful message via his Yahoo email account).

While the fear of facing legal consequences for writing politically sensitive reports lurks in the minds of Chinese journalists, a far more common source of concern is a libel suit. As of late 2003, *Southern Weekend* had been sued more than 20 times for libel. *Southern Weekend* loses nearly all libel suits because laws allow the plaintiff to decide whether the case will be tried by courts where the alleged offense occurred, where the plaintiff is based, or in the juristiction where the media is based; plaintiffs typically choose their own juristiction, where they have strong personal connections to the courts, not Guangzhou where the *Weekend* is based.

To protect itself against libel suits, CCTV's news program News Probe keeps tapes of all news footage for six months. Although the threat of facing a libel suit increases media attention to collection of material news sources to support a story, the net influence of libel laws is that media organizations tend to err on the side of caution and refrain from printing or airing certain stories. This is due in part to precedents demonstrating that the facts of a libel case may be irrelevant to the court's final decision. A journalist at *Southern Weekend* related the following case of the newspaper encountering and losing a libel case when all the facts seemed on its side:

> In 1996, a man from Guangdong province was driving a truck in the city of Beihai, Guangxi Autonomous Region. The truck driver passed by a woman lying in a ditch. She had crashed her motorcycle and was bleeding from her injuries. The truck driver stopped and took the woman to a hospital. As she had no money, he paid her medical bills. When it was clear that the woman would be fine, the man obtained the woman's phone number and left. One month later, the truck driver returned to the same city and called the woman to see if she had recovered. Her brother-in-law answered the phone and thanked the truck driver, saying that he would like to meet him to repay his kindness. They arranged to meet. When the truck driver arrived at the designated location he was accused of causing the accident and arrested by the police. His truck was confiscated and given to the woman's brother-in-law. The police also extorted 5,000 RMB[renminbi] from the truck driver. Police never filed a report on the incident; therefore, the procedure used to confiscate the vehicle was illegal. The truck driver sued the police station to get his truck back and was sued by the woman for "causing" the traffic accident that injured her. After reporting the story, Southern Weekend was sued for libel. The case, tried in Guangxi, went against the newspaper in 2002.[4]

A weekly newspaper of intellectual bent, and somewhat different tastes than *Southern Weekend*, is the *Economic Observer*. Unlike the *Southern Weekend*, the *Economic Observer* has never been taken to trial for a libel suit because the editor-in-chief is said to be particularly adept at negotiating "mutually acceptable" terms of compensation for offended parties. Handling libel cases, whether in or outside the courtroom, is a serious concern for news organizations doing investigative news stories or issuing critical reports. Libel laws in China deter media from aggressively reporting the news.

Writing about the lives of CCP leaders is one of the most challenging tasks journalists face. It is illegal to write without permission about the president, vice president, premier, chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, chairman of the Central Advisory Committee, the chair of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, or current or past members of the Politburo Standing Committee. All reports concerning these political figures must be submitted to the local GAPP branch for review and meet the approval of the local Propaganda Department and the GAPP in Beijing. Prior to publication, reports on individuals active in politics must have approval from the individual to which the report refers. Requests to write stories about central leaders can also be submitted to the Central Propaganda Department. Similar restrictions govern accounts of important Communist revolutionary figures, such as Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping.

The procedural complexity of getting such articles approved is a deterrent for most journalists, who can expect higher levels of government to refuse permission for controversial accounts of key state leaders. As a result, this regulation virtually eliminates coverage of currently serving national leaders; reports critical of national leaders almost never appear in television and daily newspaper reports.

Nevertheless, commercial news media occasionally attempt to print reports on central leaders. One such attempt by *Securities Weekly* to publish an account on the financial misconduct of former Premier Li Peng and members of his family resulted in confiscation of all copies of the newspaper edition and imprisonment of the journalist who wrote the story. Pamphlets or books on China's leaders, often of a tawdry nature, are sold furtively in back alleys. Meanwhile, reliable accounts of China's past and present leaders in books such as the *Private Life of Chairman Mao* by Li Zhishui, *The Tiananmen Papers* edited by Perry Link and Andrew J. Nathan, and *China's New Generation* by Andrew J. Nathan and Bruce Gilley are not available in China.

In 2001, the Central Propaganda Department strengthened restrictions over the use of photos taken of

national leaders. All local media must have permission from the provincial bureau of the Propaganda Department, which is under centrally appointed leadership, prior to publication of photos of national state or party leaders in a work environment or in a leisure setting. Magazines hoping to use photos of a national leader on the cover must secure permission from the leader appearing in the photo prior to publication, a process that is likely to end in the refusal from individuals portrayed in an unfavorable light.

Chinese journalists are expected to understand the party's priorities and avoid reporting on issues considered to be too sensitive. Examples of issue areas considered risky include, in order of declining sensitivity, the democracy movement in China, separatism or ethnic minority interests in Taiwan or Tibet, nationalism or national honor referred to in a derogatory sense, labor unrest, corruption within the CCP, mass protest, natural or manmade disasters, and outbreaks of disease likely to lead to domestic unrest or international criticism. Health news is treated as a national secret whose disclosure is punishable by imprisonment. This made reporting on SARS more difficult for journalists and, of late, has induced caution among journalists reporting on the bird flu outbreak. Many issue areas, however, have opened up for relatively free reporting, such as arts and leisure and finance and economics, providing such news is not critical and does not concern a politically sensitive issue.

If a report is judged too sensational, the journalist likely will not receive payment and risks losing performance bonuses. . . . Therefore, journalists who fall out of favor with their superiors, or whose work is frequently censored, find themselves quickly out of the money.

Commercialization and Content Management

In the 1980s, the Chinese Communist Party launched sweeping reforms of the media industry, which allowed for the sale of commercial advertisements and led to rapid proliferation of print and television news media and diversification of media content. For the vast majority of Chinese media, commercialization provides incentive for media managers and journalists to be risk averse. The Propaganda Department appoints top-level media managers in consultation with the CCP Organization Department. Media organizations pay these managers very high salaries (which makes managers unwilling to risk losing their jobs). Media managers' career prospects are tied to their effectiveness in producing media content that is both attractive to consumers and politically uncontroversial. Underneath the party-appointed leadership are lesser managers, senior editors, copy editors, and journalists, whose salaries are strongly affected by the nature of news content they produce. By providing bonuses to their employees to produce acceptable news content, top managers create a work environment conducive to self-censorship.

For personnel who are not appointed by the party, most media organizations make attempts to quantify the quality of employee performance and link performance to the amount of salary an employee receives. The performance of television producers, for example, is evaluated in part by the ACNielsen ratings of the programming they oversee. Their bonuses are determined by upper-level managers within the television station. Data from interviews suggests the bonuses make up roughly 20 percent of the total salary for producers and editors, an arrangement that empowers managers to reward model employees.

Typically, a much greater percentage of a journalist's salary is derived from performance bonuses than for producers and editors. One criterion for evaluating the performance of journalists is the popularity of their reports,

based on consumer response. If consumers are happy with a journalist's report, they may write letters or send text messages to the newspaper with favorable comments. A positive (or negative) consumer response is seen as an indicator of consumer preference that drives television ratings or newspaper circulation levels, which in turn are often used to justify advertising prices. In general, media with high numbers of consumers can charge high advertising prices.

Since the early 1990s, journalists' pay has also been tied to the number and length of stories that are broadcast or published. If a report is judged too sensational, the journalist likely will not receive payment and risks losing performance bonuses, which amount to more than half of their salary. Therefore, journalists who fall out of favor with their superiors, or whose work is frequently censored, find themselves quickly out of the money. Some television stations require journalists to pay the production costs out of pocket for censored material.

Journalists in the Shanghai Media Group receive a base salary that is 15 to 20 percent of their total salary. Monthly and yearly performance bonuses make up the rest of their salary. The disparity between the top and the bottom of the salary scale, based on the amounts of bonuses, can be as much as a factor of 10. At the CCTV's News Probe, members of an advisory board consisting of senior media professionals, scholars, and the producer give each 45-minute report a score that is adjusted based upon viewer ratings by ACNielsen for the time slot in which the program is broadcast. Variation between the lowest score for a report and the highest can lead to differences in performance bonuses equaling a factor of 18.

At *Southern Weekend*, the monthly base salary for journalists in 2003 was $340 (before taxes), or approximately the same amount as the average farmer's annual income.[5] Performance bonuses at *Southern Weekend* increased a journalist's monthly salary to a ceiling of around $2,430. In order to combat a journalist's incentive to censor her work, *Southern Weekend* pays up to 70 percent of the performance bonus for a story even if it is too controversial to print. Even with such compensation, the desire to win performance bonuses results in journalism that steers well clear of dangerous political controversy and meets the party's propaganda requirements.

Normalizing judgment is about the provision of incentives and punishment for non-conformance to ideals.[6] In the case of "disciplining" Chinese journalists to comply with party content priorities, incentives provide a daily pressure for journalists to toe the party line in the interests of putting bread on the table. Over time, the decision to engage in self-censorship on the part of journalists, whether due to the desire to earn more or avoid repression, becomes "normal" practice, even for those journalists who may have entered the profession for the noblest of purposes. The administrative and legal system for restricting press freedom has evolved over time, taking on new layers of regulations and monitoring institutions as testament to the difficulty of keeping a lid on diverse media content. For example, the system of performance bonuses followed the Tiananmen crackdown on mass demonstrations and reflected the party's growing awareness that coercion alone was ineffective at forcing journalists to write propaganda bolstering regime legitimacy. From the perspective of the CCP, incentives and disincentives for journalists go well together, the former providing daily reason to flatter China's rulers and the latter making examples of individuals who challenge the limits of freedom.

Potential Sources of Future Change

While in the short term the unraveling of party control of the media seems unlikely, three factors could powerfully affect the prospects of greater press freedom in China. Foremost of these factors would be greater privatization of media ownership, which is central to influencing the priorities of media managers and journalists and to fostering a work environment in which freer journalism can thrive. At present, only party or state institutions may legally own media; however, creeping privatization has occurred as state media subcontract operations to private enterprises. Some private entrepreneurs have been tempted by high advertising growth to invest in media ventures, while media managers have reached out to the private sector for efficient management and capital to diversify products and services. Over the long term, the increase in privatization of media ownership could undermine party control of the media if privatization saps the party's power to appoint media managers, whose careers

are tied to the production of media content that supports the regime. Therefore, although many other state-owned enterprises have been privatized in China, the CCP is unlikely to legalize private ownership of the media, unless the party decides to embrace political liberalization.

A second factor that could reduce party control over the media would be growing market competition in China's media industry, driving media to engage in journalism of interest to consumers that might be unfavorable to the party. CCP policies to reduce the effects of competition have so far been largely successful. Current regulations restrict most local media from competing in the national media market by preventing them from reporting on events in other provinces in China as well as internationally. In the last decade, the Chinese print and broadcast media have been reorganized into media conglomerates that enjoy high market share in local markets and have less incentive to compete for advertising revenue.[7] In order for competition to emerge as a powerful force for news media freedom, the state would have to open the national media market up to powerful local media conglomerates—a move that appears highly unlikely—or allow more foreign media access to the Chinese media market.

A third factor that could induce change is greater availability of information from abroad that is not subject to the elaborate system of state control. The effects of globalizing information flows have already been considerable. With vigorous foreign media operating in China, the regime's task of suppressing information has become more difficult; for Chinese with foreign language ability, foreign news reports present an "alternate" truth to that available in the official media. A growing number of Chinese travel abroad, telephone friends or relatives overseas, and watch a plethora of pirated media products available in urban areas. The number of Chinese accessing the Internet is certain to rise as the cost of connectivity decreases relative to spending power. While the state has expended considerable effort to limit Chinese access to web pages deemed politically subversive, many users find ways to access blocked Internet sites by using proxies or anti-blocking software. The Internet has increased the speed and convenience of accessing information and decreased the financial costs of interpersonal communication—two factors which helped to undermine authoritarian regimes in Ukraine and Indonesia. If a democratic opposition emerges in China, it is likely to use the Internet as a tool to mobilize supporters and challenge CCP ideology.

To address the challenges posed by private capital, market competition, and globalization, the CCP's central leadership must ensure effective implementation of existing regulations (which has already proven difficult) and rely to a greater degree on coercion—a strategy that is vulnerable to criticism both domestically and internationally. The choice facing the CCP leadership is an unpleasant one: More freedom or more repression? Both alternatives pose hazards to the party's monopoly on power.

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Notes

1. Data used in this report was collected in interviews conducted in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Changsha from 2001-2005. Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, interviewees were promised anonymity.
2. "PRC Protection of National Secrets Law" (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo baoshou guojia mimi fa*), Article 8 and Article 20.
3. *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo xingfa* (Criminal Law), as amended by the National People's Congress on March 14, 1997, and promulgated on October 1, 1997. See Articles 103 and 250.
4. Interview, November 2003.
5. By comparison, the average yearly farming income in 2004 was $353. Joseph Kahn, "China Pledges to Lift Wealth of Its Peasants," *The International Herald Tribune*, February 3, 2005, p. 1.
6. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 177-180.
7. Ashley Esarey, "Cornering the Market: State Strategies for Controlling China's Commercial Media," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 29, no. 4 (December 2005).

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POLITICAL EXPRESSION IN THE CHINESE BLOGOSPHERE

Below the Radar

Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang

Abstract

This study examines subtle forms of political expression, including political satire and criticism of the state, in the writings of popular Chinese bloggers. It finds that the advent of blogging has provided citizens of the People's Republic with a medium for making sophisticated critiques of the regime without encountering harsh repression.

Keywords: China, blogging, media, propaganda, satire

Introduction

In post-Mao China, two types of discourse emerged—public discourse that had the approval of the state and private discourse that took place beyond the observation of the state. These two discourses were related in the sense that the latter responded to, and in many ways, supplemented the former. However, private discourse about politics typically was intended only for an audience of trusted friends or confidants. With the onset of blogging, these two discourses have begun to merge: Conversations once held only in private or in "hidden transcripts" have entered the public domain through skillfully written blog postings whose coded meaning is understood by readers who are aware of stringent restrictions

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Asian Survey, Vol. 48, Issue 5, pp. 752–772, ISSN 0004-4687, electronic ISSN 1533-838X. © 2008 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp. DOI: AS.2008.48.5.752.

on political pluralism.[1] In the words of Elizabeth Perry, China has "witnessed the development of the 'hidden transcript' of unobtrusive dissent."[2] Increasingly (albeit cautiously), Chinese are speaking truth to each other, and by doing so in a widely accessible manner, are speaking truth to power.

While the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been largely successful in controlling the state-owned commercial mass media, managing online content has proven far more difficult.[3] Since the arrival of the Internet in China in the late 1980s, the number of China's Net users or netizens has exploded to over 253 million, surpassing users in the United States. In recent years, self-expression on the Internet has become more convenient because of the advent of specialized services to create weblogs or "blogs"—webpages with content consisting of reverse chronologically ordered posts by private individuals or "bloggers."[4]

In January 2005, there were an estimated 500,000 Chinese bloggers. By the end of the year, one source estimated the number at 16 million, nearly equal to the number of bloggers in the United States and Japan combined.[5] In 2006, there were more than 75 million blog readers, nearly 58 million of whom read blogs frequently.[6] A 2007 study suggests that 46,982,000 bloggers maintained 72,822,000 Chinese blogs; there were nearly 17 million "active" bloggers updating their sites at least once per month.[7]

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1. James C. Scott discusses the concepts of "public" and "hidden transcripts" in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 2–16.

2. Elizabeth Perry, "Studying Chinese Politics: Farewell to Revolution?" *China Journal* 57 (January 2007), p. 10.

3. For analysis of how state-owned mass media have commercialized while remaining under tight party control, see Ashley Esarey, "Cornering the Market: State Strategies for Controlling China's Commercial Media," *Asian Perspective* 29:4 (Winter 2005).

4. For an account of the emergence of blogs in China, see Xiao Qiang, "The Blog Revolution Sweeps across China," *New Scientist*, November 24, 2004 at <http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn6707>.

5. Zhongguo hulianwangluo xinxi zhongxin [China Internet Network Information Center] (CNNIC), "2006 Zhongguo Buoke diaocha baogao" [2006 China blog research report], September 2006, pp. 2–5, at <http://www.cnnic.cn/uploadfiles/pdf/2006/9/28/182836.pdf>, accessed October 6, 2006. According to the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan had 4.73 million bloggers in September 2005. Sawaji Osamu, "A Personal Matter? Blogging in Japan," *Japan Journal*, April 2006, p. 6. According to a July 19, 2006, study by Pew Internet and American Life Project, there were an estimated 12 million bloggers in the United States. See Amanda Lenhart and Susannah Fox, "Bloggers: A Portrait of the Internet's New Storytellers," <http://www.pewInternet.org/pdfs/PIP%20Bloggers%20Report%20July%2019%202006.pdf>, accessed July 3, 2007.

6. CNNIC, "2006 Zhongguo Buoke diaocha baogao," pp. 2–5.

7. Ibid., "2007 nian Zhongguo Buoke shichang baogao" [2007 China blog market report], p. 10.

Blogging has very low costs for entry—all that is required is online access. Blogs are accessible to any netizen via search engines and "blog rolls" or lists of hyperlinks connecting blogs. Inter-linkage via blog rolls means that readers often proceed from one blog site to others with similar content or perspectives. Although blog content, with its many "horizontal linkages" to the work of other bloggers written at different times in different geographic areas, is considered a virtual community or "blogosphere," blog content reflects the views of a vocal and interconnected cross section of Chinese netizens.

Blog content ranges widely from diary-like commentary (often referred to as a blog post) to photos, music, video links, and news reports. The speed with which information is disseminated via blogs is another reason for their popularity with readers and also the primary reason they are feared by the Chinese Communist Party leadership. Further, once information is widely available on the Internet, it is very difficult even for blog service providers to erase all references to a controversial subject.

Incentives for bloggers are largely personal and thus differ from those of journalists working in China's official mass media. Almost no bloggers depend upon blogging for their livelihood and, therefore, they are less affected by pressures to comply with regime priorities for media content. Unlike mainstream media products, which are subject to extensive editorial review and external political monitoring, blog content is entirely up to bloggers. It is immediately available to readers, who can post their own reactions, which remain in the blog or can be removed subsequently at the discretion of the blogger.

Blogging Politics in the People's Republic

A growing number of Chinese blogs now consider political subjects, but rarely exclusively. Most popular bloggers vary their content and only occasionally criticize the action (or inaction) of Chinese political leaders and government policy. In China, where the mass media has traditionally been part of the state structure, bloggers addressing politically sensitive subjects exercise caution and carefully choose words likely to slip by government filters of online content.[8] It is well known that numerous government agencies

8. For a typology of censored words, see Xiao Qiang, "The Words You Never See in Chinese Cyberspace," *China Digital Times,* August 30, 2004, at <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2004/08/the_words_you_n.php>, accessed July 3, 2007. Recently discovered lists of censored words include a wide variety of references to the CCP; the names of prominent Chinese political figures, such as Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Wen Jiabao, and Hu Jintao; as well as those of controversial academics, such as Jiao Guobiao, an outspoken critic of the party's Central Propaganda Department; and possible political opponents, such as the Dalai Lama or the Falungong religious sect. Names of regions with histories of ethnic strife are monitored, such

such as the Ministry of Public Security participate in management of the Internet; the state employs tens of thousands of vigilant "Internet police" to track online content deemed inappropriate, harmful to social stability, or critical of the state in a manner that challenges the CCP's monopoly on political power. Blogs addressing controversial topics in a direct manner can be swiftly shut down by blogging service providers, often at government order.[9]

While China operates the "most extensive, technologically sophisticated, and broad-reaching system of Internet filtering in the world,"[10] savvy bloggers find ways to critique political events with satire and vague or coded phrases. Others occasionally give voice to criticism of Chinese politics and society that pushes the limits of political acceptability, as defined by the CCP. Indeed, the increase in the number of bloggers writing about politics represents a major breakthrough toward the formation of a Chinese public sphere, albeit a virtual one.[11] Moreover, because of recent crackdowns on bulletin board system (BBS) chat forums—websites allowing the posting of online content with greater anonymity—blogs have become China's freest media.[12]

In China's post-totalitarian society, there is considerable risk to voicing dissent as an individual. As one Chinese proverb notes, "The gun shoots the

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as Xinjiang and Tibet. In addition, combinations of numbers that could symbolize politically sensitive days such as 64 or 6.4 (after June 4, 1989, the date of the crackdown in Tiananmen Square) are likely to receive close scrutiny.

9. One blog shut down that received considerable media attention was the closure on December 30, 2005, by Windows Live Spaces (also known by users as MSN Spaces) of a blog by Zhao Jing, who wrote under the pseudonym of Michael Anti. Zhao's blog disappeared soon after he wrote about the firing of three editors at *Xinjingbao* [Beijing News] and called upon subscribers to the paper to cancel subscriptions. See Roland Soong on *EastSouthWestNorth,* at <http://www.zonaeuropa.com/200512brief.htm#100>, accessed December 22, 2006.

10. OpenNet Initiative, "Internet Filtering in China in 2004–2005: A Country Study," at <http://www.opennetinitiative.net/studies/china>.

11. A public sphere, according to political theorist Jean Cohen, refers to a "juridicially private space where individuals without official status seek to persuade one another through rational argumentation and criticism about matters of general concern. . . . [T]he public sphere is universally accessible, inclusive, and freed from deformations due to economic or political power, and social status." Jean L. Cohen, "The Public Sphere, the Media, and Civil Society," in András Sajó, ed., *Rights of Access to the Media* (The Hague: Springer, 1995), p. 31. As of yet in China a public sphere does not yet fully exist because criticism of the state or other matters in blogs or elsewhere is not protected by law; nor is debate free from "deformations" caused by the fear of repression.

12. How long blogs will remain China's freest media remains to be seen. Recent reports by the Chinese official government mouthpiece, Xinhua News, indicate the government may favor regulations requiring bloggers to use their real names when registering for blogging services. See, for example, Liu Jing and Zou Dapeng, "Hulianwang xiehui: Shangwei chutai 'buoke shiming' zhi guanli guiding" [Chinese Internet association: The unreleased 'blogger name use' management regulation], *Xinhuawang*, October 23, 2006.

bird with its head up" (*qiang da chutou niao*). The first bloggers to broach a sensitive topic take a higher risk than those who wait while others test the water, so to speak, before plunging in. As a result, there is greater security in voicing dissent that is analogous to criticism articulated by numerous other bloggers. If many birds are flying, as it were, they are less likely to be targeted by the regime for repression.

With digital technology, it has become common for Chinese to find out what sort of political speech is prevalent in the blogosphere by using search engines. For example, if an Internet search in the fall of 2006 were to have revealed that many bloggers were debating the party's sacking of Shanghai Party Secretary Chen Liangyu for alleged acts of corruption, a blogger who wished to weigh in on the topic might have assumed that commenting on Chen's removal would not result in repression. However, if few bloggers chose to comment on Chen's case, a blogger might have assumed the subject was better left unmentioned.[13]

Case Selection

To consider the transformation in political discourse occurring in the Chinese blogosphere, this article examines the new genre of political speech appearing in blogs and analyzes the subtle strategies of popular bloggers who communicate political critiques to curious and often supportive readers. Our study finds that political expression is often the result of a compromise between what bloggers want to express and what the regime allows them to write. The blogs discussed in subsequent sections feature satirical, implicit, or otherwise guarded critiques of the party-state that are comprehensible to readers who understand the meaning behind bloggers' facades of ignorance or of loyalty to the state. The blogs examined are popular precisely because they employ such tactics and survive for a sufficient period of time to develop a popular following. Censors are not blind to the true meaning of coded speech, which can be characterized loosely as *zhenghua fanshuo* (speaking truth the opposite way), a term applicable to satire or sarcasm. Thus far, repression has been reserved largely for three types of blogs: those criticizing the state or state policy directly, those advocating mass political action, or those airing views that openly conflict with party ideology.[14]

13. Interestingly, state monitors of online content are said to use the same tactic to track dissent.

14. For example, blogger Pu Zhiqiang, a well-known lawyer, had three blogs shut down after he posted writings about freedom of speech and the press. The only explanation he received was a message from a website administrator that the closure "was ordered by authorities from above." Pu Zhiqiang subsequently started new blogs. Vivian Wu, "Internet Police Keep Tight Grip on Blogs," *South China Morning Post*, March 8, 2007.

Each blogger has a distinct worldview. Their comments typically vary a great deal over time in terms of the subject matter considered. It is, therefore, difficult to generalize about blog content without conducting content analysis of a random or representative sample. In this article, we focus on blog postings of the following types: political satire, humorous adaptation of official media products (*egao*), implicit criticism of the party or state structure, and explicit but guarded criticism. This typology is designed to facilitate analysis of multiple blog content of a similar nature in order to examine the strategies used to express political dissent. Our typology was developed after a broad survey of political blogs through assiduous web surfing. We followed the interconnecting hyperlinks of numerous mainland Chinese blog sites with political content that were popular among fellow bloggers. It should be pointed out, however, that seldom does the entirety of a blog post fit perfectly into any of these four categories.

As Han Woo Park and Mike Thelwall have pointed out in a review of hyperlink analysis, website administrators often elect to link their sites to others that are seen as credible, similar in content (with the exception of satirical posts), and as desirable affiliates.[15] As the principal administrators of blog sites, bloggers have full autonomy to choose which sites, if any, their blog will be linked to. The motivations for linkage to another site vary. Some links reflect the desire to gain prestige by association with a popular site. Others stem from the obligation to credit the source of a blogger's information or the wish to illustrate a rhetorical point.

A list of the blog sites examined below is in Table 1, with statistics on the number of sites linking to each blog.[16] That these blog sites, especially that of star popular culture blogger Wang Xiaofeng, are perceived by bloggers as highly credible and popular can be seen in the large number of linkages by other blog sites and/or high rates of traffic.[17] Based on an average calculated by dividing the number of Chinese bloggers posting content at least once per month (7.7 million) by the total number of blog readers (75 million), it appears that most bloggers write for a relatively small readership —just under 10 readers. By comparison, the blogs analyzed here have a much wider reach than the average—a fact reflected by the ability of

15. Han Woo Park and Mike Thelwall, "Hyperlink Analyses of the World Wide Web: A Review," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 8:4 (July 2003), at <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol8/issue4/park.html>.

16. The hyperlink counts should be treated as estimates. Search engines tracking hyperlinks between websites operated by companies such as Google and AltaVista are unable to index the entire Web. For related analysis, see Mike Thelwall, "Web Log File Analysis: Backlinks and Queries," *Aslib Proceedings* 53:6 (June 2001).

17. In general, sites with higher numbers of incoming hyperlinks have more visitors or "traffic." Park and Thelwall, "Hyperlink Analyses of the World Wide Web," p. 14.

TABLE 1 *Blog Interconnectivity*

Blogger	*Number of Linkages to Blog by Other Blog Sites**
Wang Xiaofeng**	1,252
Bingfeng	338
Lian Yue (Zhong Xiaoyong)	218
Luo Yonghao	170
Gouzi	73
Huang Laoxie	15
Li Weiguang***	0

SOURCE: By the authors.

* These statistics were generated by Google searches for web links to each blogger's main page on October 19, 2006, and should be interpreted as indicating the popularity of blogs, especially among other bloggers, rather than as a statistic reflecting blog readership directly.

** By comparison, the blog of China's top blogger, the movie star Xu Jinglei, has been linked to 35,723 other sites.

*** The Google search indicates no other blogs linking to Li Weiguang's. However, the statistics on Li Weiguang's blog on October 25, 2006, indicated his 100 blog postings have attracted 22,158 visitors for an average of just over 221 visits per posting.

bloggers like Wang Xiaofeng, Zhong Xiaoyong, and Huang Laoxie to sell advertisements.

Bloggers in China who write about politics represent a small subset of all bloggers, the majority of whom blog to record their thoughts or emotions or to express their views.[18] According to a 2006 survey conducted by the CNNIC, bloggers reported that 85% of their content pertained to personal matters—the modal content category. Only 6.2% of bloggers said they write about current affairs or news (politics was not a category in the survey questionnaire).[19] Although the small sample of blogs examined here lends itself to careful analysis of individual blog postings, our findings should be seen as preliminary pending a systematic study of a larger sample of blogs of a political nature.[20]

Blogger Power?

Among American pundits, estimations of the effects of China's new online discourse vary. Nicholas D. Kristof, a columnist for the *New York Times,*

18. CNNIC, "2006 nian Zhongguo buoke diaocha baogao," p. 11.

19. Ibid.

20. For quantitative analysis of political discourse in a larger sample of Chinese blogs, see Ashley Esarey, "Bloggers vs. the Propaganda State: Political Discourse in Official Media and Web Logs in China" (working paper).

has hailed freedom in the blogosphere as evidence that the CCP's "monopoly on information is crumbling" and asserted that the party's "monopoly on power will follow," when a "single blog can start a prairie fire."[21] Others, such as new-media scholar Rebecca MacKinnon, have a more qualified appraisal of blogging, arguing that Chinese authorities have managed to employ technologically sophisticated strategies to control online speech in the short term, and are likely to do so in the medium term, despite a more than 90-fold increase in blogs since 2005.[22]

As in the United States, where bloggers have proven to be fearsome critics of politicians and media personalities,[23] bloggers in China have succeeded at spreading the word about government malfeasance, misleading media reports, and political dissent. In the spring of 2007, Zhong Xiaoyong, a freelance journalist who blogs under the name Lian Yue, was a vociferous critic of the construction of a chemical plant to manufacture paraxylene, a petrochemical used to make synthetic fabrics, near the center of Xiamen, a seaside metropolis in Fujian Province. Investment in the plant was reportedly valued at more than $600 million, the largest investment project ever approved for the city. Months before cell phone text messages circulated among some one million Xiamen residents and demonstrations involving perhaps 10,000 people forced the government to suspend the project, Zhong's blog urged readers to speak to "friends, family, and colleagues about the event. They might be in the dark."[24] Even after

21. This plays upon the famous quotation by Mao Zedong, "A single spark can start a prairie fire." In his column, Kristof wrote about how he started two blogs in China to test the limits of discourse by making controversial statements about such topics as the imprisonment of *New York Times* researcher Zhao Yan, the Tiananmen Square Massacre, religious freedom, and the Falun Gong. His blogs were subsequently removed. Nicholas D. Kristof, "In China It's ******* vs. Netizens," *New York Times*, June 20, 2006, p. 17.

22. Rebecca MacKinnon, "Flatter World and Thicker Walls? Blogs, Censorship, and Civic Discourse in China," *Public Choice* 134:1–2 (January 2008), pp. 31–46, at <http://rconversation.blogs.com/rconversation/files/mackinnon_chinese_blogs_chapter.pdf>.

23. Consider the fate of long-time CBS Evening News anchor Dan Rather, who resigned after conservative bloggers spread the word that his report that President George W. Bush had received preferential treatment in the National Guard was based on false information. Katharine Q. Seelye, "Bloggers as News Media Trophy Hunters," *New York Times*, February 14, 2005, p. 1.

24. According to a May 29, 2007, report in *Nanfang Dushibao* [Southern Metro Post], one widely distributed text message likened the construction of the chemical factory to dropping an "atomic bomb" on the city of Xiamen. For analysis of the emergence of the text message, see Hua Shicheng, "Cong 'duanxin fan wuran' kan quanli de renxing" [From 'text message opposition to pollution' see the responsibility of the empowered], *Nanshi Shixun* [Southern Metro News], May 30, 2007, at <http://www.yzdsb.com.cn/20070530/ca753073.htm>, accessed July 8, 2007. See also Mitchell Landsberg, "Chinese Activists Turn to Cell Phones," *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 2007.

the demonstrations, Zhong continued to post excerpts from numerous Chinese and international media reports about popular resistance to the chemical factory. While Chinese reporters with national media were reportedly warned against running stories on the controversy, Zhong observed that he was under less pressure to be silent. "They [i.e., the authorities] were afraid," he said. "As for me, I don't rely on any work unit, so I had less to worry about. If I had been working a regular job, I couldn't have done it."[25]

It is difficult to identify a direct causal link between Zhong's blog posts, heightened awareness of the risks the chemical factory posed to Xiamen residents, the circulation of cell phone text messages, or even increased attention by the official media. To do so would require interviews with journalists, activists, and authors of the text messages—a task beyond the scope of this article. At this point, a more tenable position is to posit the possibility that blog posts written by Zhong and others played an important agenda-setting role, raising questions about paraxylene and stimulating the public to think critically about the matter. Zhong's role was especially important because prior to the large demonstrations, the official media generally supported the local government's backing for construction of the factory.

The sections below do not consider the likelihood that blogs will lead to widening activism that culminates in democratic transition or political revolution in China. This would necessarily involve many factors in addition to freedom of speech. We hold the view, however, that understanding how blogging has expanded political discourse is a preliminary step in determining how the medium may change political views or patterns of political participation in the future.[26]

Political Satire

The use of political satire and Aesopian analogy to mask social critiques is far from a new phenomenon in China. Written in the mid-18th century, Wu Jingzi's ironic portrayal of the decline of Confucian literati in *Rulin Waishi* (The unofficial history of scholars) is seen as one of the classics of modern Chinese literature.[27] In *Rulin Waishi*, Wu criticizes a highly arbitrary

25. See also, Edward Cody, "Text Messages Giving Voice to Chinese: Opponents of Chemical Factory Found Way around Censors," *Washington Post*, June 28, 2007.

26. In an excellent study comparing the introduction of the telegraph in China in the 1860s to the rise of Internet use in the late 1990s, Zhou Yongming makes a similar point. Zhou Yongming, *Historicizing Online Politics: Telegraphy, the Internet, and Political Participation in China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 5–10.

27. Shang Wei, *Rulin Waishi and Cultural Transformation in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

examination system that rewarded candidates who devoted their life to rote memorization of knowledge with little practical value for governing, as well as cheaters. The characters in the novel with the least aptitude are often the most successful.[28] In the late Qing dynasty, authors like Wu Jianren (also known as Wu Woyao) followed in the tradition of Wu Jingzi by criticizing corruption by greedy officials, the practice of buying official titles, Chinese cowardice and lack of patriotism, the defects of the examination system, and poor social mores among public servants.[29]

From the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 through the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) and the Democracy Wall Movement (1978–79), the medium of choice for expressing dissent was the *dazibao* (big character poster). This consisted of large sheets of paper bearing political critiques that were displayed in public places.[30] Most popular during the Hundred Flowers Campaign (1956–57) and the early years of the Cultural Revolution, *dazibao* were often stern denunciations of specific individuals perceived as acting improperly. Also targeted were undesirable political phenomena such as "bureaucratism" among cadres or party leaders, including Deng Xiaoping, who were accused of "taking the capitalist road."

Occasionally, *dazibao* took the form of creative, often negative, satire. People's Republic of China (PRC) President and CCP Vice Chairman Liu Shaoqi was denounced in his official Beijing compound in Zhongnanhai by a poster reading, "Down with China's Khrushchev Liu Shaoqi." One of the characters in Liu's name (qi) was distorted to resemble the character for "dog."[31] Although the use of *dazibao* largely ceased with their banning in 1980, it is worth noting that blogs are much faster to write than posters laboriously made by hand. Blogs are easily updated, readily disseminated to a broad national (or international) readership, and contain

28. Paul S. Ropp, *Dissent in Early Modern China: Ju-lin wai-shih and Ch'ing Social Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), pp. 101–19.

29. Wu Wo-yao, *Vignettes from the Late Ch'ing: Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over Two Decades* [Ershinian muji zhi guai xian zhuang] (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1975).

30. In the 1940s, *dazibao* were sometimes referred to as *bibao* (wall newspapers). For an account of the emergence of and use of *dazibao* in political campaigns, see Göran Leijonhufvud, *Going against the Tide: On Dissent and Big-character Posters in China* (London: Curzon, 1990).

31. Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 147. The poster referred to a perceived parallel between Liu Shaoqi and the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, whose 1956 "de-Stalinization" speech at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Soviet Union shocked the Chinese establishment. Some Chinese saw the speech as an abandonment of the highly transformational goals of socialism and as a metaphor for friction between Liu and Mao Zedong, a (posthumous) ardent supporter of Stalin.

multimedia content that appeals to a diverse audience. *Dazibao* expressed discourse to facilitate political mobilization. Blogs express alternative views while remaining disconnected from mobilization.

Bloggers have helped carry the torch of political satire into the digital age. Consider the following comments by Huang Laoxie in his *Ah Q Weekly Blog* (Ah Q zhoukan). In his posting dated March 7, 2006, Huang ruminated at length about why he would not talk about the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which were both in session at the time. Huang voiced a number of disclaimers, including the fact that he was not a member of the NPC or CPPCC: "If idiotic people like me comment and criticize, am I trying to prove that those representatives only have pig brains? Those representatives do not have pig brains, therefore I can only shut-up." However, Huang then discussed the very opinions he "had wanted to say but could not say," the first of which was that national representatives are overly inclined to talk about future plans, when they should be considering past governmental performance:

> Representatives all like to talk about work in the future, but do not pay enough attention to how things were implemented from last year's meetings. Therefore, old problems drag out year after year, while new policies change their face every year. If you don't believe me, you can dig up the press reports about last year's meetings, is there a big difference? I attended these meetings [as a journalist] 10 years ago: the education budget, science and technology budget, and the issue of peasants were hot problems representatives were concerned with. Ten years later, they are still talking about these problems. What's up with this? Therefore, small and uneducated people like me think annual NPC and CPPCC meetings every year and every session should carefully review the work of the past year in detail, one item after another, and find out where the problems are and who is responsible. For example, the jerk who covered up chemical pollution in the Songhua River last year, shouldn't he give a brief explanation to all representatives? So the NPC and the CPPCC should have a new rule: If you cannot clear up the previous year's work and cannot find the roots of problems, you should not start to plan next year's work.[32]

Huang's boldness in criticizing the ineffectiveness and rubber-stamp tendencies of China's largest representative bodies is masked by self-effacing statements and the confidential-seeming nature of his remarks. In addition, the following disclaimer appearing at the top of Huang Laoxie's blog

32. For more of Huang Laoxie's commentary on the NPC and the CPPCC, including translation and links to the original in Chinese, see <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2006/03/i_am_not_going_talk_about_the_npc_and_cppcc_i_am_really.php>, accessed December 22, 2006.

homepage seemed to be a defensive mechanism in the event his comments provoked the ire of Internet monitors: "This site has a lot of content that is not factually reliable. My intention is to tease you and trick you into clicking on a few hidden advertisements. Readers, please hold your breath and seal your pockets to avoid being ripped off by savvy companies."

As with many of China's popular bloggers, Huang Laoxie's blog features advertisements, a fact that may tempt him to push the limits of acceptable discourse to gain readers while avoiding going too far, because to do so would jeopardize the survival of *Ah Q Weekly*. However, by comparison to mainstream media, which is state-owned and subject to much tighter restrictions, Huang Laoxie's commentary is truly provocative.

Another vivid example of the use of satire appeared in Zhong Xiaoyong's blog entitled *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent* (Lianyue de di ba da zhou). Zhong alluded to the 2006 accident at the Sago mine in West Virginia that killed 12 American coal miners. Blogging under the pseudonym Lian Yue, Zhong seized upon this tragic accident to point out that vastly greater coal mining hazards exist in China, where deaths related to coal mining accidents number in the thousands each year, and media coverage of them is often restricted. Unlike the fluid and lugubrious prose of Huang Laoxie, Zhong's post came in the form of a simple list:

1. It has been said this (mining accident) is a New Year's gift to the Chinese government from the American government.
2. This gift has a status equal to "Ping Pong Diplomacy" in the history of U.S.-China relations.[33]
3. In return, China will give two pandas to the U.S. at an appropriate time.
4. One will be called Kuangkuang (mining mining). Another will be called Nannan (accident accident).
5. (Foreign Minister) Tang Jiaxuan will publish a new book titled *China's Mining Safety Conditions Are the Best in the World.*[34]
6. China will build a monument to dead American miners in the appropriate place.
7. Mr. He Zuoxiu will use calligraphy to write on the monument, "They were unfortunately born in America."[35]

33. "Ping Pong diplomacy" refers to a series of exchange matches by ping pong players that was seen as the beginning of a warming of relations between China and the U.S. during the Nixon presidency.

34. This barb refers to a statement made by Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan on Phoenix Television in which he claimed, "China's human rights are the best in the world, human rights in the United States are not comparable." Tang's comment was criticized by Chinese bloggers and ridiculed in Chinese BBS forums.

35. He Zuoxiu, a physicist, is a member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, with a reputation for making highly nationalistic comments.

8. Xinhua News Agency will receive the Pulitzer Prize for the world's most comprehensive and in-depth reporting about the mining accident.
9. China, North Korea, and Iran held an emergency meeting on the American mining accident.
10. The three parties at this meeting reached the following unanimous conclusion: There are no mining accidents in China. There is no starvation in North Korea. And Iran does not have nuclear ambitions.[36]

By using the tragic death of 12 American miners to poke fun at the extreme sensitivity with which mining accidents are seen by Chinese leaders, Zhong steps entirely into the realm of black humor. His jest, however, reflects the cynicism felt by Chinese who believe the CCP whitewashes its own checkered policies in the interest of shoring up regime legitimacy. The assumption behind the joke is that if fatal mining accidents occur in a country as wealthy and powerful as the United States, and if Beijing claims that mining accidents do not occur in China, the People's Republic will have vastly improved its reputation. And if the U.S. actually "arranged" for a mining disaster on China's behalf, the result would be pandas, a monument, and olive branches, so to speak. The scenario is so ridiculous that Zhong Xiaoyong could possibly defend his posting as "just a joke" rather than truly subversive.

Egao as Political Satire

Another form of online political satire involves the deliberate adaptation of official news broadcasts, films, or print news stories. The Chinese expression for the practice is *egao,* meaning to "mess with" media content in a harmful way. *Egao* is a phenomenon made possible only with digital technology, which makes editing media products fast and easy. Typically *egao* is practiced on works that are popular or well-known, so as to make the act of cultural "vandalism" humorous to a broader audience. People who practice *egao* keep portions of the original format of a film, television news program, or wire story, while radically changing the meaning. One prominent example of *egao* was the conversion of a People's Liberation Army (PLA) propaganda film known as a "red classic" (*hongse jingdian pianzi*) into a short film about a boy's gambit to win a singing contest. In a news article published by Xinhua News Agency, the deputy director of the Bayi Film Production Department of the PLA said he was reserving the

36. For the original posting in Chinese, see <http://rosu.spaces.msn.com/Blog/cns!1p1L4o2e2EQzzeHIztmkqJ0g!3098.entry>, accessed December 22, 2006. Additional commentary by *China Digital Times* is at <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2006/01/american_mining_accident_lian_yue.php>, accessed December 22, 2006. Lian Yue's blog home page has moved to <http://www.bullog.cn/blogs/rosu/>, accessed December 22, 2006.

right to take legal action against the perpetrator.[37] Another act of *egao* involved replacing the faces of cartoon characters used to promote the 2008 Beijing Olympics with the faces of prominent Chinese comedians or stars from the talent-search television show "Supergirl" (Chaojinüsheng).[38]

Egao was considered to be a problem of such great concern that the central-level newspaper *Guangming Ribao* (Enlightenment Daily) held a conference on August 10, 2006, calling for government action to halt the practice.[39] At the conference, the director of China's Internet Association, Hu Qiheng, described the situation as "extremely serious" and noted that young people had begun to disseminate information that inclines toward "extreme" and unacceptable perspectives. In October, the city of Chongqing announced new regulations imposing fines on those "who spread information or remarks defaming others, launch personal attacks, or damage others' reputations online."[40]

Despite widely publicized official condemnations, the practice of *egao* has proliferated in the blogosphere. In a posting on September 14, 2006, the Chinese blogger "Bingfeng" suggested that the popularity of *egao* reflects the fact that youth anywhere enjoy spoofs and Chinese youth confront more frustrations than their peers in other countries; they express their cynicism through satire because China's media is so controlled.[41]

Implicit Criticism

In China, bloggers use a number of strategies to criticize undesirable state conduct or policies perceived as counterproductive. Implicit criticism in blog entries often comments on negative events or problems under the purview of the Party committee or governmental organization, without indicating which organization or individual should shoulder responsibility for the problem. Consider two postings by Wang Xiaofeng, an exceedingly popular blogger who used the pseudonym Dai Sange Biao (Wears Three Watches)

37. See <http://news.xinhuanet.com/photo/2006-08/13/content_4955198.htm> article, accessed December 22, 2006. The short film clip called *Pan Dongzi cansai ji* [Story of Pan Dongzi's participation in the contest] was produced by a Chinese netizen named in the Xinhua article as Hu Daoge. To make matters worse from the perspective of the PLA, the short film was shown at an officially sanctioned press conference promoting a China Central Television singing contest.

38. See <http://goldenbg.com/asparticle.?id=494>, accessed August 30, 2006.

39. See <http://sh.qihoo.com/article/n52473,ff96ac,3009_20701.html>, accessed December 22, 2006.

40. Associated Press, "Chinese City to Fine Web Satirists," October 16, 2006.

41. See <http://blog.bcchinese.net/bingfeng/archive/2006/09/14/88915.aspx>, accessed September 18, 2006.

for his blog called *Massage Cream.*[42] In his entry of May 15, 2006, Wang commented on the construction of exceedingly opulent office buildings by the Huiji district government in Zhengzhou City and pasted in a series of photos he took during a weekend trip there. The title of Wang's post was "The Glory Resulting from Hard Work—The World's Number One Local Government" (Yijianku fendou wei rongzhi—shijie diyi quzhengfu). The photos showed a shining government building amid a series of channels in a manmade lake full of hungry carp, gaudy neo-Roman statues, winding footpaths, and the PRC flag waving over an empty plaza—in short, unnecessary extravagance. "Speaking from the bottom of my heart," Wang wrote, "The place is really beautiful. On the whole the feeling is that this is not a local government office. Rather the local government has made use of a natural park for its office."[43]

In comments that follow, nearly all of Wang's readers demonstrated they understood his implicit criticism by mentioning, tongue in cheek, how much they envied the officials in Henan Province or by suggesting that only corruption could have prompted such construction. One reader wrote, "I can only sigh. It appears the road ahead in the anti-corruption campaign is still a long one." Another reader's criticism was more blunt: "We should take guns and execute those dog officials!"

In his entry on November 11, 2006, Wears Three Watches took on the profession of journalism by making a clever pun on the name of Journalists' Day, which is a homonym of "journalists' disaster" (*jizhejie*). A senior journalist at *Life Weekly Magazine* (Shenghuo Zhoukan), Wang had experienced the frustrations of Chinese journalists working in a tightly controlled and highly politicized environment:

> Yesterday early in the morning, someone sent me an SMS text message wishing me a happy holiday. I thought for a long time but I couldn't figure out what holiday it was. Then someone told me: It was Journalists' Day. Then I asked myself: "Am I a journalist?" I have always been ashamed of the word "journalist." When I had just graduated, I wanted to be a journalist covering social issues, but later discovered that my personality was unsuitable to be a journalist covering social issues.
>
> Once I was chatting with a boss of mine. He had a large sum of money and no place to invest it. I asked him: How come you don't invest in media? He said

42. Wang's pseudonym is a play on words of the Jiang Zemin slogan *sange daibiao* or "three represents," stating that the CCP must represent "the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people," Xinhua News Agency, "China to Put 'Three Represents' into Constitution," December 22, 2003.

43. Wang Xiaofeng, "Yijianku fendou wei rongzhi—shijie diyi quzhengfu," May 15, 2006. The previous post is currently unavailable on Wang's new website at <http://www.wangxiaofeng.net/>.

one time he had gone to the XXXX Evening News. On the senior editor's desk he saw a huge pile of documents, which he discovered were notices ordering the newspaper not to report on this and on that. Then he said investing in media is risky! A businessman's way of thinking is to minimize risk to the lowest possible level and to avoid investments where the risk cannot be controlled.

A few days before Journalists' Day, the slogan of the *Beijing News* (Xinjingbao), "responsibly report everything," disappeared. I have thought of another slogan: "Responsibly report certain things." In the end, is it "responsibly reporting everything" or "responsibly reporting certain things" that will make society harmonious? Bright people will understand.[44]

While Wang's posting did not explain why he was unfit to work as a journalist covering social affairs, a savvy reader could imagine the reason might have been his tendency to be too frank about such issues as crime, economic development, and politics—subjects that might be seen as standard fare for a journalist covering social issues. Further, Wang did not elaborate about why his boss thought a desktop full of propaganda circulars made investments in the media risky.[45] However, the commentary allowed readers to fill in the blanks. Most people know that the Chinese media environment is highly political; one mistake can lead to the dismissal of an editor or the closure of a media organization. Most importantly, however, Wang did not point a finger at who or what is responsible for the dismal state of journalism in China. To do so, might have pushed his blog into the realm of unacceptable, even dangerous, speech from the perspective of state monitors of online content.

Explicit but Guarded Criticism

Most bloggers do not "walk on the wild side" very often. Only a small percentage of bloggers directly criticize China's political system. Their blog entries are abstract rather than highly specific critiques of Chinese politics. When bloggers write direct criticism of the state, they often avoid mentioning the names of individuals or organizations. Explicitly critical blog entries can seem more like the expression of a desire for positive change or passive rumination than a call to arms. An example is a "New Year's wish list" by Luo Yonghao, a teacher in Beijing, posted in late January 2006. The entry is deeply critical of the status quo in China. Excerpts follow:

44. For more translation of this blog entry, see <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2005/11/massage_milk_and_the_disaster_of_journalism_in_china_da.php>, accessed December 22, 2006.

45. For an explanation of the origin and function of propaganda circulars, see Ashley Esarey, "Speak No Evil: Mass Media Control in Contemporary China," pp. 4–5, Freedom House Special Report, at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/33.pdf>, accessed December 22, 2006.

- I hope all good people have a happy new year, I hope all bad people have a miserable new year; I hope all people who are not so good and not so bad can arrange their new year as they wish. . . .
- I hope all corrupt officials will live in greater fear; I hope those officials who are not corrupt can hold on.
- I hope Chinese peasants can migrate freely in their own country; I hope city residents who oppose peasants migrating into cities one day can realize that they had no conscience.
- I hope those migrant workers who cannot get their wages can find a good lawyer to help them. I hope those who intentionally withhold overdue wages of migrant workers are hit by lightning, no matter how watchful they are.
- I hope all websites will not have key words filtering, and I hope all websites which set up this filtering do not do so voluntarily.[46]

The comments above do not indicate by name who is "bad" or upon whose head the "lightning" should strike. In addition, Luo protected himself to some extent by standing on the side of the peasants (a group traditionally championed, at least in rhetoric, by the CCP) and migrant workers as he lashes out against those who restrict peasants' chances of profiting from China's booming economy. In Luo's wish for greater Internet freedom, a more controversial subject than migrant rights, his language was less direct. Luo did not explicitly say why he disapproves of the use of Internet filters, nor did he criticize the party leaders responsible for their use. Rather, Luo wrote of his hope that filters would not exist in the future, without specifying how their removal might take place or mentioning how website operators might resist their imposition.

Another example of guarded criticism can be found in a posting by Li Weiguang, a blogger (and former journalist) of academic bent. On March 17, 2006, Li wrote a critique of the Chinese media that comes off like a note of resignation about the futility of gleaning reliable information from official news sources because of excessive propaganda:

> A long time ago I stopped watching television news because the people who play with programming take a normal person and make him into an idiot. The program gives you "edited" information, while educating you in a million ways how to see this information so that you have a "high degree of unanimity" with it. For this, no country in the world is as creative as we Chinese are. The great

46. Luo Yonghao's list also contained items less critical than the ones selected here, which pertain more directly to Chinese politics. Translation by *China Digital Times.* Additional sections of this entry available at <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2006/01/old_luos_new_year_wish_list_luo_yonghao.php>, accessed December 22, 2006. Luo Yonghao maintains a blog accessible to members only (*chengyuan*), who must log in to read his entries, as well as the following publicly accessible blog: <http://luoyonghao.blog.sohu.com/>, accessed December 22,

> image [of China] in media reports has been "great" for several decades already. In the end the effect is to make you feel as if everywhere in the motherland has "owls singing and swallows dancing" (*yingge yanwu*) and a "beautiful stream of water. . . ." (*liushui chanchan*). Media reports on a model person seem as if the person is a mystical god; media reports on some other country's presidential election, in the end, make you look down on that country's political system: That is democracy, rule of law, freedom, and human rights? Aren't the two political parties struggling for power like biting dogs? What's so special about cheap political midgets using the party to profit personally and using public power to settle personal scores? This sort of unreasonable use of partial truths, naked bias, and hegemonic instruction sweeps away the objectivity of news. What kind of value can you talk about for this sort of television program?[47]

Li Weiguang's entry continued to eloquently explain why he does not read newspapers, magazines, or books in China either. His only praise was reserved for the Internet, which gives him near total freedom of choice to consume precisely the sort of unvarnished information he desires.

Li Weiguang's gripes about the Chinese media were guarded, in the sense that the language he used was carefully selected to avoid truly biting criticism while articulating a message that undermined the credibility of propaganda produced by official media. Rather than labeling television news as censored and biased, Li says it is "edited" by producers who "play with programming." Li wrote that news reports on China for too long have been "great," rather than negligent: they fail to mention the country's problems. Further, he suggested, the negative light in which democracies were portrayed by the media reflects an effort to convince Chinese they are better off in the People's Republic under CCP rule.

Evaluating Freedom of Speech in the Chinese Blogosphere

Preliminary evidence from popular blogs indicates that blog content differs greatly from that of the mainstream news media. Recent research shows that the scope of freedom in mainstream media content has declined since the early years of the Reform Era (1978-present).[48] Unlike mainstream journalists, bloggers do not receive propaganda circulars from the CCP's Propaganda Department regarding taboo topics to avoid or

47. See *Li Weiguang's Blog*, March 17, 2006, at <http://blog.cat898.com/boke.asp?guangli203.showtopic.8650.html>, accessed December 22, 2006. Li has recently more essays at the following website: <http://www.tecn.cn/homepage/liweiguang.htm>, accessed September 4, 2007.

48. Ashley Esarey, "Liberalization without Freedom? An Empirical Analysis of China's Newspapers, 1980–2003," in Susan Shirk, ed., *Changing Media, Changing China* (forthcoming).

desirable content to stress in their postings, nor do bloggers receive financial incentives to engage in self-censorship. By comparison, most journalists receive payment for their work only if it avoids political controversy, a situation that provides journalists with a direct incentive for self-censorship.[49] The livelihood of bloggers is almost never solely dependent upon income from their blogs; their true identities are typically concealed by the use of pseudonyms. Thus, bloggers are relatively free from financial and political pressure to toe the party line.

Unleashed in a personalized and inexpensive medium, bloggers have made fun of the Chinese state and its leaders and criticized Chinese politics in a nuanced manner. This requires readers' understanding that what bloggers would *like* to write is often different from what they *can* write. Blog readers know the risks faced by bloggers and learn how to "fill in the blanks." Indeed, readers' comments (visible on the blog page) are often shielded by "protective" sarcasm.

In the case of blogs, technology has provided the Chinese with the means to adapt political communication to bring "hidden transcripts," once suppressed, into the light of public consideration. It is easy to see why Chinese political activists or intellectual bloggers have been delighted with the freedom the Internet allows them to enjoy. Unlike Westerners, who commonly compare freedom of speech in China to freedom of speech in democracies, Chinese bloggers compare their present freedom to the more restricted environment they encountered in the past. Bloggers such as Li Weiguang see vast improvements in the freedom with which they can access uncensored information. By publishing their blogs, they have found considerable support for their anti-establishment views.

The political blog content considered here was written by individuals with widely different interests and perspectives. Blog posts can be mutually supporting, however, if they echo similar sentiments or provide links to blogs voicing similar concerns via a blog roll, a list of hyperlinks to other blogs or webpages. For example, Li Weiguang's direct criticism of the lack of objectivity in official media reports was similar to Wang Xiaofeng's indirect criticism of excessive restrictions imposed on journalists. If thousands of bloggers have a similar gripe, criticism once seen as controversial can seem to be politically acceptable, even commonplace.

Freer political expression in blogs has several noteworthy effects. First, dissent that enters the mainstream public discourse about politics gradually undermines popular belief in the more-censored official media. The power of the CCP's "propaganda state" to shape the beliefs of Chinese weakens

49. Ashley Esarey, "Cornering the Market: State Strategies for Controlling China's Commercial Media," pp. 57–59.

as more Chinese turn to the blogosphere for news and political commentary.[50] Second, citizens are gradually developing strategies for challenging regime positions, albeit with caution, without being subjected to harsh forms of repression. Third, because online content is extensively monitored —especially that of highly popular blogs—the specter of repression remains for those who directly criticize the state or encourage netizens to mobilize to achieve a political objective. This has made the Chinese blogosphere an arena where self-expression is contested and has resulted in the "watering down" of online content. Blog content, therefore, reflects a compromise between what people want to say and what the regime is willing to permit them to say. Neither bloggers nor top CCP leaders are comfortable with the uncertain status quo.

Is it possible that freedom in the blogosphere represents a kind of safety valve that benefits the CCP regime by allowing dissenters to blow off steam? A blogger who goes by the name Doggie (Gouzi) groused in a posting on August 15, 2003: "I want to bite this society, but the society is a Taiji master. I thought I had a good bite, at least I could bark. But in fact it seems very likely I just bit the places where society itches, not where it hurts. My barking was not only as piercing as I expected; it obviously became a variation of the melody this symphony of society needs!"[51]

A frequent writer of political critiques, Doggie implied that his blogging was harmless and ineffectual self-expression. This perspective might be accurate in a society free from government efforts to impose ideological orthodoxy. In the PRC, tremendous resources have been expended to impose limits on acceptable speech. If the CCP leadership was truly unafraid that blogging could erode party dominance over ideology and, consequently, the regime's ability to influence public opinion, it would not have erected such an elaborate system of online content controls.

It is difficult to predict developments in the Chinese blogosphere with certainty. In the future, it seems likely that the government will require bloggers to use their real names when registering for blogging services, although according to Wang Xiaofeng, present technology already makes it possible for the state to identify bloggers.[52] A similar restriction was imposed upon

50. The concept of a "propaganda state" was developed to describe party guidance of the media in the former Soviet Union. Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization 1917–1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For an excellent study outlining the roles of institutions in charge of propaganda in China, see David Shambaugh, "China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy," *China Journal*, no. 57 (January 2007), pp. 25–58.

51. Doggie's sentiment was expressed in the context of commentary on food and politics at <http://cul.sina.com.cn/s/2003-08-15/40518.html>. The link is no longer active.

52. Jean Pyun, interview with Wang Xiaofeng, January 2007, Beijing. Interview transcript available upon request.

BBS Internet chatrooms in 2003–04; freedom of expression in the medium subsequently declined. More important than the actual reduction of dissent under a "real-name system" would be the psychological effect stemming from the knowledge that bloggers could more easily be made to pay a price for pushing the limits of ideological orthodoxy.

The number of bloggers will probably continue to rise even as government attempts to monitor political content increase, perhaps resulting in more-frequent elimination of blogs with politically controversial content. Efforts to impose restrictions on self-expression may inspire pushback from a large, interconnected "society" of bloggers that could serve as a catalyst for liberalization or political reform. Controlling the information available to Chinese citizens will become more difficult as new communication technology, such as blogging, empowers people to broadcast their views to an unprecedented degree.

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