

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The 1980s' Chinese Debate on Journalism Reform

by

Renzhong Wang

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis establishes the significance of the 1980s Chinese debate on "journalism reform". It provides a critical identification and analysis of the internal lines of the debate and the emergence of an alternative "model" of Chinese journalism.

A comprehensive analytical treatment of the debate is not currently available in either Chinese or Western scholarship. This thesis will include a critical assessment of the implications, internal coherence and consequent relevance of the debate and the success of the press reform. The analysis places the debate in political context and traces its historical origins.

The implication of the debate demonstrated a new substantial pattern of independent and critical thinking on the part of Chinese journalists reformers. The continuing relevance of the debate is also manifest in the direction of post-June 4 journalism reform.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis critically identifies and analyzes the internal lines of Chinese debate over "journalism reform" and the emergence of an alternative "model" of journalism in the pre- and post-June 4 context of China's political conditions. This analysis will include a critical assessment of the implications, internal coherence and consequent relevance of the debate and the success of the reform.

"Journalism reform" as one of a few alternative translations of the Chinese phrase *xinwen gaige* may need some explanation. The most frequently used translations of *xinwen gaige* in English literature are "news reform," "press reform," "media reform," "mass media reform," and "journalism reform." As one can see, the differentiation of the various versions of the translation lies mainly in the first Chinese word, *xinwen*.

The literal English translation of *xinwen* is "news". However, since the Chinese debate involved not only news writing, news collecting, news editing and reporting, but also concerned many other issues such as media management, media policies and theories, the term "news" does not adequately convey the scope of the debate. On the other hand, the terms "media" and "mass media" are too broad. In the terminology of communication studies, "media" normally refers to all types of form and channel of communication, while "mass media" encompasses news-related mass media as well as

non-news-related mass media such as movies, discs and books, which are beyond the range of the subjects covered by the Chinese debate.

The original connotation of "journalism" and "press" was limited to print-news-related mass media, ie., newspapers and news magazines. But the two terms have gradually extended to include both "print" and "electronic" news-related mass media, such as radio broadcasting and television. In addition, "journalism" and "press" also refer to the whole "business", "profession", and the "process of gathering, writing, editing, publishing, and broadcasting news."¹

Thus, in comparison with the previously-mentioned options, the term "journalism reform" more closely reflects the nature and content of the Chinese debate, hence it is chosen as the equivalent of *xinwen gaige* in this thesis. The term "journalism" will be used interchangeably with the term "press" in its broader connotations.

The Chinese debate on "journalism reform" began in 1979,² yet,

¹ See Richard Weiner, *Webster's New World Dictionary - Media and Communications* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1990); R. Terry Ellmore, *NTC's Mass Media Dictionary* (Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1991); and *Longman Dictionary of Mass Media & Communication* (England: Longman Inc., 1982).

² Judy Polumbau indicated that as early as in 1978 "journalism reform" was proposed. See Chin-Chuan Lee ed., *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism* (New York: the Guilford Press, 1990), p.36. Kenneth Starck & Yu Xu did not give the exact year, but suggested that Chinese journalists began to discuss "journalism reform" in the early 1980s. See Kenneth Starck & Yu Xu, "Loud Thunder, Small Raindrops: The Reform Movement and the Press in China," *Gazette* vol. 42 (1988/89), no. 2. These two accounts are not justified with original Chinese sources. According to an official Chinese source, *Xinhua yuebao* (Xinhua Monthly), no. 1, 1989, p. 109, calls for "journalism reform" first emerged in 1979. Another Chinese source also confirmed this. See *Xinwen jiaoxue cankao ziliao* (Reference Materials for Journalism Education) (an

it did not catch the research attention of Western scholars until 1984, when Robert L. Terrel³ from the University of Missouri offered his observations on the developing debate.

Although Terrel correctly pointed out that the emerging Chinese journalistic debate was "a critically important dialogue" between the Party and the journalists, he did not outline the debate in detail, and he offered no critical analysis. Given the fact that the debate was still in its initial stage when his observation was made, Terrel was then indeed unable to provide an overall picture of the debate. Nevertheless, he had an optimistic prediction about the future of Chinese press. He claimed that the Party's modernization drive would ultimately challenge "... its leaders' concepts of the most appropriate ways to use mass communications systems to promote national objectives". He anticipated that if the trend towards liberalization continued, China's press would have "more independence".

Kenneth Starck and Yu Xu⁴ provided a relatively more detailed discussion of the debate but only for the specific year, 1988. They identified the emergence of two schools of thought concerning

internal publication by the Faculty of Journalism, the People's University of China), no. 35, Oct., 1986.

³ Robert L. Terrel, "Modernization and the Media in China", *Gazette* 33 (1984), pp. 143-154. Terrell was employed by the Chinese government to work as an editor for *Beijing Review* during the 1981-82 academic year. His article was largely based on his interviews with Chinese journalists, educators and government officials in that period of time.

⁴ Kenneth Starck & Yu Xu, "Loud Thunder, Small Raindrops: The Reform Movement and the Press in China", *Gazette* 42 (1988), pp. 143-159.

China's press reform: the "major reform" and the "minor reform". They highlighted some of the main issues debated by Chinese journalists, such as "news values", "enterprise newspapers", and "press legislation". They asserted that "an open economic system" could not exist in "a closed press system". Starch and Xu commented that "... the rhetoric is louder than the practice" but they, nonetheless, suggested that "... the debates portend change."

Timothy Cheek and William A. Mulligan⁵ addressed one of the important issues of the Chinese debate, namely, the press law. Cheek observed that the drafting of a press law had become a focus of the journalistic debate since the 13th Party Congress in 1987. He indicated the existence of two groups of opinion toward the purpose of a press law in the circles of journalism. One group stressed "control and order", while the other emphasized the "protection of the freedom of press." Cheek suggested that the arrival of a truly free press in China seemed as unlikely as a return to the stilted propaganda of the early 1970s.

Mulligan saw the "openness" in the Chinese discussions about establishing a journalism law as the "most impressive progress" in China's press circles in the late 1980s. After reviewing the development of the drafting of press law, Mulligan concluded that "... until a real journalism law comes into being, Chinese

⁵ Timothy Cheek, "Redefining Propaganda: Debates on the Role of Journalism in Post-Mao Mainland China", *Issues & Studies* 25, no. 2 (1989), pp. 47-74.

William A. Mulligan, "The Debate On Journalism Law", *International Communication Bulletin* vol. 25, no. 1-2 (Spring 1990), pp. 13-16.

journalism will find it difficult to play a full function in China's modernization program." However, he argued that the difficulties in establishing a journalism law would remain until a democratic system could be set up in China.

Judy Polumbaum's discussion of the Chinese journalistic debate primarily focused on the dissatisfaction and frustration of Chinese journalists during the 1980s.⁶ She categorized this discontent into four areas: the dilemmas of serving two masters; the various formal and informal mechanisms of press control constraining newswork; obstacles to coverage and publication of specific genres of news; issues of journalistic initiative and autonomy. Polumbaum correlated this dissatisfaction and frustration with the inevitable result of the social change and political liberalization in China through the 1980s. She viewed the Chinese journalists' break with the Party line during the 1989 student democracy movement as an expression of the journalistic discontent with the failure of press reform. She concluded that Chinese journalism, in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananman Square Incident, "... entered a dark age."

The previous discussions on the Chinese debate by the above-mentioned authors have provided preliminary valuable insight into the Chinese debate. It may be noted, however, that the primary focus of these pioneering discussions concentrated either on one or

⁶ Judy Polumbaum, "The Tribulations of China's Journalists After a Decade of Reform", Chin-chuan Lee, eds., *The Voice of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990), pp. 33-68.

a few selected issues that emerged during the Chinese debate, or on some limited aspects of the Chinese debate in a particular period of the ten-year journalistic debate. The literature presently lacks a study of the 10-year Chinese debate as a whole. It also lacks coverage of the post-June 4 development of China's journalism, which, however, is very important for a more realistic assessment of the success of the journalistic debate. The debate encompassed a comprehensive intellectual attempt to seek an appropriate model of journalism for China under the modernization drive. The journalistic development in the past two years has illustrated the continuing relevance of the previous debate on press reform.

This thesis will examine the debate as a whole, and it will argue that the process of the debate itself constituted a substantial effort by Chinese journalism professionals⁷ to seek an appropriate model of journalism for China in the phase of "socialist construction". The debate required significant reform to the existing model of journalism that had been fostered during the pre-1949 period of "armed struggles", and, recent development indicates that some of the ideas and suggestions advocated by journalism reformers have already been adopted into the present system of Chinese journalism.

⁷ As a result of the post-Mao period's new intellectual policy, "respect knowledge, respect qualified personnel," the term "zhuan ye ren yuan" (professional) has become popular in China. Those who are engaged in journalistic work, such as reporters, editors, and anchorman, used to be called "xinwen gong zuo zhe" (journalistic workers), and now they are respected as "professionals". "xinwen zhuan ye ren yuan" (journalism professionals) in China also include educators, writers and theorists who specialize in journalism or communication studies.

The issue of "journalism reform" was first proposed in 1979, according to Chinese accounts.⁸ Chinese journalistic circles responded to the Party's call for efficient communication and effective propaganda to promote the "four modernizations" program.⁹

When China's post-Mao leadership under Deng Xiaoping launched its ambitious program to achieve the "four modernizations" by the end of this century, it faced an immediate challenge as to how to mobilize the populace and gain national support. The leaders were aware that the failure in economic development and numerous political campaigns in the first three decades of the PRC, especially the ten-year Cultural Revolution, had greatly eroded the people's support for the regime. There was a commonly recognized "crisis of faith". The Party itself was well aware of public apathy towards the government, the Party and the so-called "superiority of socialism".

To regain the people's trust and mobilize national support, Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues believed, efficient propaganda and better communication between the leaders and the masses were essential. In a speech delivered at a meeting of high-ranking officials in 1979, Deng Xiaoping highlighted the importance of

⁸ See footnote no. 2.

⁹ The "Four Modernizations" program refers to the modernization of China's agriculture, industry, national defence, science and technology. It was first proposed in the early sixties, but not confirmed until 1975 by former Premier Zhou Enlai in his speech "Report On Government Work" delivered at the Fourth Congress of China's National People's Congress. The post-Mao leadership reconfirmed this program in 1978 and proclaimed to achieve the "four modernizations" by the end of this century.

propaganda and communication, urging senior officials to communicate sincerely with the masses:

*If comrades in different organizations really explain to the people the problems facing our country, ... if they explain to them the measures we are taking to overcome the difficulties, the people are sure to feel and react differently. So long as we maintain close ties with the people and explain things to them patiently, we will have their sympathy and understanding and will be able to surmount any difficulties, however great.*¹⁰

News related mass media, which is defined by the traditional Chinese theory of journalism as the "voice" of the Party and the "bridge" between the Party and the masses, were certainly expected by the post-Mao leadership to play an important role in this regard. The Party leaders had a deep belief that the news media could do so, for "even a newspaper alone" could exert "tremendous influence", to use Deng Xiaoping's words.¹¹

It remained a question, however, for both the leaders and the journalistic circles, as to how the media would play such a role effectively and efficiently. Timothy Cheek observed: "It has been long accepted in mainland China that the press should propagandize the policies of the Chinese Communist Party, but in the post-Mao

¹⁰ The speech entitled "Senior Cadres Should Take the Lead in Maintaining and Enriching the Party's Fine Traditions", addressed to the cadres of the rank of vice-minister and above from the central Party, government and army organizations on November 2, 1979. See *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1983), pp. 208-223.

¹¹ *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1983), p. 221.

period it is not clear how the press should do that."¹²

In the late seventies, the pressing problems for China's news media seemed to be the lack of "credibility" and "attractiveness". Chinese readers and audiences criticized the news media for their "jia, da, kong" (falsehood, exaggeration, and empty talk).¹³ According to one report, the press circles was satirized by the public in the following terms: "Except for the little square in the upper left corner of the first page, nothing else in your newspaper is reliable."¹⁴ This situation threatened to undermine the effectiveness of the news media in promoting the Party's new policies, hence Party leaders supported the idea of press reforms. Journalism professionals, on the other hand, felt pressure from both the Party and the masses, and they too vigorously called for "journalism reform". Without reforms, as many Chinese journalists suggested, China's journalism would become neither compatible with the process of the four modernizations, nor satisfy the demands of

¹² Timothy Cheek, "Redefining Propaganda: Debates on the Role of Journalism in Post-Mao Mainland China", *Issues & Studies* 25, No.2 (1989), pp. 47-74.

¹³ *Kongjun bao tongxun* (Air Force Daily Bulletin), January, 1981, p.3.

¹⁴ The "little square" is where the date is printed in Chinese newspapers. For the reference, see *Shanghai, Nanjing xinwenjie dui xinwen tizhi gaige de yixie kanfa* (The Views of Nanjing and Shanghai Press Circles on Some Issues Concerning the Reform of China's Journalism System). Occasional paper by the Research Institute of Public Opinion, the People's University of China, Beijing, 1989, p.1.

the masses.¹⁵

In contrast to the consensus on the necessity of journalism reform, there were fundamental differences of opinion as to what to reform, the purpose of "journalism reform", and the degree and approach to which the reform ought to be carried out.

For the Party authorities, the aim of the reform was solely to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the Party's propaganda machine. Therefore, "no matter how far the reform is to go, the nature of the Party's journalism cannot be changed", said Hu Yaobang, a leading reformer and then general secretary of the Party Central Committee.¹⁶

Within the journalistic community, views and opinions were also divided. Two groups of opinion emerged.¹⁷ Some opinion-makers such as Mu Qing, Gan Xifen, and Lin Feng advocated "minor reform" (*xiao gai*), which was limited to modest adjustments in the operation of the news media. In other words, this approach would only involve changes in content and improvement of news writing and presentation, while the press system would remain basically unchanged.

Others such as Hu Jiwei, Qian Xinbo, and Yu Keping called for

¹⁵ "Xinwen gaige shiti" (Ten Issues Concerning Journalism Reform), *Kongjunbao tongxun* (The Air Force Daily Bulletin), no. 1, 1981, p. 3.

¹⁶ Hu Yaobang, "Guanyu dangde xinwen gongzuo" (On Party Journalism), *Renmin ribao*, April 14, 1985.

¹⁷ "Guanyu xinwen gaige de yixie yijian" (Some Opinions on Journalism Reform), *Cankao Ziliao* (Reference Materials) (Beijing: Faculty of Journalism, People's University of China, 1986), pp.1-7.

"major reform" (*da gai*), which included not only improvement to the content of news reporting and style of presentation, but also basic structural change within the system of China's journalism. This position necessarily involved a re-examination of the traditional Party press theory, which emphasized the role of news media as the propaganda organ of the Party, and a re-evaluation of the existing system of journalism, characterized by a highly centralized hierarchical structure and tight Party control.

The "minor reform" group defended extant Party press theory, and focused on restoring the "fine traditions" of the Party press. They argued that the "fine traditions" that were fostered during the Yan'an days in the early 1940s should encompass both a "Party orientation" and a "people orientation".¹⁸ The poor performance and the alienation of the press from the people during the Cultural Revolution, according to this opinion group, had nothing to do with such a theory or concept of Party press, but rather, resulted from the manipulation of the news media by some individual careerists in the Party leadership, such as Lin Biao and the "Gang of Four".

The "major reform" group challenged the applicability of the traditional concept of Party press to the contemporary Chinese society. It argued that the traditional theory was formulated

¹⁸ According to Gan Xifen, "Party orientation" (*dang xing*) refers to the nature of journalism as the organ of the Party and propaganda for the Party's goals and policies as the major function of news media. "People orientation" (*renmin xing*) means that the press should also act as the voice of the people". See Gan Xifen, "Makesi zhuyi xinwenxue de jiben guandian" (The Fundamental Viewpoints of Marxist Journalism) in Gan Xifen, *Xinwen Lunzheng Sanshinian* (Thirty-year Debate over Journalism) (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1988), pp. 1-25.

during the war-time when Party control of the press was necessary; however, conditions had changed since the founding of the PRC in 1949. In the reform era, the concept of "Party press" was superseded by the concept of "national journalism" (*guojia xinwen shiye*), which confirmed the contemporaneous existence of both Party and non-Party media.

As for the highly centralized and tightly controlled system of the Party press, the "major reform" group criticized it as an anachronistic model that was developed during the revolutionary war-time, and later extended in a blind copying of the Soviet model. This model was no longer compatible with Chinese society. Indeed it was in alleged contradiction with the Party's new emphasis on economical development and political democratization since the 1978's Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee. The "major reform" journalists contended that such a model was too open to arbitrary political manipulation by small groups such as the "Gang of Four". It was deficient in reporting upward, and information was often missing and distorted.

The argument over "journalism reform" was essentially a controversy over the most appropriate model of journalism for the period of socialist construction. Both the Party leaders and the two opinion groups in the journalistic circles agreed on the need to "develop a journalism that would fit in the period of socialist construction", but disagreed on what this model of journalism

should look like.¹⁹

The debate had its ups and downs. Its participants were highly susceptible to changes in the political temperature. But the progress in economic reform and the general trend of liberalization during most part of the 1980s encouraged unprecedented critical thinking and bold discussion. There was a great flourish of discussion on the issues of political reform in 1986,²⁰ and the debate on "journalism reform" went deeper than ever before. The later touched on very sensitive issues such as "freedom of press", "independence and autonomy of news media", "objective laws governing journalism", and a "press law". Journalism reformers suggested that the reform of the press system was an integral part of the political reform, but it should go ahead of political reform. As the debate continued, the "major reform" group gained increasing credibility within the circles of journalism and support from the majority members of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).²¹

¹⁹ See Hu Jiwei, "Yanjiu shehuizhuyi jianshe shiqi de xinwenxue" (Study Journalism of the Period of Socialist Construction," *Renmin ribao* (the People's Daily), Aug. 5, 1985, p.5.

²⁰ "Political reform" was first raised by Deng Xiaoping in 1980, but it was not open to public discussion until 1986. See Benedict Stavis, *China's Political Reforms* (N.Y.: Praeger Publishers, 1988), pp. 9-15.

²¹ This view is based on the two surveys conducted in 1988 by Public Opinion Research Institute of the People's University of China, and Journalism Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Investigation Section of the Capital Journalism Association, respectively. For reference, see Chen

In October 1987, journalistic reformers got an added moral boost from then Premier Zhao Ziyang's report on the work of the government to the 13th Party Congress. Zhao highlighted three principles for newswork: that the press should exercise oversight over the work and conduct of public officials, expressed in the term "supervision by public opinion" (*yulun jiandu*); that the press should inform the public of important events (*zhongda shijian rang renmin zhidao*); and that it should reflect public debate on important issues (*zhongda wenti rang renmin taolun*).²² Zhao's report gave Chinese journalists the impression that the spring for journalism reform was imminent.²³ In 1988, the advocates of "major reform" put forth "a target model" (*mubiao moshi*) of journalism, which emphasized three characteristics, namely, genuine two-way communication; multi-tier structure and multi-types of press; and the rule of law.²⁴

The vigorous discussions on "journalism reform" lasted until

Congshan, Mi Xiuling ed., *Zhongguo Chuanbo Xiaoguo Toushi* (A Perspective Study of Media Communication Effects in China), (Shenyang: Shenyang chubanshe, March, 1989).

²² Zhao Ziyang, "Advance Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," report to the 13th Party Congress, 25, Oct. 1987, translated in *The 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of China* (Beijing: Beijing Review, 1987).

²³ "Time is Ripe for Press Reform," *Beijing Review*, Dec. 28, 1987-Jan. 3, 1988, p.9.

²⁴ Public Opinion Research Institute, People's University of China, "Shoudu zhiming renshi dui longnian de zhanwang" (Outlook of the Year of Dragon (1988), From the Notable Figures in Beijing), in Chen Congshan and Mi Xiuling ed., *A Perspective Study of Media Communication Effects in China* (Shenyang: Shenyang Publishing House, March 1989), pp.103-121.

mid 1989 when the Tiananmen Square Incident took place. The unprecedented public rebellion of China's major news media and the participation of many Chinese journalists in the 1989's Chinese student pro-democracy movement showed the great impact of the earlier debate on China's journalism. On the other hand, the June 4th Incident also revealed the limited degree of tolerance that the Party was prepared to exercise in regard to the freedom of press and expression.

In the aftermath of the 1989's Tiananmen Square Incident, the Party tightened up ideological control, and as a result, discussions on "journalism reform" have cooled down. The more radical views which emerged in the pre-June 4's journalistic debate, especially those challenging the Party's authority over the press, were explicitly criticized as the manifestation of "bourgeois liberalization" in journalistic circles.²⁵ Nevertheless, some of the ideas advocated by reform-orientated journalism professionals during the pre-June 4th journalistic debate, such as "two-way communication", "rule of law", and "non-Party newspapers", have survived.

The journalism debate during the last decade was not the first in the history of the Party. Since the CCP became the ruling Party in 1949, both Party leaders and journalism professionals have regularly asked the question how should the Party run journalism, and what would be the most appropriate model of journalism for

²⁵ Zhao Fu, "Jianchi makesizhuyi xinwenxue de jishi-houshe lun" (Uphold the Corner Stone of Marxist Journalism - the Concept of Mouthpiece), *Renmin ribao* (the People's Daily), Oct. 27, 1989.

China under socialism. Inspired by Mao's "Two Hundred Flowers" policy, in 1956 liberal intellectuals challenged both the "war-time" and the Soviet model of press, advocated more editorial autonomy. This first attempt at press reform ended prematurely with the anti-rightist campaign of 1957.²⁶

The 1980s' journalism debate was more significant. It lasted much longer, and was much larger in scope and greater in depth in terms of the issues under scrutiny and the influence of the debate. It was the first time for Chinese journalism professionals to air their views so fully as to what kind of journalism would be more suitable to the contemporary Chinese society.

The emergence of different opinions toward the evaluation of the existing theory and system of China's journalism, and the variety of proposals for the reform of journalism, indicated clearly the rise of critical thinking among Chinese journalism professionals. The debate in fact revealed the changing mentality of Chinese journalists as a result of the economic reform and the policy of opening to the outside world that were introduced by the post-Mao leadership.

The 1980s' debate also illustrated the dilemma that the Chinese journalism professionals faced between maintaining the traditional role as the Party's propagandists and satisfying the masses of people, both of which were expected by the post-Mao leadership. Economic reform created a new consumer orientation

²⁶ For reference to the 1956's discussions on press issues, see Jinglu Yu, "The Abortive 1956 Reform of Chinese Journalism", *Journalism Quarterly* 65 (2), Summer, 1988, pp. 328-334.

which was partially justified in reference to the Party's faithful implementation of the mass line, but this orientation also seemed to move beyond the mass line.

The 1980s' journalistic debate was more than just an academic exercise. It was a debate on the future of China's journalism. An informed understanding of the 1980s' Chinese debate on journalism reform would not only help readers with a more meaningful comprehension of the transformation of China's journalism but also helpful for predicting the future parameter of development within China's journalism. It is in this sense that the debate deserves research attention.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. This first chapter has briefly introduced the major terms of reference within the internal debate on journalism. Chapter Two is devoted to a historical examination of China's journalism during the period of 1921-1976. It offers background knowledge about the development of the system, policies and practice of China's journalism in different historical stages prior to the "Deng era". This chapter will hopefully provide a comprehensive understanding of the history of journalism which will help place the 1980s debate in historical context.

Chapter Three attempts to illuminate the whole spectrum of the 1980s debate. It includes a comprehensive chronological examination of the debate, which highlights two major schools of thoughts within the press circles. It illustrates the impact of politics on the debate, as well as the gradual development of the independent

and critical thinking of Chinese journalism professionals in the context of "political liberalization" and vigorous economic reform during the last decade.

Chapter Four assesses the practical impact and the limits of the debate, as well as its theoretical implications, with special attention to the participation of the journalists in the 1989 students pro-democracy movement and the post-June 4th journalistic development. The performance of the Party press and journalists in the student movement illustrated the impact of the debate on the thinking of Chinese journalists. The tolerance of the Party authorities towards the freedom of speech and the freedom of press was seriously tested. The post-June 4 development of China's journalism in a new direction may indicate the foreseeable future of China's journalism.

The 10-year debate on journalism reform was a significant phenomenon in the history of China's journalism. This phenomenon will be examined as an intellectual endeavour by Chinese journalists in creating an appropriate model of journalism for the contemporary Chinese society driven by the post-Mao leadership's "four modernizations" program. The purpose of the thesis is to critically identify and analyze the internal lines of the journalistic debate, and to assess the implications, internal coherence and prospects for such reform in light of the pre- and post-June 4 political conditions.

CHAPTER TWO

INTERPRETING CHINA'S JOURNALISM IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT, 1921-1976

The extant model of China's journalism, characterized by Party control, propaganda-orientation, and centralized hierarchic structure, has its origins in the civil war years of the 1920s-40s, when the Chinese Communist Party struggled for the acquisition of political power. In the actual process of organizing revolution, the Chinese Communists gained an intuitive knowledge as to how to use the press to promote the Party's objectives, while Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought provided the basis for a more formal conceptualization of the Party press.

This press helped facilitate the CCP's "democratic revolution", which eventually led to the collapse of the Guomindang regime and the birth of the People's Republic in 1949. As the propaganda organ of Mao and other Party leaders, this press played an important role in promoting the "socialist revolution and construction" during the numerous political and economic campaigns of the fifties, sixties and seventies. However, this press came under attack by many Chinese journalists, educators and theorists of journalism, as well as some Party and government officials during the 1980s when China was vigorously pursuing its "four modernizations". Reference to the historical development of Chinese journalism is crucial to our understanding of the 1980s' debate on journalism. This chapter reviews the development of China's journalism in different historical phases from the

inception of the Chinese Communist press in 1921 to 1976, when Mao died. This historical period can be divided into two major stages. From 1921 to 1949 the Communist Party was not in power, it ran newspapers primarily in a few scattered base areas. Once the CCP became the ruling Party in 1949, it began to develop a nationwide news media network.

It should be noted that there were two schools of thought in Western, particularly American, discussion of the Chinese model of revolution. The "cold war" school asserted that the Chinese model was the same as the Soviet, namely, characterized by "totalitarianism", while the American "revisionist" school tended to interpret the Chinese model as an alternative to Leninist-Stalinist approach. They believed that Mao's "massline" theory provided the CCP leaders with a more flexible, effective approach to cope with the hardship, contingency, and isolation.

However, in so far as the Chinese press model is concerned, most Western scholars of communication and journalism have not been really concerned to distinguish the Chinese from the Soviet model. As a matter of fact, since the publication of the *Four Theories of the Press*¹, many American experts of Chinese journalism simply regard the Chinese press as another copy of the Soviet model.² This

¹ Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press* (The University of Illinois Press, 1956).

² For reference, see Franklin W. Houn, *To Change A Nation: Propaganda and Indoctrination in Communist China* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, A division of the Crowell-Collier Publishing Co., 1961); Frederick T. C. Yu, *Mass Persuasion in Communist China* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1964); James W. Markham, *Voices of the Red Giants: Communications in Russian and*

view is in fact ironically shared by many contemporary Chinese scholars of journalism and communication.

I. THE PARTY PRESS FOR "NEW DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION" 1921-1949

In official Party historiography, 1921-1949 is "the period of new democratic revolution". The goal of this revolution was designed "to overthrow the rule of imperialism and feudalism", and to establish a "people's democratic government". The Party expected the press to play a role in this revolution. "Armed struggle" was one of the "three magic weapons" for defeating the enemy in the revolution.³ However, armed struggle itself, Mao admitted, was not enough. It had to go hand in hand with another "weapon", namely, the power of propaganda and agitation through all means of communication, including the press. Speaking to the Chinese intellectuals in Yan'an in 1942, Mao Zedong asserted:

To defeat the enemy we must rely primarily on the army with guns. But this army alone is not enough; we must also have a cultural army, which is absolutely indispensable for uniting our own ranks and defeating

China (The Iowa State University Press, 1967); Alan P. L. Liu, *Communication and National Integration in Communist China* (University of California Press, 1971); Godwin C. Chu, *Radical Change Through Communication in Mao's China* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1977); Robert L. Bishop, *Qi Lai! Mobilizing One Billion Chinese: The Chinese Communication System* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1989).

³ The so-called "three magic weapons" include "armed struggle", "Party building" and "the united front". For reference, see Mao Zedong, "Introducing The Communist", *Selected Readings From The Works Of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), pp. 133-144.

*the enemy.*⁴

This idea was echoed by Lin Biao, one of the most senior military leaders of the Chinese Communist Party. He said: "Carrying out a revolution is inseparable from two barrels. One is the barrel of a gun and the other, the barrel of a pen. To establish a political power, we must depend on these two barrels."⁵

The top CCP leaders deeply believed in the power of propaganda in generating "class consciousness". While the CCP subscribed to Lenin's notion of the Party as the "vanguard of the proletariat", it further developed the notion of the "mass line" within the practical context of the Chinese revolution.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE PARTY PRESS, 1921-1927

For quite a few years since its founding, the CCP had no independent armed force; and for most of the 28-year struggle the CCP's red army was too weak to compete with its enemies. Such hardship left the Chinese Communist Party with no option but to depend on propaganda and agitation, especially in the very early days of the revolution.

For these reasons, the CCP attached great importance to newspaper work since the inception of the revolution. In 1920, a year before the First National Conference of the CCP, Cai Hecen, a

⁴ "Talks At The Yen'an Forum On Literature And Art", in *Selected Readings From the Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), pp. 204-209.

⁵ Lu Keng. *The Chinese Press as I See It. The Asian Messenger*, Winter/Spring, 1979/80, p. 44.

prominent Chinese communist, wrote to Mao from Europe, strongly suggesting the publication of "a newspaper to propagate Marxism and communism." This paper, he insisted, "must have the clear-cut stand of the proletarian class". He added that "no wavering theory, or anything contradictory to Marxism-Leninism should be published in the newspaper."⁶ Cai's suggestion soon became true.

Shortly after its founding in July, 1921,⁷ the Party set up newspapers in many big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Jinan and Guangzhou. Under the leadership of Chen Duxiu, who was the first general secretary of the Party, the CCP's focus was then on the labour movement. The early Party newspapers, therefore, usually named "workers' daily", had as its main purpose "to foment agitation among workers." The most influential workers' newspapers in the early twenties were *Laodong zhoukan* (Labour Weekly) in Shanghai and *Gongren zhoukan* (Workers' Weekly) in Beijing.⁸ These newspapers spread Marxist ideas, reported news about the Soviet

⁶ Cai Hesen was Mao's classmate and a close friend. He joined the Chinese student "work-study" trip to Europe in the early twenties, and became propaganda head of the CCP in 1922. For reference see Fang Hanqi and others, *Zhongguo Xinwen Shiye Jianshi* (Brief History of China's Journalism) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1983), p. 165.

⁷ Communist organizations emerged in Shanghai, Beijing and other big cities as early as in 1920. However, the Chinese Communist Party was not formally established until July 1921 when the First Conference of the CCP was held in Shanghai. See Franklin W. Houn, *A Short History of Chinese Communism* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), pp. 16-19.

⁸ Fang Hanqi, Chen Yeshao and Zhang Zhihua, *Zhongguo Xinwen Shiye Jianshi* (Brief History of China's Journalism). (Beijing: China People's University Press, Aug. 1983), pp. 105-107.

October Revolution, and carried stories about workers' strikes in different cities. They played an important role in promoting the early Chinese labour movement. The Communist-led labour movement developed so successfully that from January 1922 to February 1923, more than 300,000 workers took part in over 100 strikes throughout the country.⁹

The CCP held its Second Congress in May 1922 in Shanghai, which significantly laid down the "maximum" and "minimum" programs of the Party.¹⁰ Although the "maximum" or long-range aims of the Party were to "organize the proletariat to struggle for the establishment of the dictatorship of the workers and peasants, the abolition of private property, and the gradual attainment of a Communist society," the "minimum" or immediate program called for a democratic united front of the proletariat, poor peasantry, and petty bourgeoisie against imperialism and warlordism. In concrete terms, the minimum program meant that in the first stage of the revolution the CCP should work with the Guomindang (GMD) (the Nationalist Party), which had long been frustrated in its attempt to bring about a national reunification and rejuvenation.

To publicize the two "programs" and the other political positions of the Party, the CCP's Central Committee published

⁹ Hu Qiaomu, *Thirty Years of the Communist Party in China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1954), p.8.

¹⁰ The "maximum" and "minimum" programs were proposed in the manifesto, one of the eleven documents adopted by the Second Congress of the CCP. For an English text of the Manifesto, see Conrad Brandt et al., *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 54-63.

several papers under its immediate control. *Xiangdao zhoukan* (The Guide Weekly), the first central organ of the CCP, was created on September 13, 1922, and published until July 1927. The other two journals were, *Qianfeng zhoukan* (Vanguard Weekly), a quarterly published in Guangzhou from July 1923 to February 1924; *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth), published from June 1923 to July 1926.¹¹

Prominent Party leaders, such as Cai Hesen and Qu Qiubai, were directly involved in newspaper work. In turn, the Party organs played important roles in publicizing Party programs, especially the CCP's call for a joint conference with the Guomindang for the purpose of building a united front.

With the aid of and support by the CCP, the Guomindang under Sun Zhongshan (Dr. Sun Yat-sen) convened its First National Congress in January 1924. The Congress adopted Sun's policy of "alliance with the Soviet Union and the CCP, and aid to peasants and workers. This new policy marked the beginning of the first cooperation between the two Parties, or the so-called "First United Front." The period of collaboration with the Guomindang for launching the Northern Expedition¹² has been designated by the CCP as the era of the "First Revolutionary Civil War."

"First United Front" provided the CCP with an excellent

¹¹ See Fang Hanqi and the others, *Zhongguo Xinwen Shiye Kianshi* (Aug., 1983), pp.108-113.

¹² The Northern Expedition" was a war against warlords, which began in July 1926 and ended in 1927. It was organized by the Guomindang with the help and participation of the CCP. The result of the war was that the Guomindang of Jiang Jieshi replaced the northern warlords with a nationwide regime.

opportunity to consolidate its power and expand its influence. Party branches were established in many provinces and the membership of the Party rapidly enlarged. In addition, a number of Communists soon joined the Guomindang, and their influence grew steadily. Some of the CCP's top leaders participated in the leadership of the Guomindang's First National Congress and were later elected as members or alternate members of the GMD's Central Executive Committee.¹³

In addition to the Central Committee's organs, the Party's local branches in various provincial capital cities began to publish their own newspapers. Communist-edited Workers' newspapers, peasants' newspapers, Youth League and student newspapers also flourished. According to professor Fang Hanqi, a primary Party press network connecting the Central Committee with its local branches was already in existence at that time.¹⁴

The Communists even attained a degree of influence within the controlled Guomindang's departments; for example, while Mao was acting director of the Guomindang's Propaganda Department and chief editor of its paper, the *Zhengzhi zhoukan* (Political Weekly) often defended the interests of the Communist Party. In the struggle for isolating and fighting the rightists of the Guomindang, and mobilizing support for the expedition against the northern

¹³ Franklin W. Houn, *A Short History of Chinese Communism* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs), p. 25.

¹⁴ Fang Hanqi is a professor of journalism at China's People's University in Beijing, also a distinguished scholar with expertise in Chinese journalism history. For reference, see Fang and Chen, Zhang, *Zhongguo Xinwen Shiye Jianshi* (Aug. 1983), p. 117.

warlords, this weekly played an influential role. Mao Zedong was not yet a leading figure in the Party in this period, but then acquired "rich experience in propaganda and agitation".¹⁵

The favourable situation for the expansion of the CCP and its press did not last long. The final split between the CCP and the GMD occurred two years after Sun Zhongshan's death. Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) staged a coup in Shanghai on 12 April, 1927, killing many workers and Communists. Many of the Communist and pro-communist newspapers were forced to cease publication. From then on the Chinese Communists decided to stage a revolution on their own terms.

THE PARTY PRESS IN RUIJIN AND DURING THE LONG MARCH 1927-1937

The Nanchang Uprising on 1 August 1927 marked the beginning of the ten-year armed struggle independently led by the Chinese Communist Party. This period has been officially referred to as "the Second Revolutionary Civil War." During this period of time, important changes were made in the Party's top leadership as well as its strategy and tactics. Mao Zedong emerged as the top political and military leader of the CCP. Despite its repeated setbacks, the Chinese Communists in this period steeled themselves, created a Party army, established soviets, experimented and refined the tactics of guerrilla warfare. It was in such context that the Party's press developed in a new direction. While the remains of

¹⁵ Frederick T. C. Yu, *Mass Persuasion in Communist China* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1964) p. 40.

the Communist press struggled to survive in the big cities that were controlled by the Guomindang, more newspapers were founded in the CCP's rural revolutionary base areas.

In April 1928, Mao and Zhu De led two groups of peasant-worker army respectively to Jinggang Mountain, where they established the CCP's first revolutionary base area. The life in the mountainous base was hard and isolated, and there was great pessimism mood among the worker-peasant soldiers. Many questioned "how much longer can the red flag be carried on?"¹⁶ Mao responded placing great importance on political indoctrination and propaganda within the Red Army. He said: "propaganda is the first important task for the Red Army. Ignorance of this work means to give up the Red Army's principal mission, and actually help the enemy weaken the power of the Red Army."¹⁷

One of the important forms of the political education and propaganda was the publishing of *Shishi jianbao* (Current Events Bulletin) within the Red Army. Mao himself directly took part in writing and editing the bulletin. Mao's idea that "a single spark can start a prairie fire" was repeatedly publicized by the bulletin and made well known to the soldiers and officers of the Red Army.

In the following few years after the establishment of the Jinggang Mountain base, the Red Army and revolutionary bases across

¹⁶ *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1969), Vol.1, P. 97.

¹⁷ *Mao Zedong Xinwen Gongzuo Wenxuan* (Selected Essays of Mao Zedong on Journalistic Work) (Beijing: Xinhua Chubanshe, 1983), p. 15.

the country underwent a process of gradual expansion. In 1930 a central revolutionary base was set up in Ruijin, Jiangxi province. The following year witnessed the birth of a news agency of the first Communist regime in China. On 7 November, on the same day as when the First National Congress of Chinese Soviet Zones was concerned, the Red China News Press was founded. It was the predecessor of today's Xinhua (New China) News Agency.

The News Press released declarations and other documents of the Party Central Committee and the central government, stories on construction in the Soviet areas, communiques on battles fought by the Red Army, and news about struggles carried on by the people in the Guomindang-ruled areas. These were received by the revolutionary bases in north and south China and by the Party Central Committee bureaus in Shanghai and Tianjin. Underground Communist newspapers in cities usually printed news stories based on the release by the News Press.

Another salient development of the CCP's press during this period was the publishing of a number of central newspapers. It was the first time for the CCP to run its own newspapers in places under its own control. These newspapers, together with the Red China News Press, functioned as major communication channels and propaganda tools of the CCP.

In December 1931 the provisional central government of the Chinese Soviet Republic set up its organ, *Hongse zhonghua* (Red China News). Subsequently it became the combined organ of the CCP and the central government, the All-China Federation of Trade

Union, and the Communist Youth League of China. This was the first fairly long-term newspaper printed in letter-press by the CCP in the revolutionary base areas. First published as a weekly, it was later published every three days. The paper was available in all Soviet areas and reported a circulation of 50,000 in 1934.

The other two important publications were *Douzheng* (Struggle) and *Hongxing* (Red Star). The former was founded in 1933 as a merger of two official newspapers in the Soviet area, *Shihua* (Plain Talk) and *Dangde jianshe* (Party Building). This became the official organ of the Central Bureau of the Soviet Areas of the CCP. *Hongxing* was also founded in 1933 as the official "mouthpiece" of the General Political Department of the Red Army. Its main purpose was to carry out political indoctrination within the Red Army. It later became one of the few papers that survived the Long March. In the Jiangxi Soviet bases, the Communists reportedly published a total of 34 newspapers during the 1930s.¹⁸

While the Red Army and the rural revolutionary bases expanded, Jiang Jieshi waged five successive "encirclement and suppression" campaigns against them. The Red Army successfully foiled the first four campaigns with their guerrilla warfare tactics, but was defeated in the fifth campaign. It faced the prospect of complete annihilation. The CCP leaders then decided to evacuate the main surviving Red forces from their hard-won bases in Jiangxi. In October 1934, the Red Army broke out of the Guomindang encirclement

¹⁸ Fang Hanqi, *Zhongguo Xinwen Shiye Jianshi* (Aug., 1983) p.155.

to the west and started on the "Long March."

Although the Communists were actually in forced retreat, their long trek was later immortalized as one of the greatest triumphs in modern military history.¹⁹ In the face of extraordinary material adversity, the need for effective persuasive indoctrination, propaganda and agitation became more imperative. For this reason, while most of the Party newspapers that were founded in the base areas had to stop publication, the Party managed to keep alive some newspapers and its news agency. The *Hongxing* (Red Star), for example, was one that continued in circulation, but it had to be printed by hand. The paper carried the victories of the Red Army in attacking small and weak Guomindang troops. It also published editorials and articles written by leaders of the Party and Red Army. It encouraged the soldiers to overcome the hardship, and predicted the bright future of the revolution.

THE PARTY PRESS NETWORK AND THE INDOCTRINATION OF THE JOURNALISTS IN YAN'AN, 1937-1945

The peaceful solution of the Xian Incident²⁰ marked the end of 10 years of the civil war and the beginning of the "Second United Front" or the second GMD-CCP cooperation during the War of

¹⁹ Edgar Snow, *The Other Side of the River: Red China Today* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 142.

²⁰ In December 1936, Jiang Jieshi was arrested in Xian by two of his generals, Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng, who asked Jiang to stop attacking the Red Army, and fight the Japanese invasion whole-heartedly. The CCP successfully persuaded Zhang, Yang and Jiang, and peacefully solved the Incident. The "Second United Front" was consequently formed.

Resistant Japanese aggression (1937-45). In this period, the CCP had propaganda-agitation work to do in three distinctively different areas, namely, the Guomindang-controlled areas, the Communist-areas, and the areas behind or around the points of Japanese occupation.

From within the formal mutual agreement on the "united front", the CCP basically sought to maintain its independence and autonomy within the cooperation, to develop its own military force independently, to establish guerrilla bases, and to agitate for a pro-Communist movement in all Guomindang-held areas with such slogans as those contained in "The 10-Point Program for Anti-Japanese Resistance and National Salvation" as the battle cry.²¹

This basic strategy led to the consolidation and rapid expansion of the CCP as well as its army. As the Communist Party and its army grew in strength and the number of base areas increased, the Communist Party press saw unprecedented development in both network building and journalistic personnel training.

This first found expression in the re-emergence of the CCP's newspapers in the Guomindang-controlled cities. For more than 10 years since the final split of the two parties in 1927, publication of Communist newspapers was banned by the Guomindang government. The CCP's underground organizations could only print some secret

²¹ The 10-point program demanded among other things total mobilization of the country, democratization of the government, improvement of the welfare of the people, and the abolition of all laws and regulations curtailing freedom of speech, assembly, and association. An English text of the document is in Brandt et al., *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, pp. 242-245.

newspapers in the cities. The establishment of the "Second United Front" in 1937 gave the Communist Party a chance to publish its newspapers openly. *Qunzhong* (The Masses) weekly and *Xinhua ribao* (New China Daily) thus emerged in Wuhan, the capital of the Guomindang government.²²

The two papers, especially *Xinhua ribao*, had a special role. It represented the voice of the Communist Party in the very centre of the Guomindang regime. Zhou Enlai, who was then in charge of the Party's liaison office in Chongqing, personally supervised editorial writing and news reporting. Serving as the organ of the CCP, the two newspapers played a special role in promoting the united front. They actively publicized the CCP's policy on "the total mobilization of the nation for the resistance against Japanese aggression," and condemned the Guomindang for taking a passive attitude toward fighting the Japanese while actively opposing the Communists. Its significant contribution to "uniting all patriots as it strove to win the war" was highly praised many times by the Central Committee of the CCP.²³

Yet, a more noteworthy development of the Communist Party's press during this period of time took place in the Communist controlled base areas, or "the liberated areas". By August 1945, the CCP was in control of 19 "liberated areas" in 19 provinces,

²² *Qunzhong* published from December 11, 1937 to March 2, 1947. *Xinhua ribao* published from January 11, 1938 to February 28, 1947. See Fang Hanqi, *Zhongguo Xinwen Shiye Jianshi* (Aug. 1983), p. 219.

²³ *Renmin Ribao* (The People's Daily), December 22, 1984, p. 5.

with a total population of 100 million.²⁴ It was in these fairly stable "liberated areas" with Yan'an as the central base, that the Communist Party developed a relatively more comprehensive and sophisticated network of the Communist press.

The first component of this network was a group of central newspapers published in Yan'an, which were under the immediate leadership of the CCP's Central Committee. *Hongse zhonghua* resumed publication in January 1936, changing its title to *Xin Zhonghua bao* (New China News). In May 1941 it merged with *Jinri xinwen* (News Today) to become a paper under the name of *Jiefang ribao* (Liberation Daily). This paper was originally the organ of the government of the Shanganning border region, and became the organ of the Central Committee on February 7, 1939.

Jiefang zhoukan (Liberation Weekly), founded on April 24, 1937 in Yan'an, was a political and theoretical organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. *Gongchandangren* (The Communist) was introduced on October 20, 1939 to guide the study of Party members and cadres. In his introductory remarks to the journal, Mao emphasized once again that the task of the journal was to "help to build up a bolshevized Chinese Communist Party of nation-wide scope and broad mass character, fully consolidated ideologically, politically, and organizationally." It was an internal Party publication, aiming at Party construction.

In addition to these Party organs, there were a number of

²⁴ Franklin W. Houn, *A Short History of Chinese Communism*, p. 58.

newspapers published by different institutions of the central government in Yan'an. *Zhongguo gongren* (Chinese Workers) (February 7, 1940) was published as "a school for educating the workers and training cadres from among the workers". The other papers were *Zhongguo wenhua* (Chinese Culture) (February 15, 1940), *Zhongguo qingnian* (Chinese Youth) (April 16, 1939), *Zhongguo funu* (Chinese Women) (June 1, 1939), and *Bianqu qunzhong bao* (Regional News For Masses) (March 25, 1940). Other journals targeted Party members and cadres in general as well as specific educational and ideological levels. With the emergence of these Party and non-Party newspapers, Yan'an became a propaganda centre for the promotion of campaigns supporting the war of resistance against Japanese aggression.

Communist newspapers also appeared in the liberated areas behind the Japanese lines. By 1939, according to one account, there were more than 700 newspapers of this type in those areas.²⁵ To ensure that all of these publications remained under the Party's tight control, the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee instructed in 1941 the Party committees in border regions to reorganize these newspapers. Each regional Party committee concentrated on five newspapers. These included a political newspaper, which acted as the most important organ of a Party committee, a political magazine focusing on the more theoretical issues concerning the armed struggles, the united front, and the Party building, an internal Party publication, aimed at the

²⁵ Fang Hanqi, *Zhongguo Xinwen Shiye Jianshi* (Aug. 1983), p. 195.

education of Party members, a cultural and literary magazine also under the supervision of the Party committee, and a popular paper for the masses of the workers, peasants and soldiers. Other papers were either shut down or merged. Through such re-organization, the border-region newspapers became more effective propaganda tools of the Party.

The expansion of the news agency was another striking development. The Red China News Press changed its name to *Xinhua* News Agency in January 1937. Beginning in 1938 the *Xinhua* News Agency established the Jin-Cha-Ji (Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei), North China, Shandong, Northwest Shanxi, and other offices. Its service areas extended from Yan'an to the liberated areas in the enemy's rear. By 1939 the news agency had become a wire service, providing translation, editing, news releases, and reception of news stories from main news agencies at home and abroad. The *Xinhua* disseminated the Party's policies on "united front" and reported economic construction in the liberated areas, helping to push the anti-Japanese forces to final victory. As the various base areas were blockaded and separated by the enemy, the agency actually played the role of a national newspaper.

The Chinese Communist broadcast system also had its beginning during this period, which constituted another important part of the network building of the CCP's press. In spring 1940 a broadcasting committee was organized and chaired by Zhou Enlai in Yan'an to make plans for the establishment of a broadcasting station. Within the same year a group of radio workers converted an old automobile

engine into a generator with an old assortment of rebuilt or handmade parts. In May 1941 Mao, in a directive drafted for the Party Central Committee, ordered that all liberated areas receive the Xinhua broadcasts. In this way, Yan'an Xinhua Broadcasting Station helped the Central Committee in Yan'an keep close supervision over the Party committees even in the scattered base areas behind the Japanese lines.

The Party also focused on the training and education of journalists as "propagandists". This program was rolled into the border region wide rectification campaign in 1942.

Since the late 1930s, an increasing number of young students and intellectuals were attracted to Yan'an to participate in the Party's propaganda work.²⁶ After experiencing the initial excitement, however, they began to accentuate some negative aspects of life in Yan'an in their literary and journalistic works. Instead of giving priority to publicizing Party policies and the progress of the revolution, quite a few writers and journalists criticized Party leaders for their inept guidance of intellectuals. They exposed the "dark side" of life in Yan'an.

These practices or tendencies were seen by the Party authorities as a reflection of the "world-outlook" of the "petty-bourgeois" intellectuals. Mao and other leaders believed that only if they were indoctrinated with basic Marxism-Leninism and the Party's discipline, could they become ideologically qualified Party

²⁶ In the CCP's terminology, "propaganda work" refers to all of its literary and artistic, journalistic, ideological and theoretical work.

propagandists. Thus the reform of newspaper work was designed as an integral part of the overall rectification campaign, through which the Party was intended to teach the journalists about "for whom" and "how" they ought to work.

Mao Zedong had emerged as the number one leader of the CCP, and he paid special attention to newspaper reform. When the campaign just started, he chaired a seminar, delivering a speech on Yan'an newspaper work. He emphasized that the press was an integral part of the entire undertakings of the Party, therefore, the Party committees at all levels must strengthen the Party's leadership over newspaper work and learn how to use newspapers to guide Party committees' routine work. For the journalists, Mao made it clear that they were the Party's propagandists, not independent individual journalists. Accordingly, they had to consciously accept the Party's leadership, and speak for the Party. Mao especially stressed the "stand" of journalists, asking them to serve the masses of the people.

Based on Mao's speech, Yan'an's journalists extensively discussed the issues concerning newspaper work. *Jiefang ribao* (The Liberation Daily) opened a special column to carry leaders' speeches and journalists' discussions.

The most important issue was about the nature of Yan'an's newspapers and the relation of the press to the Party. *Jiefang ribao* carried an article entitled "The Party and the Party Press", introducing Lenin's concept that "a newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and agitator, but also a collective

organizer." This article argued that the "collective" did not refer to any other collective groups or organizations, but only to the Party. Since the newspapers belonged to the Party, they must act in accordance with the interest of the Party.

The second issue was how to understand the character of "news". This issue also involved the relationship between "facts" and "truthfulness". In view of the fact that some reporters in Yan'an tended to focus on "novelty" as the main criterion for selecting news, and enjoyed free criticism and exposure without paying enough attention to "facts" and "accuracy", *Jiefang ribao* published an article entitled "Our Basic View On Journalism", written by Lu Dingyi, a veteran Communist journalists and then the propaganda head of the Party Central Committee.

Lu held that the origin of news was material objects, ie, facts. This was a materialistic view on the question of "what is news?" and "what is the origin of news." Based on this view, Lu defined "news" as "the latest report on the facts that happened lately", and he argued that "facts come first, news secondary." He emphasized that "materialistic journalists must respect objective facts in the whole process of news collecting, editing and reporting." However, Lu continued, "facts" were not equal to "truthfulness" of news. Lu asserted that only if "a reporter's attitude of "respecting facts" is combined with his "revolutionary stand", could the truthfulness of his news reports be achieved." This view has been regarded by the Chinese Communists as a correct understanding of the nature of "news" and the relationship between

"news" and "truthfulness".

Lu's concept of "news" here actually introduced a fundamental view of the Party on the press. The Party expected the press to have a clear-cut political inclination, and at the same time, be truthful and respect facts.

The status of Yan'an journalists was another subject of discussion. Some reporters agreed that journalists act as "the king without crown". This view was criticized as a "bourgeois" concept. Indeed, this terminology did originate in the development of the free press in the West. *Jiefang ribao* proposed that the journalists should be "the public servant" of the people, they must serve the workers, peasants and soldiers.

The style of writing was also examined in the "rectification" of the newspaper work. Some writers and reporters enjoyed writing lengthy articles with literary language or elegant words. Mao firmly opposed this style. To Mao, a writer's style of writing related to his work-style, his world-outlook, and his sense of responsibility for readers. Lengthy and empty articles, in Mao's opinion, were not only useless, but also harmful. He said:

*Some of our comrades love to write long articles with no substance, very much like the foot bindings of a slattern, long as well as smelly. Why must they write such long articles? There can be only one explanation: they are determined that the masses shall not read them. Because the articles are long and empty, the masses shake their heads at the very first sight of them. How can they be expected to read them. Such writings are good for nothing except to bluff the naive, among whom they spread bad influence and foster bad habits.*²⁷

²⁷ *Selected Readings From The Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), p. 191.

Mao attacked the style of "pretentiousness" of writing, ie., writing "without considering the audience", and the style of writing "with drab language." Mao believed that these kinds of writing style were not only "unsuitable for expressing revolutionary spirit," but "is apt to stifle it."

What Mao considered the appropriate style of writing was "vigorous, lively, fresh and forceful." This was, to Mao, the Marxist-Leninist style of writing, hence should be advocated and adopted by the journalists. Mao's view was publicized in full text by the *Jiefang ribao*, serving as the guide for the rectification of the newspaper work.

Participants of the campaign also discussed the relationship between "political orientation" and "professional skills" in newspaper work. The *Jiefang ribao* carried an editorial entitled "Politics and Technique", stressing the priority of politics over technique or skills in newspaper work. It insisted that technique or skills must serve politics, thus "Politics first, technique secondary" became a principle for newspaper work.

In addition to the above-mentioned issues, three "work-styles" were advocated. Mao first proposed the three "work-styles" as the Party's fine tradition, which include (1) integrating theory with practice; (2) maintaining close links with the masses; (3) and criticism and self-criticism. *Jiefang ribao* suggested that the "three styles" were also applicable to newspaper work.

To integrate theory with practice meant to reflect the actual state of affairs in news reporting and then to achieve theoretical

generalizations from the practise, which would in turn guide practical work. To maintain close links with the masses, meant to serve the masses, to treat the workers, peasants and soldiers as the primary readers or audience. It also meant to let the masses participate in the newspaper work. Journalists had to go to the masses, and to learn from the masses. As for "criticism and self-criticism", the newspapers were to criticize mistakes and wrongdoings both outside and inside journalism institutions.

The 1942 rectification campaign provided the first opportunity for the CCP formally to indoctrinate newspaper workers with the Party's ideology. It had great impact on the later development of the CCP's press work. Practically, it made Yan'an journalists, if not accept, at least clearly understand the Party's definition of the nature and role of the newspapers, and the Party's expectation of what and how they supposed to work as Party propagandists. In this sense, the campaign helped bring the journalists under the ideological control of the Party.

From theoretical point of view, the rectification campaign was also significant. It has contributed to the conceptualization of the Chinese Communist Party's theory of press. Fang Hangqi has put it in this way:

During the rectification campaign, ... some bourgeois concepts of journalism were criticized, the Chinese proletarian theory of journalism was unprecedentedly developed, the thought of the journalists was deeply remoulded ... the Chinese proletarian theory of press developed into a relatively mature stage.²⁸

²⁸ Fang Hanqi, *Zhongguo Xinwen Shiye Jianshi* (Aug. 1983), p. 191.

THE PRESS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR "LIBERATION", 1945-49

Soon after the surrender of Japan in 1945, the CCP and the Guomindang began a struggle for the control of the country. In about four years, the struggle finally led to the collapse of the Guomindang rule of the mainland, and the establishment of the People's Republic of China. This historical period is called "The Third Revolutionary Civil War".

The CCP's propaganda work had new focus during this period. While discrediting the Guomindang regime by exposing its officials' corruption²⁹ and portraying Jiang Jieshi as the chief offender who initiated the civil war, the CCP called upon the nation to overthrow the Guomindang regime and promised a "democratic coalition government" based upon freedom of speech, of press, of assembly and of association.³⁰

This massive propaganda campaign certainly required the continuous development of the press network. In the "liberated areas", a number of relatively big newspapers were newly established and old ones were enlarged and consolidated. The Xinhua News Agency continued to expand. In addition to the offices in the

²⁹ The CCP's propaganda campaign to expose the Guomindang officials' corruption was very successful. For instance, the appearance of Chen Boda's (Deputy-Director of the CCP Propaganda Department at that time) pamphlet entitled *The Four Big Families* (si da jia zu) proved particularly damaging to the public image of Jiang Jieshi and some of his principal associates.

³⁰ On October 10, 1947, the Communist Party issued a formal declaration, which elaborated these points. For reference, see Franklin W. Houn, *A Short History of Chinese Communism* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, 1967), p. 70.

liberated areas, it began to set up bureaus in such Guomindang-ruled areas as Chongqing, Beijing, and Nanjing. Reporters were sent to cover the war, and offices were set up one after another on the battlefield. Radio broadcasting also saw rapid growth during the "Third Revolutionary Civil War". The number of stations increased from only one in Yan'an to 35 in dispersed locations. Broadcasting time increased from 2.0 hours per day in 1945 to 3.5 hours per day in 1946, and much longer latter. According to a CCP report, broadcasting from these stations had a tremendous impact on the morale of Guomindang officers, many of whom joined the People's Liberation Army as a result.³¹

The Party continued to emphasize the training of journalists. The *Huazhong* (Central China) Journalism School was opened in February 1946. The school used *Xinwen Xue Jianhua* (Talks on Journalism) as the textbook³² to teach students about news writing, interviewing techniques, and news collecting and editing. The school also offered courses on advertising and news value, etc. Technique training was closely integrated into ideological indoctrination; for example, students were told to remember the five fundamental functions of the Party press, namely, encouraging,

³¹ John A. Lent, *Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), p. 25.

³² *Xinwenxue Jianhua* was written by Yun Yiqun, published by Jinzhong New China Book Store in the liberated areas in July 1947. It was popularly used as a textbook for training journalists in the liberated areas in the late 1940s. For reference to this book, see Yu Jiahong and others ed., *Xinwenxue Jianming Cidian* (A Concise Dictionary of Journalism) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 1988), pp. 217-218.

stimulating and promoting, criticizing and warning, educating, and organizing. The school trained many of new China's journalists before the actual founding of the PRC in 1949.

Beginning in 1948, the Liberation Army began to launch a nationwide offensive, and the main battlefields gradually moved to the Guomindang-controlled areas. After the fall of Shenyang (Mukden) the CCP captured many heavily defended cities, Communist journalists were faced with the new task of running newspapers in the large cities under their own control. They only had very limited experience in running newspapers in the rural base areas. To guide the journalists, the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee issued a directive in August 1948, highlighting two erroneous tendencies. One was to forget that the newspapers should mainly represent and serve the workers and peasants; and the other was to refuse to serve small businessmen and owners of small factories, and intellectuals.³³

These two tendencies existed for quite a while when the Communist journalists first entered the new liberated cities. A typical example was the practice of *Shijiazhuang ribao* (Shijiazhuang Daily), which attacked all other classes except for the worker-peasant class. Old newspapermen who were used by Communist newspapers also posed a problem. These people were used to making news reports attractive by focusing on "bad" news and using striking titles such as "price keeps going up", "disastrous

³³ See Fang Hanqi, *Zhongguo Xinwen Shiye Jianshi* (Aug., 1983), pp. 253-254.

fire caused deaths". These practices were criticized by the Party as a deviation from the character of the Party press. Because once the cities were under the Communist control, the Party wanted to maintain social stability. Reporting on bad news would cause more chaos.

The Party's effort in training the journalists was also seen in the "anti-Krikun" campaign in the liberated areas in 1947. The term "Krikun" was taken from the name of a reporter in the Soviet play *The Front* who had allegedly made groundless accusations and fabricated lies. In the Chinese press circles, this term referred to a kind of news reporting divorced from facts and characterized by fabrication, boasting, exaggeration, and empty talk.

In view of these problems, which had already caused the masses' distrust in the Party newspapers, *Shanxi-Suiyuan ribao* (Shanxi-Suiyuan Daily) began a campaign to do away with the "Krikun" phenomenon. The *Xinhua* News Agency and *Jiefang ribao* joined it by publishing a number of editorials and articles to criticize the tendency toward exaggeration, distorted facts, irresponsible remarks, and the practice of reporting only good news, not bad. The emphasis on "facts" and "accuracy" in news reports was consistent with Lu Dingyi's concept of "news". It was also the manifestation in the field of Party journalism of the so-called Yan'an spirit of "seek truth from facts." In fact, despite the fact that the Communist leaders put great emphasis on the propaganda function of Party press, they, however, simultaneously emphasized that propaganda must be based on facts. This had been

one of the Party's consistent views on how the Party press conduct propaganda.

As the People's Liberation Army won one victory after another following the commencement of its nationwide offensive in July 1947, the CCP began to anticipate an early collapse of the Guomindang regime. There was only a little time to make necessary political preparations for the establishment of a new regime. Top Party leaders, such as Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi, prepared related guidelines for a national press.

On April 2, 1948, Mao elaborated his view on Party press in a speech entitled "*A Talk To The Editorial Staff Of The Shanxi-Suiyuan Daily*".³⁴ The speech has been regarded by the Chinese journalists as one of the most important guides on the Party's newspaper work.

Mao explicitly defined the function of the press as the organ of the Party. He said, the role and power of the newspaper consisted in their ability to bring the Party programme, the Party line, the Party's general and specific policies, its tasks and methods of work before the masses in the quickest and most extensive way. Questions concerning policy, according to him, "... should as a rule be given publicity in the Party papers or periodicals."

Mao emphasized once again that newspaper work was important Party work. Therefore Party leaders at all levels must learn how to

³⁴ *Selected Readings From The Works Of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), pp. 288-292.

"make full use of newspapers" in arousing the people's enthusiasm and mobilizing mass support for the Party's policies. He affirmed:

To run a newspaper well, to make it interesting and absorbing, to give correct publicity in the newspapers to the Party's general and specific policies and to strengthen the Party's ties with the masses through the newspapers - this is an important question of principle in our Party's work which is not to be taken lightly.

Here, Mao for the first time applied his "mass line theory" to newspaper work. He criticized reporters and editors who always stayed in office, as follows: "Our papers talk about mass line everyday, yet frequently the mass line is not carried out in the work of the newspaper office itself." The "mass line" in newspaper work, according to Mao, meant two-way communication between the Party and the masses. He asked the press to publicize the Party's voice, and at the same time, encouraged journalists to reflect the "great mass struggles," and speak "for the masses". Mao said, "Your comrades are newspapermen. Your job is to educate the masses, to enable the masses to know their own interests, their own tasks and the Party's general and specific policies." He praised the *Shanxi-Suiyuan ribao* for the paper was not only "rich in content, sharp, pungent and vigorous," it also "... reflected the great mass struggles, it spoke for the masses."

Mao also elaborated the "truth" and "style" of news reporting:

We must firmly uphold the truth, and truth requires a clear-cut stand. We Communists have always disdained to conceal our views. Newspapers run by our Party and all the propaganda work of our Party should be vivid, clear-cut and sharp and should never mutter and mumble. That is the militant style proper to us, the revolutionary proletariat.

Liu Shaoqi gave a similar speech to the Northern China

Journalists' Group. He described the role of journalism as "an important bridge between the Party and the masses." He said, the Party depended on the press "to contact the masses, to guide the masses, to supervise the work of the Party and government in different regions". The Party also depended on it to learn about the activities and the mood of the masses.³⁵

The pre-1949 development of the Chinese Communist Party's press provided a primary base, both materially and ideologically, for the construction of China's nationwide network of journalism and mass communication after the Chinese Communist Party took over the country in 1949.

II. JOURNALISM FOR THE "SOCIALIST REVOLUTION" 1949-1976

The People's Republic of China, was officially proclaimed on October 1, 1949, but it immediately faced massive problems. In a series of speeches in 1949, Mao announced the Party's aim of creating socialism in China. However, as the Communist Party itself acknowledged, it had no experience in building a new socialist country. The same was true with journalism. Mao frankly acknowledged in 1957 that the Party had no experience in running newspapers nationally. He said:

Speaking of running newspapers, the Communist Party is not as adept as the non-party personages. In Yan'an we had a short history of running newspapers, so we have no experience in running newspapers nationwide.

³⁵ Fang Hanqi and others, *Zhongguo Xinwen Shiye Jianshi* (1983), p. 267.

*The game we are good at is fighting battles.*³⁶

However, the Party's war-time press policy and experience in running newspapers would still provide some basis for continuity in journalism work. Also, the Chinese journalism seemed to have been very much influenced by the Soviet model of highly centralized hierarchic press structure. Despite China and the Soviet's commitment to "socialism", their experience was different.

THE BUILDING OF A NATIONWIDE NETWORK, 1950-1956

During 1950-56 the newly founded Republic concentrated on consolidating its political power, and rehabilitating the economy. To achieve the first objective, the CCP leaders relied on their early experience in leading the revolution. Consolidation was a matter of mass mobilization.

In Yan'an, Mao had clearly articulated the importance of the masses:

*We should go to the masses and learn from them, synthesize their experience into better, articulated principles and methods then do propaganda among the masses, and call upon them to put these principles and method into practice so as to solve their problems and help them achieve liberation and happiness.*³⁷

This message reveals two points relevant to journalism. First,

³⁶ Roderick MacFarquhar, Timothy Cheek, and Eugene Wu, ed., *The Secrete Speeches of Chairman Mao - From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward* (Harvard Contemporary China Series, n. 6, by the Council on East Asian Studies/Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 262.

³⁷ Mao Zedong, "Get Organized!" *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 3, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), p. 158.

communication was apparently at the centre of the whole approach, secondly, the communication should be two-way, rather than one-way, hence "from the masses, to the masses." With this approach, the Communist Party had done successfully in the previous three decades of the democratic revolution. The new regime hoped to apply the same approach, and they needed "a highly efficient, well-controlled communication system to achieve their objectives of development".³⁸

For this reason efforts were made in the early fifties to establish a nationwide network of news-related mass media and communication, through which the Party and the central government were hoping to transmit efficiently Party policies and government decisions to provincial and lower level authorities, and at the same time to publicize them among, and collect feedback from, the masses of people.

The first step taken by the new regime was to "clean up and take over the old press published during the Guomindang regime." This work was not to ban all privately-owned newspapers. The people's government, according to a Party policy statement, would "Protect the people's freedom of speech and press, abolish enemies' freedom of speech and press."³⁹ This meant, in practice, that only those papers with "reactionary dispositions" would be immediately outlawed. "Progressive" papers and those without definite political

³⁸ Godwin C. Chu, *Radical Change Through Communication In Mao's China* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1977), p.25.

³⁹ Jia Peixin, "Xin zhongguo baoye sishinian licheng" (The Forty-year History of New China's Press), *Xinwen Yu Xiezu* (News and Writing), no. 6, 1990.

inclination could apply for new licenses under which they could continue publication. Thus quite a number of privately-owned papers, including 43 dailies, were able to carry on business alongside newspapers owned by the Party, even though subject to strict control and supervision by the regime.

However, late in 1951 the regime began to reduce the number of privately-owned newspapers. The Party transformed those papers which had survived. Most privately-owned newspapers were closed, and some amalgamated. By 1953, there were only five privately-owned newspapers left, and none of them retained their former identity or independent status.⁴⁰ Besides having Party members as staff, these five newspapers were assigned specific responsibilities in the conduct of propaganda and indoctrination. They actually became a part of the official press apparatus.

In the early fifties, private ownership of newspapers was necessitated by the Party's view of the nature of the state as a "people's democracy". In such a state "national capitalists" and "democratic parties" were presumed to be in alliance with the Communist Party. Aside from "enemies of the people" such as "bureaucratic capitalists", "feudal landlords" and "lackeys of foreign imperialism", all other classes were considered legitimate elements of the People's Republic and therefore entitled to the enjoyment of all political rights, including that of an individual

⁴⁰ The five papers were *Dagong bao* (in Beijing), *Guangming ribao* (Beijing), *Wenhui bao* (Shanghai), *Xinmin bao* (Shanghai), *Xinwen ribao* (Shanghai). For reference, see Franklin W. Houn, *To Change A Nation* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, a division of the Crowell-Collier Publishing Co., 1961), p. 111.

to own his own newspaper.

Private ownership was not seen as inconsistent with the newspapers' function as an instrument of government, since those in the hands of the people's "allies" served the same purpose as those in the hands of the people's government itself. In practice, the Party controlled the private newspapers as effectively as it did the official press.

With the graduation of China from the stage of "people's democracy" to that of socialism in 1955-1956, this justification for the existence of privately-owned papers underwent change. The official position now held that while the national bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie had lost their economic base as a result of the socialist transformation of commerce, industry, and agriculture, they still retained their "bourgeois" ideology and old political outlook. This position justified the personnel and editorial control of the private newspapers.

The ownership transformation of private newspapers was accompanied with a rapid increase in publication of newspapers by various Party and government institutions at different levels. As a result, the total number of newspapers in China increased from 263 in 1952 to 1325 in 1956. Radio broadcasts were also regarded by the Party as an important means of propaganda. Given China's high level of illiteracy, however, the radio network was even given more priority than newspapers in the early days of the PRC.

The development of the radio network in the fifties paralleled that of the newspapers. After the liberation in 1949, the

Communists took over all stations left intact by the Guomindang regime and converted them into "people's broadcasting stations", owned and operated by the government. As of June, 1950, there were eighty-three radio stations in the country, of which fifty were people's broadcasting stations and thirty-three were privately-owned and operated. From 1951 to 1953 the government undertook to nationalize some of the privately-owned stations and gave others the status of joint state and private enterprises. In effect, there were virtually no privately-owned and operated broadcasting stations in China. The existing stations were, for all practical purposes, a part of the regime's propaganda system.

Nevertheless, China's radio network has been expanded since 1950, in the number of frequencies used and in power and strength rather than in the number of stations. There were at least two reasons for the very moderate increase in the number of stations. There was an acute shortage of trained personnel and technical equipment, and the regime prepared to centralize programming. These problems, however, had not prevented the regime from making radio a major propaganda weapon. The use of "radio-diffusion exchanges" and the promotion of wide-scale "collective listening" supplemented the insufficient broadcasting facilities.⁴¹

Between 1951 and 1954, Beijing government concentrated on the development of radio-relay stations and collective-listening groups

⁴¹ The "radio diffusion exchanges" system was virtually a system of point-to-point radio broadcasting, with dissemination of selected programs at the point of reception by means of wire loudspeakers.

in factories, mines, enterprises and the army. In 1955, it began to turn to the rural areas. It was no simple coincidence, incidentally, that the development of broadcasting in rural areas took place after 1955. It came simultaneously with the promotion of "agricultural cooperatives", in full swing throughout China. Needless to say, the regime needed these radio stations to transmit the messages of the government and the Party to facilitate its tasks.

The efforts by the new regime to build a nationwide network of news-related mass media and mass communication appears to have been quite successful. By 1956, a nationwide comprehensive network consisting of both newspapers and radio broadcasting stations had been established in China.

The network was characterized by government monopolized ownership, centralization of administration, and hierarchic structure. Such structure was based on what Alan Liu called "the principle of unity with diversity."⁴² The rationale of this kind of structure came from the Chinese Communist Party's emphasis on mass mobilization. "Unity", in the substance and organization of the press, was achieved by stamping out privately-owned newspapers and radio stations and organizing a nationwide chain of Party press, ie., newspapers and radio stations representing the Party at national, provincial, municipal, and lower levels. "Unity" in the press was ultimately achieved by establishing a single

⁴² Alan P.L. Liu, "People's Republic of China", in John A. Lent eds., *Newspapers in Asia: Contemporary Trends and Problems* (Hong Kong: Heinemann Educational Books "Asia" LTD, 1982).

authoritative news agency, the New China News Agency, which supplied national news stories to all newspapers and broadcasting stations, and national news to all regional newspapers and radio stations.

"Diversity" within unity was accomplished by "non-Party" papers, ie., newspapers published by major mass organizations such as All-China Federation of Trade Union, the Communist Youth League. These "non-Party" papers virtually subscribed to Party line.

The press was not independent, but an integral part of the government or of the Communist Party. Its primary function was to bring about the Party or the government programs before the masses of the people in the quickest way.

Centralized control by the Party was vested in the Department of Propaganda of the Party, which was under the supervision of the Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee. This department determined policy and issued operational directives through two principal means. The first was the Party chain of command from the Department of Propaganda to the various provincial, municipal, and local party propaganda departments and committees. The second was the government's hierarchy of agencies, such as the Publications Administration, and the Bureau of Broadcasting Affairs of the State Council, which controlled all newspapers, radio stations, and Xinhua News Agency.

This highly centralized hierarchic system of news media seemed to have two origins. The first was the "war-time" model of the Chinese Communist Party press. During the "war time" period, the

Communist Party occupied scattered border regions. To ensure that Party committees in different regions would follow the Central Committee's line and policies, the Party needed, and actually established, a centralized press system, which consisted of both central organs, such as the *Jiefang ribao*, Xinhua News Agency and Yan'an Xinhua Broadcasting Station, and regional newspapers in those border regions. The Central Committee gave instructions not only the papers under its direct control, but also those in border regions. The 1941 re-organization of regional newspapers into "five types" in each border region was a typical example of the centralization.

The Soviet influence was another origin of China's highly centralized hierarchic structure of press administration. Mao always called on Party leaders to pay attention to the peculiarity of Chinese revolution, and strongly opposed "blindly copying foreign experience", yet in reality, China was still greatly influenced by its "big brother", the Soviet Union in many sectors, including journalism. This became especially evident in the mid 1950s. In 1956, for instance, Liu Shaoqi, the vice chairman in charge of the Party's routine work, told cadres in charge of the Party's propaganda, "Our news reporting has followed the model of Tass, becoming dull and not at all lively We should get rid of that kind of Party dogmatism."⁴³ Many journalists expressed their unhappiness with such a model of press during the 1956's "Hundred

⁴³ Ting Guanlin, "Yijiuliunian Zhongguo Xinwen Gaige Jianjie" (A Brief Sketch of China's Journalism Reform in 1956), *Xinwen Daxue* (Journalism University), 3: 85 (1982).

Flowers" campaign.

**FROM "TWO HUNDRED FLOWERS" TO "GREAT LEAP FORWARD"
1957-1959**

The Party's Eighth Congress in September 1956 hailed the decisive victory in socialist transformation and approved the second Five-Year Plan for development. The political report of the Party issued at the Congress declared that since the socialist system had been basically established, the main task confronting the Party and people was to nurture and increase social productivity in order to achieve industrialization. This estimation resulted in three campaigns in the late fifties: the "Hundred Flowers" campaign in 1956, the "Anti-Rightist" movement in 1957, and the "Great Leap Forward" in 1958, all of which had impact on China's journalism.

Realizing the important role intellectuals could play in socialist construction, the Party Central Committee launched the Hundred Flowers campaign, so as to encourage free discussion. On May 2, Mao announced the policy of "Let one hundred flowers bloom" and "Let one hundred schools of thought contend". Mao stressed that policy was made to let all people express their opinions freely so that they dared to speak, dared to criticize and dared to debate.⁴⁴ Lu Dingyi, the head of Party Propaganda Department, explained the policy further by saying that the Party now stood for freedom of independent thinking, of debate, of creative work. It also supported freedom to criticize and to express, maintain or

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 432.

reserve one's opinions on questions concerning art, literature and scientific research.⁴⁵ The media publicized the policy both in editorials and in news stories.

Chinese journalists, who perceived the advantage of the open climate, thought it was also time for a change in journalism. *Renmin ribao* (The People's Daily) submitted its reform plan to the Central Committee of the Party. On July 1, it officially announced its reform in the editorial "To Our Readers". the paper pledged to "meet as best as we can the diverse needs of the readers."⁴⁶ The Party asked other newspapers to learn from *Renmin ribao*.

Free discussion of political issues marked a major change in the press of this period. As the campaign continued, discussions were carried on in every newspaper with topics ranging from philosophy, education, legal system, arts, and literature to sciences. News stories, commentaries, cartoons and pictures criticizing bureaucracy also appeared in the press. Readers' letters and criticism increased. Besides, human interest stories with emphasis on social morality and new social values began to replace dry, dogmatic propaganda in newspapers.

All these changes in the press reflected a concerted effort to break the bounds of dogmatism and stilted writing, and to broaden and diversify content and style. To this point, the campaign was supported by the Party.

⁴⁵ Lu Dingyi, "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend", the *Renmin ribao*, Sept. 15, 1956.

⁴⁶ *Renmin ribao*, July 1, 1956.

In early 1957, a campaign began within the Party to combat bureaucracy, sectarianism and subjectivism. The Party and Mao encouraged non-party members to criticize the bureaucratic way of Party work. In Mao's vision, criticism from below and supervision from outside the Party would serve to prevent leaders from becoming alienated from the people and effectively eliminate tension or contradictions between the bureaucracy and the people, so that the people's enthusiasm for socialist construction could be aroused. This was also consistent with the Party's "mass line" work-style.

It was at this stage of the "Hundred Flowers" campaign and the Party's rectification campaign that many theoretical and directive issues concerning journalistic practice and theory were raised and debated in public. The trend was most clearly reflected in the *Guangming ribao* (Enlightenment Daily) and the *Wenhui bao*, whose readers were largely intellectuals, and in discussions held in Beijing and Shanghai.⁴⁷

Participants of the discussions criticized explicitly Party monopoly and control of the press, challenged openly the highly centralized hierarchic structure of the press. As an alternative to this model of journalism, a veteran journalist even suggested that the Party allow non-party organ newspapers to serve as watchdogs of the Party and government. Some others asked for a non-official news agency to be established. On a theoretical level, Wang Zhong, a professor of journalism at Fudan University, criticized the concept

⁴⁷ For details about these discussions, see Jinglu Yu, "The Abortive 1956 Reform of Chinese Journalism", *Journalism Quarterly*, 65 (2), Summer, 1988, pp. 328-334.

that the press was mainly a tool of class struggle. He argued that the class nature of a media did not mean that every news story should advocate an ideology. Since there was no privately owned news media after 1955, he said, the Party press should strive to meet the needs of different people in addition to functioning as the Party's propaganda instrument.

The wave of criticism gradually took on more fundamental aspects. Criticism grew steadily sharper. The *Guangming ribao* and Shanghai *Wenhui bao* devoted a great deal of space to all the criticism and remarks without any of the critical qualifications, which was expected by Party leaders. The criticism finally came to the point that not only the socialist system and Party leadership, but also the top leaders of the Party and government, were challenged. For instance, Xu Aoning, the chief editor of the *Guangming ribao* wrote an open letter, "Some Opinions Presented to Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou", in which he denounced the monopoly of political power by the Party.

At this point, Mao and his colleagues could bear no more. On June 8, an editorial in the *Renmin ribao* signalled the large scale counterattack known as the Anti-Rightist Campaign. Soon, one editorial after another appeared in the paper, attacking the "rightists". All summer long the movement continued with public hearings, accusations and self-criticism. Thus ended the "Hundred Flowers" campaign.

The sudden reversal in political climate was felt intensely in journalism circles. Mao began since then to overemphasize Party

control and the class nature of the press. He said:

*They deny the party spirit and class nature of the press, they confound the differences in principle between proletarian journalism and bourgeois journalism ... they admire bourgeois liberalism and are against the leadership of the Party. There are also indications that the rightists in press circles are instigating the workers and peasants to oppose the government.*⁴⁸

Two newspapers, the *Guangming ribao* in Beijing and *Wenhui bao* in Shanghai, were charged with falling under the control of "rightists" and spreading anti-socialism and anti-party views. Mao personally wrote a open letter to criticize the *Wenhui bao*:

*For several months the paper served as the mouthpiece of the reactionaries who mounted unbridled attacks against the proletariat and it changed its orientation to one of opposing the Communist Party, the people and socialism, that is to the bourgeois orientation.*⁴⁹

When Wang Mo, Deputy Director of the Section of Journalism and Publications of the Central Committee's Propaganda Department, preached formally in January 1958, that the Party's leadership in the press was "the only correct leadership" and that "the leadership of the Party is the soul of journalism in a socialist country", no voice of challenge was raised. The Chinese journalists had learned a painful lesson. Therefore they would be very reluctant to challenge the Party's leadership over the press.

However, it would be proven later that even such an attitude was not "fine". Because the Party was not one single person, but a group of leaders who might have different views toward major Party

⁴⁸ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 5, pp. 441-442.

⁴⁹ Mao, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 5, p. 455.

policies or strategies on development, such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. When contradictory views and opinions emerged among Party leaders, who represent the Party? More specifically, under such circumstances, to whom should the press listen? Could the press be the forum for diverse views from within the Party? After all, the Party's own principle of "democratic centralism" required debate within the Party and among the people. However, in practice, this had been a critical question challenging the Chinese press in the late fifties, sixties and seventies.

Encouraged by the success of the first Five-year Plan, Mao and some other leaders launched the "Great Leap Forward" campaign, aiming to make China a major industrial power overnight. Mao's supporters seemed to believe that political enthusiasm and millions of hands would accomplish in a few months what other countries had taken decades to do. This turned out to be disastrous. However, in 1958, not many people dared to challenge Mao's strategy toward economic development. In the beginning, most Party leaders uncritically supported this campaign. So did the news media.

After the anti-rightists movement in 1957, editors and reporters tried especially hard to act according to what Mao and the Party wanted. The media thus thoroughly mobilized to fully promote the Great Leap Forward.

A few Chinese leaders, such as Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and Peng Dehuai, soon came to realize that the "Great Leap Forward" had violated "objective economic laws", and that it would bring about economic ruin. According to one account, Liu Shaoqi approved a

Renmin ribao editorial opposing "reckless advance", but Mao condemned it for undermining "the initiative and creativity of the masses and cadres."⁵⁰ The debate within the Party came into the open in August 1959 at Lushan during the Eighth Plenum of the Central Committee. Peng Dehuai, a member of the Political Bureau and minister of defense, criticized the Great Leap. Peng was frank and honest in reviewing the "success" of the Great Leap. He appealed to the Party's own "fine traditions" such as "seek the truth from the facts", "democratic centralism", and "criticism and self-criticism". Refusing to accept Peng's criticism, Mao and his supporters charged him with "right opportunism". Peng and his supporters were summarily removed from the leadership.

During the inner-Party struggle, the press clearly allied with Mao's side, and failed to present the critical views of other Party leaders. This was one of the "great lessons", cited during the 1980s by critics of the extant model of Chinese journalism. In addition, the Chinese journalistic principle that "propaganda must be based on facts", lost all credibility in journalistic practice. Without careful investigation, the press often gave one-sided coverage of the exaggerated figures of the increase in production. Thus, with the unchecked spread of such errors throughout the country, the coverage of economics in the press helped promote the tendency of ignoring "objective economic laws" and played a negative role in sabotaging the national economy. As Won Ho Chang

⁵⁰ Alan P.L. Liu, "People's Republic of China", in John A. Lent eds., *Newspapers in Asia: Contemporary Trends and Problems* (Hong Kong: Heinemann Educational Books "Asia" LTD, 1982), pp. 31-53.

observed:

From 1958 to 1961, newspapers and newscasts often, though not always, resorted to boasting and exaggeration, and were full of idealistic slogans and unbelievable reports of production outputs. There were even fabricated news photos showing scenes of bumper harvests".⁵¹

It should be noted that such practice was not encouraged by all Party leaders. Liu Shaoqi once told the press at that time that news reports must be truthful and "Don't add salt and pepper on purpose".⁵² Unfortunately this instruction was ignored by Chinese journalists.

"READJUSTMENT" AND THE PRESS, 1960-1962

The Great Leap Forward had led to the collapse of the national economy in 1959. In the face of mounting criticism of the Great Leap, Mao turned over major responsibilities to Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping to devote himself to fundamental policy and philosophy. This time the media switched course as the more pragmatic elements of Party leadership took control. Exaggerations began to disappear in news coverage and broadcasting.

A group of intellectuals made an appearance as the vanguard of criticism of radical policies in 1958-1959. The group was organized around the head of the Propaganda Department of the Beijing Party Committee, Deng Tuo, a veteran journalist; the deputy major of Beijing, Wu Han; and the head of the United Front Department of the

⁵¹ Won Ho Chang, *Mass Media in China* (Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1989), p. 39.

⁵² Godwin C. Chu and Francis L.K. Hsu, *Moving a Mountain* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979), p. 103.

Beijing Party Committee, Liao Mosha. From this group, particularly from Deng Tuo, emanated the satirical essays published in *Beijing wanbao* (Beijing Evening News) and the Beijing fortnightly *Qianxian* (Frontline). At the same time, Wu Han published his historical play *Hairui Baguan* to plead for the rehabilitation of Peng Dehuai. This group of critics was soon joined by China's two leading economic theorists, Lo Gengmo and Sun Yefang, who directly and sharply criticized the radical policies in articles carried in the *Renmin ribao*.

In January 1962 the enlarged Central Work Conference attended by 7000 people made a preliminary summary of the positive and negative experience of the Great Leap Forward. The praise of the Great Leap thus vanished in the news media and was replaced by calls for "step by step" and "observe 'objective economic laws'".

RADICAL RESURGENCE AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The successful readjustment of the economy in the early 1960s came under attack at the Tenth Plenum of the Party Central Committee, where Mao widened and absolutized the concept of "class struggle". He declared that the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie remained the principal contradiction in socialist society.⁵³ He warned against the bourgeois attempt to restore capitalism, and he traced the source of revisionism within the Party itself.

The growth of "leftist" trend in the spheres of politics,

⁵³ Ibid., p. 30.

ideology, and culture since 1962 was serious, but these ideas had not yet become dominant. An important reason was that Party organs such as the *Renmin ribao*, were still under the leadership of pragmatic leaders.

In the spring of 1965, news media began to upgrade the stature of Liu Shaoqi to such an extent that he frequently appeared to be in a position equal to Mao. Power struggles within the Party leadership intensified. This had a direct impact on China's press circles. With no help from Beijing press circles, Mao looked for support in Shanghai. On November 10, 1965, *Wenhui bao* directed an attack against the vice mayor of Beijing, Wu Han, describing his historical play *Hairui Baguan* (The Dismissal of Hai Rui) as a "great poisonous weed" that must be eradicated and rooted out.⁵⁴ The author of this attack was Yao Wen yuan, a future member of the Gang of Four.

The Party major organ initially refused to reprint the editorial. Only after it had been published as a pamphlet in Shanghai and after *Jiefangjun bao* (Liberation Army Daily) had reproduced it, did the *Renmin ribao* carry this editorial. However, the newspaper added a footnote labelling the article as a contribution to discussion and calling for a general expression of opinion. As a matter of fact, the *Renmin ribao* and the media under the Beijing Party Committee published several articles in December 1965 defending Wu Han against Yao's attack. The self-criticism Wu finally published on 30 December in the *Renmin ribao* was equivalent

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 152.

to a defense of his position, and as late as January 1966 the newspaper published a reader's letter condemning the criticism of Wu Han.

Nevertheless, the army's paper *Jiefangjun bao* gave the signal for a general attack on Deng Tuo, Wu Han, and Liao Mosha. Eventually all the news media in China joined the attack. The darts aimed at the three were also aimed at the press and cultural circles in the capital.

Supported by Lin Biao who controlled the army and the army's newspaper, Mao finally launched the Cultural Revolution. For ten years from early 1966, the country was thrown into confusion.

The 10 years of the Cultural Revolution was a "dark age" for China's journalism. The news media, which supposedly acted as the organ of the Party and the government, virtually became the tool of individual leaders. Lin Biao and the "Gang of Four" manipulated the media to attack Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and many other leaders of the Party and government, in the name of Mao's theory of "continuing the revolution under the proletarian dictatorship".

From 1966 to 1976, the theory that news must be truthful and based on facts was discredited. The fallacy that facts should follow the interest of political line became the guiding principle of journalism. The concept that news media was "the tool of class struggle" was made absolute. In practice, the media then often ignored and distorted facts on purpose. Sometimes the media made up "facts" to serve specific purposes. Quotations from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and sometimes even Mao, were taken out of

context.

The Cultural Revolution fostered a style of writing, which was characterized by falsification, exaggeration and empty talk. This style seriously damaged the credibility of the Party press as well as the Party itself. The malpractice of the news media during the Cultural Revolution helped to foster a "personality cult" and to undermine critical thinking.

The malpractice of the media during the Cultural Revolution was a result of the power struggle within the Party. It illustrated the "vulnerability" of China's journalism to the manipulation by individual leaders of the Party, in a time of crisis. Did the poor performance of the media originate in the traditional concept of Party press, which overemphasized the unconditional obedience of the press to the absolute Party leadership? Did the highly centralized hierarchic structure of the journalism hinder the upward flow of information and the presentation of different views? These questions would be raised by Chinese journalism professionals when Mao, the helmsman of the Chinese revolution and the founder of socialist China, passed away in 1976. China thereafter changed dramatically with the rise of Deng Xiaoping.

During his years in power since 1949, Mao Zedong initiated three major policies which could be described as radical departures from the Soviet and Chinese Communist practice: the Hundred Flowers of 1956-1957, the Great Leap Forward of 1958-1960, and the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976. Each movement, as Roderick MacFarquhar insightfully pointed out, was a disaster for the intellectuals, the

people, and the Party."⁵⁵ The same may be said of the press. The three campaigns resulted in the bad image of the press as the organ of the Party. The prevailing cynicism among Chinese intellectuals including journalists was reflected in the notion: "When one writes too much, one's liability grows; when you write black letters on white paper, you do not know when you will get into trouble."⁵⁶

In summary, the extant model of China's journalism originated in the "revolutionary war-time" when the Communist Party organized the "democratic revolution". With the adoption of Lenin's notion of "Party press" and the accommodation of Mao's "massline" theory, the Chinese Communists defined the press as the "propaganda organ" of the Party, and required the press to consciously accept Party leadership, speak for the interest of the Party. Propaganda was the primary function of the press. The press was required to have both a clear-cut stand, political inclination, and material base in their news reporting and propaganda. Propaganda must be based on facts. But facts did not equal truthfulness. Only when facts were integrated into a proletarian stand, could a reporter achieve truthfulness in his journalistic work. The press should educate the masses, but it was also expected to reflect the struggle of the masses, and speak for the masses.

⁵⁵ Roderick MacFarquhar, Timothy Cheek and Eugene Wu, ed., *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1989), p. 3.

⁵⁶ Alan P.L. Liu, "People's Republic of China", in John A. Lent eds., *Newspapers in Asia: Contemporary Trends and Problems* (Hong Kong: Heinemann Educational Books "Asia" LTD, 1982), p. 50.

With such a concept, the Party used the press mainly for the purpose of mass mobilization supporting the revolution. The press did help facilitate the success of the Party's democratic revolution during the 1920s-1940s. With the growth of the Party, a centralized press structure developed in border region base areas in the Yan'an days of 1940s.

Based on the war-time experience and the Soviet model, shortly after the founding of the People's Republic, the Chinese Communist Party established a nationwide press network. This network, characterized by centralized hierarchic structure, excluded private ownership, highlighted the Party Central Committee's control over the press. As the propaganda tool of Mao and other Party leaders, this press played a poor role in the Great Leap Forward, and in the Cultural Revolution. The performance of the news media during the 1950s-1970s illustrated the vulnerability of the Party press to the manipulation by individual leaders in power, and also damaged its own image as the organ of the Party.

CHAPTER THREE

THE "JOURNALISM REFORM" DEBATE, 1979-1989

The issue of "journalism reform" was first proposed by Chinese journalists in 1979. It was raised in the wake of the dramatic political changes in the country which followed upon the death of Mao Zedong, in September 1976, and the subsequent downfall of the Gang of Four. The "ultra-left" political line was finally renounced when Deng Xiaoping and the so-called "reform" faction within the post-Mao leadership consolidated their power against the "Two-Whatevers" faction headed by Hua Guofeng¹ at the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee in December 1978. "Mass campaign politics", ideologically based upon "taking class struggle as the key link", were replaced by an ambitious modernization program that embraced a sharply redefined political agenda.²

To facilitate the realization of the "four modernizations", Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues called for "socialist democracy" and "socialist legality". The new leadership advocated "Emancipate the minds, seek truth from facts and unite as one in looking to the

¹ The "Two-Whatevers" faction headed by Hua Guofeng, who was Mao's appointed successor to Mao's position insisted that "whatever policies Chairman Mao has devised we will resolutely implement, and whatever directives Chairman Mao has laid down we will forever observe." For reference, see the February 7, 1977 the *People's Daily* editorial entitled "Xuehao wenjian zhuhahaogang" (Study the Documents Well, Grasp the Guiding Principles).

² Parris H. Chang, "China after Deng: toward the 13th CCP Congress", *Problems of Communism* (May-June, 1987), pp. 33-42.

future".³ Meanwhile, the Party took crucial new policy initiatives such as "opening up to the outside world" and "economic reform" to promote economic development. There was also a restatement of policies such as the "Two Hundred Flowers" and the "Three Don'ts"⁴, aiming to encourage free expression of ideas and criticism - a way to stimulate intellectuals' enthusiasm and get their wisdom for the Party's new program.

For most of the 1980s Chinese society and particularly China's intellectuals experienced an unprecedented relaxed atmosphere. An impressive number of China's intellectuals enthusiastically participated in building of "socialism with Chinese characteristics". Never before, had Chinese intellectuals enjoyed so much freedom of expression, nor had they been so outspoken. Their discussions, research, writing, and speeches demonstrated the emergence of an independent, critical Chinese intelligentsia, which included journalism professionals. It was under such lively circumstances that the debate over "journalism reform" took place.

According to Chinese reformers, the 10-year Chinese debate on "journalism reform" underwent three major "ups and downs": 1979-1984, 1985-early 1987, and the second half of 1987 through the

³ *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), p. 151.

⁴ The principle of "Three Don'ts" states: "don't pick on others for their faults, don't put labels on people, and don't use a big stick." This principle was issued by the post-Mao leadership to guarantee the "democratic means" be used in political discussions within the Party and among the people. For reference, see *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), p. 155.

spring of 1989. These "ups and downs" reflected the intrusion of politics into the debate and also demonstrated the rise of independent and critical thinking among the journalism professionals.

The first stage began with discussions that climaxed in the aftermath of the Third Plenum, and cooled down during the "Anti-Spiritual Pollution" campaign between late 1983 and early 1984. The debate of this period focused on criticism of the Gang of Four for their abuse of the media, and a call for restoration of the "fine traditions" of the Party press. However, questions arose as to how to interpret the "fine traditions" of Party press. Meanwhile, as against the manipulation of media by "officials' will", efforts were made to explore the "objective laws" governing journalism.

From early 1985 to the beginning of 1987 the debate moved into its second stage. The then Party general secretary Hu Yaobang delivered a major speech on Party journalism,⁵ which set the official tone for the debate, and stimulated another wave of enthusiastic discussion on journalism reform. Hu Jiwei, a former director and editor-in-chief of *Renmin ribao* advocated "journalism that fits the period of socialist construction".⁶ Teng Teng, the deputy director of the Party's Propaganda Department reportedly endorsed at the meeting of provincial editors greater editorial

⁵ Hu Yaobang, "Guanyu dangde xinwen gongzuo" (On the Party's Journalism), in *Xinwen zhanxian* (Journalism Front), May, 1985.

⁶ Hu Jiwei, "Yanjiu shehuizhuyi jianshe shiqide xinwenxue" (Study the Journalism of "Socialist Construction" Period), *Renmin ribao*, August 5, 1985.

autonomy.⁷ Finally, the Central Committee's approved discussion about political reform in 1986. Journalists were inspired to advocate changes in the extant system and structure of China's journalism. At the same time, the argument between the two opinion groups over the purpose of and the approach to the reform intensified.⁸ The debate ebbed after the student demonstrations in the late 1986 and Hu Yaobang's forced resignation in early 1987.

The 13th National Congress of the CCP, in October 1987, marked the beginning of the third stage of the journalistic debate. The theory of "initial stage of socialism" adopted by the Party Congress acknowledged the existence of different interest groups in contemporary Chinese society. This in turn allowed for the presentation of different voices of the masses through news media. The Congress once again put "the reform of political structure" on the agenda, calling for "political transparency", promising the "openness" of the process of government decision-making, and the "supervision" over government policies and official conducts through public opinion. The Congress decided to promote "democratic consultation and dialogue" with the broad masses of the people. Chinese journalism professionals felt that the "time is ripe for press reform". Consequently, the professional journals and news press were full of related articles. Important, sensitive issues such as the "supervision role of the press", "two-way

⁷ *The Renmin ribao*, August 20, 1986, and January 15, 1987.

⁸ "Guanyu xinwen gaigede yixie yijian" (Some Opinions on journalism Reform), *Cankao Ziliao* (Reference Materials) (Beijing: the Institute of Journalism, China People's University, 1986).

communication", "legality of press", "press freedom", "press autonomy", and "multi-tier press structure", were further debated. At this stage, an alternative model of journalism was proposed and accepted by the majority of Chinese journalists.⁹ This situation continued until the spring-summer of 1989 when the Tiananmen Square Incident occurred.

This chapter attempts to illuminate the whole spectrum of the 1980s debate on "journalism reform" as a historical phenomena. It includes a comprehensive chronological examination of the debate, which highlights two major schools of thought within the journalism community, and it illustrates the impact of politics on the debate, as well as the gradual development of the independent and critical thinking of Chinese journalism professionals in the general context of "political liberalization" and vigorous economic reform during the eighties.

I. REFORM AND THE "TRADITIONAL THEORY" OF PARTY PRESS 1979-1984

The shift in the Party's focus from "class struggle" to the "four modernizations" precipitated an immediate re-orientation of China's journalism. In January 1979, Hu Yaobang, then the Party's propaganda head, called a meeting attended by all important

⁹ The Research Institute of Public Opinion at China People's University, "Quanguo xinwenjie dui xinwen gaige taidu de diaocha" (A Survey of the Attitude towards Journalism Reform among the National media), in Chen Congshan and Mi Xiuling, ed., *Zhongguo Chuanbo Xiaoguo Toudi* (A Perspective Study of Media Communication Effects in China) (Shenyang: Shenyang Publishing House, March 1989), pp. 176-195.

propaganda officials, declaring that the Party's propaganda work including journalism, from 1979 on, must shift from "class struggle" to promoting the "four modernizations".¹⁰

Although Hu clearly prescribed the new orientation for Chinese journalism, he acknowledged frankly that the Party Central Committee had no clear idea as to how the news media could do this job efficiently as well as effectively. Hu conceded that there were no "ready answers" even in the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong. To solve this problem, Hu encouraged Party propagandists "to face the reality, and to pluck up courage, shatter the ideological shackles," and "to clear up those misleading slogans, and statements or decisions which did not conform to actual situations."

Hu's message was in accordance with the Party's new emphasis to "emancipate the minds and seek truth from facts". Despite the lack of a clear definition of "truth" and "facts", this formula was designed to break away from the so-called "sixiang jianghua" (ideological ossification) which was characterized by dogmatism, sectarianism, and personality cult. "Seeking truth from the facts" alternatively sought a lively political situation in which criticism and debate within the Party and people would be not only allowed, but encouraged. Inspired by Hu's speech and the Party's new line, Chinese journalists began to discuss problems concerning

¹⁰ Hu Yaobang was the member of the Political Bureau and the Director of the Propaganda Department of the Party. Immediately after the Third Plenum, he called an orientation meeting for propaganda in the new era. See "Basic Tasks of Party's Propaganda Work", *Beijing Review*, January 26, 1979, pp. 3-4.

Party press, with an aim to better serve the Party's program - the "four modernizations".

To fulfil the Party's requirement, however, was not easy for the journalists. Popular dissatisfaction with the "Cultural Revolution style" of propaganda was more a matter of degree than substance. The malpractice of the news media during the ten disastrous years had caused serious damages to the credibility of the Party press. The *Renmin ribao* admitted many times in July-August 1979, that "falsehood, exaggeration, and empty words" had been prevalent in the Party press in the late seventies. Many people complained that Party newspapers only reflected the voice of leaders and not that of the masses.¹¹ With such an image, the media would have no way to be effective and efficient in promoting the Party's objective. For this reason, a very general consensus emerged between the leaders and journalists on the importance of journalism.

The Party leaders's view toward the press was certainly instrumental. Deng Xiaoping and his followers believed that China's successful modernization would require a credible, active, and somewhat critical press, which would help reinforce democracy and discipline within the Party. The Party's general line emphasized two points which Deng and his colleagues believed to be equally crucial. The two points were "to work single-mindedly for the four modernizations", and to create a lively situation with "unity and

¹¹ John A. Lent, eds., *Newspapers In Asia: Contemporary Trends and Problems* (Hong Kong: Heinemann Educational Books "Asia" Ltd, 1982), p. 51.

stability".¹² For this purpose, the post-Mao leadership needed a press that was both lively and loyal to the Party. "What Deng wanted is to keep the journalistic pot simmering while making sure that it does not boil over into the type of 'counterrevolutionary' criticism...", Zucherman observed.¹³

For Chinese journalists, their demand for "journalism reform" mainly came from the frustration with "satisfying two masters simultaneously", ie., the political authorities and the masses. Leaders wanted newspapers to publish official documents, reports of official meetings, reports on the words and activities of officials, and instructions intended to guide work units in carrying out Party policies and programs. On the other hand, their readers wanted a broader range of coverage, more news about life and society, including human interest stories, accidents and disasters, and criticism of wrongdoing.

In referring to leaders and readers, journalists spoke of their "liangtou" (two chieftains), and of the need to "look both above and below" or "both sides". This difficult situation was described by Chinese journalists as "riding the horse between the

¹² The "general line" is also called "political line". See Ye Jianying's speech on the National Day of 1979. Deng Xiaoping cited Ye's formulation of the "general line" in his speech addressed at the Central Committee's Cadres Conference in January 1980. See Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan (1975-1982)* (Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping), (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp. 203-237.

¹³ Laurence Zuckerman, "Letters from China", *Columbia Journalism Review*, Nov./Dec., 1985, p. 34.

leaders and the masses, afraid of displeasing both."¹⁴ The journalists hoped that the "reform" would finally address this situation in a meaningful way.

In spite of explicit agreement on the need for "reform", however, there were serious differences of opinion on the purpose and substance of the reform. There were two groups of opinion. One group insisted that the purpose of journalism reform was "to improve, not to destroy, the present system of China's journalism."¹⁵ For them, the reform meant to improve the style of news presentation and to increase the variety in the content of news coverage. This group was later identified as the "minor reform" group.

Another group argued that the reform should not confine itself to merely technical improvement and changes in style and content of news reporting. They maintained that a critical reexamination of the traditional concept of Party press and the existent system of China's journalism would be more helpful for a better understanding of what the reform should bring about to Chinese press.¹⁶ The purpose of journalism reform, this opinion group suggested, was to make the press more suitable for the new "reality" of the Chinese

¹⁴ "Dangqian woguo xinwenjie dui xinwen gaige wentide yixie kanfa" (Some Views of Chinese Press Circles Concerning the Issue of Journalism Reform), in *Ningxia Ribao Tongxun* (The Ningxia Daily Bulletin, August, 1982), pp. 2-3.

¹⁵ Gan Xifen, *Xinwen Lilun Jichu* (Basic Theory of Journalism) (Beijing: The Press of China's People's University, 1982), p. 244.

¹⁶ *Xinwen Jiaoxue Cankao Ziliao* (Reference Material For Journalism Education) (Beijing: Library of the Journalism Institute, China People's University), no. 31, April, 1985, p.11.

society driven by the modernization program. This group also contended that the efficient promotion of Party policies and the cultivation of a genuine understanding between leaders and masses would require the removal of the obstacles hindering the exercise of criticism and self-criticism and the elimination of boasting and exaggeration. This group later became known as the "major reform" group.

The argumentation over the purpose of the press reform between the two opinion groups directly involved an assessment of the influence of the Gang of Four and a reevaluation of the traditional concept of "Party press". The "minor reform" group blamed the Gang of Four for the decline of the credibility of the Party press, arguing that it was the Gang, not the traditional theory of Party press, which had fostered the misconduct of the news media during the Cultural Revolution and its consequence. Indeed, this group argued that the Party press had "fine traditions" which had been grossly violated when the Party press was under the Gang's control. This group believed that a restoration of these "fine traditions" would help restore the credibility of the Party press. Gan Xifen's view was representative of this opinion group. In his lecture to a journalism class at the Party School of the Central Committee of the CCP, he listed the manifestations of "ultra-leftist trend" in China's journalism, and blamed such a "trend" almost solely on the Gang of Four. He said:

During the ten disastrous years, the reputation of the Party press was disgraced seriously. The Party press had become the tool of the Gang of Four in their plot to seize power. This is the greatest shame for us in the history of our

*Party press. ... Since the Third Plenum our journalism has recovered to a great degree, the newspapers look like Party newspapers again. But there are still many problems, the masses still have a lot of complaints about our journalistic work. Our press has not yet restored its reputation to the same degree as the Party press enjoyed in the early fifties in terms of the trust of the masses. ... What are the reasons that make the masses still do not like our news media very much? In my humble opinion, the main reason is that the pernicious influence of the Gang of Four has not yet been completely liquidated.*¹⁷

To change this situation, Gan suggested, the journalism reform should focus on clearing up "the pernicious influence of the Gang of Four", on the one hand, and carrying forward the "fine traditions" of the Party press on the other.¹⁸

There was no question in the press circles about the need for criticism of the Gang of Four. In effect, much of the vigour for the journalism debate had already originated in such criticism.¹⁹ It was generally agreed among the journalists that the Gang of Four had used the press as a "big stick", rather than as a legitimate organ of the Party. The "Gang" used the press to persecute arbitrarily any perceived enemies. The "Gang" violated the norms of press criticism and self-criticism, allowing no opinions which seemed against theirs to appear in newspapers or broadcasting

¹⁷ Gan Xifen, "Lun women xinwen gongzuo zhongde zuode qingxiang" (On the Leftist Trend in Our Journalism Work), in Gan Xifen, *Xinwen Lunzheng Sanshinian* (Thirty-Year Debate On Journalism) (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1988), pp. 104-139.

¹⁸ Gan Xifen, *Xinwen Lilun Jichu* (Basic Theory of Journalism) (Beijing: People's University Press, July 1982), p. 3.

¹⁹ For a good English reference to the Chinese criticism of the Gang of Four in the post-Mao press circles, see Won Hou Chang, *Mass Media In China: The History and the Future* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1989), pp. 47-49.

programs. They had created a new "eight-legged" (ba gu) style of fabrication.²⁰ They had fostered the odd phenomenon of "wooden-headed copying" by forcing all newspapers in the country to reprint articles composed by the Gang's writers.²¹ The "Gang" had also coined such concepts as "Facts serve politics", "Politics first, facts second". Chinese journalists agreed that all these practices and concepts had to be stopped and criticized.

What distinguished the view of the "major reform" group from that of the "minor reform" group, however, was that the former disagreed on the tendency to simply pick up the Gang of Four as a convenient hook on which to hang most of the problems and leftist errors that Party press had made in the past. Instead, this opinion group began to ponder whether the traditional concept of Party

²⁰ The November 14, 1977 editorial of *Jiefangjun bao* (The Liberation Army Daily) offered the following description of the "eight-legged" style of fabrication: "Newspapers under the Gang's control used false speeches, fabricated events, made false reports, created false models, publicized false experiences, wrote false history, and even falsified the sayings of our revolutionary teacher. As a result, the credibility of our newspapers and publications was impaired."

²¹ The "Gang's writers" refers to Yao Wenyuan, a member of the Gang of Four, and the "Liangxiao" (the two writing teams) from Beijing University and Qinghua University. During the Cultural Revolution, the two writing teams produced hundred of thousands articles to guide the direction of the movement. These articles were as a rule reprinted by *Renmin ribao* and broadcast by China Central broadcasting Station, and then copied by almost every newspaper or journal throughout the country. This practice, aimed to unify "public opinion" of the masses, resulted in such a popular saying: "Small newspapers copy big newspapers; big newspapers follow 'Liangxiao'." Because of such practice, "When people read a newspaper, they only looked at the headlines. When they read a book, they only looked at the cover. Newspapers and publications were not received by the masses of the people", said the *Jiefangjun bao*'s editorial of November 14, 1977.

press had itself contributed to the bad performance of the Party press in the past.

A major controversy over the traditional concept of "Party press" occurred in December 1980, when the Journalism Institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences organized a seminar to discuss a to-be-published university textbook of journalism theory *Xinwen Lilun Jichu*.²² Participants of the seminar came from all sectors of Chinese journalism. The reason this seminar attracted so much attention was that the proposed text would be the first to include a systematic summary of the Chinese theory of Party press.

With heavy quotations of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Zedong to support his conceptualization, Gan Xifen, the author of the book, summarized six concepts as the key components of "the proletarian approach" to the nature and role of the Party journalism. They were "jiejixing" (class character), "dangxing" (Party character or Party orientation), "renminxing" (people character or people orientation), "zhidaoxing" (the character of "guidance"), "zhenshixing" (the character of "truthfulness"), and "pipingxing" (the character of "criticism and self-criticism"). Gan maintained that these concepts all originated in the "fine

²² The seminar was held between the 9th and 11th of December, 1980. It aimed to collect opinions and suggestions about China's first book on the "Party press theory". For reference, see Gan Xifen, "Xinde shidai, xinde lunzheng" (The New Era, New Debate), in Gan Xifen, *Xinwen Lunzheng Sanshinian* (The Basic Theory of Journalism) (Beijing: The Press of China People's University, 1982), pp. 72-103.

traditions" of the Party press.²³

Taking "class analysis", as fundamental, Gan concluded that any and each news media in class societies must belong to a certain class. In this explicit sense, the news media were the tool of the class struggle. Because of its very nature, no news media could avoid "political inclination"; it had therefore to speak for the interest of the owner's class. The press had "class character", which would persist until the said class disappeared.

"Party character", according to Gan, was the most important feature which distinguished proletarian press from bourgeois press. It declared proudly that the press must be the "houshe" (mouthpiece)²⁴ of the Communist Party, and speak all the time for the interest of the Party. The press, therefore, had to accept the Party's leadership ideologically, politically, and organizationally. Party committees of all levels could use the press to guide work. Journalists and news media had to consciously ask the Party for directions for their journalistic practice. No challenge was allowed.

"People character" or "people orientation" was another characteristics of the Party press. It regarded the Party press as

²³ Gan elaborated these concepts in the book *Xinwen Lilun Jichu* (1982).

²⁴ The Chinese term "houshe" has been popularly translated into English as "mouthpiece" by both Chinese and English writers. However, these two words are not quite the same. Unlike "mouthpiece" in English which has a very negative connotation, the Chinese term "houshe" is a neutral word. The literal translation is "throat and tongue". When it is used to refer to news media, it simply means the "voice".

"the voice of the people". In practice, this meant that the news media had to reflect popular opinions, suggestions, complaints, as well as criticisms. The "people character", however, was not contradictory with the "Party character". Gan argued that the two "characters" were identical. Because, the Party consisted of all the excellent elements of the masses of the people, accordingly, it could best represent the interest of the people. In this sense, Gan said, the Party's mouthpiece was also the people's "mouthpiece".

As a part of the Party organizations and as the "mouthpiece" of the Party and the people, the primary functions of the Party press were to publicize Party policies and decisions and experiences and lessons of the masses, and to interpret events from Marxist point of view. This was called "the character of guidance". The "guidance" offered by the media aimed to "unify" the thought and action of the broad masses so that they would be mobilized around the Central Committee of the Party to work with one heart and one mind.

In order to guide the masses, Gan maintained, the news media must uphold the principle of "positive reporting". This meant, in practice, that the Party press should mainly report on the positive side of the society, criticism must be "constructive" and well-intended. The "dark side" of the life, such as crimes, natural disasters, accidents, could be given publicity, only in the way that they were treated as "bad examples" or "lessons" that the masses should try to prevent from happening in future. This kind of reporting, however, was to be limited to a small percentage of the

entire news coverage.

On the other hand, "the character of truthfulness" was a principle of the Party press. Gan insisted that "Party orientation" and "political inclination" in news coverage had to respect the principle of "seek truth from facts". While all news reports and propaganda had to be supported by facts, "truthfulness" was not equal to a mere listing of the "facts". To be truthful, news media must reflect the "general trend" and the "nature" of a development or a phenomenon, and reflect the "mainstream" in the society, through continuous news coverage. Thus, in collecting and selecting news, journalists must grasp the essence of events with the aid of the "microscope" and "telescope" of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.

"Criticism and self-criticism" by and through the press was an important form of freedom of expression and freedom of the press among the masses of people. Genuine exercise of such a principle would help develop a good relationship between the Party, the press, and the people. By publicizing criticism of the Party's work, the press could help the Party keep closer contact with the masses. However, Gan further qualified the concept. Criticism could only be constructive. There was to be no challenge to the Party leadership and its guiding ideology. No criticism could be made to oppose the resolutions or policies that had already been decided by the Central Committee.

The above-mentioned concepts, in Gan's opinion, basically reflected the experience of the Chinese Party press and the Party's

consistent view on the nature and function of press as revealed in speeches of Party leaders and resolutions made by the Central Committee concerning journalistic work since the inception of the Party. They were the distillation of the "fine traditions" that had been fostered during the Yan'an days and had helped the Party press establish a good relationship with both the Party and the masses in the forties and early fifties.

Gan's view as expressed in his book met serious challenge from the majority of seminar participants. Most participants felt that Gan's view reflected merely the ideas of Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong, but ignored Marx's concept of "free press" when he was a young journalist.²⁵ They argued that Lenin, Stalin, and Mao's concept of Party press overemphasized strict control of news media by the Party, absolute obedience to the Party, and the role of press as the propaganda tool of the Party. This concept had become inappropriate since the liberation of 1949. Such a theory, they claimed, made the press vulnerable to the manipulation of individual careerists within the Party leadership such as Lin Biao and the Gang of Four.

Looking back on their own experience during the Cultural Revolution, many journalists were ashamed of the "contemptible role" they had played as "a trumpeter" or eulogist of whoever happened to be in power. Such a "fate", they believed, was the result of the traditional concept of Party press, which had

²⁵ Gan argued that when Marx advocated "absolute" freedom of press, he had not yet become a genuine, complete Marxist. See Gan Xifen, *Xinwen Lunzheng Sanshinian* (1988), p. 73-76.

improperly defined China's journalism as a propaganda organ of the Party. This definition required the journalists and the news media to make no challenge at all to the leadership of the Party. When the Party was under the control of the Gang of Four, publicizing the Party policies virtually became propagating the Gang's policies.

To prevent such tragedy from ever happening again, some journalists proposed that "News coverage must be responsible for facts, while the news media must be responsible to the law."²⁶ Within this limit, these journalists argued, journalists and news media should have the right or freedom to report whatever they want.

Gan opposed this view. He argued that "the principle of being responsible for facts and law" was not enough for socialist journalism. The "higher principle" for socialist journalism would require the journalists and news media to "give consideration to the fundamental interest of the country and the people", in addition to respect for facts and observing laws. In Gan's opinion, this was the "starting point" for either writing a news story or running a newspaper. He concluded: "otherwise, even though you have no error in facts, nor commit a crime, you may also do something foolish enough to cause damage to the country and the people."²⁷

Some journalists postulated that a freer and more independent press would be much more helpful for China's socialist construction

²⁶ Gan, *Xinwen Lunzheng Sanshinian* (1988), p. 93.

²⁷ Gan Xifen, *Xinwen Lilun Jichu* (1982), pp. 243-244.

in general and for the "four modernizations" in particular. They advocated that the ideas of Young Marx, who had championed the free press against Prussian censorship. They hoped that the rediscovery of young Marx's concept of press freedom would help salvage Chinese traditional concept of the Party press from rigid and narrow Leninist-Stalinist interpretations. Wang Ruoshui, a deputy editor-in-chief of the *Renmin ribao*, argued that Marx had proposed direct election and press freedom as essential elements of socialism when he analyzed the failure of the Paris Commune.²⁸

Some participants indicated that there were three models of journalism in the world, namely, the Western model of "free press", the Soviet model of the "Party press", and the model of "developing countries". Chinese press, according to their opinion, belonged to the "Soviet model."

Other participants asked whether China's socialist system had generated the social conditions in which political careerists within the Party leadership such as Lin Biao and the Gang of Four could thrive and control the Party and the Party press. They compared those careerists to a "blood fluke", and the socialist system to "oncomelania". In order to eliminate the "blood fluke", they argued that the social conditions would have to be exterminated.

Gan disagreed with their diagnosis. He argued that even though

²⁸ Hu Jiwei and Li Lanxing, "Ping yulu xinwen xue" (On "Quotation" Journalism), in Chen Lidan, ed., *Malie Zhuyi Xinwenxue Jingdian Lunzhu* (Classical Works of Marxism-Leninism On Journalism) (Beijing: Renmin ribao chubanshe, 1987), pp. 405-432.

"there are still many flaws in our present press system, these flaws are not equal to a cancer." Such "flaws" required "reform" rather than "revolution".

The controversy over the traditional concept of Party press as indicated in the three-day seminar of 1980 signalled the rise of critical thinking within the Chinese journalism community. This was obviously a result of the liberal policies set by the Third Plenum of 1978. Following this seminar, there was some evidence indicating that Chinese journalists became bolder in challenging the traditional concept of Party press. For example, in 1982, Hu Jiwei, a veteran journalist and then director of the *Renmin ribao*, questioned the concept of "the unity of people orientation and Party orientation".²⁹ In an academic discussion, Hu asked, "If the newspapers are the voice of the Party, to whom are we referring?" Hu claimed that newspapers ought to belong first to the people and second to the Party, that the first responsibility was as the voice of the people and only then as the voice of the Party. In Hu's view, the Party had committed a number of very serious errors over the years. It was, therefore, important, that the press be in a position to resist or reduce the harm inflicted by those errors.

As the head of the most authoritative propaganda organ of the Party, Hu's words generated a lot of interest. One Chinese source³⁰ indicated that there were many lively journalistic discussions

²⁹ Liu Binyan, *China's Crisis, China's Hope* (Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 90-91.

³⁰ "Xinwen gaige shiti", *Kongjun Bao Tongxun*, 1981, no.1, p.4.

between 1982 and 1983, which focused on the contradiction between the "Party orientation" and "people orientation". The dominant line of the argument, represented by Hu Jiwei, was that the "people orientation" should be given first priority.³¹ "People character" must not to be replaced by "Party character". "People orientation" was the base for newspapers, without it, there would be no "Party character". Another Chinese report said that many editors and reporters proposed that the main objective of the journalism reform should make newspapers the voice of the masses. They suggested that the news media should pay more attention to the needs and desires of the readers. Serving the public interest was not to be replaced by a focus on leaders' will. Audience study should not be replaced by leaders' study.

The journalists were not alone in their challenge to Party leadership. In Chinese theoretical circles, there was a heated discussion on the issue of "alienation" in socialism. In the realm of literature, Bai Hua's movie script entitled "The Sun And Man" dared to raise such a question: "You love the Party, does the Party love you?"³² The Party viewed such criticism as opposition to the "four cardinal principles".³³ The Party counterattacked launching

³¹ *Ningxia Ribao Tongxun*, 1982, no. 8.

³² Wang Renzhi, "Guanyiu fandui zichanjieji ziyouhua" (On Opposing the "Bourgeois Liberalization"), the *Renmin ribao*, February 22, 1990, pp. 1-2.

³³ The "four cardinal principles" - socialism, proletarian dictatorship, the leadership of the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, were proposed by Deng Xiaoping in 1979, as the fundamental principles for the China's modernization and the building of socialism with Chinese characteristics. See

the "anti-spiritual pollution" campaign in October 1983, and this movement lasted well into 1984. During this period of time, the debate on journalism reform wound down.

Although the 1979-1983 debate on journalism was confined to the reinterpretation of the traditional concept of the Party press, this reinterpretation broke new ground as it exposed the inadequate press performance of the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution.

II. "MINOR REFORM" VERSUS "MAJOR REFORM", 1985-1987

The second high tide of discussion on journalism reform was brought about by Hu Yaobang's speech on Party journalism, which was published in the front page of the *Renmin ribao* on April 14, 1985. As the general secretary of the Party, Hu's speech was considered as the Party Central Committee's formal response to the questions raised by journalism professionals during the debate in the previous few years.

Confirming the Party's orthodox view on the nature of Party press, Hu stated:

The Party's journalism is the mouthpiece of the Party, and also the mouthpiece of the government that is under the leadership of the Party. This sentence, of course, cannot cover the entire content and every function of the Party journalism. For instance, the journalism is also a link and bridge, an instrument of transmitting information about the Party, about domestic and international situation. Since our Party has committed itself whole-heartedly and whole-mindedly to serving the people, the press as the mouthpiece of the Party should function to make the instructions and policies of the top known to the bottom, and bringing the situation of the low levels back to the top. The role of the

*press is to strengthen the link between the Party and the masses, reflect the voices of the people and satisfy the people's needs for information.*³⁴

Hu also distinguished the Party press from the non-Party press. Hu insisted that newspapers run by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee, by the various democratic parties, and also specialized technical newspapers could not act as "the mouthpiece of the Party".

Responding to the question as to whether journalism should enjoy the same freedom as creative writers do, Hu said "no". He explained that the press was different from literature. Party journalism, he emphasized, should speak as the representative of the Party, should publish commentaries to guide work in line with the Party's own policies.

As to whether journalistic reform could copy the reform in other sectors of the economy and whether a newspaper could be run as commercial or economical enterprise, Hu said that would be "improper". He stressed: "No matter how much reforms are introduced, the nature of the Party's journalism cannot be changed."

In reply to journalists' suggestion that China needed different voices, Hu contended that while it was necessary to listen to different voices, the voices had to respond to the same political orientation; they had to respect the unified fundamental policies of the Party. The press had to respect such policies

³⁴ Hu Yaobang, "Guanyu dangde xinwen gongzuo" (On the Party's Journalism), the *Renmin ribao*, April 14, 1985, p. 1.

because the Party and government represented the people and shared the same interest. But on specific problems, he conceded that there were indeed different voices. These voices were already published by different newspapers and magazines, and had been encouraged by the Party and welcomed by the people.

In his lengthy speech, Hu covered almost all the major issues concerning Party journalism. Although he emphasized the role of the press as an organ of the Party, he also endorsed the role of journalism as the voice of the people. He encouraged the journalists to learn to be the organ of the Party creatively and actively. Accordingly he required that news reporting be timely, interesting, and informative.

Talking about "truthfulness", Hu agreed with the view that the facts had to be given priority and that news reports must be accurate. Predictably he insisted that the news media should also reflect the essence and "mainstream" of the society. Since in socialist China the sunny side was the mainstream of life, he required that "newspapers should contain 80% good news and 20% criticism of the seamy side of things...." ³⁵

The Party general secretary's speech seemingly established strict limits of officially condoned debate but it ironically helped stimulate yet another wave of vigorous debate on journalism reform. The interpretations of Hu's speech were surprisingly different among journalism professionals. Mu Qing, the director of

³⁵ Hu Yaobang, "Guanyu dangde xinwen gongzuo", the *Renmin ribao*, April 14, 1985, p.2.

Xinhua News Agency, interpreted Hu's speech as a reemphasis on the Party character of the press, but more and more people interpreted Hu's speech as a signal for greater freedom to discuss the issue of journalism reform.³⁶

The liberalization was apparently confirmed in the Party's formal permission in 1986 for open discussion of political reform and in the renewal of the "Hundred Flowers" policy. Vice Premier Wan Li promised the intellectuals that the "Hundred Flowers" policy would not only apply to scholarly discussions, but also to political debate.³⁷ He reassured the intellectuals that there would be no repeat of the late 1950s "Anti-Rightist Campaign". As a result, in 1986 China was buzzing with talk about reform of the political system. Top leaders and academics detailed the shortcomings in the existing system and outlined ideas for reforms to make the system more democratic.

In press circles, the debate on journalism reform developed in three major directions. First, there was continuous interpretation of Hu Yaobang's speech. Secondly there was an increasing focus on "objective laws" governing journalism. Thirdly there was a debate on the overall approach to press reform.

The discussion on Hu's speech focused on how to understand

³⁶ *Xinwen Jiaoxue Cankao Ziliao* (Reference Materials For Journalism Education) (Beijing: The Library of The Journalism Institute, China People's University) no. 35, Oct. 1986.

³⁷ "Shi juece gengjia minzhuhua kexuehua shi zhengzhi tizhigaigede zhongyao bufen" (Making Decision-Making More Democratic and Scientific is An Important Part of Reform of the Political System", the *Renmin ribao*, Aug., 15, 1986.

properly the concept, "mouthpiece". The general secretary talked of many issues concerning the Party journalism, but many journalists felt that the most stimulating aspect of his speech originated with Hu's description of the three functions, namely, "making the instructions and decisions of the top known to the bottom", "bringing the situation of the lower levels back to the top", and "reflecting the voices of the people and satisfying the needs of the people for information". Many believed that a freer definition of the nature and role of the Party press could be derived from a careful reading of this aspect of his speech, and that such reading could lead to the constructive reinterpretation of the traditional concept of the Party press.

"Making the instructions and decisions of the top known to the bottom", for example, referred to the traditional concept of "guidance". As the organ of the Party, Party newspapers surely must play such a "guidance" role. But how? Did "guidance" merely imply that the Party committees would publicize policies through the media? Many journalists explored the wider connotations of "guidance". The latter was to include suggestions and advice on the life of the masses. Others maintained that the term "guidance" should be replaced by "service". In their opinion, the Party was the representative of the people, and all Party's work was for the interest of the people. Therefore, the term "service" could better reflect the essence of the relationship between the Party and the people.

"Bringing the situation of the bottom back to the top"

highlighted the importance of feedback. This would include reflecting the complaints of and criticism by the masses; it implied that negative things would be reported openly.

"Satisfying the needs of the people for information" was interpreted as a signal for a broader definition of the role of press. It meant that the press should have other functions to play in addition to the role as a propaganda organ of the Party.

As for the "objective laws governing the press", a few months following the publication of Hu Yaobang's speech, Hu Jiwei wrote an article entitled "Yanjiu shehuizhuyi jianshe shiqide xinwenxue" (Study Journalism of Socialist Construction).³⁸ Hu Jiwei's "journalism of socialist construction" moved beyond the general concept of "Party press", or, "socialist" or "proletarian journalism". It constituted a theoretical breakthrough. Hu challenged traditional thinking which divided the world of journalism into "bourgeois" and "proletarian" journalism.

In elaborating his idea, Hu Jiwei argued that while Lenin and Mao Zedong had written a great deal about Party journalism, most of their writing focused on the period of revolution. Therefore, some of their views were no longer suitable in the period of socialist construction. The status of the Party had changed, the audience had changed, the social environment had also changed. For this reason, Hu argued, the old model of socialist journalism must be replaced by a new model that would fit the particular reality of socialist

³⁸ Hu Jiwei, "Yanjiu shehuizhuyi jianshe shiqide xinwenxue", in the *Renmin ribao*, August 5, 1985.

construction. To develop a new and more appropriate model, one had to find the "objective laws governing the press", and at the same time observe these laws. To study the journalism in the period of socialist construction, Hu maintained that Chinese journalists had to critically distinguish the "old" or out-of-date concepts of the traditional theory of Party press from those which still had some contemporary relevance. The focus on "objective laws" was almost certainly an attempt to play down the role of the "leaders' will" in running journalism.

Despite such good intention, there was no sophisticated analysis explaining what the objective laws governing the press might be.³⁹ For example, Xia Dingming listed only the often stated criteria such as "truthfulness", "objectivity", and "5 Ws"⁴⁰ as the objective laws that news writers must observe.

As discussions of political reform turned hot in early 1986, the debate in the press circles intensified. Inspired by bold discussions in the theoretical circles, liberal journalists began to publicize proposals for reform in the system of Chinese journalism, and in this context the divergent views between the two groups came into sharper focus. The dominant line of argument in most of 1986 was the that "journalism reform should be a integral part of the political reform". And some even insisted that "press

³⁹ See Hu Jiwei, "Yanjiu shehuizhuyi jianshe shiqide xinwenxue", in the *Renmin ribao*, August 5, 1985.

⁴⁰ The "5 Ws" refer to the five basic elements in writing a news story, namely, "who", did "what", "when", in "what" context, and with "what" result.

reform" should march ahead of the political reform. The "major reform" group was in the dominant position for most of 1985-86.

The views of the "major reform" group were clear. They wanted major changes involving both the theoretical concepts and structures of the journalism.⁴¹ Their main argument was that the concept of Party press, the practice of journalism, and the tightly controlled and highly centralized structure of the journalism, had all been developed to respond to the contingencies of the revolutionary war period. The pre-1949 model of journalism, however, became increasing inappropriate to the conditions of post-liberation China, but because of the ill-advised application of this model since 1949, Chinese journalism performed badly during the fifties and seventies. The Anti-Rightists campaign in 1957, the Great Leap Forward in 1958, and the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976, were cited as typical examples during which the press had failed to serve the interest of the Chinese people. The press had actually added "fuel to the flames" of the ultra-leftist line and policies. To meet the new situation brought about by the Party's "four modernizations" program since 1978, and to facilitate the program, Chinese journalism needed a "major operation".

Specifically, the "major reform" group proposed to change the old concept of "Party press" and to establish a new concept of "national journalism". This group rejected the narrow concept of

⁴¹ The following introduction of the "two approaches" to the journalism reform is based on the Chinese source "Guanyu xinwen gaigede yixie yijian" (Some Opinions On Journalism Reform), *Cankaoziliao* (Beijing: Journalism Institute, China People's University, 1986).

the press as exclusively "propaganda tool", and alternatively focused on the "multi-functions" of the press. In the new era the press was to provide entertainment and commercial information to the masses. Instead of assuming that criticism would cause damage to the Party and socialism, the press was to function on the more optimistic basis of "criticism can promote progress, no criticism would hinder progress" in socialist construction. The press was to substitute the "market place of ideas" for "unifying public opinion". There was no "magic bullet". Instead, the press had to recognize that different readers and interests would react differently to the same message. In short the press had to respond to a differentiated audience.

As for the reform of the press structure, the "major reform" group suggested that, the general concept of "national journalism" should be applied to the reconstruction of the press system. The aggregate of each and every news media throughout the country was labelled as "national journalism". Both Party and non-party journalism would operate within this macro-framework. Even with the Party press as the core, the press system was to become more organizationally diversified.

As far as the function of such a press system concerned, this opinion group emphasized the concept of "two-way communication". While the press system as a whole was to be controlled by law, the Party press was also subject to Party discipline and resolutions.

The view of the "major reform" group reflected the impact of the general trend of political liberalization during 1985 and 1986

on the thinking of journalism professionals. Liberal journalists often received encouragement from Party officials. For instance, at a conference on journalism in August 1986, Teng Teng, the Vice Director of the Propaganda Department of the Party, agreed with editors on their appeal for a greater editorial autonomy. He said, "Newspaper editors should have the final say in deciding what to and what not to print."⁴²

The concept of "press freedom" (*xinwen ziyou*) was another hot subject under discussion in 1986. Journalists maintained that the freedom of press was a critical element of political reform. One writer observed that freedom of speech and publication was the basic condition for political reform. Chen Congshan,⁴³ a researcher at the Institute of Journalism, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, pointed out that even while under the socialist system of public ownership, the alienation of labour had been reduced to a great degree, political alienation still existed. Citizens had been deprived of their constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of speech. Chen took the case of Zhang Zhixin as an example.⁴⁴

Qian Xinbo,⁴⁵ vice president of All-China Journalism

⁴² *Renmin ribao*, August 20, 1986.

⁴³ Chen Congshan, Mi Xiuling, ed., *Zhongguo Chuanbo Xiaoguo Toushi* (A Perspective Study of Media Communication Effects In China) (Shenyang: Shenyang chubanshe, 1989), pp. 11-28.

⁴⁴ Zhang Zhixin, a Party member working at the Propaganda Department of Liaoning Provincial Party Committee, was executed during the Cultural Revolution because of her criticism of the Gang of Four in a letter to the Central Committee of the Party.

⁴⁵ Chen Congshan, Mi Xiuling, ed., *Zhongguo Chuanbo Xiaoguo Toushi*, pp. 1-10.

Association, emphasized that freedom of press should provide everyone with equal opportunity to express his or her opinion. He said that as China opened its door to the outside world, Chinese journalism professionals had found that they had lagged much behind the West not only in communication technologies and equipment, but also in "journalism freedom and democracy." Qian explained that such freedom and democracy meant to "fully reflect different opinions and different voices..." He especially emphasized that minority of opinions and opposite opinions should be given an equal chance of expression."

Qian contended that the "truth" did not always reflect the majority opinion. Citing the case of Peng Dehui at the Lushan Conference in 1959, Qian argued that while Peng Dehui and a few comrades were in the minority, they did possess the "truth". Mao's orchestrated majority opinion was later exposed as wrong.

Qian pointedly asked: "At that time, did the news media provide Peng Dehui and his minority with any chance to express their opinion and give support to the minority?"

The discussion of press freedom was closely related to renewed calls for a press law. A press law was first proposed in 1980, but no work had been done until the Sixth National People's Conference in 1985, when Hu Jiwei was put in charge of the drafting such law. With slow but steady expansion of journalistic autonomy in 1985 and 1986, the Chinese news media carried more criticisms and investigative reports. These publications gained the Chinese press more credibility, but at the same time media units and individual

journalists were increasingly embroiled in political controversy and legal battles. *Zhongguo fazhi bao* (China Legal News) reported that investigative reporting which exposed incompetence or scandal, often invited counterattacks on the press. Those who were criticized went to higher officials, and charged the papers with libel. They subsequently refused interviews. Precisely for such reasons, institutionalizing the independence of the press was necessary:

*A free press can ensure people the rights to criticize individuals or the government and voice their ideas. Freedom of speech and publication is the basic condition for political democracy, which is the ultimate goal of China's political reform. To ensure this freedom, media and publication laws should be published. So long as it does not violate the law, any speech or article should have the right to decide what to publish. Intervention by any organization or individual should be taken as infringing upon civil rights. The key to the reform of the press is that each newspaper should have adequate decision-making power. The Party and the government should keep interference to a minimum.*⁴⁶

During 1985-86 the "minor reform" group was not as conspicuous as the "major reform" group. However, their position on the journalistic reform was also clear. Basically, this group advocated practical changes in the content and method of propaganda and news reporting. They insisted that journalism reform, the same as the economic reform, was not a fundamental change. It was a process of self-perfection and self-improvement of socialist journalism. The nature of the press remained essentially the same.

This group believed that no matter how many new newspapers came into being, the Party press would continue to play a dominant

⁴⁶ *China Daily*, Nov., 7, 1986, p. 4.

role in the society. Hence, the role of Party press as the "mouthpiece" of the Party was not to be weakened in the slightest degree.

The challenge to the Party press, according to this opinion group, was how to act creatively as the "mouthpiece of the Party". While upholding the principle of "Party character", the "minor reform" group agreed to a wider definition of the role of Party press. The Party press had to function as a "forum for public opinion", and as an instrument by which information was transmitted.

The "minor reform" group responded to new concepts proposed during the debate, and it endorsed "five transitions" in journalistic work. The first "transition" was from "one-way" to "two-way flow". The second involved the transition from "single function" to "multi-functions". The third was from a "closed" to an "open model". The fourth was from "instruction" to "service-orientation". The last "transition" was from "indoctrination" to "communication".

While some Party leaders and intellectuals wished to further reform, the defenders of the status quo began to link reform to the rise of bourgeois liberalization. They warned that reform would negate the "four cardinal principles" and foster "spiritual pollution". As for journalistic reformers, especially those who advocated freedom of press and press autonomy, the street tabloids were the conservatives' first and easiest target.

The student demonstrations that began in November, and then

spread quickly through 20 or more cities in December and early January, gave conservative leaders the chance to launch a counter-attack. They began their ideological assault by ousting Hu Yaobang, and they attacked the most outspoken intellectuals such as Lin Binyan, Fang Lizhi and Wang Ruowang. Hu Yaobang's January 16, 1987 resignation marked the end of the second high tide of the journalistic discussion.

Conservative Party leaders and propaganda officials gained dominance over the news media. They began to reemphasize the "mouthpiece" role of Party press. The head of the Party Propaganda Department, Zhu Houze, an ally of Hu Yaobang and an exponent of liberal cultural and literary policies, was transferred.

Five days after Hu Yaobang resigned, the Office of Media and Publication was established at ministerial level under the State Council. Among its duties was the "drawing up of principles and policies on management of press and publications, and conducting press censorship." The new office was also charged with "banning illegal publications" and the management of the printing of books and newspapers and periodicals.⁴⁷

A number of newspapers were closed down, including *Shenzhen qingnian bao* (Shenzhen Youth Daily). The *Guangming ribao* (The Enlightenment Daily), once a strong proponent of a free press, changed its tone immediately. A commentary published on the 4th of April simply stated: "All cultural activities, including journalism

⁴⁷ Du Daozheng, "Press Legislation is Imminent", FBIS-CHI, 18 April, 1988, p.27.

and publishing, must serve the needs of the 'four cardinal principles'."

III. "SOCIALIST JOURNALISM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS", 1987-1988

The most exciting moment for Chinese journalistic reformers came when the Thirteenth Party Congress was held in October 1987. In his work report delivered at this Conference, Zhao Ziyang, the acting general secretary of the Party, addressed two important themes: the "initial stage of socialism", and "political structure reform". This thematic content had a direct bearing on journalism reform.

The "initial stage of socialism" was a theory of Su Shaozhi,⁴⁸ the former director of Marxism-Leninism Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). It was a result of Chinese intellectuals' reconsideration of the Chinese socialist road. For about three decades since the founding of the People's Republic, socialism had been considered mainly as an ideology and political system. Therefore, after the ownership transformation in the early fifties, Chinese leaders declared that China had entered the stage of socialism. Since the 1978 Third Plenum, Chinese post-Mao leadership declared that poverty was not "genuine socialism", and then it put forward the "four modernizations" as the focus of the Party and the country. Thus economic performance became a key

⁴⁸ Bill Brugger and David Kelly, *Chinese Marxism in the Post-Mao Era* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 33.

factor in judging the success of "socialism". Because of the low level of industrialization and the related underdeveloped economy, China was not considered to be in the stage of "advanced socialism". The three decades of socialism road had not yet provided the desired standard of material success. The stages of socialist development were then reconceptualized. China had not made it out of the "initial stage of socialism".

At the Thirteenth Party Congress, Zhao Ziyang endorsed this "initial stage of socialism".⁴⁹ He declared that it would be at least 100 years from the 1950s, when transformation of private ownership into public ownership had been completed, to the time when socialist modernization would be in the main accomplished. All these years belong to this "initial stage". The purpose of acknowledgement was clearly pointed out by Zhao Ziyang: this stage was a period in which China would be gradually lifted out poverty and backwardness.

The acknowledgement that China was still in the "initial stage of socialism" had significant implications for China's economic reform and political reform as well as for Chinese journalism. First, it allowed commodity economy to develop. It spotlighted the market mechanism and its values, such as "competition" and "efficiency". Reform called for the limitation of the power of "officials' will" in the society.

Secondly, since a growing portion of private ownership was

⁴⁹ For reference, see "Zhao Ziyang Work Report to CCP Congress", FBIS-CHI-87-206S, October 26, 87, pp. 10-34.

allowed legally to exist in this "initial stage", there was greater recognition of emerging interest groups in Chinese society. Such acknowledgement required a more "pluralistic" policy. The journalists were alive to the implications of these changes for Chinese journalism.

"Political restructuring", a sensitive topic for quite a few years, was now formally put on the agenda. It was a result of the further development of the economic reform. Once the economic reform began to stall in the mid-1980s, China's leaders began to focus more clearly on the overconcentration of power and the confusion of Party and state authority. Without some changes in the political structure, the economic reform would get nowhere. However, there had been constant resistance from the conservative leaders who rejected the very discussion of such a topic. The fact that the issue of political structure reform was put on the agenda at the 13th Party Congress suggested the success of the reformer-faction within the leadership.

"Political restructuring" emphasized democratization of political life in China, and this obviously had significant implications for journalism. In the work report, Zhao Ziyang proposed to establish "a system of social consultation and conversation". He emphasized that there were "different interests" and "contradictions" in the society, and the correct way to deal with the "different interests" and "contradictions" was to

"coordinate".⁵⁰

Zhao attached great importance to two-way communication between leaders and the masses. He pointed out, the leading organs at all levels could realistically carry out work and avoid mistakes only by tentatively "listening to the views of the masses". It would be difficult for the masses to understand the activities of leading organs and the difficulties they confronted, unless the leaders were aware of them, and explained these difficulties clearly to the masses. For this reason, Zhao claimed that there must be "a channel for the demands and voice of the masses to constantly reach the high levels."⁵¹

Zhao also talked about the importance of horizontal communication among the masses themselves. Pointing out that the concrete views and matters of interests of the masses "may differ from each other". Zhao emphasized:

*There must be a channel for them to contact each other. Therefore, social consultation and conversation should become a regular activity which can promptly and correctly make the situation at the low levels known to the higher authorities and the directives of the authorities known to the low levels and attain mutual understanding.*⁵²

The aim of establishing such a system of social consultation and conversation was "to increase the openness of the activities of the leading organs, and let the masses know and discuss major

⁵⁰ Ge Wu, "Blueprint for political Restructuring", *Beijing Review*, vol. 30, no. 44, November 2-8, 1987, pp. 7-9.

⁵¹ "Zhao Ziyang Work Report to CCP Congress", FBIS-CHI-87-2065, 26 October 87, p. 27.

⁵² FBIS-CHI-87-2065, 26 October 87, p. 27.

issues." And this, Zhao said, was based on the Party's fine tradition of "from the masses, to the masses".⁵³

In the work report, Zhao specifically mentioned the "supervisory role" of public opinion and the usage of media in this regard. He said, "We must make use of modern media to increase reports on government and Party affairs. We must give full play to the supervisory role of public opinion, encourage the masses to criticize the mistakes in our work ...".⁵⁴

The Thirteenth Party Congress and Zhao Ziyang's report gave a strong new impetus to the journalism which had cooled down since the "Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization" at the end of 1986. Journalists were excited about the spirit of the Congress as revealed in Zhao's work report, and felt that the time was ripe for the press reform. A survey conducted by Public Opinion Research Institute indicated that "journalists commonly felt that the 13th Party Congress has created an unprecedented good environment for journalism reform".⁵⁵ Thus, shortly after the conclusion of the 13th Party Congress, seminars on journalism reform were held in the Capital and Shanghai.⁵⁶ It was commonly agreed by the participants at the

⁵³ "Zhao Ziyang Work Report to CCP Congress", FBIS-CHI-206S, 26 October 87, p. 27.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

⁵⁵ The survey was conducted by the Public Opinion Research Institute of China's People's University between February and March 1988. Chen Congshan, Mi Xiuling, ed., *Zhongguo Chuanbo Xiaoguo Toushi* (Shenyang: Shenyang chubanshe, 1989), p. 185.

⁵⁶ The two seminars were held in December 1987. See "Time is Ripe for Press Reform", *Beijing Review*, Dec.28, 1987-Jan. 3, 1987, p. 9.

seminars that the Party Congress had brought "the best time for press reform", and the Congress had "paved the way for press reform". While there was considerable optimism, there was no consensus as to the specific content of press reform.

Nevertheless, compared with the previous few years during which the journalists constantly complained about the lack of "specific policies for press reform", this time the messages from the top political authorities seemed clearer, at least to some journalists or senior propaganda officials. Du Daozheng, Director of the Media and Publication Office, said, "An aim of the press reform is to inform people about vital issues, to act as a forum for discussion, and communicate people's opinions, proposals and complaints to the authorities." Expanding on this idea, Fan said that the press should also let the world know more about China and China know more about the world." To some journalists, this meant an "open press".

The "openness" of Chinese press had been limited in the past. Ordinary people sometimes had to learn about important decisions of the central authorities by listening to foreign radio stations or reading foreign newspapers. This odd phenomenon had been popularly dubbed as "chukou zhuanneixiao" (selling exports in the domestic market).⁵⁷ This kind of practice was cited by the participants in seminar discussion of the futile attempts of the Chinese news media

⁵⁷ "Shanghai, Nanjing xinwenjie dui xinwen tichi gaigede yixie kanfa" (The Views of Shanghai and Nanjing Press Circles on Some Issues Concerning the Reform of China's Press System). Occasional paper by the Research Institute of Public Opinion, China People's University (Beijing: 1989), p. 4.

to "let the masses know and discuss major issues". Hu Jiwei, president of the Capital Journalism Society and former director of the *Renmin ribao*, held that in order for the media to "help heighten people's consciousness about participating in political life and enhance their ability to do so," the government should "provide more and faster information about political affairs."

In accordance with the 13th Congress' emphasis on two-way communication between the leaders and the masses, Hu once again tackled the key issue of "serving two masters". "Newspapers should speak for both the leadership and the people.... but the emphasis in the past has been on speaking for the leaders, and the press has been regarded as a textbook for the people." Echoing Hu's opinion, Li Ji, editor-in-chief of *Gongren ribao* (Workers' Daily), said that the main task of press reform "is to satisfy the demands of readers and produce newspapers that are readable and reliable."

"Reform in the press system" and "press legislation", as many participants suggested, should be the focus of journalism reform. Many journalists agreed that a press law was central to journalism reform. Without a press law, journalists could not protect their rights. Li Senhua, deputy director of the Shanghai People's Radio Station, held that a press law could help the media exercise their supervisory role.

The debate on journalism reform was further pushed forward when Zhao Ziyang called for "developing socialist journalism with

Chinese characteristics."⁵⁸ Zhao did not repeat the traditional "Party tool" concept as Hu Yaobang had done in 1985. He seemed to have a wider definition of the role or nature of the press in mind. Zhao might not have specifically endorsed "national journalism", but many journalism-reformers believed that his work report implicitly endorsed Hu Jiwei's "journalism of socialist construction". Even though Zhao did not explain what the "socialist journalism with Chinese characteristics" meant, journalists attempted to grasp the essence of such a "journalism" through the reading of his work report. Journalists quickly concluded that China's journalism must fit the "reality" of the "initial stage of socialism". Based on such an understanding, Chinese journalism professionals began to explore the concrete form and content of the "socialist journalism with Chinese characteristics". Their discussions focused on the role of news media, the structure of news media, the means of media control, and press freedom.

On the Role of News Media.

Most Chinese discussion of the media's role in 1988 and early 1989 tended to suggest that news media should be the "principal channel" (zhuqudao) for "social democratic consultation and dialogue".⁵⁹ They believed that this was the fundamental role of Chinese journalism in the "initial stage of socialism" in China.

⁵⁸ "Zhao's Message to Journalists", *China Daily*, Jan.11, 1988, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Chen Congshan, Mi Xiuling, ed., *Zhongguo Chuanbo Xiaoguo Toushi*, p. 117-121. The following discussion will largely base on this source.

Such a role could provide two-way flow of information and communication. It would make the press an open system. This was an explicit breakthrough to the traditional concept of "mouthpiece". Such a "principal channel" would realize "three types" of rights of the masses, namely "zhijingquan" (the right to know), "fayanquan" (the right to speak), and "jianduquan" (the right to supervise). These three rights were correlated with three phrases in Zhao Ziyang's work report, namely, "let the masses know major issues", "let the masses discuss major issues", and "supervisory role of public opinion" through mass media.

Journalists argued that "right to know" was a basic right for all citizens, who were the masters of the country. In order to let the people exercise the other two rights properly, the "right to know" must be first satisfied. And the news media could and should play such a role in this respect. However, in reality, many "old" principles and concepts that hindered the media in its exercise of such a role. For example, in news reporting, there was a principle of "report immediately, report later, and do not report". In the past the tendency had always been to emphasize "report later, and do not report". In addition, there were too many taboo areas, such as diplomatic policies, police, military affairs, which the press had never been allowed to report on. As a result, the media had played the passive role of eulogist. The journalists argued, from the perspective of democratic politics, the phenomena of blocking the people-the master of the country-from access to information, must be changed. In the new situation, they said, the role of the

media should "change from a passive propagandist of decisions to a positive participant in the process of decision-making".

Journalists argued that the "right to speak" was stipulated in the Constitution as the freedom of speech, but in reality it had never been really realized. From the point of view of the media, this was due to the traditional role of the press as a "zhixingzhe" (the person who implements) of the principle of "unified public opinion". With this principle, the communication was a one-way flow, ie., "only the leaders speak, and the masses listen." This was certainly not "conversation" or "dialogue". And this had resulted in the phenomenon of "thousands of people, one voice". Because of this principle and practice, the prestige of the media was damaged, and the democratic life was destroyed.

The journalists argued that public opinions should not, indeed could not be unified in reality. The principle and practice of "unified opinion" was especially unsuitable to the contemporary Chinese society, because diversity of opinions was the inevitable fruit of the "different interests" in the "initial stage of socialism". The media had therefore to change its stance from "zhixingzhe" (the one who implements decisions) to become a guide which helped foster diversity of public opinion.

The "right to supervise" was regarded as very important. The realization of the other "two rights" would make the exercise of supervisory role of public opinion possible. Hu Jiwei distinguished five spheres of public opinion supervision: (1) supervision over decision-making; (2) supervision over government and Party routine

work; (3) supervision over legislation; (4) supervision over morality; (5) supervision over democratic discussion.⁶⁰

To facilitate such supervision, Hu maintained that the media would have to be given the right to criticize and expose. Freedom of press and rule of law were two guarantees for the media to exercise the supervisory role. The previous principle that media had no right to criticize the Party committee of the same or above its level, had, therefore, to be banned.

On the Structure of Press.

Journalistic discussions of 1988-1989 tended to agree on developing a pluralistic model of press structure, described as "yiti duoyuan" (one system, many types). "One system" meant that each and every news medium was a constituent part of the whole system of socialist press. "Many types" meant that the ownership patterns were to be diversified, namely, privately-owned-papers and collectively-owned-papers would be allowed legally to exist, in addition to the existing Party and government-owned-papers. Such a structure was an institutional guarantee of the democratic model of two-way communication wherein the media as a whole would act as a "principal channel" of democratic consultation and dialogue. While Party and government press continued to be official organs, private or collective papers could serve as different voices.

It was commonly believed that such a structure was in line with the spirit of the 13th Party Congress, which emphasized

⁶⁰ Hu Jiwei, "Luelun yulun jiandu" (On the Supervision of Public Opinion), the *Renmin ribao*, Oct. 19, 1987.

democratization of political life, and recognized the existence of different interests.

On the Means of Press Control.

Discussions on journalism reform before the 13th Party Congress had exposed many constraints and interferences in the business of journalism. These interferences or constraints largely came from regulations, policies, and resolutions made by Party Committee or even some individual leaders at one time or another. Journalists complained about "too many parents-in-law". This phenomenon was traced to the "rule of man" in press control, or as Chinese journalists called "running press according to officials' will". To get out of such a situation, many Chinese journalists had been appealing for more freedom of press, and at the same time, calling for legalization of press control. In 1988 and early 1989, they began to argue that the supervisory role of news media and the role of press as an open forum for public discussion could not be realized without a change of press control from "rule of man" to "rule of law".

"Rule of law" meant to regulate the press by law, rather than by Party committees or government leaders. All news media and journalists must observe laws, but at the same time, enjoy the freedom of reporting, within the limit of law. This applied to every media. For Party organs, however, in addition to observing the law, they had also to obey Party disciplines and policies and regulations. Party leadership over official organs should be also maintained at the macro-level. For non-party newspapers, they might

not be subject to Party rules. Thus, the control, or administration of non-party press was distinguished from that of Party press.

Closely related to the discussion of "rule of law", there were several other issues which caused a heated debate. Since 1987, China saw an impressive increase in lawsuits against the news media. Statistics showed that as many as 20 percent of the cases of reputation damage accepted by the courts were caused by articles or news reports published in newspapers or magazines.⁶¹

As a result, the press and the courts had to grapple with a series of challenging questions. How can the law protect both the proper supervision of public opinion through news media as well as the citizens' right to reputation? What is the relationship between the press and the law? At what point does reporting encroach on one's reputation and rights? What is the legal responsibility of the reporters? What is the legal responsibility of newspapers concerned? How is the line drawn between press freedom and the use of personal photographs without permission? How does one draw the line between an untruthful report and libel?

These questions in essence reflected one basic concern of journalists: how should the law guarantee the freedom of press, and how should the press act according to law? Answers to these questions were varied. But in general, journalists tended to emphasize freedom of the press, asking for more independence and autonomy in reporting. Others stressed the legal responsibilities

⁶¹ "Supreme Court Authorities Address Press, Law", FBIS-CHI-89-078, 25 April 1989, p. 37-42. The following discussion will base on this source.

of the press. Of course, there was no easy way to balance the two emphases. In defending themselves, the journalists urgently called for speeding up promulgation of a press law, which would guarantee the freedom of press, and the protection of journalists. However, others argued that a press law might bring more constraints to the freedom of press and more limits to the right of reporters. Controversy over the purpose of the press law apparently delayed its promulgation.

On Press Freedom.

Controversy over the content of the press law related to growing controversy over the concept, "freedom of the press". In 1988 and early 1989, there was an attempt to define this seminal concept. Zhang Youyu, an senior legal expert, said, "The press freedom to which we refer should include open criticism of Party and government work." Freedom of press, according to Zhang, also meant the ability to publicize different opinions so long as they "are not aimed at instigating counterrevolutionary activities and violating the law."⁶²

Hu Jiwei was another prominent advocate of press freedom. He maintained, the exercise of press freedom could improve the degree of political transparency, promote the supervisory role of the media, and facilitate democratic decision making. He said, when people can fully enjoy freedom of the press, the level of making information known to the public and political transparency "will be

⁶² "Legalist Views Press Freedom, Press Law", FBIS-CHI-88-033, 19 February 1988, p. 9.

increased", and supervision by mass media "will be expanded". He concluded: "In this way, the decision making stratum of the state will handle matters more meticulously. This is beneficial to reducing mistakes and defects."⁶³

Second, Hu said, "freedom of press is also a safe channel for people to vent their dissatisfaction." Hu maintained that letting people speak out and the press publish more opinions of the masses within the scope of law could help maintain social stability. This is because "... people need an outlet for their anger." In this sense, press freedom was the base for maintaining a stable situation in modern society. Freedom of press was not to be limited to freedom of news gathering, of writing, and of publication, it was also "the rights of all citizens, through mass media, to learn the real situation, for discussing and participating in government and political affairs, and for supervision."

Press freedom was helpful not only to social justice, but also to the establishment of democratic authority of the Chinese leadership stratum. Hu believed that only leadership authority established under the condition of a free press was a democratic authority truly supported by the people. Otherwise there could only be autocratic authority with which people dared not to vent their anger. Hu maintained that democratic authority was the best factor of stability, whereas autocratic authority was the most unstable factor.

⁶³ "Hu Jiwei Stresses Freedom of Press", FBIS-CHI-89-057, 27 March 1989, p. 48.

The vigorous journalistic debate since the 13th Party Congress had actually been dominated by the "major reform group". The reform-oriented journalism professional had found their theoretical base in the theory of "initial stage of socialism". They became more confident in expressing their views. Their opinions and views seemed to have influenced the majority of Chinese journalists, including the "minor reform" group. Some members of the latter changed their opinion and became advocates of "major reform"; for example, Gan Xifen, one of the most influential advocates of the traditional "mouthpiece" theory and the existent system of press, even proposed the publication of major private newspapers in 1988.⁶⁴

A survey⁶⁵ showed that eighty percent of journalists disagreed with the traditional concept which had treated the press as "a department of the Party or government" and "the mouthpiece of the Party". About seventy four percent of them agreed that "within the scope of law, any news based on facts could be reported". Seventy five percent of the journalists opposed the view that "press freedom is a bourgeois concept, and therefore could not be used by Chinese journalists".

The debate on journalism reform since the late 1987 also attracted the attention of many Party and government officials and

⁶⁴ "Time is Ripe for Press Reform", *Beijing Review*, Dec. 28, 1987-Jan. 3, 1988, p. 9.

⁶⁵ This survey was conducted between February - March 1988 by Public Opinion Research Institute of China's People's University. The sample size was 3094. See Chen Congshan, Mi Xiuling, ed., *Zhongguo Chuanbo Meijie Xiaoguo Toushi*, pp. 177-195.

important decision-makers. According to a survey conducted in 1988 by the Public Opinion Research Institute of China People's University, the majority of the members of China People's Congress (CPC) agreed on the proposals made by the "major reform" opinion group for journalism reform.⁶⁶ These proposals included some sensitive issues such as "to publish privately-owned newspapers", "an independent press system free from the control of the government and the Party, but responsible to the law." The former director of the Press Bureau of the State, Zhong Peizhang, said that "The goal of media reform is to achieve press freedom."⁶⁷

During 1988 and early 1989, new terms such as "moshi" (model), "chuanbo moshi" (model of communication), "dazhong meijie" (mass media), "chuanbo xiaoguo" (effects of communication), "xiaoyi" (effectiveness), "shouzhong" (audience), "xinxi" (information), and "fankui" (feedback), frequently appeared in the debate on journalism reform. The usage of these new terms by Chinese journalists indicated a new receptivity to the terms popularly used in Western scholarly discussions in the field of communication studies. The introduction of these new concepts helped Chinese journalists break with the ideological and theoretical limits of the traditional theory of Party press.

JOURNALISM DEBATE, 1979-1989

⁶⁶ Chen Congshan, Mi Xiuling, ed., *Zhongguo Chuanbo Xiaoguo Toushi*, p. 96-100.

⁶⁷ "Urgent Call for Reform of the Chinese Media", *China Daily*, May 11, 1988, p. 4.

The debate on journalism reform, since its inception in 1979, had gone through three distinct stages. Before 1985, it focused on the criticism of the Gang of Four and a call for restoration of the "fine traditions" of Party press. Reviewing the history of the Party press, however, some journalists realized that many mistakes of the press were due to the influence of the orthodox theory of Party press. Thus, questions about the applicability of such a theory to the 1980s' reality of Chinese society were raised, and challenges to the traditional concept of Party press emerged. The thought of most journalists was however still limited to the theoretical framework set by the Party press theory. The relationship between the press, the Party, and the people were the major concern. The defenders of the traditional theory and system of the Party press were the dominant group in this period.

In 1985 and 1986, the official approval of open discussion of political reform and the restatement of "Hundred Flowers" policy encouraged the reform-minded journalism professionals. They became more critical, and began to challenge in public the existing system and traditional theory of the Party press. They proposed major reform in journalism, including not only improvement of techniques of news presentation and increased variety of content, but also basic change in the structure of journalism. They proposed new concepts such as "national journalism" and "the variety of press ownership". They became known as the "major reform" group. This opinion group remained active until late 1986.

In the meantime, the "minor reform" group stuck to the old

theory and pattern of Party press system, but tried to improve the credibility of the Party press by reinterpreting the traditional concept of Party press and the spirit of Hu Yaobang's speech on journalism.

The most exciting stage for reform-minded journalism professionals began in October 1987. The theory of "initial stage of socialism" and the Party's formal endorsement of political structure reform became the theoretical base for the "major reform" group. Their exploration of the "socialist journalism with Chinese characteristics" continued in depth throughout 1988 and 1989. Their call for "major reform" gained support from most journalists and many important decision-makers.

After nine years of consistent efforts, reform-minded journalists finally put forward an "alternative model" of journalism in 1988. This model defined the role of news media as a "principal channel" of "democratic social consultation and conversation", functioning as a forum for public discussion and a watchdog supervising decision-making of political authorities. This "open" model emphasized the two-way flow of information and communication. The proposed new model would be regulated according to the principle of "rule of law". This suggested model of the press would also change the existent highly centralized and controlled structure into a "pluralistic" structure, which would include privately- or collectively-owned press, as well as the Party press.

The evolution of the 10 years of journalism debate, which

ended in the spring of 1989 demonstrated the rise of independent and critical journalism. Initially inspired by the liberal policies of the post-Mao leadership, and later taking advantage of every opportunity, the journalists challenged the orthodox theory of journalism, exposed the defects of the existing press system, and proposed a number of new concepts which challenged the underlying assumptions of the traditional theory of the Party press. These new concepts also illustrated the impact of Western theories of mass communication and the Western concept of independent press and press freedom on the thinking of Chinese journalists. Certainly, many new ideas and concepts proposed during the debate also had their Chinese roots. The concept "two-way communication" and the idea of "supervision" are both expressed by Mao's "massline" theory, "from the masses, to the masses". Zhao Ziyang explicitly related his new expressions such as "dialogue" and "supervision" to the fine tradition of the "massline", which indicated the internal coherence of the official line on the press.

CHAPTER FOUR

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEBATE AND THE FUTURE OF CHINESE JOURNALISM

This chapter evaluates the significance of the ten-year Chinese debate on journalism reform by examining the defiance of the Chinese press during the 1989 Chinese student movement and the development of China's journalism in the post-June 4 political context. The pattern of news media participation in the events of Tiananmen Square reflected the further development of pressure which had already been fostered in the 1980s debate on journalism reform. Also, the limits of Party tolerance towards press openness were established as the Party leadership re-consolidated its political position. The post-June 4 development of Chinese journalism reform may imply the pattern that the Chinese press will likely follow in the foreseeable future. This chapter will show how the 1980s debate continued to influence the Party's terms for press reform. The chapter therefore consists of two parts: "The Tiananmen Square Incident and the Chinese Press"; and "The Post-June 4th Development and the Future of Chinese Press".

I. THE "TIANANMEN SQUARE INCIDENT" AND THE CHINESE NEWS MEDIA

Chinese journalists had traditionally been considered by both the political authorities and journalists themselves as the Party's propagandists. The news media seen as the "mouthpiece" of the Party. In academic discussions, this role was once questioned by a

small group of intrepid journalists and again by the majority of the journalism professionals during the 1980s debate. In practice, the traditional role of Chinese press had never been seriously challenged. This situation suddenly changed in the spring of 1989, when thousands of reporters and editors took to the streets, joining the student demonstrators, petitioning for freedom of the press, and breaking official sanctions to report sympathetically on the "actual state of affairs". This defiance was short-lived, but unprecedented. It was the outcry of Chinese journalists for greater freedom of the press and openness of news reporting. It demonstrated the impact of the journalistic debate prior to the spring of 1989 on the thinking of Chinese journalists. At the same time the leaders' tolerance toward press openness and the freedom of press was surely tested.

The impact of the journalistic debate clearly manifested itself in the rebellious actions of journalists within many of the major news institutions including the most prestigious Party organ -the *Renmin ribao*. The spark that set off the unprecedented large-scale student movement was the death of Hu Yaobang on April 15. Hu was the general secretary of the Party and was the point man for the reform forces which were beginning to assume leadership positions in the Party and in the government. He was ousted in January 1987 after an internal Party power struggle in which he was accused of failing to crack down on student protesters during the 1986-87 student demonstration. Hu's death served as the catalyst for the 1989 movement.

Pro-democracy rallies began the day of Hu's death, and wall posters were put up at Beijing University mourning Hu Yaobang and criticizing conservative leaders of the Party. These actions quickly spread the next day to Shanghai. On April 17, 1989, six thousand Beijing students marched to Tiananmen Square to lay down wreaths honouring Hu, who had overnight become the darling of the student movement.

The Chinese press was squarely faced with the dilemma of how to report on these events. The students' voluntary mourning activities were at the centre of the news, but their slogans involved such sensitive issues as "a reassessment of Hu Yaobang", "reassessment of the 1986's student demonstrations", and "greater democracy and freedom". The major news media, inclusive of Party organs such as the *Renmin ribao*, Xinhua News Agency, Central Broadcasting Station, and Central Television Station, kept silent as through nothing had happened. This did not mean, however, that every journalist working for the Party organs simply wanted to ignore the occurrence. For example, several reporters of the *Renmin ribao* who witnessed the student daring march had written a news story about it. But when the paper's night-duty editors made a late night-trip to the editor-in-chief's office for an approval, the news story was turned down.¹ They were told that the paper had to follow Party instructions when assigning, reporting, and especially publishing stories. Any deviation from the norm could endanger the

¹ Seth Faison, "The Changing Role of the Chinese Media", in Tony Saich, ed., *The Chinese People's Movement: Perspectives on Spring 1989* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990), pp. 145-146.

careers of the reporters and editors involved. Predictably, the next day, neither the *Renmin ribao* nor any of the other major news institutions carried anything about the march. It appeared that censorship, exercised by veteran editors, would prevail.

The *Renmin ribao* remained silent about the student demonstrations until April 20, five days after Hu's death. Then the paper published its first report on the student demonstrations in front of Xinhuaamen, the ceremonial gate to Zhongnanhai, headquarters of the Communist Party and residential compound of many top Chinese leaders. In that report, the students were said to be used by a "handful of instigators" when they "tried to break into the gate and throw bottles and shoes at the security guards." The next day, the *Renmin ribao* stepped up its accusations against the demonstrators, who were now reported to have incited "disturbances" in their speeches. They had allegedly shouted "counterrevolutionary" slogans such as "Down with the Communist Party". These were serious charges. The Daily also published a Xinhua News Agency's editorial referring to the students as "troublemakers" who had been instigated by a very small group of anti-Party agitators behind the scenes.

Up to this point, the *Renmin ribao* had failed to mention such student demands as "freedom of the press", "ending corruption", and the rehabilitation of Hu Yaobang. Their call for a dialogue with government officials was also ignored by the press until the April 26 *Renmin ribao* editorial accusing the students of creating "turmoil".

Contrary to the example of the authoritative Party organs, other quasi-official newspapers that were published by state-funded but not strictly governmental organizations, ignored official instructions and covered the early stages of the demonstrations prominently. Notable among them was the *Keji ribao* (Science and Technology Daily). The *Keji ribao* normally limited its coverage to nonpolitical news, but it published a factual account of the scene in the Square alongside a large photograph showing students, some with clenched fists, packed around a huge banner that proclaimed "The Soul of China".² Copies of the issue were quickly pasted up on bulletin boards at Beijing universities.

When the *Keji ribao* printed its ground-breaking first report on the demonstrations, the question many journalists immediately asked was why the newspaper's chief editor, Lin Zexin, had allowed such a report when Tan Wenrui, the chief editor of the *Renmin ribao* had not. It was explained later that Lin had been overlooked when top editors were called to a meeting by Hu Qili, the senior Politburo member responsible for ideological affairs, where he instructed them not to report on the disturbances.³

Nevertheless, admiring the courage of the *Keji ribao*, journalists from other news units began to follow the paper's lead. In the following few days, balanced stories on the spreading

² Seth Faison, "The Changing Role of the Chinese Media", in Tony Saich, ed., *The Chinese People's Movement: Perspectives on Spring 1989* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990), p. 146.

³ Michael J. Berlin, "Sun's Fight for Press Freedom", *Index on Censorship* (Aug. 1989), p. 12-14, describes how the chief editor of the *Keji ribao* flaunted the rules.

demonstrations appeared in the *Gongren ribao* (Workers' Daily), the *Nongmin ribao* (Peasants' Daily), *Beijing qingnian bao* (Beijing Youth News), and the *Zhongguo funubao* (China Women's News). The residents of Beijing were able to obtain copies of these issues.

In Shanghai, the *Shijie jingji daobao* (World Economic Herald) played a similar role, but its influence was much greater.⁴ This is because of the paper's special status as an "unofficial" paper, and its prestige in intellectual circles.

The *Herald*, born in 1980, captured the spirit of China's "reform and open-door" policy. With its relatively independent status, the paper had been bold in exposing problems in Chinese political and economic systems, in advocating new thinking and new ideas, and in emphasizing different points of view. It was praised by its counterparts and the Propaganda Department of the Party as "a new school of journalism".⁵

Hu Yaobang's death was reported sympathetically by representatives of the *Herald*, which also presented the student movement in a positive manner before May 4. One week after Hu died, the paper's editor-in-chief, Qin Benli, authorized its Beijing

⁴ For references to the involvement of the *World Economic Herald* in the 1989 student movement, see Xi Huashi, "Shijie jingji daobao zhenxiang" (The Truth About the "Incident" of the *World Economic Herald*), in *Xinhua yuebao*, August, 1989, pp. 50-54; also see Hsiao Ching-chang and Yang Meirong, "Don't Force Us to Lie: The Case of the *World Economic Herald*", in Chin-Chuan Lee ed., *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990), pp. 111-121.

⁵ "Weile zhongguo de xiandaihua - Shijie jingji dabao de wunian" (For China's Modernization - Five Years of the *World Economic Herald*), *Jiefang ribao* (The Liberation Daily), July 4, 1985, p. 3.

Bureau to invite several prominent and outspoken intellectuals to a special forum, in which a group of well-known intellectuals expressed their anger at the Party's decision to force his resignation in 1986. They urged his rehabilitation, and attacked Party conservative leaders for manipulating his downfall. The *Herald* carried telling extracts from the forum.

While Hu Yaobang was highly praised at the official memorial service in the Great Hall, Party hardliners were antagonized by the *Herald's* suggestions that the purge of Hu and the campaign against "bourgeois liberalization" in early 1987 were both misguided. Such a rehabilitation, should it take place, would clearly indicate that the aging leaders such as Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, and Wang Zhen themselves were wrong in forcing Hu to resign. The Shanghai Party Committee sent a work team to the *Herald*, and fired the paper's editor-in-chief, Qin Benli.

These actions taken by Shanghai Party Committee drew strong reaction. Qin's colleagues at the *Herald* published a page-one headline, "We Need an Atmosphere Where We Can Speak Freely".⁶ They even prepared a lawsuit against the Shanghai Party Committee, which the *Herald* claimed was not in a legal position to fire Qin, because the paper belonged to the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, and not to the city's Party secretary.

The *Herald* staff gained immediate support from their counterparts in Beijing. On May 4, several hundred journalists

⁶ Xi Huashi, "Shijie jingji daobao zhenxiang" (The Truth About the Incident of the *World Economic Herald*), in *Xinhua yuebao*, August, 1989, p. 52.

joined the student marches, openly paraded under the banners with the names of their newspapers and carried signs proclaiming, "Newspapers Should Speak the Truth", "Press Freedom", and "Reinstate Qin Benli".

The April 26 *Renmin ribao* editorial seriously agitated the student demonstrators. Entitled "Resolutely Oppose Turmoil", this editorial escalated tensions more than any other event during the protest. The students felt that their "good will" was misinterpreted and their image was distorted. They feared that they might be misunderstood throughout the society. In the following few days, therefore, they organized larger demonstrations, in which they called for "Retraction of the April 26 People's Daily editorial". The students' concern is understandable, because in China, the articles of *Renmin ribao* are regarded by many people - especially the less-educated - as the "documents of the Party Central Committee".

Realizing the possible influence of the editorial on the public understanding of their activities, the students turned to the concept of "freedom of press". They seemed to believe that if the press could present the true face of their movement, or at least not distort it, other sectors of society would come to understand and support them. Thus, on April 29, at the first formal dialogue between government officials and the student representatives there was a call for the removal of press censorship, and students strongly demanded that the press should "tell the truth." Yuan Mu, the spokesman of the State Council,

responded by saying that "China does not have such a thing as press censorship". Yuan predictably argued: "... according to the Constitution, the press enjoys freedom, but at the same time, it has to be constrained by the Constitution and law. Since the press bears certain social responsibilities, it has also to be responsible to its readers and cannot report on whatever happens. This is true in all countries."⁷

The students saw little hope of a sincere dialogue with the government on the issue of press freedom. About 10,000 students held a bicycle demonstration in protest against press control by the government. They proceeded to some important news organizations such as the *Renmin ribao*, the *Guangming ribao*, Xinhua News Agency, and the Central Broadcasting Station. While they marched, the students shouted such slogans as "*Renmin ribao* lies to the people", "*Guangming (brightness) ribao* has no light." They even accused the Xinhua News Agency of being a "rumour-monger."

The students' dissatisfaction with the coverage of their demonstrations by Party organs such as the *Renmin ribao* and Xinhua News Agency was actually shared by many journalists working at these media. A number of journalists, especially the younger ones, were eager to demand freedom of reporting. Even some of the senior journalists had actively called for an "open", if not "free" press, by which they meant that the press should report on the "dark" as well as the "sunny" side of society. However, given their position,

⁷ Yi Mu and Mark V. Thompson, *Crisis at Tiananmen: Reform and Reality in Modern China* (China Books & Periodicals, Inc., 1990), p. 127-128.

they had to serve as the "mouthpiece" of the Party and government, and could not report on one of the most significant events since 1949. Thus they appeared very passive in comparison with the bold reporting of the non-Party newspapers. The journalists at the Party organs were just waiting for the opportunity to demand a freer press in China.

Such an opportunity arrived when Zhao Ziyang's message was revealed to the press circles. According to one account, the tone of the April 26 *Renmin ribao* editorial was set by Deng Xiaoping, who had personally reviewed a draft of the editorial, crossing out each reference to the "student movement", and replacing it with the politically charged "turmoil", effectively branding the student demonstrators as political enemies.⁸ In view of the development of the student movement, Zhao Ziyang, however, seemed to disagree with Deng's hard-line stance toward the protesters. Speaking to a meeting of the Asian Development Bank on May 4 in Beijing, Zhao insisted: "The responsible demands from the students must be met through democratic and legal means". Zhao also told Hu Qili and fellow Secretariat member Rui Xingwen that there was "no big risk in opening up a bit by reporting the demonstrations and increasing the openness of news."⁹

.. Whatever the politics behind the scenes, journalists all over

⁸ Seth Faison, "The Changing Role of the Chinese Media", in Tony Saich, ed., *The Chinese People's Movement: Perspectives on Spring 1989* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990), p. 154.

⁹ Stefan R. Landsberger, "Chronology of the 1989 Student Demonstrations", in Tony Saich, ed., *The Chinese People's Movement*, p. 169.

Beijing seemed convinced that an irrevocable step toward press freedom had been taken. "The most concrete reform to come out of the student demonstrations has been more freedom of the press. That cannot be taken away again", opined a *Herald* journalist.¹⁰

From May 5 on, there was an obvious change in the tone of the *Renmin ribao* and almost all other Party organs in the Capital, in the coverage of the student demonstrations. On May 5, the *Renmin ribao* carried large photographs of the massive demonstration held the day before, the first time the paper had done so. In contrast to the minimal stories on the march of April 27, which had been described as illegal and improper, those published on May 5 reported accurately on the student calls for democracy and science. A photograph appearing on the front pages of many newspapers showed a banner that urged, "Support the *World Economic Herald*". It was clear which side the main newspapers were now on. For ordinary readers outside Beijing, it was the clearest news yet on the demonstrations. For many readers all over China, it demonstrated the depth of the political crisis that was unfolding. From May 5 to May 20, during the high tide of the student demonstrations, Beijing's newspapers and broadcasting stations, for the first time in 40 years, broke away from Party control. The press organs of the Party acted as the voice of the students.

After May 5, the notion of returning to a completely one-sided media coverage of the demonstrations seemed impossible. On May 9,

¹⁰ Xi Huashi, "Shijie jingji daobao shijian zhenxiang", *Xinhua yuebao*, August, 1989, p. 53.

a group of one hundred journalists marched to the All-China Journalists Association to present a petition with over one thousand signatures, calling for talks with the Party and government about press reform.¹¹ The signers came from over thirty news organizations in Beijing, including the *Renmin ribao*, the Xinhua News Agency, *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, *Guangming ribao*, *Beijing ribao* (Beijing Daily, and *Beijing wanbao* (Beijing Evening News).

The petition marked the first time in the history of the People's Republic that journalists attached to official news organizations massively called for freedom of press from the political authorities while closely linking themselves with a student protest. The petition, which was read to foreign and Chinese journalists, requested a "sincere and equal dialogue" on press reform with leading Party propaganda officials. It also criticized the sacking of Qin Benli and refuted the statement made by Yuan Mu that "China has no press censorship", saying that this simply did not conform to the facts. The petition expressed special dissatisfaction with the press coverage of the student movement, saying that the reports on the events had been "far from enough, not objective, and neither fair-minded nor comprehensive." More importantly, the petition expressed a strong demand for government approval of a "major reform" of journalism - a reform of the press system.

Directors of the Journalists Association were proud to accept

¹¹ For reference to the journalists' petition, see Yi Mu and Mark V. Thompson, *Crisis at Tiananmen: Reform and Reality in Modern China* (1990), p. 129-130.

the petition. The Association pledged to see that the petition reached the appropriate authorities.

Due to the unprecedented nature of the petition and the extraordinary situation, the CCP reacted within two days. Hu Qili, member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo in charge of propaganda, and other high ranking propaganda officials, including Wang Renzhi, head of the CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department, and both Rui Xingwen and Yang Minfu, members of the Secretariat of the Party Central Committee, visited almost all the major news media organizations in the Capital. In those meetings, the journalists expressed strong dissatisfaction with the way they were ordered to report on the student movement and the editing of their articles. The journalists asked for the right to criticize publicly leading members of the Party and argued that only if the press was democratically reformed so it could make independent criticism , and could a democratic system based on the "rule of law" really begin to develop. Thus the journalists insisting that press reform should be a vital part of the reform in general. it seemed that Hu Qili, at this point, agreed with the journalists. Hu said, "We have reached a stage where the press system has to be changed." He also said that "The press should report the actual state of affairs."¹²

The student hunger strike had evoked a great outpouring of public sentiment. Up to a million Beijing residents joined the

¹² Yi Mu and Mark V. Thompson, *Crisis at Tiananmen: Reform and Reality in Modern China* (1990), p. 132.

march. A large number of journalists also joined the march toward the Tiananmen Square. The number of those from national-level media organizations who took to the streets was particularly impressive. On May 18, the *Renmin ribao* reported that more than 1,000 journalists from the paper had taken part in the march. This was more than half the paper's total employees. The English-language *China Daily*, which is loosely under the auspices of the Central Committee's Propaganda Department, ran a photograph of its marchers with a caption reporting that 100 people-about one-third of the entire staff-had gone out.¹³

What was most compelling about this action was the fact that journalists from these media publicly marched under the banner of the organizations for which they were employed. This presented an open challenge to "unified Party leadership" and a rejection of their traditional status as the Party's "mouthpiece". Journalists' dissatisfaction was translated into their reports on the student demonstrations in the mid and late-May. They provided more balanced and sometimes even sympathetic coverage on the hunger strike. The students were reported positively.

Apart from news reports on the demonstrations and hunger strike, the Chinese press also published letters from various organizations, mostly official state organizations, and well-known writers, artists, and theorists supporting the student demonstrators. Official Party organs also published some articles written by staff reporters to show their support for the movement.

¹³ *China Daily*, May 18, 1989, p. 3.

The *Renmin ribao*, for example, carried a long feature article of its own, entitled "History Will Remember This Day", which was written in a very emotional style, and showed solid support and understanding of the student demonstrations. This trend reached its height on May 16, 17, and 18. These were the days Liu Binyan, referred to when he said, "Press freedom in China existed for only three days."¹⁴

Following Premier Li Peng's declaration of the martial law in parts of the Capital, the Party attempted to reinstate its strict control over the press. But for the first few days, it was not completely successful. The majority of reporters and editors found ingenious ways to signal their resistance to the authorities through using oblique and inferential editorial techniques to oppose the government and Party authorities, for instance, they made reference to foreign news reports.

On May 21, only one day after martial law was declared, the *Renmin ribao's* coverage of the demonstrators was curtailed. But at the bottom of the front page, the editors ran a story on the resignation of a prime minister in Italy. This was a back-handed swipe at China's own prime minister, Li Peng. The next day, in the same space there was an item on a Hungarian leader's statement that Stalinist tactics of violence should not be used to suppress the people.

By May 24, the hard-liners had gained more substantial control

¹⁴ Frank Tan, "The People's Daily: Politics and Popular Will - Journalistic Defiance in China During the Spring of 1989", *Pacific Affairs*, Summer, 1990, p. 153.

of the press, and as a result, sympathetic coverage of the hunger strikers was cut. The press made increasing reference to the protesters as "hooligans" and "rioters". Reports of disorders and disruption of traffic increased while coverage of the demands of the students subsided. A box that appeared on page one of the *Renmin ribao* reminded readers each morning how many days the martial law had been in effect. The overall tone of reporting changed from one of suggesting that the government listen to the protesters to one of exhorting people to avoid the demonstrations. The media focus was on social order, and not the demands of the protesters. After June 4, there were no more overt signs to report by Chinese media. But there was still an exception. A Radio Beijing reporter, Li Dan, extraordinarily managed to report the killings which had happened in the Capital, including the killing of the "colleagues at Radio Beijing".¹⁵ Li also called the listeners to "join our protest for the gross violation of human rights and the most barbarous suppression of the people."

Implications of Tiananmen Journalism

The short-lived journalistic defiance in the spring of 1989 had several significant implications. First of all, it illustrated the impact of the previous 10-year of debate on journalism reform. The main theme of the journalistic debate was how to make China's

¹⁵ Steven Mark, "Observing the Observers at Tiananmen Square", in Peter Li, Steven Mark, and Marhorie H., Li ed., *Culture and Politics in China* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1991), pp. 259-260.

journalism better serve the "four modernizations". Many reformers had believed that a freer, critical, and more open press would be more beneficial than a press which merely serves as a propaganda organ of the Party and government. An open press could facilitate two-way communication between the leaders and the masses, while critical press could help expose official corruptions and check wrongdoing, so that the government and Party would gain genuine support from the broad masses of the people. Their defiance during the student movement was undoubtedly an expression of their long years of frustration with their own status as the purveyors of officially sanctioned news.

The call during the debate for a broader definition of the role of the Chinese press, that is, a press which should serve as both the organ of the Party and the voice of the people, seemed to have approval of leading Party authorities, as revealed in Zhao Ziyang's work report at the 13th Party Congress. The Party Congress promised to conduct social democratic dialogue with the masses on a regular basis and through multi-channels of communication, to inform the masses on major issues, to encourage open discussion of policies and political affairs, and to let the news media play a supervisory role through public opinion. However, the way in which the Party authorities dealt with the press during the student demonstrations, clearly indicated that the Party leaders still regarded the media as the "mouthpiece" of the Party. The top propaganda officials instructed the media to downplay the story and discredit the students. Thus the Party's commitment to genuine two-

way communication and "to inform the public major issues", and "supervisory role of news media through public opinion" became increasingly hollow. The tolerance of the political authorities toward press openness and journalistic freedom was only limited to the level of discussion.

The handling of the case of Qin Benli and the *Shijie jingji daobao* (World Economic Herald) touched one of the several sensitive issues that were debated for years among the journalists before the student movement. That is the control of press through "rule of man" or "rule of law". The *Herald* was a semi-private paper linked to the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. Therefore, for the journalists, especially those working at the paper, it was improper for a city's Party secretary to fire the editor and close the paper. In terms of "major reform" the paper need only be responsible to law and subject to law, not to the Party secretary.

The sequence of Tiananmen events confirmed the "major reform" criticisms of the 1980s. Party organs like the *Renmin ribao* failed to report on the early stage of the student demonstrations. The *Herald* was closed down after diverging from the official line. The freedom of press "existed only three days". The overall tone of the coverage of the student movement by Chinese news media changed in relation to the inner-Party struggle. Without a change in the overall system of the press, the freedom of press as enjoyed by the journalists in the spring of 1989, could only be short-lived. The hardliners's control over the press clearly showed the residual strength of the Party's institutional constraints.

The experience of Chinese media in the spring of 1989 has also raised a question about the evolving Chinese concept of press freedom. In the previous debate, the journalists seemed to regard press freedom as a means to enable the press to provide the public with a more balanced and comprehensive picture, and to reduce partisan bias in news coverage. And many journalists, including senior editors like Hu Jiwei, argued that journalism freedom meant that news media or journalists should have the right to decide what and how to report within the limits of law. In response to the Party's emphasis on "stability", the journalists argued that "stability cannot be maintained without freedom of the press." This was re-emphasized by the journalists during the student demonstrations. One banner even said, "Press freedom makes the state stable!"¹⁶

The performance of the Chinese press during the student demonstration in 1989, however, did not necessarily conform to a strict sense of the concept of press freedom. They did not report on the student movement from the Party and government stand but from an anti-government stand, or the stand of the student protestors. As a result, the Chinese media tried to avoid partisan or state bias, but was unable to remain objectively distant from the events. The press participated in the events. Michael Berlin observed:

While the reporting by the Chinese news media was, according to many scourges, accurate and complete, there were some

¹⁶ Michael J. Berlin, "Chinese Journalists Cover (And Join) the Revolution", *Washington Journalism Review*, Sept. 1989, p. 36.

*instances in which its coverage took on a distinctive, anti-government bias.... Some of the stories went to the extreme of giving short shrift to the official line and distorting actions and statements to make the students look better."*¹⁷

The bias was indirect but still clearly expressed even once martial law was declared. With the hardliners moving to consolidate control of news media, Chinese journalists turned to indirect means to express their sentiments. Newscasters on national television sent signals by reading headlines with downcast eyes and the news in gloomy tones; the *Renmin ribao* featured an article quoting Hungarian leaders as saying they would never order troops to act against civilians.

The anti-government bias and inclination to the students was understandable, considering the government's attempt to control and censor the press. But this kind of bias and inclination just provided another excuse for the hardliners to tighten the control over the media. In the Party's view, the period of press freedom that was enjoyed by the Chinese news media, did not facilitate the "stability" of the society, but rather, it contributed to the political upheavals during the student demonstrations.

Nevertheless, the journalistic rebellion as demonstrated by the Chinese press during the 1989 student demonstrations sent an unmistakable message: The purveyors of officially sanctioned news, including those working at the apex of the nation's propaganda system, were deeply dissatisfied with the conditions and content of their work. Never before had China's official messengers

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 36.

demonstrated such insubordination. Their activism had two aspects: opposition to control of the press, itself, and support of the student demonstrators. The first aspect reflected a desire for greater occupational power, specifically, the right to make independent judgments without threat of censorship, suppression, or punishment. The second aspect reflected a political bias favouring mass sentiment over the official line. Neither aspect conformed to their conventional role as propagandists for the Party and government.

II. THE POST-JUNE 4 DEVELOPMENT AND THE FUTURE OF CHINESE PRESS

The prevalent view in the Western analysis suggests that the post-June 4 process of journalistic reform represents a return pre-1978 theory and practice. Chinese critics such as Liu Binyan and Ruan Ming agree with this view.¹⁸ However, while this is only partly true in terms of the tightening of Party control over the press in the short period of time right after the June 4 incident. This view overlooks the gradual change in the Party's policies on "journalism reform" in the new context of developing "socialist market economy". In fact, there is a gradual, yet distinctive progression in the direction of journalistic development in the last four years since the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident.

The unprecedented student movement and the defiance of the Party press in the spring of 1989 forced the Party leaders to

¹⁸ See Liu Binyan, Ruan Ming, and Xu Gang, *Tell The World - What Happened In China And Why* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1989).

consider the underlying causes of such "abnormal" developments. One of the key factors that has been identified as an important cause of the student upheaval is the Party's loosening control of the media. Officially the origin of the student demonstrations were traced to "bourgeois liberalization". The media allegedly promoted such a trend by providing liberal intellectuals with an efficient channel for dissemination of their ideas and opinions. The media was able to do so, because Party leadership over the press had been weakened. The rebellion of the Party press was a clear indicator of the Party's weakness in exercising its leadership over the media.¹⁹ In its immediate reaction, the Party leadership under Jiang Zemin, the new Party general secretary, adopted three approaches to the tightening of Party control over the press. The first was the control of personnel through changing those chief editors who were considered disloyal to the Party line during the student demonstrations. The *Renmin ribao* was the first target. Soon after June 4, the replacement of the two top leaders of the paper, supposedly for "health reasons", was announced. Chief editor Tanwen Rui,, who in fact had been hospitalized during the tense political period, was replaced by the director of the Propaganda Department of the PLA General Political Staff, Shao Huaze. And the paper's director, Qian Liren, was replaced by the vice president of the Party School under the CCP Central Committee, Gao Di. In addition, almost an entire tier of middle level editors were demoted in the following months. Other news units were ordered to remove those who

¹⁹ *Xinhua Yuebao* (Xinhua Monthly), Nov. 1989, p. 76.

had either participated in the student demonstrations or disagreed with the official line in their reports on the student movement.²⁰ The inevitable rectification was much milder than expected, it involved only a few arrests. For example, Zhang Shu, who had put out an unofficial "extra" with inside information not appearing in the official press, was the only *Renmin ribao* reporter who was reportedly arrested.²¹

The second step was the strengthening of the Party's supervision over the content of media coverage. Unified opinion was emphasized. With new leadership to supervise news media, the Chinese press was not allowed to print any controversial views to any challenge the Party's line in news reporting. For example, right after June 4, 1989, the media was instructed to publicize only the official version of the Tiananmen Square Incident.²² The

²⁰ For information on the fate of journalists after June 4, see Claudia Rosett, "Self-Preservation in Shanghai", *Wall Street Journal*, June 16, p. A8; An S. Tyson, "Beijing to Chinese Journalists: Toe the Communist Party Line", *Christian Science Monitor*, Sept. 7, 1989, pp. 1-2.

²¹ Frank Tan, "The People's Daily: Politics and Popular Will", *Pacific Affairs*, Summer, 1990.

²² On June 14, the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee released a detailed account of the events of June 3-4. The account suggested that "a certain small group of people", founded by "overseas reactionary political forces", had "plotted to arrest Party and state leaders and seize political power". The group attacked the army on June 3, killing nearly 100 soldiers and policemen while injuring thousands. Although exercising extraordinary restraint, troops were forced to fire after this. All the major Party organs such as the *Renmin ribao*, Central Radio Broadcasting and Television Station, were required to publicize this official account. For reference, see Stefan R. Landsberger, "Chronology of the 1989 Student Demonstrations", in Tony Saich, *The Chinese People's Movement*, p. 184.

"four cardinal principles", and "stability and unity" became the main theme of media content for a few months after June 4.

The Party's third approach to the control of the press was the ideological rectification in the press circles. This was considered the most important long-run measures. Only a few weeks after the June 4 Incident, the Press Bureau of the Propaganda Department of the CCP held a seminar, calling upon the journalistic circles to "seriously and carefully sum up experience and lessons".²³ Most of the participants were the newly promoted chief editors of major news organizations. They criticized the performance of the Chinese press during the student movement as "rebellion". Chen Hushan, the editor-in-chief of *Beijing ribao* (Beijing Daily) said that what some of the newspapers did in the spring of 1989 was strange: "these news media are the Party's propaganda organs, but they oppose the Communist Party."²⁴ Shao Huaze, the *Renmin ribao's* new editor, called for a reconsideration of "press reform". He said, the core question of journalism reform was to uphold the "four principles". The vice-director of the Propaganda Department of the CCP, Li Yan, chaired the seminar.²⁵ In summarizing the lessons learned on the role of the press during the student movement, he concluded: "the problem for the Chinese press during those days was the direction that some of our news media had taken in leading the

²³ "Xinwenjie yiao renzhen zongjie jingyanjiaoxun" (The Press Circles Must Sum Up the Experience and Lessons", the *Renmin ribao*, July 1, p. 1.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 1.

public opinion." He emphasized that the wrong direction in leading public opinion by these media related back to some of the erroneous questions that had been raised during the previous journalistic debate, such as questions about the "unity of Party character and people character", "truthfulness over political stand", "bourgeois concept of press freedom". Therefore, he urged the press circles to reconsider the direction of journalism reform.

The new general secretary of the Party, Jiang Zemin, and new member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, Li Ruihuan, paid special attention to the ideological rectification campaign in the press circles. At a meeting on Party propaganda work held in November 1989,²⁶ Jiang restated the traditional concept of Party press, emphasizing that the primary role of the press was a propaganda organ of the Party. With such a nature, he insisted, the press must conduct its work in accord with Party's line and policies. Jiang called on the press to play a more active role in "maintaining social stability and unity". Jiang's speech seemed to oppose the concept of "openness" in news reporting. When talking about "transparency" of politics, he said: "Something that needs to be transparent at certain times should be given publicity, if the opportunity is ripe. Whereas certain things that must be made known to only a limited number of people at certain time, cannot be transparent." The criterion for media to decide whether something should be transparent or not", Jiang said, "depends on if it helps maintain social stability and unity."

²⁶ *Xinhua Yuebao*, November 1989, pp. 76-80.

Li Ruihuan elaborated the official view on press reform. He emphasized that China's "journalism reform" must stick to "socialism" in its fundamental direction, and must not weaken Party leadership over the press. According to Li, the "Bourgeois concept of press" and "Western model and system of press" could not be applied to China. As for the underlying principle for news reporting, Li Ruihuan emphasized the concept of "positive reporting". According to Li, "positive reporting" meant "... news reports should focus mainly on those things that can inspire the masses, educate the masses." This was because the mainstream of the society was the "sunny-side". Li admitted the importance of press criticism, but insisted that the impact of criticism must be given serious consideration. The standard for judging whether a criticism should be published in the press was to see if such criticism would help facilitate "stability" and "unity".

The speeches by the new Party secretary and Li Ruihuan clearly revealed the Party's concern about the "power" of news media in influencing public opinion, and the "role" of the press in maintaining social order and the legitimacy of the Party leadership. This was considered as the most important lesson for the Party, which had lost its control of the news media in the spring of 1989. Precisely for this reason, the post-June 4 Party leadership put extraordinary emphasis on the Party leadership over the press, and called for "positive reporting". The traditional press theory was re-asserted as the dominant line in Chinese journalism.

The Party leaders repeatedly emphasized that the "turmoil" had threatened social "stability" and the "unity". And this has been the post-Mao leadership's consistent concern and emphasis since 1978. Both hardliners and reformers agreed that social stability and unity are the prerequisite and guarantee of China's economic development and the success of the "four modernizations". This is why the hardliners' rectification campaign after the June 4 incident was limited and short-term. According to one account, in less than two weeks after the crackdown, Deng Xiaoping gave a secret speech to top leaders, in which he said there should be "limits to the crackdown and executions for 'counter-revolutionary' activities."²⁷ At the same time, the Party declared to its people and the world that there would be "no change in reform and the open door policy."²⁸ Understandably, pragmatic leaders like Deng did not want the crackdown to affect the Party's most important program - the "four modernizations". They certainly did not like the economic sanctions by Western countries after the June 4 incident.

The post-June 4 leadership of the CCP also seemed serious in re-thinking the "lessons" of the student movement and the rebellion of the Party press. A few months after the crackdown, the official media began to change the tough tone toward the events and reemphasize the importance of "listening to the people", "value the

²⁷ Stefan R. Landsberger, "Chronology of the 1989 Student Demonstrations", in Tony Saich, ed., *The Chinese People's Movement* (1990), p. 188.

²⁸ *China Reconstruct*, September, 1989, p. 5.

people's voice", and "supervision by the masses".²⁹ The Party signalled a moderate policy. Fang Lizhi and his wife³⁰, were given permission to leave China. Zhang Weiguo, a *Shijie jingji daobao* (World Economic Herald) reporter, and an active participant in the demonstrations, was also reportedly given a passport to leave China.³¹

The moderate trend in policies was clearly reflected in journalism. Discussion on "journalism reform" in the press circles resumed in early 1990.³² Under the new circumstances, most journalists would not dare to openly advocate such Western concepts as "freedom of press", "independent press", or "Fourth Estate". However, some Western concepts that had been advocated during the 1979-1989 journalistic debate, such as "two-way communication", "audience research", "media effect" and "effectiveness of communication" were still considered valuable and helpful to the development of Chinese style journalism. The journalists now argued

²⁹ For example, *China Reconstruct* carried an article in September 1989, admitting that some slogans put up by the students during the demonstrations, such as "Punish Official profiteers", "Root Out Corruption" and "Promote Democracy", were reasonable demands and would be given serious consideration by the government. See *China Reconstruct*, Sept. 1989, p. 5-6; also see Wu Naitao, "Listening to the People", in *Beijing Review* (April 2-8, 1990), pp. 28-30.

³⁰ *Beijing Review*, July 2-8, 1990, p. 10.

³¹ "Dissident Shanghai Journalist to Get Passport", in FBIS-CHI-92-238, 10 Dec., 1992, p. 20.

³² "Guanyu jicheng, jiejian, gaige wentide taolun" (On the Issues of 'Heritage', 'Learning From Foreign Countries', and Reform"), *Zhongguo Gwangbo Dianshi Xuekan* (Academic Journal of Radio and Television), no. 4, 1990, pp. 4-24.

that, with a better understanding of the audience and the effects of communication, the new media could be more effective and efficient in publicizing Party policies and promoting mutual understanding between the leaders and the masses. Of course, no one disputed the "fine traditions" of the Party press. The post-June 4 discussion of "journalism reform" has not been as far ranging as in the 1980s.

The Party and the government did however take new initiatives in promoting "press reform". This is in sharp contrast to the Party's attitude during the 10 years of 1979-1989. At that time, the journalists were very enthusiastic in discussing press reform, while the Party and government did not pay much attention to it. The journalists had been calling for an official resolution to guide press reform for years, but they did not get a real answer from the authorities in the late 1980s.

Although there have been constant speeches made by Party and government leaders with regard to journalism reform since late 1989, the Party's line on the Chinese press was not made clear until late 1992. The Fourteenth Party Congress, which was held in October 1992, and Deng Xiaoping's speeches on his inspection tour to southern China, both put very strong emphasis on the acceleration of economic development. The 14th Party Congress decided to fully develop the market economy, urging all sectors to redesign their strategy of development, including journalism.

Based on the new situation of the "market economy", the Party urged the press to "meet the needs of the establishment of a

socialist market economy and the building of the two civilizations". Ding Guangen, the Party's Propaganda head, outlined in great detail the Party's view on journalistic work and the press reform.³³

Ding did not use the term "Party press" as Hu Yaobang had done in 1985, instead, he referred to "people's journalism". Of course, people's journalism also needs Party leadership. However, there was a subtle change in wording, when Ding Guangen talked about the Party leadership over the press and the people-orientation of the press. The journalism reform, Ding said, should be constructive in helping to "improve" party leadership over journalism. It should "service" the people's needs and reflect realities. Party leaders were more used to choosing the word, "strengthen", when talking about Party leadership over the press, and "guiding", when talking about the relation of the press to the masses. Changes in wording actually reflected the change of the Party's focus. Clearly, "mass viewpoint" was given more priority in the new emphasis on improving Party leadership.

Ding stressed the upward flow of communication, while confirming the importance of bringing Party policies and programs down to the masses. He said, the news media "should express the masses' new wishes, satisfy the masses' new needs, solve new problems, ... strive to reflect the masses wishes, opinions and demands". The "supervisory role" of news media, according to Ding,

³³ "Ding Guangen Speech at *Renmin ribao* Meeting", FBIS-CHI-93-080, 28 April 1993, pp. 25-32.

also meant to reflect the people's opinions, views, and criticism. Ding rolled all of these into the "mass viewpoint".

Ding also gave a broader definition to the role of the press, suggesting that the news media "perform multiple functions". He cited the traditional emphasis on the "guidance" role meaning to be "an effective vehicle for creating favourable public opinion in support of reform and opening up and modernization", and the "bridge" role between the Party and the masses, but Ding also clearly emphasized the media's role to "provide information". He said, "Increasing the volume of information and enhancing timeliness should be stressed in our present efforts to improve newspaper work." The masses "... create information and they also need information." "Serving the masses", Ding explained, means "to provide the information they need."

Ding also emphasized "feedback", "result" and "art" of news reports and communication. He suggested that the fundamental approach toward improving "propaganda method and generating better propaganda results" was to "establish a mass viewpoint, enhance our awareness of the need to provide service, truly face the masses and encourage popular participation." Ding suggested that news media should improve writing style, encourage short news reports, increase on-site reporting, and provide more abundant, updated, and accurate information. He also asked the news media to "focus on feedback about news reports".

As closely related to the development of socialist market economy, Ding called for the press to "pay attention to correctly

handling the relationship between social benefits and economic benefits." On the one hand, market competition mechanism should be introduced into the realm of journalism, some newspapers could be run like enterprises, because "news media need economic returns". Ding also pointed out, that the news media "should put social benefits above economic benefits". As for Party newspapers, Ding asserted, they "must uphold the principle of Party character and authority, ... must not seek profits at the expense of its high standards."

Ding's speech also revealed new interest in the reform of the press structure. He agreed on the increase of variety of newspapers and journals, and claimed that it was necessary for journalistic organizations "to diversify operations".

The Party's view on the journalistic work and press reform, as revealed in Ding Guangen's speech, is obviously different from the Party authorities' attitude toward the press in the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Square Incident. The new press policy invites comparison with the ideas proposed in Zhao Ziyang's work report to the 13th Party Congress. But this new press policy is more specific and direct in guiding the journalistic work and press reform.

The actual development of Chinese journalism seems to have largely followed the new guidelines. At least the new press policy is clearer in meaning. Since 1991 the "improvement" in Party leadership over the press has been clearly predicated in the "separation" of power between the state and the Party. In practice,

while the Party continues to exercise its direct leadership over the Party organs, the regulation of all other kinds of non-Party media has been transferred to the State Press and Publications Administration, which constitutes a press bureau and a publication bureau. The press bureau is responsible for registration of newspapers and journals, issuing rules and guidelines for publication and closing of newspapers.

The "improvement" in Party leadership over the press has also encompassed a shift in press administration and management from the Party Committee's "direct control" to "indirect control". An official Chinese report has stated: "The newspaper administration structure and form have undergone tremendous changes as the party committee's direct control of newspapers has been forsaken, the Party leadership has been separated from newspaper management, and newspapers are now run according to the relevant laws."³⁴

Secondly, the new press policy approved the introduction of the market mechanism into journalism. In practice, this has implied "commercialization" of media management. Newspapers are regarded as commodities subject to the law of value in the context of market competition. One source indicates that the Propaganda Department of the Party decided at the end of 1992 that, the state will only give financial subsidies to two central-level newspapers and one journal, namely the *Renmin ribao*, the *Jingji ribao* (Economic Daily), and *Qiushi* (Seek Truth). The rest would have to face the

³⁴ *Gongren ribao* (Workers' Daily), Nov. 17, 1992, p.1.

challenges of the market place.³⁵ According to the same report, the policy will be phased in starting with the papers and journals for the people's cultural life and consumer interest. The evening posts, digests, trade journals, and papers mainly reflecting people's daily life were to be commercialized first. The Party organs at various levels, comprehensive newspapers of the state, Army papers, and other journals and newspapers with a strong political and policy orientation, were to be more gradually commercialized. By the end of 1992, one third of the total newspapers in China had already become financially independent.³⁶

The emphasis on commercialization of non-Party non-political newspapers and journals has resulted in a rapid increase in advertisements in newspapers and journals. The limited number of newspaper pages then became a problem. Foreign firms complained that they had to wait too long for advertising space, and many newspapers took advantage of the opportunity to raise their prices for advertising. Newspapers editors are now trying to increase the number of pages.³⁷

The emphasis of the new press policy on "serving the masses" and "providing information" to the masses, has also had practical implications. There has been a significant increase in non-Party and non-political newspapers and magazines in the past two years.

³⁵ "Most Domestic Paper Subsidies To End in 1994", FBIS-CHI-92-238, 10 December, 1992, p.21.

³⁶ FBIS-CHI-92-238, 10 December 1992, p. 21.

³⁷ "Newspapers Plan More Advertisement Pages", FBIS-CHI-93-007, 23 April 1993, p. 17.

These newspapers are run like enterprises. They are financially independent, and they enjoy a greater degree of editorial autonomy. In just a few months last year, the State Administration of Press and Publications approved 400 varieties of newspapers, most of which were academic ones. In addition, 500 popular magazines were still waiting for approval.³⁸ The government then began to slow down the process of approval for it was not sure of the implications of such rapid development.

The impressive increase in the publication of non-Party and non-political newspapers and journals has begun to make the press system change from Party monopolized ownership to "pluralistic" ownership. Privately-owned media has emerged in addition to group-owned media. A recent example is the establishment of the privately-owned TV centre in Xian in April 1993, the capital of Shanxi Province, in northwest China. The centre is established and owned by 8 well-known Chinese writers and playwrights.³⁹ There are also indications that the government will formally approve the so-called "joint-venture" media. The government has already given approval in principle for certain categories of media units to form joint-venture publications with their counterparts in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas. These media cover non-sensitive issues, relating to business, sports, culture, and entertainment. In response, many newspapers and journals along the coast have already set up businesses ranging from printing and advertising to business

³⁸ FBIS-CHI-92-240, 14 December 1992, p. 17.

³⁹ FBIS-CHI-93-077, 23 April 1993, p. 19.

consultancy and real estate.⁴⁰

The rapid development of non-Party and non-political publications has raised a question as to how to control the content of these papers and journals. As mentioned previously, the State Administration of Press and Publications is responsible for setting rules and guidelines to clearly indicate which types of materials cannot be published. An article advocating "Western style democracy", for example, is likely to be banned. But the government⁴¹ says a greater degree of autonomy will be given to four categories of newspapers, namely, afternoon and evening publications, news digests, papers specializing in culture and lifestyle and trade journals. On the other hand, there are still restrictions against coverage of sensitive political and ideological issues. The *Weilai Yu Fazhan* (Future and Development), a bi-monthly magazine, was closed after publishing an outspoken article calling for greater democracy in politics and human rights.⁴² And yet, the *Shijie jingji daobao* (World Economic Herald), which was closed down during the 1989 student demonstrations, is likely to be reinstated on the understanding that the paper will not become involved in politics again.⁴³

Tight control will still be imposed on five types newspapers:

⁴⁰ FBIS-CHI-92-228, 25 November 1992, p. 11.

⁴¹ FBIS-CHI-92-250, 29 December 1992, pp. 27-28.

⁴² "Magazine Shut Down for Publishing Pro-Democracy Articles", FBIS-CHI-92-239, pp. 15-16.

⁴³ FBIS-CHI-92-222, 17 November 1992, p. 15.

party "mouthpieces", nationally or municipally circulated general newspapers, and papers with special target audiences. With the exception of Party organs and army papers, however, most newspapers will be treated as commodities rather than as the "tools of propaganda". According to the Administration, China will take "a legalistic and institutional approach to media control." That is, "censorship will be exercised by specialized government departments, not Communist Party functionaries."

There is also a sign that the control of news coverage will loosen gradually. This may be an inevitable result of the trend of commercialization that has brought about increased competition between media. According to *Hong Kong Wen Wei Po*, during the U.S. presidential election campaign in 1992, two radio stations in Shanghai competed with each other on covering the election campaign. They could transmit TV signals directly received from satellite television.⁴⁴ This development is significant, because, if this practice is allowed to continue, the government's monopoly of news sources will be broken, and there will be a much greater variety of media content.

There is also a new development since the beginning of 1993 concerning legal control of press. In the past few years, there has been a rapid increase of law-suits involving journalists or news media units. Most of these were cases where the press or reporters were charged. In April 1993, a journalist sued the Shanxi Provincial Party Secretary for "alleged slander". The same

⁴⁴ FBIS-CHI-92-215, November 5, 1992, p. 12.

journalist had participated actively in the student demonstration in Shanxi Province in 1989. He had been detained for 13 months after the crackdown. He accused the Provincial Party secretary Wang Maolin of "belittling the law, and abusing his power, trampling human rights". The journalist wanted the Party secretary charged with slander. He demanded the restoration of his honour in the state media and a total of 130,000 yuan fine for the damages. Other similar cases have been reported, but the court has thus far rejected all of them.⁴⁵ The case is still significant. Even though the journalist failed. The fact that his suit was initially accepted and processed by the court indicates modest progress in the "rule of law" in journalism.

The post-June 4 development of Chinese journalism has undergone a gradual, but clear transition, as a result of the changes in Party policies on journalistic work and press reform. The Party authorities' immediate and over-sensitive reaction to the 1989 student upheaval brought the Chinese press under the Party's tight control. This period was, however, short. For the sake of continuing economic development, and also as a result of the Party's reconsideration of the lessons taken from the student movement, the Party reconsidered its relationship with the masses and the press. This reconsideration has resulted in a relatively more moderate media policy, which is characterized by an emphasis on both the "improvement" in Party leadership over the press and the "mass viewpoint". The new policy also urges the Chinese media

⁴⁵ FBIS-CHI-93-063, 5 April 1993, p. 21.

to adopt to the new situation of "market economy". This new policy has set a clear direction for "journalism reform", which has led to an impressive development of journalism since 1992. The current features of the journalistic development encompass the institutionalization of press administration or control, the commercialization of non-Party news media, and the diversification of media ownership. These new tendencies are embryonic, but they may suggest the direction, in which Chinese journalism is going to move in the foreseeable future.

CONCLUSION:

Based on the Chinese reality and guided by Marxist-Leninist approach of "class struggle", the Chinese communists developed their theory of Party press during the "revolutionary war-years". This theory defines the role of the press as a propaganda organ. As the "mouthpiece" of the Party the press bridges the gap between the masses and the Party. This theory clearly subordinated the Party press to the Party leadership; and it required a clear-cut proletarian stand on the part of the media and journalists. According to this theory, the Chinese press must follow the Party lines and policies, interpret events from Marxist-Leninist point of view. The main purpose of the press is to inspire, educate, organize, and mobilize the masses of people for the revolution. From the CCP's point of view, this theory and the Party press built on the theory proved to be very useful during the twenties, thirties, forties, when the Chinese Communist Party was leading the

democratic revolution for the acquisition of political power.

The Party, therefore, continued to apply the same theory after 1949. A highly centralized and hierarchical press system based upon the Party's monopolized ownership was established in the early fifties. Due to the changing condition of the Chinese society, however, this traditional theory and the model of journalism turned out to be quite unsuitable. The overemphasis on the subordination of the press to the Party leadership and on the nature of the press as the "mouthpiece" of the Party made the press vulnerable to power struggles within the Party leadership. Consequently, the press in reality became the propaganda tool of whoever happened to be in power. The manipulation of media by individual leaders often led to media reports which were unrealistic and one-sided. This was especially evidenced during such campaigns as the Anti-Rightists in 1957, the Great Leap Forward in 1958, and the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976.

The traditional theory and model of the Party press were questioned and challenged by Chinese journalists during the 1980s. Both the leaders and the journalists agreed to reform China's journalism so that it would better serve the "four modernizations". However, they disagreed on the purpose of the reform. The Party wanted to have a lively and reliable press, but also wanted to keep the press as the propaganda organ of the Party. The journalists, however, wanted to have a more critical and independent press, and insisted that the press was also the voice of the people.

Within the press circles, two groups of opinion debated on the

approach to the reform. While the "minor reform" advocated the restoration of the "fine traditions" of the Party press, and focused on reforming the style of news presentation and increasing the variety of the content, the "major reform" group called for a more fundamental change to both the structure and the traditional concept of Party press. They proposed to replace the concept of Party press by the concept of "national journalism". They argued that this broader concept could more realistically reflect the new reality of the Chinese society driven by the modernization.

Based on this later concept, and encouraged by the spirit of the 13th Party Congress, reform-minded journalists proposed an alternative model of journalism, which was characterized by "two-way communication", "rule of law", and "variety of ownership pattern". The proposed new model seemed to be accepted by majority of journalism and supported by some Party and government decision-makers. But the student movement in the spring of 1989 proved that the Party leaders still wanted to control the press as its "mouthpiece". The incident also illustrated the great impact of the previous journalistic debate on the thinking of Chinese journalists, who for a short time changed their role from the "mouthpiece" of the Party to the "voice" of the student demonstrators.

The fact that the political authorities easily re-controlled the media right after the June 4 event indicated the strength of the Party's institutional constraints on the Chinese press. At the same time, it justified the "major reform" group's desperate call

for a "reform of the press system" and "rule of law".

The moderate official media policy and the actual development of Chinese journalism since 1992 implies at least tentatively a certain success of the 1980s journalism reform. Selective concepts which were highlighted in the debate, such as "two-way communication", "institutionalization of press administration", "broader definition of the role of press", "feedback", "effects of media communication", "press as the voice of the people", re-appeared in the contemporary program for journalism reform.

The official adoption of these new concepts, however, does not necessarily mean a deviation from the Party's fundamental ideology on the press. It indeed reflects the post-Mao leadership's more flexible application of the ideology to the new reality of the Chinese society driven by the "four modernizations". Mao's emphasis on the Party's leadership over the press and the "massline" approach - "from the masses, to the masses", have never been rejected by the post-Mao leadership in their "new" media policies. Instead, Hu Yaobang's definition of the press being the "bridge" and "link" between the leaders and the masses, Zhao Ziyang's advocacy for "informational openness" and "supervisory role" of the news media, and the Party's latest focus on "improvement" in the Party leadership over the press from the "mass viewpoint", all have their origin in the essence of the "massline" ideology. The concept of "mass line" surely contains a variation or the theme of "two-way communication". Perhaps, had the Chinese Communist Party leaders, including Mao, genuinely applied the "mass line" approach to the

journalism, the Chinese press would not have committed "grave mistakes" in the fifties and seventies.

In summary, the 1980s Chinese debate on journalism reform is significant. It demonstrated the efforts by Chinese journalism professionals to seek the most appropriate model of journalism for the contemporary Chinese society. The variety of opinions and views toward "journalism reform" during the debate indicated the decline of the influence of the long-standing theory of the Party press, and, at the same time, signified the emergence of critical and independent thinking of the Chinese journalism professionals, as a result of China's economic reform and the general trend of political liberalization since 1978. The journalistic debate during the last decade was more than just an academic exercise. It was a real debate on the future of China's journalism.

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