

THE CONTROL OF THE MEDIA  
IN THE  
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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HAUPTREFERENT: PROF. DR. RUDOLF G. WAGNER  
ZWEITGUTACHTERIN: PD DR. BARBARA MITTLER

NICOLAI VOLLAND

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BBS	Bulletin Board Systems
BPTSP	Book Publishing Title Selection Plan
BSE	<i>Bol'shaia Sovietskaia Entsiklopedia</i>
CC	Central Committee
CQ	<i>The China Quarterly</i>
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
ECCP	<i>Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period</i>
GMRB	<i>Guangming ribao</i>
GPA	General Publication Administration
ICP	Internet Content Provider
ISBN	International Standard Book Number
ISP	Internet Service Provider
ISSN	International Standard Serial Number
JFRB	<i>Jiefang ribao</i>
MEI	Ministry of Electronic Industries
MII	Ministry of Information Industries
MPT	Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication
NPC	National People's Congress
PD	Propaganda Department
PPA	Press and Publication Administration
PRC	People's Republic of China
RMRB	<i>Renmin ribao</i>
SARFT	State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television
SCMP	South China Morning Post
UFWD	United Front Work Department
WHB	<i>Wenhuibao</i>
XGWH	<i>Zhongguo gongchandang xinwen gongzuo wenjian huibian</i>
XGWX	<i>Zhongguo gongchandang xuanchuan gongzuo wenxian xuanbian</i>
ZDBQ	<i>Zhongguo da baike quanshu</i>
ZRGCSL	<i>Zhonghua renmin gongheguo chuban shiliao</i>

## NOTE

All websites cited in the footnotes as “downloaded” have been deposited in the Digital Archive for Chinese Studies (DACHS) and can be accessed through the following website:

<http://www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/dachs/volland050530.htm>



## Introduction

What are the media? And what are they about? What is their function? Why do they have to be controlled? This study is an attempt to find answers for these most fundamental questions; questions that arise invariably when it comes to the media in the People's Republic of China (PRC), past and present.

This study examines the motivations, logic, and functions of media control in the PRC. It is not intended to tell the history of media control in modern China, nor to give a comprehensive account of the techniques employed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to control the media. Rather, I will investigate the origins of media thinking in modern China, as well as the consequences of the resulting concepts for practical media work in the PRC.

The media and the press have received much attention from the political leadership in the PRC. All important leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were actively involved in media and propaganda activities at some point in their careers. In 1959, Mao Zedong once again stressed the crucial importance of the media in the political landscape of the PRC when he proposed the slogan "newspapers must be run by politicians" (*yao zhengzhijia ban bao* 要政治家办报).<sup>1</sup> In the light of the prominence that the CCP attaches to propaganda work, however, the subject of the Chinese media is surprisingly underresearched.

In this study, I propose to take the media as a variable to measure changes in the CCP's approach to governance. The Party's handling of the media serves as a mirror of state-society relations; consequently, the investigation into the media provides us with information on the CCP's conceptions of governance under changing circumstances. I will argue that over the past twenty years, the CCP has successfully altered and reinterpreted its vision of the state and its position therein; it has adopted a more flexible set of methods to achieve its fundamental political objectives. At the same time, the ultimate goals of the Party

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<sup>1</sup> In a conversation with Wu Lengxi, the editor-in-chief of RMRB. See *Mao Zedong xinwen gongzuo wenxuan*. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1983, p. 215-16. The lasting impact of the CCP's early conceptions of propaganda is shown by the renewed attention this text has received in recent years. See, for example, Zhang Wenxue, Liu Wenbo. "Chongdu 'Yao zhengzhijia ban bao'" in *Junshi jizhe* 1996.6, p. 4-5. Zhou Bin. "Ba zhengzhejia ban bao luodao shichu" in *Zhongguo jizhe* 2002.6, 54-55.

have changed remarkably little: the CCP is still sticking to some of the basic credos of the Yan'an era. The goals and the methods employed to achieve these goals, thus, may come into conflict, sending out those mixed messages about the state of the PRC that tend to plague interpretations of Chinese politics by observers abroad. An investigation of the Chinese media, I argue, will help us to understand these contradictions.

\* \* \*

In contrast to fields like the internal organization of the state or the dynamics of mass campaigns, the Chinese media have received rather limited scholarly attention. In general, research from the 1950s to the 1970s has concentrated on the propagandistic nature of the PRC media.<sup>2</sup> Studies like those of Alan Liu had to cope with a scarcity of primary material, not to speak of internal sources that would provide information of the inner functioning of the media apparatus. Furthermore, they were written under the impression of the Cold War and influenced by the theory of totalitarianism.<sup>3</sup> This background and their interpretative framework, however, has limited the explanatory value of these studies to the Chinese media sector of the Mao era.

Recent writing on the contemporary Chinese media proceeds from the assumption that fundamental changes have occurred in the media sector after 1978, a thesis supported by the official Chinese discourse. Research over the past twenty years thus has been preoccupied overwhelmingly with mapping the reinterpretations of the media in the face of reform and change that were brought about by China's opening to the outside world and by technical innovation.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick T.C. Yu. *Mass Persuasion in Communist China*. New York: Praeger, 1964; Alan P. Liu. *Communications and National Integration in Communist China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971; and Oskar Weggel. *Massenkommunikation in der Volksrepublik China: mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Zustandes seit der Kulturrevolution*. Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1970, to name the more substantial studies. More literature will be quoted in the following chapters.

<sup>3</sup> Especially Hannah Arendt's book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951, had a lasting impact on studies dealing with the countries in the Soviet sphere of influence.

<sup>4</sup> See Zhao Yuezhi. *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998; Lee Chin-chuan (ed.). *China's Media, Media's China*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994; Won Ho Chang. *Mass Media in China: The History and the Future*. Ames: Iowa University Press, 1989; and Daniel C. Lynch. *After the Propaganda State. Media, Politics, and 'Thought Work' in Reformed China*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University

general tendency of this literature is to stress the greatly increased amount of leeway for the media and the retreat of the government from direct interventions; many authors predict a trend towards further liberalization of the Chinese media sector. This argument, however, is contradicted by a constant stream of reports detailing the efforts of the CCP and the Chinese government to strengthen their grip on the media.<sup>5</sup> The astonishing growth, in numerical terms, of the Chinese media in the past twenty years has created a much broader spectrum of choice for the audiences, yet the analytical equation of commercialization with liberalization apparently falls short of reality. Much of the current writing on the Chinese media is furthermore plagued by too narrow a view on the subject, resulting from the transposition (all too often without reflection) of media concepts developed with view to Western paradigms by scholars with a background in journalism and communication science. The resulting studies thus have difficulties to explain how and in which terms their subject, the Chinese media, perceive of themselves.<sup>6</sup>

In this study, I will take a different approach. In order to understand the Chinese media as both a comprehensive phenomenon and a product of historical processes, we must proceed from the perspective of the media themselves. For this purpose, I will reconstruct: what does the Party think what media are (or should be), and how do the media speak about themselves? This leads to a text-centred approach, an investigation into the reflexive discourses of the regime. It is necessary to place the media in their social and institutional environment, so as to explain both their historical roots and the logic of their operation. However, this does not mean the insulation of “things Chinese:” to the contrary, due consideration of China’s international environment is a necessary analytical component. The modern Chinese state has borrowed (first of all, the institution of the modern media itself), and is still borrowing from ideas and concepts originating

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Press, 1999. For an overview over this literature see Barrett McCormick. “Recent Trends in Mainland China’s Media: Political Implications of Commercialization,” in *Issues & Studies* 38.4-39.1 (2003), p. 175-215.

<sup>5</sup> Compare the ongoing crackdown on dissent on the Internet, discussed in chapter nine.

<sup>6</sup> The positive exception here is Daniel Lynch’s study which opts for a more comprehensive approach. Yet while his *After the Propaganda State* is highly informed on a very broad spectrum of issues, the author tends to overrate the actual impact of globalization and technical innovation on the government’s ability to control the media sector.

abroad. While these elements are transformed, adapted to local needs, and reinterpreted, they do also provide the basis for comparative reflection.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, placing the media within the complex social and political framework they interact with on a constant basis, is not only an essential requirement for a comprehensive analysis of the media themselves. The process can be reversed: the reflection on the ideological and institutional arrangements of the media within the state-society framework also allows us to translate the findings of the investigation into the media back into the complex of the state-society relationship. Being one factor within the structural arrangements of the political space, the media are also an indicator of the dynamics of this framework in general. On a micro-level, the media sector mirrors the structural arrangements of the larger state-society matrix within the political space. I will thus propose to see the media as an analytical category for the study of the relationship of state and society, an issue that has drawn much attention in recent years.<sup>8</sup> The analysis of the media sector from a diachronical perspective reveals elements of both change and continuity, allowing for a view on the dynamics of this relationship, and for an empirically informed interpretation of the changes taking place.

The CCP has never formulated a single, unitary concept of the media in a theoretical form. I will therefore step in and do so in the Party's place: the core features of such a concept can be extrapolated from the writings and documents of the CCP's formative period, the Party's Yan'an years in the late 1930s and early 1940s. What I refer to in the following as the "modern Chinese media concept" thus is an integrated system of beliefs and assumptions concerning the media that relies on a peculiar world view and draws on both the Marxist-Leninist tradition and on indigenous Chinese sources. The modern Chinese media concept governs a section of political space that is identified as a crucial part of the "propaganda sector" (*xuanchuan xitong* 宣传系统). Proceeding from the CCP's own logic, I demonstrate that the role of the state in the media sector is characterized not

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<sup>7</sup> There have been some efforts to develop a comparative perspective. See Julian Po-keng Chang. *Propaganda and Perceptions: The Selling of the Soviet Union in the People's Republic of China*. PhD Diss., Harvard University, 1995; and Gabór T. Rittersporn, Malte Rolf, Jan C. Behrends (eds.). *Sphären von Öffentlichkeit in Gesellschaften sowjetischen Typs: Public Spheres in Soviet-Type Societies*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Merle Goldman, Elizabeth Perry (ed.). *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2002, contains a number of attempts to reconceptualize the state-society relationship. Chapter One will expand on this issue.



simply by negative interventions (censorship etc.), but primarily by a proactive approach: the modern Chinese media concept is part of a much larger normative system with the general objective to educate and reform the population in accordance with a value system prescribed by the state. The Party's value system has shifted over time, and the media have generally followed these shifts.

The concept formed in the Yan'an era has provided the ideological framework for the organization of the media sector after the creation of the PRC in 1949. Notwithstanding the frequent twists and turns since the CCP's assumption of power, the role and the functions of the media have changed remarkably little over roughly half of a century: the core features of the media concept are visible even through the veil created by commercialization and globalization. The success of this concept, so my findings in this study, is owed to its openness that allows for reinterpretations if circumstances require. The "Yan'an way" of politics proposed by Mark Selden<sup>9</sup> is therefore an inappropriate formulation as far as concerns the media, since it does not differentiate between means and goals: the CCP's media concept has formulated the goals of Chinese media work, but left open the choice of the means to attain these goals. Thus, the media concept, and especially the Party's claim to control the media, has been able to resist all major challenges to the present day, while a flexible interpretation has made possible the adaptation of the concept to varying political settings and circumstances. The Party has permitted changes in the means of implementing the media concept, but has stuck closely to the goals formulated in the 1940s. In the media sector, continuity weighs heavier than change.

The first part of this study traces the modern Chinese media concept back to its origins in Marxist-Leninist political philosophy. This tradition, however, has not been transferred directly into the modern Chinese context: rather, it has been mediated and transformed in the process of modernization and "Sinification". As I will show, those elements of the complex of Marxist-Leninist ideas concerning the media were accepted in China that could be imagined and understood in the context of traditional Chinese political thought. The efforts to put the resulting media concept into practice make up the body of part two of this volume. A series

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<sup>9</sup> See Mark Selden. *The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971; and Selden. *China in Revolution: The Yanan Way Revisited*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1995.

of case studies will provide a diachronic perspective that shows how the media concept has been adapted to different challenges arising from the political environment. These chapters focus on the degree to which the theoretical concepts have been shaping practical media work under different conditions, and how in turn these conditions have influenced the evolution of the media concept. Notwithstanding the major political, social, economic, and technological transformations of the PRC over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, the modern Chinese media concept has remained remarkably stable, its core tenets being as firmly in place today as ever.

\* \* \*

The first chapter of the present study is dedicated to some of the conceptual issues indicated earlier in this introduction. Beyond establishing a framework of analysis, the basic structure of the media field and its position within the propaganda sector are outlined; furthermore, some important terminological problems must be addressed that are all too often neglected. Terms and words are not simply designations of objects existing in the “real world,” but do by themselves provide the categories that structure the subjective human reality; it is along these lines of categorization through linguistic structure that human thinking operates. The categories associated by terminology and the resulting structures, however, vary in different languages, creating major problems of translation that are almost never addressed. Only after the particular logic has been made visible that is reflected in the terminological structuring of the media sector, the Chinese media concept and its origins can be analysed. Arguing that the linguistic and conceptual arrangements are reflected by real political structures, I will, in the remainder of chapter one, investigate the composition of the Chinese propaganda sector and its formation in the early decades of the CCP’s history.

The role of the state in the management of social values is usually being discussed in terms of negative intervention, such as censorship, prohibition of pornography etc. With regard to media in socialist countries under the leadership of Communist parties, however, this argument falls short: similar to theocratic systems, the socialist state adopts a more proactive and intrusive attitude. In the

socialist context, media are invested with the explicit function to participate in the education and formation of 'new man,' in accordance with the norms and values of the state. The media are supposed to create an environment that will further the 'correct behaviour' of this 'new man' and protect him from sliding back into his old habits. This drastic intervention into the definition of the media's role and into their work is legitimized by the projection of a utopian goal, the construction of socialism and finally, the achieving of communism. It is further justified by the party's claim to represent an avant-garde of such 'new men;' since this process of reform is not self-sustaining, the party will intervene by way of the media to assist the process.

This particular view on the media, as it is found in the PRC, can be traced back to Marxist roots. That is what chapter two does. To reconstruct the main sources of influence, I will work with a number of key texts – texts whose authoritative nature can be established because they are frequently quoted in China, or because they are officially named as key texts and advertised for cadre study. Among these are Lenin's 1902 article "What is to be Done?" and the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course*, commissioned by Stalin in 1938 and consequently translated and distributed in numerous languages and countries, including China.

Marxist-Leninist ideas thus have been received in China not directly, but more often in mediated form, especially in their Stalinist version. Apart from the *Short Course*, the popularizing works of Ai Siqi 艾思奇, himself heavily influenced by Stalin's version of Marxism-Leninism, stand out for their influence on Mao Zedong and other CCP leaders. Proceeding from these key texts, I will extrapolate the main positions of the CCP towards the media from a close reading of Party documents, newspaper articles, and speeches by the Party leadership in the crucial Yan'an years. In several steps, the modern Chinese media concept thus emerges as the product of these positions derived from a sinified form of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism. At the centre of the concept stands a highly elitist position: while they are destined to be the future masters of society, the workers in their current situation are handicapped by illiteracy and long labour days that prevent them from effective self-organisation. They are unable to move beyond trade-unionist goals, which are in effect but compromises for the satisfaction of selfish short-term needs. To proceed to the revolutionary position, revolutionary

consciousness must be carried into the proletariat from outside – only the professional revolutionaries organized in the party can do so, they are the avant-garde of the proletariat. The immature people's masses and the enlightened position of the party, educating the rest of the population in the population's own interest (even preventing the masses from doing harm to their own interests), are key elements of the Leninist world view. The media play a crucial role in this process of enlightenment and education; they disseminate the party's world view and mould the workers into a cohesive revolutionary block under the party's leadership. This central position has dominated the CCP's thinking from earliest times and has also shaped the Party's media concept.

However, this instrumental approach to the media and the world view that informs it is by no means unique to the CCP. Rather, in the first half of the twentieth century, parties and governments worldwide, from the far right to the left, all subscribed to the idea of the media as propaganda tools in a modern polity. Concepts of party press and state press organs dominated the international marketplace of ideas at the time when the CCP defined the Party's media philosophy. The CCP leaders could refer to the GMD press as models as much as to the Japanese, Soviet, French, or British press in China – or, to the advanced war time propaganda techniques of the U.S. Committee on Public Information.

The various elements that in their totality make up the media concept do thus come from different periods, different historical contexts, and different traditions of thought. As a consequence, the modern Chinese media concept is no monolithic bloc: while the different influences were merged in the Yan'an era to form a coherent whole, these elements remain recognizable within the concept itself. Thus, the media concept is characterized by a latent inherent tension between the single elements. The heterogeneity of the media concept is responsible for its flexibility and resilience, and has allowed for different interpretations when changing circumstances forced the Party to do so, with alternative stress on different components. Yet the tension within the media concept has also triggered violent confrontations when alternative interpretations of the concept clashed. The most prominent such examples were the debate on the press during the Hundred Flowers movement, and the Cultural Revolution.

Chapter three turns to the importance of the legacies of traditional Chinese thought and statecraft for the evolution of the modern Chinese media concept. The CCP did not import Soviet media thinking lock, stock, and barrel. Rather, theories and concepts of Soviet and other origin had to compete with various incarnations of Chinese tradition transformed by modern influences. The CCP thus borrowed from the Soviet Union in a highly selective manner. In this chapter I argue that those elements of the Leninist-Stalinist complex of ideas were easier absorbed that could be explained and imagined from the perspective of pre-modern Chinese thinking – or from ideas that had been introduced to China at earlier stages. I will show that certain elements of the modern media concept proved to be acceptable, because the lines of argumentation sounded familiar. To do so, I will turn to the closest functional equivalents in late imperial China of the modern propagandistic media: the Kangxi emperor's *Sacred Edict* (*Shengyu* 圣谕) of 1670, the religious propaganda of the Taiping rebellion, and the indigenized early press in China. The CCP leadership (most of whom had received a classical education in their youth) thus felt familiar with a number of issues they found in the Soviet press theory; it is these elements that came to figure large in the Chinese media concept.

Before proceeding to the case studies of the second part of this study, chapter four introduces the mechanics of control that shape the structure of public communication in the PRC, as these will be essential for the diachronic analysis in the second part. These features include: a binding ideological framework of reference (the party's "general line"); a hierarchical administrative structure that can direct and control the media at any given point in the hierarchy; control of the flow in information (e.g., the Xinhua monopoly on certain kinds of information); control of information access (access to less stratified information for personnel in higher echelons of the social hierarchy); language control; and control of discourse through prescribed 'master texts.' Not all of these are directly or exclusively related to the control of the media, but in their entirety they form a comprehensive system of public communication, of which the media is but one, albeit an important, element.

The second part of the study transposes the modern Chinese media concept into the empirical reality of practical media work in the PRC. The objective of this strategy is to account for the actual relevance of the theoretical conceptions

for everyday work in the sphere of the media. The research interest here centres on two interrelated questions: In how far does the modern Chinese media concept determine media behaviour under changing circumstances in the state-society matrix?, and, How do these changes in the larger parameters affect the stability of the concept itself? Finally, we must try to determine what the shifting interpretations of the media concept tell us about the changes in the CCP's overall approach to governance.

To provide answers for these questions, media practice in the PRC is investigated in a number of case studies. The cases have been selected so as to represent a variety of important media and to illuminate different historical periods in the PRC's history. This selection does intend, however, to deliver a linear historical account of media performance in the PRC, neither does it imply a claim to completeness with regard to the respective media. Rather, both the periods and the media have been chosen for their representative character. A further selection criterion has been to focus on such moments when the established media concept has come under particular stress: periods of intense political, social, and economic change or debate. Such periods of high pressure should be particularly apt to identify the main lines of argument that in 'normal' times might be buried under the everyday-distortions (from power struggles and factional quarrels to thinly veiled suppression of dissent or corruption) that characterize every major sub-system in complex societies.

The first such point occurred in 1949/1950, when the CCP was forced, in a relatively short time, with limited manpower, and with myriad other issues to be resolved, to transfer the media concept developed in rural war-time Yan'an to the predominantly urban-based media industries of the entire country. The first case study, chapter five, investigates the dismantling of the Party-controlled Sanlian 三联 bookstore in order to build up the monolithic Xinhua shudian 新华书店 chain that came to dominate the Chinese book publishing industry as early as 1951.

A second study will turn to the newspaper sector, in this case the Shanghai daily *Wenhuibao* 文汇报, a non-Party paper. Reopened in October 1956 after a shut-down earlier that year, the paper adopted a liberal policy in the Hundred Flower movement and in May 1957 called for improvements in the treatment of Chinese journalists. In the Anti-Rightist campaign that started in June 1957

*Wenhuibao* was a prime target and suffered heavily for its outspokenness. The case illustrates the self-perception of journalists and the problems into which the media concept ran as early as the 1950s, as well as the limits of discourse in the media.

While the Anti-Rightist campaign targeted journalists and intellectuals across the nation, they were criticized as individuals, while the basic structure of the media sector remained in place. The start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, however, fundamentally changed the institutional landscape. Chapter seven thus deals with a paradox: how and why did the Party's control of the media continue to function once the mechanics of control – in particular the institutional apparatus led by the Propaganda Department – broke down under the attacks of the Red Guards? This chapter investigates the Red Guard newspapers that appeared since fall 1966 and were published autonomously, in the absence of a unified infrastructure of control. My findings suggest that the media concept itself was stronger than the institutions that were initially built to support it. The Red Guard press distanced itself from the latter and pledged their loyalty to the former. The result was an interpretation of the media concept that was more stricter than at any time before the Cultural Revolution.

The next turning point was the introduction of economic reforms and the liberalization of the political climate that followed the Third Plenum in December 1978. In April 1979, *Dushu* magazine 读书 published its first issue, setting out on a ticket of intellectual freedom, unhindered discussion, and pluralism of debate. Far from being a marginal publication, *Dushu* had support in the highest echelons of the propaganda sector and was launched to give a voice to the supporters of reform-minded politicians. Magazines and journals, which mushroomed after 1978, were the key platform of practically all major discussions taking place in the 1980s.

In chapter nine, I will address the boom in television broadcasting in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with stress on the issue of commercialization: under pressure to become financially viable and to create profits, TV stations at central and local levels were struggling to find a format that would fit both their commercial interests (and thus, the tastes of the audience), and the demands of their political mission, defined in the Party's propaganda department.

The final issue to be discussed is the explosion of the Internet in China since 1997. Thus carrying the study of the Chinese media to the present, the case study sheds light on the particular problems that resulted from the introduction of new technologies: the fusion of telecommunications, a sector traditionally under the economics *xitong*, and the media sector, situated in the propaganda *xitong*, challenged the Party's structures of control; the resulting problems took several years to resolve. Notwithstanding the popularity of the Internet and its commercial potential, however, the Party has refused to let control of the medium slip away. The CCP has worked hard, and increasingly successful, to impose the same kind of controls and restrictions on the Internet industry that have applied to the rest of the media sector for half a century. The heavy-handed state control of modern digital public communication serves especially well to illustrate that the core tenets of the media concept developed in the 1940s have survived through all transformations and do form the foundation of the Chinese state's attitude toward the media even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



## Chapter One

### A Functional Approach to the Chinese Media

*“The media constitute a separate ‘social institution’ within society, with its own rules and practices, but subject to definition and limitation by the wider society. Thus, the media are ultimately dependent on society...”*  
(Denis McQuail. *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory*)

*“What is the mission of this newspaper? It can be summed up in one single sentence: to unite the people of the entire nation in their fight to defeat Japanese imperialism. This is the general line of the Chinese Communist Party, and it is also the mission of this newspaper”*  
(Mao Zedong. “Publication foreword to the Yan’an ‘Jiefang ribao’”)

The CCP has never formulated a comprehensive, unitary theory of the media. This finding comes as a surprise: the remarkable continuity in the Party’s<sup>1</sup> approach to the media and the definition of their suggests a comprehensive, coherent body of ideas about the media, and an implicit media concept. In chapter two, I will make this concept explicit, through extrapolation from a broad range of the Party’s own writings and publications. In the present chapter, I am going to work towards a definition of the subject matter under study, and of the social and political factors that determine Chinese thinking on the media. The central question in this chapter is: What are the conditions that led to the formation of a genuine Chinese media concept?

The media are firmly rooted in society. It is impossible to conceive of the media as anything but a component of a more complex social and political reality; consequently, the media cannot be discussed but in their proper context, their social environment. The relationship between the media and their environment is reciprocal in nature: their particular conceptualization and formation is dependent on social forces and ideas. At the same time, the media themselves influence and shape society, and they are used expressly for these purposes. This reciprocity comes as a burden insofar as it precludes any attempt to gain an understanding of the media in isolation. All the same, the interrelationship between media and society carries great analytical potential, since a more comprehensive approach to the subject enables us to draw further conclusions with regard to the general nature of the state-society relationship, as I hope to do in later chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> The capitalized *Party* here is an abbreviation, usually, for the CCP, and will be used in this way throughout the present study; it corresponds with the Chinese *dang* 党. In contrast, *party* refers to any political party, as do the Chinese words *dangpai* 党派 or *zhengdang* 政党.

Positions concerning the nature of the relationship between the media and society may vary substantially. For a long time, theoretical approaches in Euro-American media studies have tended to stress the media's dependence on society: as an institution within a complex social body, they are subject to multiple kinds of external influences that shape the behaviour of the actors involved and ultimately define the role of the media themselves.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, emphasis may be placed on the opposite aspect: the media's role in shaping the mental outlook and the normative environment of the very society that surrounds them. This latter aspect has been highlighted in the media critique of contemporary Marxist critics, but it has been the point of departure also in all Socialist political systems. In the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, Mao Zedong argues that during the war of resistance against Japan, the media are to take a proactive stance, they must offer a guide for people's life.<sup>3</sup> According to this view, it is not primarily society that determines the media, but rather the other way round; they are a tool for purposes defined otherwise. While both of the above positions do also acknowledge the possibility of influence in the other direction, each stresses one particular aspect of the relationship.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of the present study, both positions are important, since they shed light on general tendencies: contemporary "Western" or "liberal" media theory is generally more inclined to emphasize the social roots of the media and thus provides us with important information concerning their dependence on social input, whereas media theory in socialist countries stresses the media's propaganda character, an approach that helps us to understand the inner logic of the system under consideration, here the socialist Chinese media.

It is possible to explain the disagreement of these positions with their respective views on the fundamental nature of society and the degree of autonomy that individual members of society can claim for themselves. A closer examination of these issues in the following two chapters will reveal how the particular world

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<sup>2</sup> Many of these approaches are discussed in Denis McQuail. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Sage Publications, 2000, *passim*. See also the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, which is taken from McQuail's "Introduction" (p. 5), where the author confesses his basic beliefs concerning the media's nature.

<sup>3</sup> The publication foreword (*fakanci* 发刊词) appeared on May 16, 1941 in *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报, and is reproduced in *Mao Zedong xinwen gongzuo wenxuan*. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1983, p. 55-57. The section quoted is the very first sentence of this foreword.

<sup>4</sup> For a medium position see Michael Schudson. *The Power of News*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

view of the CCP and its conception of governance determine the Party's media concept. It is nonetheless crucial to acknowledge from the start of this investigation that the media do not operate in a social, political, or conceptual vacuum: the Chinese media as an institution have a distinctly social character – in both the sense of the media being dependent on society, and with regard to their normative mission to shape this society's mental environment.

In this chapter I argue that the investigation into the Chinese media faces a challenge that is due to the incongruence of conceptual terminology in English and Chinese. First of all, until recently there has been no equivalent term or concept for the English "media" in Chinese. While the institutions usually subsumed under "media" – books, newspapers, magazines, television, etc. – do certainly exist in the PRC, they are discussed in the Chinese context under different conceptual categories, especially those associated with "propaganda." The first thing to do is therefore to establish these categories. These considerations are very important, as they allow us to reconstruct the inner logic behind the organization and functioning of the media in the PRC. This leads me to a functional approach: concentrating on the basic function of public communication, a general interdependence of the various media can indeed be confirmed, albeit with a different structuring. Thus, even in the absence of such a term itself, it is justified to speak of "Chinese media" (I will continue to do so throughout this study for reasons of convenience), if proper attention is given to the actual arrangements that place these media in a particular conceptual space.

This space cannot easily be grasped with Western theories of media and communication, although approaches such as the Habermasian "public sphere," can be helpful to some degree. The conceptual space that contains the media in China is the propaganda sector, or *xitong* 系统. This *xitong* is historically grown, as I will show by tracing the evolution of the institutional developments leading up the Yan'an era, when the *xitong* stabilized as a functionally integrated hierarchy. The propaganda *xitong*, though, is not identical with the media sector, as it comprises other functions, too: education, literature and art, the sciences, and even public health do all belong to the propaganda sector, as a look at institutional structures will show. Any investigation into the Chinese media should therefore take into account this peculiar construct, the media's institutional neighbourhood. It is in this

environment where the media unfold their most fundamental function: the nourishing of the spiritual health of the people.

### *The Chinese “Media”*

The study of mass media in China meets with a major problem: it deals with a phantom. The term “media” is used throughout this book to circumscribe the subject covered in this study. “Media” is a relatively young term, signifying books, journals, newspapers, broadcasting etc., in short, the carriers of mass communication in modern society.<sup>5</sup> No such term, however, has existed in Chinese until the most recent past.<sup>6</sup> The incongruence of the terminology used in Chinese and the English translation terms employed by Western scholars is all too often neglected. It must be seriously asked if this study – and many others – are searching for a product of fantasy, created by the projection into China of a concept of Euro-American origin. Does there exist such a thing as “the media,” however defined, in China? Is it a meaningful undertaking, after all, to look for the “Chinese media?”

The Chinese word *meiti* 媒体 is a translation term for the English “media.” A very fine choice, *meiti* is both a phonetic loan and an explanation of the English term: consisting of *mei* 媒, that is a go-between or matchmaker, and *ti* 体, a body or substance, *meiti* is a mediating tool that explicitly invokes the notion of communication. Ingenious as the term may be, it is a loan of very recent origin: it was the process of reform and opening that has led to the rapid proliferation of the word *meiti* since the 1980s, when it first came into use. Etymological inquiries show that the word was first used in the mid-1980s, and entered the Chinese mainstream vocabulary not before the early 1990s.<sup>7</sup> Other terms signifying the media such as *meijie* 媒介 and *chuanmei* 传媒 (an abbreviation for *chuanbo meijie*

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<sup>5</sup> The word has older roots (esp. in the singular form) but came into use, carrying the above meaning, in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century only. For etymology and meanings see Raymond Williams. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

<sup>6</sup> As far as I can see, none of the major dictionaries and encyclopaedias has an entry on “meiti,” the single exception being Wu Guanghua (ed.). *Han-Ying dacidian*. Shanghai: Jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> A survey of article titles in the *Fuyin baokan ziliao* database (1978-1997) has found no use of the word *meiti* before 1987, and only sporadic uses thereafter. Only since 1994 the term is used frequently (15-20 titles per year).

传播媒介) are of recent origin, too.<sup>8</sup> *Meiti*, a term that probably originated in Taiwan,<sup>9</sup> is now in the process of replacing the other two terms in both Chinese mainland newspapers and scholarly publications.<sup>10</sup>

The above finding – that the Chinese word *meiti* has emerged only recently as a translation term – means that for most of the period covered in this study, no generic term has existed that would refer directly to the English “media” and cover the entirety of newspapers, books, the periodical press, and broadcasting. The resulting problem, however, is not limited to a merely linguistic level but has more far-reaching consequences: beyond the level of linguistic denotation, words are also responsible for the organization and classification of the phenomena of reality. Words consist of two layers, one being the term, a linguistic notation of an object or phenomenon. The second is the idea associated with that term, and can be called concept. It is these concepts that form the categories in which we think and which we use to distinguish between different objects and phenomena. Michel Foucault has characterized this relationship:<sup>11</sup>

[Language] is to thought and to signs what algebra is to geometry: it replaces the simultaneous comparisons of parts (or magnitudes) with an order whose degrees must be traversed one after the other. It is in this strict sense that language is an *analysis* of thought: not a simple patterning, but a profound establishment of order in space.

In this order, generic terms occupy an important position, since they – as concepts – structure other concepts of a lower level. It is the category part of a word that decides what can be called a “fish” and what not, or, in our case, what belongs to

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<sup>8</sup> The survey of article titles found 68 hits for *meiti*, of which 61 were from the period 1992-1997. Of 24 hits for *chuanmei*, the first occurred in 1986, the second in 1992, and 19 of the total between 1995 and 1997. There were 96 hits for *meijie*, starting from 1980; hits ranged between 5-12 from 1986 to 1997, in the later period thus producing significantly less results than *meiti*; of the total for *meijie*, about 30% were unrelated to “media.” The general increase in frequency for the three terms documents the proliferation of new terminology in the Chinese language; it is unrelated to the structure of the database itself, since searches for *baozhi* 报纸, *dianshi* 电视, and *xuanchuan* 宣传 produced a relatively even distribution of hits over the 1978-1997 period.

<sup>9</sup> There is not enough evidence to prove this point. However, all book titles containing the word *meiti* in the OPACs of both the Library of Congress and the Chinese University of Hong Kong for books from before 1991 were Taiwanese publications.

<sup>10</sup> A survey with the Chinese version of the Google search engine (<http://www.google.com/intl/zh-CN/>) has found significantly more hits for *meiti* (1,630,000) than for *meijie* (400,000) or *chuanmei* (238,000). The results for *meijie* included meanings other than “media.” Date of survey: Feb. 20, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1973, p. 83. For an alternative explanation see Ferdinand de Saussure’s terms *parole* and *langue*, roughly corresponding to what I have called the linguistic and conceptual levels of language, respectively. *Cours de la linguistique générale*. Paris: Payot, 1916.

“media” and what not. The fixed relationships between words function by way of the category-part of the words; and it is these relationships that structure human knowledge and construct the order of the world we live in.<sup>12</sup> We feel it to be obvious that the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *USA Today* are “dailies,” that dailies are “newspapers,” that newspapers belong to the “press,” which in turn is part of the “media.” Theoretically, however, it may very well be possible to construct a different chain of meaning, for example to group *USA Today* with plastic bags and waste paper into the category “wrappings for your shopping.”<sup>13</sup> Usually, however, we would follow the first meaning chain, since the construction of our reality follows fixed logical structures.<sup>14</sup> These meaning structures may evolve over time, yet as a rule they are very stable.

This stability, however, may break down, the most obvious such case being that of translation: the meaning structure of two languages may differ significantly. So when two terms are translated, their relationship in the target language may not necessarily be the same as in the source language, because the categories involved are interconnected differently – or simply because certain categories do not exist in the target language. The translation thus leads to deviations not only from the original meaning, that is, on a purely linguistic plane, but also from the structures and hierarchies of categories. In the target language, we not only find different expressions for the original words (or none at all), but also differing structural relationships of particular terms that may lead, in some cases, to varying approaches to the concrete manifestations of these terms; different terminological conventions lead to different perceptions of reality.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> I am using here partly concepts from structuralist linguistics. A good discussion can be found in Umberto Eco. *Einführung in die Semiotik*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1972, p. 357ff.

<sup>13</sup> Such a classification is, of course, not limited to *USA Today*. In 1942, a CCP document complained: “Some party members ... do not pay attention to studying and discussing [the Party paper], or even use it to clean their windows or wrap their shopping – instead of giving it to other people for reading!” See “Zhonggong zhongyang Xibeiyou guanyu *Jiefang ribao* gongzuo wenti de jueding” (dated Sept. 9. 1942) in Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan xinwen yanjiusuo (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang xinwen gongzuo wenjian huibian*. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1980, 3 vols. (hereafter XGWH), 1.132-34, here p. 132. Italics added.

<sup>14</sup> These structures are in fact a result of learning and education in a social context. On this issue see the study by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Doubleday, 1966, to which I will return later in this chapter.

<sup>15</sup> For an elaborate discussion of this issue see Lydia H. Liu. *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity – China, 1900-1937*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1995, ch. 1.

With the massive import of Western writings into China and the interaction with Western ideas since the late 1970s, the emergence of new categories first in linguistic space, and then in the structural and conceptual organization of things has accelerated significantly in many areas. The media sector has not been exempted from this trend. The introduction of a new generic term for the media, *meiti*, is a case in point. As shown above, however, this term has not been used before the 1980s, and it is absent for an even longer time in Party documents and other PRC official publications:<sup>16</sup> the conservative attitude towards innovations in lexicon gives testimony to the rigidity of language control within official discourse.<sup>17</sup> Relying on a long-established Chinese conceptual framework for the linguistic structuring of the space covered by the English category “media” – structures different from those in the English language and in Western imagination – the Party and government organs responsible for the media sector have resisted a new, all-embracing concept that would upset an established order. It is exactly this established order that a study of media in the PRC must be interested in.<sup>18</sup>

### *Media and Communication: Functional Approaches*

So does it make sense to speak of the Chinese “media,” after all? In order to answer this question, we must step back for a moment and look at some of the general features that are associated with the media. Since we have confirmed that the institutions subsumed under the generic English term “media” exist in the PRC, we must search for alternative categories that might be used as a generic. To find these categories, in the following discussion I have opted for a functional approach.

Although the media have been discussed broadly as a category of the social sciences, there is no standard definition of what media are. The theoretical

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<sup>16</sup> Search in major databases of CCP documents confirmed this point: well over 1800 documents in *Zhongguo gongchandang wenxian ziliaoku*. Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe (CD-ROM edition) produced more than 600 hits for *xuanchuan*, but only 7 for *meiti*, the earliest from 1994. A search in another database, Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*. Beijing: Zhongyang dang’anguan (CD-ROM edition) (hereafter *Zuzhishi ziliao*), did not produce a single hit for the term *meiti*.

<sup>17</sup> On this topic see chapter four.

<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, only very few authors of Western literature on the Chinese media have paid attention to methodological problems. Only Daniel Lynch has addressed some of the methodological issues involved in the research of the Chinese media. See his *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and ‘Thought Work’ in Reformed China*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1999, ch.1.

literature of Western origin provides no simple answer,<sup>19</sup> and recent Chinese definitions remain equally vague. Even a definition of media in the broadest of terms thus runs into problems. Some general approximations to the subject, however, are possible at this point.

In the most general terms, media are essentially about communication. Communication, that is “a process of increased commonality or sharing between participants, on the basis of sending and receiving ‘messages,’”<sup>20</sup> is a primary function of human life. For Jürgen Habermas, for instance, communication is a precondition of rational behaviour; it is the means through which people set up “Weltbezüge” with their environment.<sup>21</sup> A very broad category, communication can be discussed from a range of different angles:

- scope: communication may extend from the most intimate personal conversation among two individuals right up to the mass penetration reached by public broadcasting, with many layers in between. The most essential differentiation here is that between public and private communication.
- content: messages conveyed in the communication process include private, political, professional, economic, and entertaining contents, to name but a few. Communication content is at least partly related to the scope of communication.
- direction: communication can be classified into top-down, bottom-up, bidirectional, multidirectional (interactive), vertical, horizontal, centralized, decentralized, specific (defined receiver), non-specific (no defined receiver) and many more options. All these directions are linked to the context in which communication takes place.

When scope, content, and direction are combined, a number of communicative functions emerge. These functions may be served by different communicative tools, such as face-to-face conversations, telecommunication, or the media. Wider definitions of communication (such as the Chinese word *jiaotong* 交通, often used

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<sup>19</sup> The first two chapters of McQuail. *Theory*, discuss problems related to this complex; yet even McQuail stops short of an easy, practical definition of the term.

<sup>20</sup> Definition taken from McQuail. *Theory*, p. 492.

<sup>21</sup> Jürgen Habermas. *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995, vol. 1, p. 148 and *passim*.



as a translation term) would even include the physical infrastructure of traffic. While media are not the only means of communication, they occupy a central position within the communicative network of modern societies.<sup>22</sup>

As implied by the term, media (from ‘mediating’) are carriers of information. In order to distinguish them from other sources of information mediation, the media, in the sense in which they are discussed in the present study, are labelled ‘mass media’ in most of the literature on the subject. Mass communication is understood to be a special case of public communication, whereby all (or theoretically all) members of society are included or addressed.<sup>23</sup> For example, the readership of a mainstream newspaper such as *Renmin ribao* 人民日报 (hereafter RMRB) is not limited legally or technically; only illiteracy or lack of availability may limit its distribution, while the paper explicitly targets a “nation-wide” (*quanguo xing* 全国性) audience.<sup>24</sup> *Anhui ribao* 安徽日报 has the same function on a limited geographical scale. Both papers can thus be classified as mass media. The concept of mass media, however, fails to account for structural similarities of mass media and other media of non-mass character, by overemphasizing a single criterion, that of scope. As a result of this rather narrow focus, the mass media are made more unique than they are within the larger field of media.<sup>25</sup> A target-group medium (such as a fashion magazine or a professional bulletin) may claim the same functions as a mass circulation daily; the exclusion of such media from the discussion is therefore analytically not justified. This point will become obvious in the discussion of the Chinese media: the explanatory value extends to forms of media other than mass media. Therefore, I propose to use the concept of public communication, rather than mass communication, for the analysis of the Chinese media, thus widening the scope of investigation.

Public communication is not identical with mass communication in that it is defined in an inclusive, not an exclusive way. The advantages of a public

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<sup>22</sup> Compare also the entry “Communication” in Williams. *Keywords*, p. 62f.

<sup>23</sup> For a model of the “levels of communication” using a higher differentiation than taken here see McQuail. *Theory*, p. 10-12.

<sup>24</sup> Chinese newspapers are usually classified into nation-wide circulated papers, regional (*difangxing* 地方性), and professional (*zhuan yexing* 专业性) newspapers. See, for example, the tables in the annual *Zhongguo xinwen nianjian*.

<sup>25</sup> This is a common problem of Western literature on the Chinese media that show a strong bias for newspapers and television, the “mass media.” The relevance of non-mass media, such as journals and books, and the impact in the media landscape, are often overlooked.

communication concept are obvious: the journals *Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu* 中共党史研究 and *Lilun dongtai* 理论动态 are tools of public communication, but have no mass character. Their distribution is limited to specified target groups either by way of specialization, or, as in the latter case, through restricted circulation that is enforced by Party guidelines. Both journals, however, discuss issues that may also appear in the mass circulation media; they are tools of information that contribute to communication processes and to discussions within their respective circles.<sup>26</sup>

Private communication, in contrast, takes place between individuals and is not intended for any public, i.e. participants in communication are limited to those personally known and addressed by the speakers. This does not necessarily mean that the information transmitted by way of private communication is of private concern only: a political debate between two speakers addresses non-private issues that may even enter the sphere of public communication if one of the speakers decides to write an editorial on the subject discussed. Up to this point, though, the communication remains private, even if it may merge into public communication later. Letters, telephone calls, and e-mail messages belong to private communication.<sup>27</sup> While the Chinese state has, at various times in history, made efforts to extend its control to include private communication, too, for reasons and along lines of logic that are discussed in the following two chapters, private communication does still have a character distinct from public communication and is not covered in the present study.<sup>28</sup>

Borders between mass, public and private communication have been fluent at all times, and in all places. They have become even more blurred towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the introduction of new media into the overall communication process and the transformation of older media forms: newspapers have gone online and have incorporated interactive elements, or offer

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<sup>26</sup> For more on restricted distribution media, their distinct rules of discourse, and the layered public sphere(s) created thereby see chapter 4.

<sup>27</sup> Naturally, exceptions to all the categorizations introduced above can be found, such as letters to the editor or “open” letters (the name implies the public character), becoming part of public communication.

<sup>28</sup> This is not to say that private communication and the messages communicated are irrelevant to society and to social processes, the contrary being true. Private communication is excluded from discussion here because it is structured in ways very different from public communication. On the question of privacy see Bonnie S. McDougall, Anders Hansson. *Chinese Concepts of Privacy*. Leiden: Brill, 2002, and Bonnie S. McDougall. *Love-letters and Privacy in Modern China: The Intimate Lives of Lu Xun and Xu Guangping*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

customization to their readers' particular (private) needs. In how far an online newspaper is still a mass medium is arguable; yet it remains clearly within the realm of public communication. On a different note, the emergence of email discussion groups has blurred the lines between private and public communication. A solution to this problem has been proposed by John Thompson in form of the concept of a dialogical 'mediated interaction' that refers to messaging, email etc., as opposed to 'mediated quasi-interaction' that is "not oriented towards specific others" but rather has an "indefinite range of potential recipients", and is thus 'monological' in character.<sup>29</sup> The general problem, that the borders between public and private communication are increasingly difficult to define, is certain to keep growing as further technological innovation is introduced. One case, the emergence of the Internet as a new medium, and the difficulties of the Chinese authorities to come to terms with the challenges posed by technical innovation, is being discussed in detail in chapter 9.

The very same trends of technical innovation and globalization do also challenge the perspective of a communication or media network based on the nation-state. China has never been secluded entirely from the outside world; rather, communication in China has acted and reacted to flows of information from beyond its borders.<sup>30</sup> These information flows have played a crucial role especially in times of crisis (cf. the role of the Voice of America and BBC broadcastings during the democracy movement of Spring 1989).<sup>31</sup> China thus operates within a global public – a trend that has accelerated in the past twenty years due to reform politics and the proliferation of new media forms. International and global (cross-border) communication, both public and private, is thus an integral part of Chinese communication, a fact that should be taken account of: put more bluntly, the *New York Times* is part of the Chinese media landscape in much the same way that

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<sup>29</sup> John B. Thompson. *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1995. For a short discussion of Thompson's concept see McQuail. *Theory*, p. 65. Quotations are taken from *ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> Rudolf Wagner has drawn attention to this point in "The Flow of News. Interactions between the Official Chinese Gazettes, the Chinese-language Commercial Papers, and English-language China Reporting in China and London," talk at the XIV EACS Conference, Moscow, Aug. 26-28, 2002 See also the special issue of *China Review: An Interdisciplinary Journal on Greater China* 4.2 (Spring 2004).

<sup>31</sup> The role of the foreign media in spring 1989 is discussed, albeit only in passing, in Linda Jakobsen. "Lies in Ink, Truth in Blood: the Role and Impact of the Chinese Media during the Beijing Spring '89", Discussion paper, Harvard University, 1990. Available at <http://www.tsquare.tv/themes/liesink.html> (downloaded Sept. 17, 2003).

*Beijing ribao* 北京日报 is – this fact is all too often forgotten.<sup>32</sup> The following chapters will attempt to take account of the international character of the Chinese media landscape, although the focus remains on those media produced domestically for a domestic audience.<sup>33</sup>

One more distinction must be introduced at this point. Media have so far been defined as carriers of public communication. Public communication is not identical with political communication. Public communication is any communication that addresses an anonymous, non-private public with matters of concern for a not further defined number of people. Political communication, in contrast, is only one subgroup of public communication, albeit an important one. Political communication is concerned with matters of politics (in the broadest sense). Thus, it also belongs to public communication, in so far as it is a reflection of the general public's concerns. It is, however, more limited in terms of content and function. Political communication is of special relevance to the government and in China has moved – at certain periods – to a paramount position. During the Cultural Revolution, for example, political communication dominated all other communication; put differently, all communication had to be politicized if it was to assume legitimacy.

Political communication is but one function of communication. Media are able to cover a number of communicative functions (defined by scope, content, and direction) at the same time, if not all of them. Their actual function, however, is usually more limited, and related to specific contexts. Thus, media are usually not single-purpose, but multi-purpose tools of communication. A newspaper may carry, besides news reporting – and even on the same page – government announcements, advertisements (i.e. communication of economic information from an enterprise to potential consumers), entertainment, letters to the editor,<sup>34</sup> job

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<sup>32</sup> I know of not a single serious effort to take such a holistic perspective on the Chinese media. The tendency to strictly separate things Chinese and others, so common in Chinese studies, is partly due to the official Chinese position that argues likewise. Since the Chinese government can control the content of foreign publications only to a very limited degree, it attempts aggressively to restrict access to these publications.

<sup>33</sup> Very little information has been made available in print on the issue of interaction between Chinese and foreign media, while anecdotal evidence abounds. Making use of whatever information available, supported by targeted interviews (see appendix).

<sup>34</sup> Letters to the editor are especially interesting in their nature: rooting in private communication, they are a double reversal of the direction of the communication process. The usual top-down direction of a newspaper is being turned around by a letter that expresses the opinion of a reader

openings, and many other pieces of information. The number of functions defined as legitimate for the media may be reduced (such as in China during the Cultural Revolution), but the media *per se* are not limited to a single purpose.

Functional approaches to communication have been regarded as old-fashioned in media theory in recent years.<sup>35</sup> In the context of Stalinist media systems, however, the functional approach remains a useful tool of analysis. Such an approach is legitimized first and foremost by the political authorities and the Party leadership in those countries: the media are explicitly called upon to ‘serve’ (*fuwu* 服务) political purposes. While more liberal concepts of the media’s nature, usually of Western origin, are beginning to find audiences in China, the idea of a politically defined “mission” of the media is still the mainstream voice. Even recent Chinese textbooks on the media stress the functional approach.<sup>36</sup>

Most of the literature on the Chinese media, however, fails to consider this problem, which leads us to a major shortcoming of the existing general literature on media and communication: an obvious bias against the state. Media theory developed in Europe and the U.S. usually takes for granted that media operate in a quasi-autonomous space of public communication, such as the ‘public sphere’ in Jürgen Habermas’ writings.<sup>37</sup> The observation that the media are situated in a space between the private sphere and that of politics which serves as a room for

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(i.e., bottom-up communication), yet through the selection and ultimately publication, the letter becomes part of the overall message of the newspaper, returning to the top-down stream of communication. In fact, the CCP leadership was conscious of the bidirectional flow of information early on. Compare Bo Gu’s fall 1944 lecture “Dangbao jizhe yao zhuyi xie shenme wenti,” in XGWH 3.203-05. Bo Gu in particular stresses the role of newspapers for intelligence gathering.

<sup>35</sup> See McQuail. *Theory*, p. 78ff.

<sup>36</sup> For a most recent discussion see Xie Haiguang (ed.). *Hulianwang yu sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo anli*. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2002. See also Yuan Jun. *Xinwen meijie tonglun*. Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 2000, ch. 3: “The social function of news media” (*Xinwen meijie de shehui gongneng*). Alternative voices come mostly from the Chinese academia and intelligentsia, rather than from the media establishment. A provocative article calling for the abolition of the Propaganda Department, for example, was written by a Beijing University journalism professor. Jiao Guobiao. “Taofa Zhongxuanbu,” [http://msittig.freshell.org/docs/jiao\\_guobiao\\_essay\\_utf8.html](http://msittig.freshell.org/docs/jiao_guobiao_essay_utf8.html) (downloaded Oct. 25, 2004).

<sup>37</sup> Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1989. (Originally published as *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* in 1962). Habermas does not claim to be a communication scientist, but his position is exemplary for the majority of literature in the field that tends to neglect or deny any positive (i.e. active) role of the state; for this reason I have refrained from quoting any more books that may take different positions concerning the media but are beset with the same problem in this aspect. To mention but one example: McQuail’s *Theory* mentions the state only in passing and does not consider it to be a player of any importance in the media field.

“reason” (“öffentliches Raisonement”)<sup>38</sup> has contributed tremendously to the conceptualization of the role that an articulate public has played ever since early modern times. Habermas defines the public sphere as follows:<sup>39</sup>

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public: they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor.

The public discourse that characterizes this sphere was located in teahouses and cafés only in its earliest times, and moved soon into the press that has ever since served as the primary carrier of this “reasoning.”

The problem with this conception becomes obvious in the few lines cited above. Habermas places the “private people” and the state in opposition to each other; the former use the public sphere as the arena for their argument. This implies a fundamentally negative view of the state: an emancipated and enlightened citizenry fights to defend their interests against an intrusive and oppressive state. The deeply liberal desire to fend off state infringement on individual liberty has historical roots, but is one-sided with regard to the modern state. Furthermore, it fails to provide sufficient explanations for the role of the state in settings dominated by very strong states that actively try to shape society, such as the Leninist state.<sup>40</sup> In the Chinese case, Daniel Lynch has used the idea of a “praetorian” public sphere to describe a state that protrudes deeply into the day-to-day affairs of the press institutions.<sup>41</sup> In this way, he can account for a more prominent role of the state, but the praetorian public sphere approach does not solve the fundamental problem: the state remains in a passive position, being mainly occupied with efforts to block the evolution of a ‘free’ public sphere.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Rudolf Wagner has criticised this point, among other shortcomings of Habermas’ approach in “The role of the foreign community in the Chinese public sphere” in CQ 142 (June 1995), p. 423-43. Barbara Mittler. *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity and Change in Shanghai’s News Media, 1872-1912*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2004; and Natascha Vittinghoff. *Freier Fluss. Zur Kulturgeschichte des frühen chinesischen Journalismus (1862 - 1911)*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002, p. 3ff, do also comment on the weaknesses of the Habermasian concept.

<sup>41</sup> See his *After the Propaganda State*. The idea of a ‘praetorian’ public sphere borrows from Samuel Huntington’s concept of “praetorian” settings of “uninstitutionalized and chaotic patterns of political participation” (ibid., p. 5). Compare Huntington. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968.

<sup>42</sup> Lynch is not alone here. The authors in Gabór T. Rittersporn, Malte Rolf, Jan C. Behrends (eds.). *Sphären von Öffentlichkeit in Gesellschaften sowjetischen Typs: Public Spheres in Soviet-Type*

Such a view, however, is compatible neither with the self-perception of the Chinese state regarding the media, nor with the empirical findings presented later in this volume. The Chinese state and the ruling Party claim a central position in the mediascape of the PRC. The CCP's media concept that I will develop in the next chapters will make this point clear. For the moment, we must start to take a closer look at the organization of media thinking in China. After having defined the main function of the media – public communication – in general terms, we can now go on to determine the context in which public communication takes place in the Chinese political *imaginaire*. The functional approach thus leads us to the organization of the political space, to the propaganda sector, or *xitong*.

### *The Propaganda Sector*

It has proven impossible to approach the Chinese conception of the media on a purely linguistic plane by using translation terminology. Yet despite the apparent lack of a comprehensive term or conceptual category corresponding to the word 'media,' the entities grouped as 'media' in English are clearly being perceived of as closely linked to each other in China through their role and their function in public communication. Books, newspapers, film etc. have a common framework of reference in Chinese – propaganda. This framework becomes most obvious when we turn to the logic of the institutional structuring of political space. It is here, in the area of political organization, that we find a reflection of the organization of thought.

An organizational approach must follow the particular institutional logic from the perspective of system insiders, since the analysis of formal institutional patterns can be of use only if these formal patterns match the categories in which the actors think and speak of their environment. The informal language that has been used to describe the structural arrangements in the Chinese political space deviates significantly from the terminology of formal organizational charts. In this language, the Chinese political body is structured into several macrosystems

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*Societies*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003, struggle throughout this volume with their inclination to the – attractive but in this context inappropriate – concept of the Habermasian public sphere.

called *xitong* 系统.<sup>43</sup> *Xitong* are vertically integrated functional systems of related bureaucracies.<sup>44</sup> In recent times, they have been led by small groups, each of which is headed by one member of the Politburo Standing Committee. *Xitong* are considered to be the largest building blocks of the PRC's political landscape. Usually, about six *xitong* can be identified that cover the areas "party affairs," "organization affairs," "propaganda and education," "political and legal affairs," "finance and economics," and "military affairs." Notably, the *xitong* cross the lines of the Party / government divide that is more of a theoretical nature than of practical relevance even today; the most important decisions have always been made within Party. A study of organizational patterns in the media sector must therefore focus on the Party bodies in question.<sup>45</sup>

Within this framework, all institutions covered by the English term "media" are organized within one distinct *xitong*, the propaganda *xitong* (*xuanchuan xitong* 宣传系统). This is remarkable since other arrangements could be imagined, too: if the media were understood primarily to be economic enterprises, they should be grouped, as an industry, under the financial and economic affairs *xitong*. The very fact that entities from publishing houses to newspapers to TV stations are considered to belong to the propaganda *xitong* indicates their proper place within the Chinese political *imaginaire*, as well as in the structural organization of things in the mental world order. In the absence of a category "media," the category "propaganda institutions" provides the common ground that unites newspapers, films, and television. All these *are thought* to be parts of "propaganda." They *are thought* to be so by all actors involved: by the Party and government bodies

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<sup>43</sup> *Xitong* in other contexts is translated simply as 'system.' In the above context, however, 'system' is no satisfying equivalent for *xitong*, given the rather loose and informal nature of the political entities called *xitong*. I will therefore stick to the Chinese terms, stressing the indigenous coinage of this concept.

<sup>44</sup> See Kenneth Lieberthal. *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1995, p. 194-95 and 207-08. In his chapter 7, Lieberthal gives a good outline of the informal categories employed by insiders to describe the institutional structure in the PRC, as opposed to the formal organizational charts (his chapter 6). See also Yan Huai. "Organizational Hierarchy and the Cadre Management System" in Carol Lee Hamrin, Zhao Suisheng (eds.). *Decision-making in Deng's China: Perspectives from Insiders*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1995, p. 39-50.

<sup>45</sup> The *xitong* concept is in fact of rather recent origin and has appeared in the relevant Chinese literature only in the 1980s. However, evidence from the history of institutions in the PRC and within the CCP clearly shows that *xitong* is but a new way to describe a phenomenon that dates back for decades. Macrosystems of related bureaucracies with distinguishable borders, delegated to the responsibility of one or two top cadres, can be traced back as far as the early 1940s, as I will show below. I am grateful to Thomas Kampen for pointing out this problem to me.



overseeing the operations of press and broadcasting, by the journalists and employees of the propaganda sector, and by the audiences. The chapters in the second part of this study will provide ample evidence for this fact. The “media” have been thought to belong to the propaganda sector since the formation of the CCP’s “media concept” (in these early times at least by the Party) and they continue to be classified in this way to the present day. The difficulty of the word and concept of “media” / *meiti* to get a foothold in China illustrates the resilience and the persuasiveness of the established logic.<sup>46</sup> The importance of this finding is obvious: if the Chinese media (or rather “media”) are to be analyzed with view to their self-perception, and if the uncritical transposition of foreign concepts and theories into a distinct social and cultural context is to be avoided, then it is impossible to think of the media in terms other than those of propaganda.<sup>47</sup>

Chinese uses of “propaganda” differ markedly from those in English. First of all, “propaganda” has come to bear a negative connotation in recent times. A modern Western textbook defines propaganda as follows:<sup>48</sup>

The process and product of deliberate attempts to influence collective behaviour and opinion by the use of multiple means of communication in ways that are systematic and one-sided. Propaganda is carried in the interest of the source or sender, not the recipient. It is almost certain to be in some respects misleading or not fully truthful and can be entirely untrue, as with certain kinds of disinformation. It can also be psychologically aggressive and distorted in its representation of reality. Its effectiveness is variable depending on the context and dispositions of the target audience more than on ‘message’ characteristics.

The two central issues associated with propaganda are the communication of a particular world view or philosophy to a large audience, and the legitimacy of using

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<sup>46</sup> I will come back to this issue in chapter nine during the discussion of the CCP’s (more or less successful) efforts to deal with the advent of new technology and new thinking that were challenging the established order.

<sup>47</sup> The only recent study that makes an effort to explain the Chinese media in their own terms is Lynch’s *After the Propaganda State*. Lynch refers to the indigenous concept of ‘thought work’ (*sixiang gongzuo* 思想工作) to discuss the media sector. However, ‘thought work,’ or more correctly ‘political thought work’ (*sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo* 思想政治工作), is a technical concept of more recent origin: it was first used by Mao in his 1957 speech “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People.” See *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977, vol. 5, p. 405. ‘Thought work’ refers to a process and is not used in the structuring of political space; within the Chinese body politic it is subordinated to the larger space of propaganda. While the Party has allowed thought work to slip in recent years, the propaganda sector as a whole has retained its important position. As a consequence of this rather narrow approach, Lynch arrives at findings that are often contrary to those presented in this study. I will expand on this point later in Part Two.

<sup>48</sup> McQuail. *Theory*, p. 501.

about any means necessary to achieve this goal, including “improper” means.<sup>49</sup> Chinese standard definitions for *xuanchuan* do not differ all too much from the above English definition, minus the negative connotation:<sup>50</sup>

[*Xuanchuan* means] to instil into men and to spread certain ideas; a goal-oriented social behaviour that aims to persuade the recipient. It is composed of the following factors: the propagandist, the propaganda content, the medium of transmission, and the object of propaganda. Its characteristics are purpose-orientation, social nature, class nature, and dependence [on the propagandist]. It is a process of influencing the social disposition of individuals and groups.

The spread of a prescribed worldview and the top-down nature of the process of propaganda feature in this PRC definition, too. The Chinese definition goes into more detail concerning the relationship between message and sender: the message corresponds to the sender’s class interests, thus playing a social as well as a political role. While this definition argues within a Marxist framework, the elements mentioned are not uniquely those of the CCP, as the short, elegant definition of *xuanchuan* in Zhao Yuanren’s 赵元任 *Guoyu cidian* 国语辞典 shows: “To disseminate, by speech or written word, one’s own position or the circumstances of one’s own country, in order to make them popular among the masses.”<sup>51</sup> Again, we find similar arguments: a top-down process centred around the sender, a message of ideological character, and the effort to reach and influence a large number of addressees all feature prominently in this GMD-supported publication. These elements can therefore be identified as the main characteristics of the Chinese term *xuanchuan*. Most importantly, however, the negative connotation that dominates the modern imagination of propaganda in most Western languages, is entirely absent from the Chinese definition (in that of the CCP as well as in that of the GMD).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Propaganda was discussed in generally negative terms by Western intellectuals since at least World War II. See, for example, the essay on the subject in Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*. Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988, p. 274f.

<sup>50</sup> *Cihai*. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1989, p. 2663. For reasons unknown, neither the original 1965 *Cihai* edition, nor the modified 1979 version contain an entry for “*xuanchuan*.”

<sup>51</sup> Zhao Yuanren (ed.). *Guoyu cidian*. Zhongguo cidian bianzuanchu, 1943, vol. 4, p. 2512. *Guoyu cidian* was an officially sponsored project and has seen many revised editions in Taiwan, supervised by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China.

<sup>52</sup> Apparently it were foreigners who confronted the Chinese with the idea of propaganda bearing negative connotations. An editorial in *Xinhua ribao*, published Sept. 1, 1943, dismissed charges that propaganda had anything to do with lying, and defined it as but another sort of education. *Xinhua ribao* was the CCP newspaper in the wartime capital of Chongqing, where foreign influences were particularly strong. “Jizhejie tan jizhe zuofeng,” repr. in XGWH 3.59-61, here p. 60f.

The term *xuanchuan* has acquired its modern meaning (the transmission of messages or ideologies with the goal of transforming the audiences' thinking) only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>53</sup> This usage has come from Europe, where 'propaganda' has been referring to the transmission of religious ideas since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Since the Japanese *senden* 宣传 appears at approximately the same time as a translation term for 'propaganda,' it is likely that the modern meaning of the word was defined in Japan and came to China from there.<sup>54</sup>

The most natural source for the Chinese Communist use of *xuanchuan* would supposedly be the propaganda concepts current in the Soviet Union. However, this turns out not to be the case here. A closer look at the terminology reveals that the terms used in Chinese and Russian are not congruent: Soviet sources make a clear distinction between "propaganda" (*propaganda*) and "agitation" (*agitatsiia*). Propaganda is the broader and less specific category: "... the propagandist conveys *many* ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator conveys *only one or a few ideas*, but to a *great mass of people*."<sup>55</sup> Agitation thus refers to "the spreading of a certain idea or slogan that arouses the masses to action,"<sup>56</sup> while propaganda is "the dissemination of political, philosophical, scientific, artistic, or other views or ideas, with the aim of instilling them in the public consciousness..."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Early uses of *xuanchuan* can be found in the *Sanguo zhi*. In premodern texts, *xuanchuan* usually means "to transmit verbally" and also "to explain;" it is often used in conjunction with imperial orders and edicts. It does not, however, refer to the modern uses discussed above. Compare standard dictionaries such as *Hanyu da cidian* or *Zhongwen da cidian*, that list both modern and premodern uses. Chinese dictionaries from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century do not yet list the modern use.

<sup>54</sup> *Xuanchuan* is not listed in Federico Masini's *The Formation of Modern Chinese Lexicon and its Evolution Toward a National Language: The Period from 1840 to 1898*. Rome: Department of Oriental Studies, 1993, neither does it appear in the appendices to Lydia Liu. *Translingual Practice*. It is not listed in the missionary dictionaries from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which use the term *xuanjiang* for the spread of the Christian gospel instead. A survey of Japanese dictionaries, though, reveals a lexicographical proximity that makes a common root (via translation) very likely. The entry "*xuanchuan*" in *Zhongguo da baike quanshu*. Beijing: Zhongguo da baike quanshu chubanshe, 1990 (hereafter ZDBQ), gives 1898 for the modern use of the word but provides no textual evidence.

<sup>55</sup> *Bol'shaia Sovietskaia Entsiklopedia* (hereafter BSE), quoting G.V. Plekhanov. See *Great Soviet Encyclopedia: A Translation of the Third Edition*. New York: Macmillan, 1973, vol. 1, p. 137 (italics in the original). The propaganda principles were thus introduced into Russia at a very early time, probably around 1890. Plekhanov is also quoted verbatim by Lenin as the authoritative voice for this definition. See „Was Tun?“ in W.I. Lenin. *Werke*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1976, vol. 5, p. 422.

<sup>56</sup> BSE, vol. 1, p. 137.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 21, p. 269.

The CCP rejected this differentiation – in contrast to other socialist parties, such as that of Eastern Germany, which leaned closer to the Soviet model.<sup>58</sup> A Chinese dictionary of the early 1950s translates “agitation” with *gudong* 鼓动 and “propaganda” with *xuanchuan* and distinguishes both in almost the same terms as the Soviet *Encyclopaedia*.<sup>59</sup> Yet *gudong* never became popular with the CCP, which preferred the word *xuanchuan* for all its propagandistic and agitational activities. Over the years, *gudong* as a translation term for *agitatsiia* became all but forgotten: as early as 1959, the standard Russian-Chinese dictionary used *xuanchuan* to explain both Russian terms,<sup>60</sup> and a later Chinese-Russian dictionary noted both ‘propaganda’ and ‘agitation’ under the entry *xuanchuan*.<sup>61</sup> The Chinese preference for *xuanchuan* may also be seen in the fact that the large Chinese encyclopaedia does not even have an entry for *gudong*.<sup>62</sup> The Soviets, in contrast, always preferred the term ‘agitation’ in their work and their writings. The lack of distinction between the two terms in their Chinese use, however, does not mean that agitation did not exist in China – to the contrary: agitation among workers and peasants has always been an area of crucial concern for the CCP. It is only with regard to terminology that the CCP did not follow the Soviets, and *xuanchuan* has simply absorbed the meanings of both Russian words.

This observation provides us with an important hint regarding the origins of CCP thinking on propaganda. Soviet models certainly played a crucial role in the 1920s and 1930s for the conceptualization of the meaning and role of propaganda in China, yet there were other models available as well. The terminology problem, I argue, suggests the importance of these alternative influences on Chinese

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<sup>58</sup> On the German Democratic Republic (GDR) see Gunter Holzweißig. *Die schärfste Waffe der Partei: Eine Mediengeschichte der DDR*. Köln: Böhlau, 2002. The GDR learned from the Russian model through translations such as Issak S. Zvavic. *Presse und Verlagswesen in der UdSSR*. Berlin: SWA-Verlag, 1948. An abridged Serbian version was published in Belgrade: *Stampa i izdavačka delatnost u SSSR*. Beograd: Privredni pregled, 1947; however, I am unaware of a Chinese translation. I am grateful to Thomas Kampen for making his copy of the Berlin edition available to me.

<sup>59</sup> *Xinding Xin mingci cidian*. Shanghai: Chunming chubanshe, 1952 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1949). See p. 5076 for the entry “*gudong* – *shandong* – *xuanchuan*.” The compilers of this dictionary did very likely rely on *BSE*, the first edition of which was published 1926-1947.

<sup>60</sup> *E-Han xin cidian*. Beijing: Shidai chubanshe, 1959, vol. 1, p. 7, vol. 2, p.1479.

<sup>61</sup> *Bol'shoi Kitaisko-Russkii slovar'*. Moskva: Glavnaia redaktsiia vostochnoi literatur'i, 1983, vol. 1, p. 45.

<sup>62</sup> ZDBQ has, however, entries for *xuanchuan* in three different volumes: *Xinwen chuban juan*, p. 427-29; *Shehuixue juan*, p. 448-49; *Xinxixue juan*, p. 475-76. The three entries are not identical, but stress the same points. That propaganda is discussed in the media, sociology, and psychology volumes of the encyclopaedia is itself an indication of its basic character.

concepts of propaganda: the world market in the interwar years was awash with ideas concerning uses of the press and propaganda that were in clear variation of the free press model: propaganda had become a respectable element of the political cultures in fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, as well as in Japan. In each of these instances, negative connotations of propaganda gave way to its being perceived as a necessity for successful politics. The attraction of the fascist model, for example on the GMD, as a path of development, has been well documented.<sup>63</sup> This includes notions of state propaganda.<sup>64</sup> Even the U.S. government became active on the international propaganda stage in the waning years of the first world war through the Committee on Public Information, whose experience in turn influenced propagandists in Japan.<sup>65</sup> Thus, sources for conceptions of propaganda could be found also beyond the immediate model of the Soviet Union. The transfer process was more complex, as the question of terminology demonstrates. I will expand on these international connections in chapter three.<sup>66</sup>

Propaganda has been a key concern of the CCP in the Party's efforts to defeat the GMD, to build socialism in the PRC, and to shape the minds of its citizens. It is here, in the propaganda sector, that we find assembled all those institutions that are commonly called "the media." The macro sector responsible

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<sup>63</sup> See Lloyd E. Eastman. *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937*. Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1990; Maria Hsia Chang. *The Chinese Blue Shirt Society: Fascism and Developmental Nationalism*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1985.

<sup>64</sup> The most elaborate study of the goals and ideas of GMD propaganda is John Fitzgerald. *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, ch. 6-7 and *passim*.

<sup>65</sup> See Hans Schmidt. "Democracy for China: American Propaganda and the May Fourth Movement" in *Diplomatic History* 22.1 (1998), p. 1-28, as well as the documentation in United States Committee on Public Information. *The Creel Report: Complete Report of the Chairman of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1972 (repr.). Carl Crow. *I Speak for the Chinese*. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1937, p. 15f. See also Tanifuji Etushi. "H.D. Razuriwru no seijigaku to seiji senden kenkyu no iso" in *Interjensu* 5 (2005), p. 74-83. I am grateful to Rudolf Wagner for bringing these materials to my attention.

<sup>66</sup> A cautionary note seems appropriate here: the discussion above and in the following sections of this chapter is concerned with *normative* issues and the conceptions of propaganda as understood by the CCP. The *effectiveness of propaganda and its actual impact* on the receivers of propaganda messages are an entirely different set of questions. These questions will arise time and again in later chapters of this study, in particular in those of Part II, and will be dealt with there. With growing sophistication, audiences tend to outgrow the expectations of the senders of propaganda messages, developing "differential encodings" (compare David Morley. *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding*. London: British Film Institute, 1980) of propaganda, including irony, amusement, and kitsch; audiences can thus acquire a significant amount of semiotic power. For numerous examples of this kind see Géremie R. Barmé. *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996. For the time being, however, I am interested only in the normative perspective on propaganda from the angle of the CCP's point of view.

for propaganda, though, is itself an historical product that has constituted itself in the course of the emergence of other modern Chinese institutions. On the search for the modern Chinese media concept I will now inspect the process of the formation of the CCP's propaganda sector.

### *The Evolution of the Propaganda Xitong*

The propaganda sector has been a key area of concern for the CCP. Propaganda activities have figured prominently on the agenda of major Chinese Communist leaders since the founding of the Party in 1921. The propaganda macro sector, or *xitong*, however, took shape only gradually in a protracted process of evolution: it was first constituted as a relatively integrated sector with discernible boundaries, a high degree of coherence, and specialized cadres in the late 1930s and early 1940s, as I will show with reference to a network of institutions linked by concurrent personnel appointments. On the same account, while important ideas about propaganda existed in the 1920s and 1930s, they were moulded into a coherent body only in Yan'an (see the discussion in chapter two). The CCP's Yan'an years are thus the formative period both in the process of institution building, and in the evolution of a number of key CCP strategies, patterns of work, and concepts – including the Party's media concept.<sup>67</sup> The

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<sup>67</sup> On the Yan'an period see Gao Hua. *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de: Yan'an zhengfeng yundong de lailong-qumai*. Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2000, the best and most detailed study that has yet been written on this period. Compare also Raymond F. Wylie. *The Emergence of Maoism: Mao Tse-tung, Chen Po-ta, and the Search for Chinese Theory, 1935-1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980. Thomas Kampen. *Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and the Evolution of the Chinese Communist Leadership*. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2000. David E. Apter, Tony Saich. *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994. Chen Yongfa. *Yan'an de yinying*. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1990. Mark Selden. *China in Revolution: The Yanan Way Revisited*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995. For a discussion evaluating this literature see ch. 2. The earliest book on the Yan'an period is Boyd Compton. *Mao's China: Party Reform Documents, 1942-44*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1952 ("Introduction"). A number of detailed studies throw light on important single aspects of Yan'an: Peter Schran. *Guerrilla Economy: The Development of the Shensi-Kansu-Ninghsia Border Region, 1937-1945*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976. Pauline B. Keating. *Two Revolutions: Village Reconstruction and the Cooperative Movement in Northern Shaanxi, 1934-1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. Chen Yung-fa. "The Blooming Poppy under the Red Sun: The Yan'an Way and the Opium Trade" in Tony Saich, Hans J. van de Ven (ed.). *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1994, p. 263-98.

formation of the propaganda sector in the Yan'an period is thus an issue of central concern.<sup>68</sup>

Teleological historiography such as that employed by the CCP suggests continuities even where there are none. This is the case with Party-sponsored accounts of the CCP's activities and organisation in the media sector.<sup>69</sup> In the early years of the CCP, activities of single Party members or Party bodies, more or less coordinated, are certainly visible in those areas later identified as belonging to the propaganda sector. These activities alone, however, do not *per se* constitute anything like a organized propaganda *xitong*. Rather, for the first two decades, CCP activities in the various fields of publishing, printing, oral agitation, or literature and art were uncoordinated, intermittent, and decentralized, and there existed no coordinating authoritative body in charge of these activities. While the GMD provided a model for coherent and reflected policies or concepts guiding these diverse areas of propaganda, CCP propaganda activities in the 1920s were generally initiated by individual Party figures or local Party cells, usually in response to the ad hoc needs of the situation. The CCP did not develop a coherent and systematic approach to propaganda until the Yan'an era. A short examination of these early institutions will show this.<sup>70</sup>

In 1921, when the CCP was founded in Shanghai, the Party's Central Bureau (*Zhongyangju* 中央局) had only three members: Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 was elected secretary (*shuji* 书记), while Zhang Guotao 张国焘 and Li Da 李达 were

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<sup>68</sup> The GMD after its 1923 restructuring provided an important model for emulation by the CCP. Built along Leninist lines of organization just as the CCP, it became a training ground for senior CCP propagandists, such as Mao Zedong, who headed the Propaganda Department under the GMD Central Executive Committee. See Fitzgerald. *Awakening China*, ch.6. In the Yan'an era, the CCP relied heavily upon the GMD model, as I will show in chapter three below. Before the Northern Expedition, however, the CCP lacked the resources for constructing a similarly cohesive and elaborate propaganda infrastructure; conditions after 1927 were even less favourable to such efforts.

<sup>69</sup> Such an attempt can be found in Lin Zhida (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang xuanchuan shi*. Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1990, which invents the prehistory of CCP propaganda from a latter-day perspective. Compare also collections of sources such as Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu bangongting, Zhongyang dang'anguan bianyanbu (ed). *Zhongguo gongchandang xuanchuan gongzuo wenxian xuanbian* (hereafter XGWX). Beijing: Xuexi chubanshe, 1996, 4 vols.

<sup>70</sup> The following section relies heavily on Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu, Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi, Zhongyang dang'anguan (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2000, 19 vols. (hereafter *Zuzhishi ziliao*). I have consulted both the print and the CD-ROM editions. This is the only compilation giving detailed information on the party organs of propaganda. Some useful information can also be found scattered in Lin Zhida. *Xuanchuan shi*. Compare also Thomas Kampen. "The CCP's Central Committee Departments, 1921-1991: A Study of their Evolution" in *China Report* 29.3 (1993), p. 299-317.

entrusted with the organization and propaganda portfolios, respectively. The amount of attention that the issue of propaganda received is quite remarkable: from the very first hours of the CCP two core areas of competence were established that consequently have been of outstanding importance up to the present day. Organization (*zuzhi* 组织) and propaganda are conceived to be complementary activities and have been likened to “the two wings of a bird or the two wheels of a chariot, both are indispensable.”<sup>71</sup> The party’s Organization Department, in charge of all personnel matters, and the Propaganda Department (Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu 中共中央宣传部 or Zhongxuanbu 中宣部, hereafter PD) were later to become two loci of power within the CCP. For the earliest time after the CCP’s founding, however, little information is available on the PD’s role and activities.

In setting up a PD, the founders of the CCP were in fact reacting to external pressures, in particular from the Communist International (Comintern). The guidelines issued by the Comintern in Moscow for all its members (and prospective members), the “Terms of Admission into the Third Communist International” (July 1920) stated that “the periodical and non-periodical press, and all publishing enterprises, must likewise be fully subordinate to the Party Central Committee, whether the Party as a whole is legal or illegal at the time. Publishing enterprises should not be allowed to abuse their autonomy and pursue any policies that are not in full accord with that of the Party” (article 12).<sup>72</sup> The naming of a propaganda director was a demonstration of the CCP’s willingness to coordinate the activities of the various leftist publications in China.

Li Da had been a natural choice for the propaganda portfolio as he was the editor of the journal *Gongchandang* 共产党.<sup>73</sup> Li was also put in charge of the People’s Publishing House (Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社), an underground publisher set up in Shanghai as the party’s “propaganda organ.”<sup>74</sup> In the earliest

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<sup>71</sup> See “Zhongyang xuanchuanbu guanyu dang de xuanchuan gudong gongzuo tigang” (June 20, 1941) in XGWX, vol. 2, p. 250-60, here p. 258.

<sup>72</sup> “The Terms of Admission into the Third International” in V. I. Lenin. *Collected Works* (4<sup>th</sup> English ed.). Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966, vol. 31, pp. 206-11, here p. 210.

<sup>73</sup> *Gongchandang* was a short-lived journal in Shanghai that existed from late 1920 to July 1921.

<sup>74</sup> Lin Zhida. *Xuanchuan shi*, p. 43. Renmin chubanshe existed from 1921 until 1922, when Li Da left Shanghai. It was merged with Xin qingnian she in Guangzhou in 1923. Among its publications



days of the Party, both the periodical and the non-periodical print media were thus placed under unified control; however, both were dependent on the person of Li Da, who fell out with Chen Duxiu in September 1923 and consequently left the CCP.<sup>75</sup> At the CCP's second congress a year later, Cai Hesun 蔡和森, editor of the journal *Xiangdao* 向导 was put in charge of propaganda affairs.

After the third party congress in 1923, a reorganization of the Party's portfolios was decided: instead of a propaganda bureau, an Education and Propaganda Commission (*Jiaoyu xuanchuan weiyuanhui* 宣传教育委员会) was to be established. The "Organization guidelines"<sup>76</sup> for this committee list subordinate departments for Editing (*Bianjibu* 编辑部), Correspondence (*Hanshoubu* 函授部), Communication (*Tongxunbu* 通讯部), Printing and distribution (*Yinxingbu* 印行部), and a Library. It is remarkable that education and press, the two major components of the propaganda *xitong*, were organized in a single hierarchy; comparable efforts were not again undertaken until fifteen years later. The young CCP, however, apparently was too weak for such an elaborate organizational structure, and the "Organization guidelines" were never implemented. Instead, a Propaganda and Press Department (*Xuanchuan baokanbu* 宣传报刊部) and a separate Publishing Department (*Chubanbu* 出版部) existed from 1924-1925 under Luo Zhanglong 罗章龙 and Zhang Bojian 张伯简, respectively. The Party's major publications, however, were under direct guidance of the Central Executive Committee (CEC, *Zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui* 中央执行委员会): *Xiangdao*, the CEC organ was led by Cai Hesun, while Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 was editor of *Qianfeng* 前锋. The journal *Zhongguo gongchandang dangbao* 中国共产党党报 was published by Chen Duxiu.<sup>77</sup> The various propaganda activities were thus once again scattered over a number of institutions, with different individuals in charge,

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were the first complete translation of the *Communist Manifesto*, and Lenin's *State and Revolution*. See Xiong Zongshan, Li Qiju. "Li Da yu chuban gongzuo" in *Chuban shiliao* 6 (1986), p. 74-79.

<sup>75</sup> See Arif Dirlik. *The Origins of Chinese Communism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 246-52.

<sup>76</sup> "Jiaoyu xuanchuan weiyuanhui zuzhifa" in *XGWX*, vol. 1, p. 554-59.

<sup>77</sup> *Xiangdao* existed from 1922 until 1927 as the organ of the CCP C(E)C. *Qianfeng*, also a CC organ, saw only three issues in 1923 and 1924. *Zhongguo gongchandang dangbao* was an internal Party publication.

all of them strong characters. Cai, Qu, and Chen were Party figures much senior to Luo and Zhang.

In 1925, a Propaganda Department was established under the leadership of Peng Shuzhi 彭述之,<sup>78</sup> with Cai Hesun and Qiu Qiubai as members, both of whom have played prominent roles in the CCP's propaganda in the early years until 1927.<sup>79</sup> A short-lived Publishing Department also existed until October of that year under the leadership of Cai Hesun, who also controlled the weekly *Xiangdao*. The Party's major journal thus remained beyond the authority of the formal Propaganda Department. This organizational arrangement was practiced also in later years, especially after the establishment of the PRC, yet only for a very small number of publications, such as RMRB, *Qiushi zazhi* 求是杂志, and *Guangming ribao* 光明日报 (hereafter GMRB), which by 1997 were the only publications under direct leadership of the CCP Central Committee (hereafter CC); their status reflects the special importance of these papers. The organizational separation in 1927, in contrast, when *Xiangdao* was the only major Party periodical, rather attests to the instability of the formal organizational structure of the CCP.

All the same, prominent members of the Communist Party played an important role in the propaganda organs of the GMD under the roof of the United Front, 1923-1927. The most prominent example is Mao Zedong, who headed the Propaganda Department of the Central Executive Committee from October 1925 to March 1926. Particularly influential during that period was *Zhengzhi zhoubao* 政治周报, a journal sponsored by the GMD Political Council and controlled by Mao. He used the journal and his position ruthlessly to further the leftist line within the GMD and did his best to suppress the voices of his inner-Party (GMD) opponents. Other Communists in propaganda-related positions included Zhou Enlai and Deng

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<sup>78</sup> Peng, a leading Chinese Trotskyist, was later expelled from the CCP. On his person and the Chinese Trotskyist movement see Gregor Benton. *China's Urban Revolutionaries: Explorations in the History of Chinese Trotskyism, 1921-1952*. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996. Compare also Peng's autobiography: Claude Cadart, Cheng Yingxiang (ed.). *L'envol du communisme en Chine. Mémoires de Peng Shuzhi*. Paris: Gallimard, 1983.

<sup>79</sup> Both died too early to play any roles in the later CCP organization: Cai was captured and killed in 1931, and Qu died in 1935 after his failed escape from the Jiangxi Soviet. Li Da and Luo Zhanglong, who both left the CCP organization early (in 1923 and 1931, respectively), remained active in the field of education and later became distinguished professors. On Li Da see Zhonggong dangshi renwu yanjiuhui (ed.). *Zhonggong dangshi renwu zhuan*. Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1983, vol. 11, p. 1-75. Luo Zhanglong wrote and published busily until his death in 1995, at age 99.

Yingchao.<sup>80</sup> All in all, CCP propaganda work through the GMD institutional apparatus may have been considerably more important and influential than the activities of CCP's own organizations.<sup>81</sup>

Institutionalization was downgraded further when the CCP moved underground as a result of GMD suppression which started in 1927. Very little concrete information is available on the Party's formal working procedures of that period. In the Shanghai underground, departments and bureaus in the propaganda sector frequently changed names and affiliations. While responsibility for the CCP's propaganda activities rested with some of the Party's most prominent and experienced leaders, such as Qu Qiubai, Cai Hesen, and Li Lisan 李立三, the institutional arrangements of this period reflect an even higher degree of fragmentation, when most publications depended entirely on the personalities of the individuals publishing them, more often than not collapsing in the wake of arrests or defections. The arrangement of keeping the major Party papers under direct CC control seems to have been continued – as far as formal organizations and institutions did play any significant role in the underground years.<sup>82</sup>

During the underground years, two trends emerge: with mounting difficulties in the CCP's publishing efforts, oral propaganda assumed higher importance; the Party increasingly organized propaganda teams that were to address workers and peasants directly. A reflection of this can be seen in a decision of the CC Politburo initiated by Qu Qiubai to split the PD into two separate organs: one responsible for propaganda and education work (*xuanchuan jiaoyu gongzuo* 宣传教育工作), the other for agitation work among the masses (*qunzhong gudong gongzuo* 群众鼓动工作).<sup>83</sup> Agitation has been a crucial component of Communist propaganda in the

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<sup>80</sup> On Mao's tenure at the Propaganda Department see Fitzgerald. *Awakening China*, ch.6, esp. p. 213-14, 236-41; the launch of *Zhengzhi zhoubao* is discussed on p. 238. For Zhou Enlai, then in charge of the army's General Political Bureau with its extensive propaganda activities, and Deng Yingchao, secretary of the GMD Guangdong provincial women's bureau, see *ibid*, p. 240 and 285, respectively.

<sup>81</sup> None of these activities is mentioned in PRC accounts of the CCP's propaganda activities.

<sup>82</sup> On the CCP after 1927 see Patricia Stranahan. *Underground: The Shanghai Communist Party and the Politics of Survival, 1927-1937*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998. See also Marcia R. Ristaino. *China's Art of Revolution: The Mobilization of Discontent, 1927 and 1928*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987.

<sup>83</sup> See *Zuzhishi ziliao* 2.74-76. I could not locate a respective Party document; the split is not mentioned in the documents of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Plenum of the 6<sup>th</sup> CC that convened a week earlier. However, Zhou Yongxiang confirms a Politburo meeting on the day in question, Oct. 3, 1930. See *Qu Qiubai nianpu xinbian*. Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1992, p. 293.

entire pre-1949 period (in practice, if not in the terminological sense); this aspect of CCP propaganda efforts is all too often overseen from the post-1949 perspective, when propaganda became more institutionalized because the Party controlled all formal channels of communication.<sup>84</sup> The second trend concerns regionalization: in the late 1920s and early 1930s the CCP set up numerous base areas across China; the army units in these areas as well as the provisional government organs engaged in intensive propaganda work. Many even published newspapers and other pamphlets. Little is known about the organizational structures of these ad hoc bodies. The idea of an integrated propaganda sector thus seems even harder to imagine for the decade of 1927-37.

The most stable Communist base area was the Central Soviet (*Zhongyang Suqu* 中央苏区) in Jiangxi. The Jiangxi Soviet set up a more elaborate institutional structure than most other areas but information on the organization of the propaganda sector is sketchy nevertheless.<sup>85</sup> However, in the relatively stable environment, the CCP was able to develop a lively publishing industry that produced several newspapers, including the famous *Hongse Zhonghua* 红色中华,<sup>86</sup> many periodicals and a significant number of books.<sup>87</sup> In Jiangxi, the CCP also set up its first broadcasting station and the *Hongse Zhonghua she* 红色中华社 news agency. The Central Soviet area gained further strength when the Central Committee moved there from Shanghai in January 1933. Jiangxi became a laboratory for administration and policies, in the propaganda sector and many other fields. However, the frequent military campaigns of the GMD forces on the one hand, and disruption caused by internal strife (in particular the bloody purges against the “Anti-Bolshevik League”)<sup>88</sup> on the other, prevented the evolution of

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<sup>84</sup> A study focusing on the Chinese media cannot in any detail address this issue that to some degree also figured prominently after 1949: especially in rural areas, but also in the factories, the CCP devoted large resources to grass-roots agitation. While this issue has not drawn the attention of Western scholars, it figures prominently in Chinese publications that see it as a source of pride. See, for example, Lin Zhida. *Xuanchuan shi, passim*.

<sup>85</sup> According to Yan Fan, responsibility for news and publishing work rested with the Ministry of Culture of the Central Soviet government. See *Zhongyang geming genjudi xinwen chuban shi*. Nanchang: Jiangxi gaoxiao chubanshe, 1991, p.35. This book is the major source for the propaganda activities in the Jiangxi Soviet.

<sup>86</sup> *Hongse Zhonghua* was founded in Ruijin in December 1931 and was the CCP’s organ in the Soviet until October 1934, when the Long March began.

<sup>87</sup> A complete list of the publications produced in the Jiangxi Soviet can be found in section two of Yan Fan. *Zhongyang geming genjudi xinwen chuban shi*.

<sup>88</sup> See Gao Hua. *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de*, ch.1.

more stable and permanent structures. It was only at Yan'an that such a structure emerged. When the CCP was forced to abandon the Jiangxi Soviet area and set out on the Long March in November 1934, most of the propaganda work in Jiangxi was discontinued or destroyed.<sup>89</sup>

It was in Yan'an that the CCP was provided with all the necessary conditions to develop a unified propaganda sector with both sufficient centralization and the differentiation necessary for institutional depth, and it was here that the Chinese media concept took shape. First and foremost, the CCP controlled a sizeable geographical area, the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Area (*Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu* 陕甘宁边区), inhabited by a population that amounted to 1.5 million in the early 1940s.<sup>90</sup> Secondly, the Party enjoyed the benefits of the armistice peace with the GMD, result of December, 1936, Xi'an incident and of the outbreak of the war with Japan. While the alliance with the GMD was shaky at best and hostilities, both armed and in word, were the order of the day, the GMD had to refrain from major advances against the CCP's main base area in Northern Shaanxi, a situation very different from the constant campaigns against the Jiangxi Soviet in the early 1930s. Furthermore, the participation in the coalition government provided the CCP with a degree of legality that also made possible, for example, the publication of *Xinhua ribao* 新华日报 in Chongqing as the official CCP newspaper in the GMD-controlled areas.<sup>91</sup> The willingness of both sides to respect the mutual agreements was rather low, and the CCP reacted to GMD censorship of its Chongqing press with a ban on GMD newspapers in the Yan'an area.<sup>92</sup> The third factor that contributed to the rapid and vigorous development of Yan'an was, paradoxically, the showdown taking place within the CCP leadership,

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<sup>89</sup> While Chinese sources such as *Zuzhishi ziliao* list the Party structures that were decided at various conferences during the Long March, I consider these to be rather theoretical in nature, serving mainly to clarify the power relationships among the leadership. On the march, the CCP did not find the conditions to set up the long-term bureaucratic structures in the propaganda sector that this section is concerned with.

<sup>90</sup> See Schran. *Guerrilla Economy*, p. 15-21 and table on p. 20.

<sup>91</sup> *Xinhua ribao*, an official organ of the CCP, was founded in Wuhan in January 1938 and was closed down by GMD authorities in February 1947. During most of the period of CCP-GMD cooperation, *Xinhua ribao* was the only legal publication of the Communist Party.

<sup>92</sup> On the constant disputes in Chongqing see "Kangzhan shiqi chubanjie fan chajin jinian (1937-1945)" in Song Yuanfang (ed.). *Zhongguo chuban shiliao: Xiandai bufen*. Ji'nan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001, vol. 2, p. 73-86; see esp. the years 1941-1945. On the close supervision of the press circulating in the Shaan-Gan-Ning border area see "Zhongyang xuanchuanbu guanyu kang Ri genjudi baozhi zazhi de zhishi" in XGWX, vol. 2, p. 263-65.

as Mao moved aggressively to consolidate his position by redefining policy packages and reshuffling the institutional structure of the CCP.<sup>93</sup> The above factors found in Northern Shaanxi provided favourable conditions for the CCP. The Yan'an era became a time of intensive Party-building and theoretical reflection and evolution;<sup>94</sup> Yan'an served as a laboratory for all kinds of institutional and policy experiments.<sup>95</sup>

From the institutional perspective, the most important development in the CCP's evolution in the Yan'an era was an organizational reshuffle decided at a Politburo meeting on March 16-20, 1943. The reorganization, consolidating the outcomes of the Rectification Campaign (*Zhengfeng yundong* 整风运动),<sup>96</sup> radically reduced the confusing number of CCP organizations and institutions that had grown since 1937 into a labyrinth of all kinds of departments, committees, and commissions, many of them short-lived and with overlapping functions, thus reduplicating other bodies. The restructuring, part of the movement "to streamline the military and administrative structure" (*jing bing jian zheng* 精兵简政), was intended to "make the setup of the Central organs simpler and more flexible, and to unify and concentrate [their] power, in order to strengthen the effectiveness of the Centre's leadership."<sup>97</sup> The 1943 reorganization was a key event in the Party-building efforts of the Yan'an era.

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<sup>93</sup> A precondition for this to happen was that the most important CCP leaders had, for the first time in a decade, the chance to meet face-to-face. This argument is made in Kampen. *The Chinese Communist Leadership*, ch. 5. The December conference of 1937 brought together, for the first time in more than a decade, the entire Politburo (with the exception of Kai Feng, who was overseeing the CCP's Wuhan bureau, and Wang Jiaxiang, who was still in Moscow). The 6<sup>th</sup> CC plenum in fall 1938 again united the Party leadership (Ren Bishi was in Moscow and Zhang Guotao had already left Yan'an after falling out with the rest of the CCP leaders).

<sup>94</sup> Institution building, however, took time. In 1940, an observer who had just returned from a lengthy stay in the Soviet Union was appalled by the improvised manner in which the Central Party apparatus was run, speaking of a "mobile-war kind of work style" (*youji zuofeng*). See Shi Zhe. *Zai lishi juren shenbian: Shi Zhe huiyilu*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1991, p. 163f.

<sup>95</sup> This point is made in Mark Selden. *The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1971, and Selden. *China in Revolution: The Yanan Way Revisited*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995.

<sup>96</sup> On the Yan'an Rectification Campaign see Gao Hua. *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de*; Compton. *Mao's China: Party Reform Documents, 1942-44*; Selden. *China in Revolution: The Yanan Way Revisited*, ch. 6; Saich. *The Rise to Power of the Chinese Communist Party*, ch. G; See also Kampen. *The Chinese Communist Leadership*, ch. 6. The next chapter will discuss the campaign and its impact on the CCP media in more detail.

<sup>97</sup> See "Zhongyang guanyu Zhongyang jigou tiaozheng ji jingjian de jue ding" (dated March 20, 1943) in *Zuzhishi ziliao* 13.619-23, here p. 619.

A main result of the restructuring was the introduction of two new committees directly under the Politburo, the Organization Committee (*Zuzhi weiyuanhui* 组织委员会) and the Propaganda Committee (*Xuanchuan weiyuanhui* 宣传委员会). All other organs were disbanded or merged, and the remaining ten bodies were placed under the guidance of the two new, all-powerful bodies (see chart 1).<sup>98</sup> The “two wings” of Party work now emerged in form of two compact, authoritative policy formulation and decision making centres.<sup>99</sup> Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 was named secretary of the Organization Committee, and Mao Zedong assumed the leading position in the Propaganda Committee, thus consolidating his power after the Rectification Campaign.<sup>100</sup>

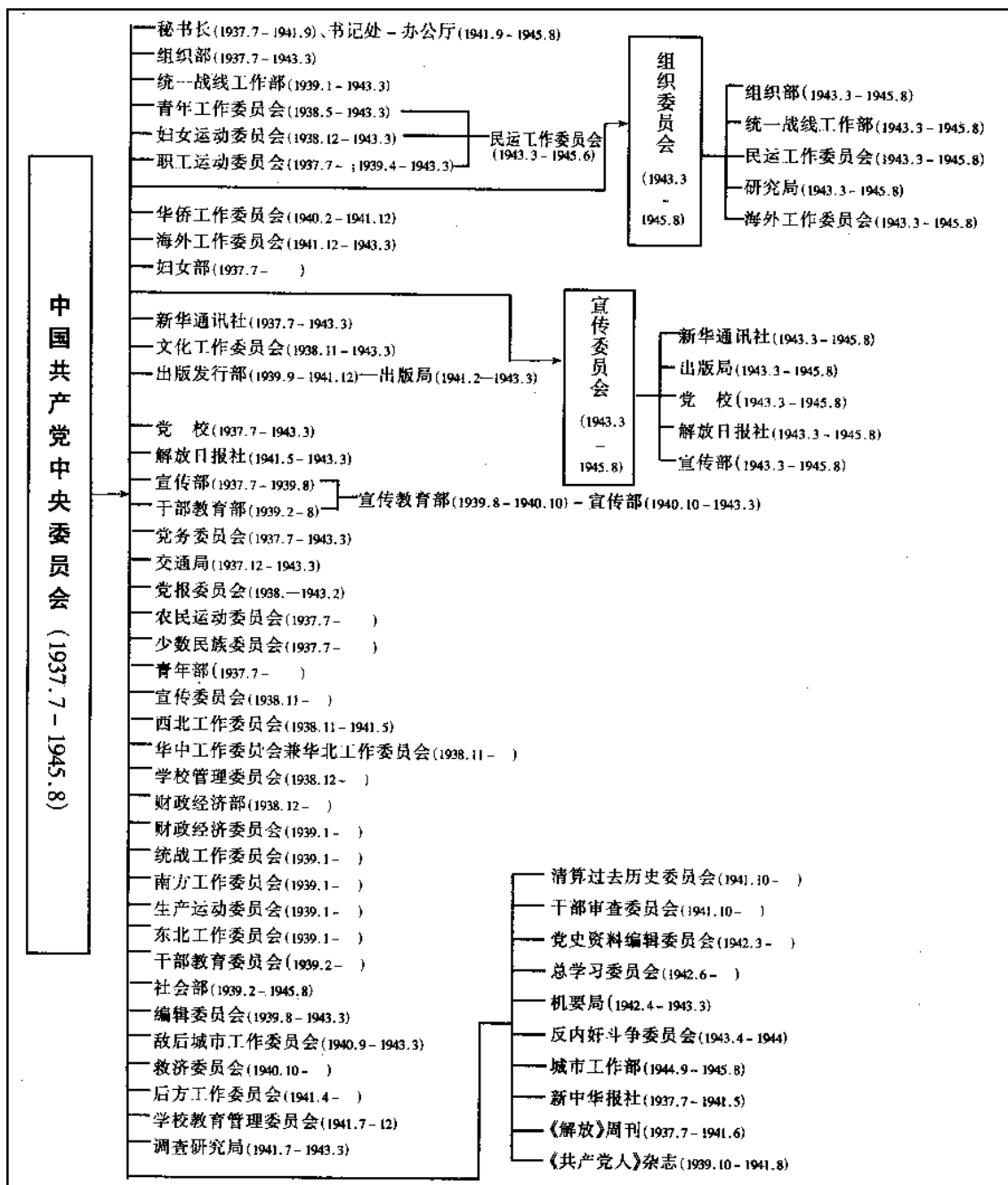
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<sup>98</sup> The Organization Committee and the Propaganda Committee appear to be extraordinarily powerful at least formally. According to Gao Hua, however, real power rested with the General Study Committee (Zong xuexi weiyuanhui 总学习委员会) and its delegate committees within numerous other *danweis* in Yan'an. This informal and secretive body has received only scant attention in *Zuzhishi ziliao* (5.55); yet it is said to have been the actual centre of power and decision-making after the beginning of the Rectification Campaign, when most other organs ceased to function regularly. See *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de*, p. 470. With Mao Zedong in charge of both the General Study Committee and the Propaganda Committee, the result may have been the same.

<sup>99</sup> From the 1930s through the 1950s, committees (*weiyuanhui* 委员会) play a different role in CCP politics than departments (*bu* 部) or bureaus (*ju* 局). With the single exception of the CC, committees are rather informal bodies; they tend to have a larger number of members with a broader background, often coming from a number of other institutions that are in some way concerned by the work of the committee in question. For example, the Party Paper Committee (*Dangbao weiyuanhui* 党报委员会, 1939-1943) was composed of leading cadres from the PD, all major Party papers, and from the Cultural Work Committee (*Wenhua gongzuo weiyuanhui* 文化工作委员会). Sometimes committees have been single-issue commissions, not much different from working conferences. A seven-member Propaganda Committee (*Xuanchuan weiyuanhui* 宣传委员会, not to be confused with the powerful 1943 body of the same name) is said to have been established in November 1938. *Zuzhishi ziliao*, however, is unable to provide a date for the abolition of this body – its existence was probably simply forgotten in the organizational jungle of the early Yan'an era. The fact that committees normally do not issue official documents – these are relegated to the departments and bureaus in question – confirms their less institutionalized character, showing that committees normally do not have permanent working staff. The same seems to be true for the powerful Organization and Propaganda Committees that are organs of oversight and control rather than permanent working bodies; as such, they are similar in structure and function to the “leading (small) groups” (*lingdao xiaozu* 领导小组) in the PRC. As gremiums of consultation and policy-making, however, the influence of these committees should not be underestimated. Fitzgerald makes a similar point for the GMD in the mid-1920s. See *Awakening China*, p. 238.

<sup>100</sup> The meeting of March 16-20, 1943, not only reformed the institutional structure of the CCP, but also appointed a new leadership; it was thus “one of the most important meetings in CCP history.” See Kampen. *The Chinese Communist Leadership*, p. 104.

Chart 1: CCP CC working bodies, 1937-1945



Source: Zuzhishi ziliao (CD-ROM edition). Compare the print ed., vol. 5 p. 64.



The Propaganda Committee exercised control over five major institutions: the Xinhua News Agency; *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报, the organ of the CC; the Publishing Bureau (*Chubanju* 出版局); the PD, now with the Compilation and Translation Bureau (*Bianyisuo* 编译所) as a subordinate agency; and the Party school (*Dangxiao* 党校). The PD was instructed to “give guidance to propaganda and education, to [oversee] the work of the Compilation and Translation Bureau, and to directly manage the [cadre] studies in the Yan’an Rectification [Campaign] and the education of active cadres,”<sup>101</sup> promoting the PD to special importance. Another organ, the Cultural Work Committee (*Wenhua gongzuo weiyuanhui* 文化工作委员会), responsible for questions of literature and art, is said to have been placed under the authority of the Propaganda Committee.<sup>102</sup> The Committee was designed as a small, compact leading group with only four members: Mao Zedong as head; Bo Gu 博古 (Qin Bangxian 秦邦宪), who was nominally in charge of the Xinhua news agency and *Jiefang ribao*; Wang Jiaxiang 王稼祥; and Kai Feng 凯丰, who had headed the Cultural Work Committee before the 1943 reshuffle.

The Propaganda Committee’s task was outlined in the March 20 “Decision:”<sup>103</sup>

To unify and concentrate the management of propaganda and education affairs, to study all kinds of concrete policies in the field of propaganda and education, and, according to the nature [of these issues], to provide the Politburo and the Secretariat with proposals and suggestions concerning propaganda and education policy. [The Propaganda Committee] has decision-making power concerning day-to-day questions of propaganda and education; it will delegate the implementation [of these decisions] to the different departments and committees under its supervision, and report to the [CC] Secretariat those questions that have already been decided.

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<sup>101</sup> “Zhongyang guanyu Zhongyang jigou tiaozheng ji jingjian de jue ding” in *Zuzhishi ziliao* 13.619. According to Gao Hua, actual power on matters of study rested with the General Study Commission. *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de*, p. 470-79.

<sup>102</sup> See *Zuzhishi ziliao* 5.57. The Cultural Work Committee (shorthand *Wenwei* 文委) had existed since November 1938 and had been led since July 1941 by Kai Feng, who assumed a position on the Propaganda Committee in 1943. There is, however, no information available on the composition and leadership of the *Wenwei*, neither is it included in the general organization charts, so it may have ceased to function after 1943, when the Rectification moved into the high-pitched “rescue phase” (see Gao Hua. *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de*, ch.13). The *Wenwei* was entrusted to “manage [the activities] of the [All-China federation of anti-Japanese literature and art circles (Quanguo wenyijie kang Ri lianhehui 全国文艺界抗日联合会)] in support of the [Shaan-Gan-Ning] border area” (*Wenkang yuan bianqu guanli* 文抗援边区管理). “Zhongyang guanyu Zhongyang jigou tiaozheng ji jingjian de jue ding” in *Zuzhishi ziliao* 13.619.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

The Propaganda Committee thus assumed the highest authority over the entire field of propaganda and over all institutions involved; in addition, responsibility for all questions of education, and, most importantly, cadre education, was handed over to the Committee. The decision to merge the propaganda and education policy fields came at a crucial point of time: to be in charge of both sectors at the height of the Rectification Campaign provided the Committee with a decisive leverage of power. In effect, however, the March 1943 reforms handed the highest control to Mao himself: since the other three members were still under attack or had taken lengthy sick leaves, Mao controlled the Propaganda Committee, and thus, all subordinate organs, almost single-handedly.<sup>104</sup> Propaganda and education were now under the effective and unified control of the propaganda authorities for the first time; they were to remain a combined portfolio for decades to come: while the Propaganda Committee was formerly abolished at the Seventh Party Congress in 1945, the functions of the PD were upgraded and thereafter comprised the control over issues of education, textbooks, and cadre training. The departments and bureaus that were united under the Propaganda Committee in Yan'an have remained closely related, mostly through personnel serving in concurrent positions, and have since been part of what is generally referred to as the propaganda *xitong*, as introduced above.

The institutional restructuring of March 1943 certainly is a road mark in the evolution of the propaganda sector. However, to identify this date as the beginning of an integrated set of institutions held together by the idea of a propaganda concept would go too far. Rather, the propaganda sector had emerged gradually since the late 1930s. This becomes evident when we examine the personnel structure of the various departments, committees, bureaus, and other institutions that were merged in 1943 and put under the control of the Propaganda Department: the practice of CCP cadres to hold concurrent posts allows us to

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<sup>104</sup> Bo Gu had been severely criticised and was in a passive position; Wang Jiaxiang had been attacked, too, and had taken ill leave in Feb. 1943 (see Xu Zehao (ed.). *Wang Jiaxiang nianpu, 1906-1974*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2001, p. 333f); Kai Feng had been attacked and was ill at the time in question, thus leaving Mao alone in command of the propaganda sector. See Gao Hua. *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de*, p. 617f. Kai Feng's sickness is confirmed by Cao Jinjie. "Mao Zedong chu shi Tian Jiaying" in *Mishu zhi you* 2004.3, p. 39f. According to Hu Qiaomu (secretary of the Propaganda Committee), it was himself who was in charge of day-to-day affairs on behalf of Wang Jiaxiang and Mao. "Hu Qiaomu huiyi Yan'an zhengfeng (xia)" in *Dang de wenxian*, 1994.2, p. 59-71, here p. 60.

draw conclusions concerning the coherence of the formerly distinct propaganda institutions. Chart 2 is based on the posts held by leading members of twenty institutions from the period of July 1937 to March 1943. It reveals a relatively small number of 29 persons in key positions in these twenty institutions over the given period. More importantly, two personnel clusters emerge, roughly divided by the Yan'an Rectification Campaign in 1941 and 1942, when personnel changes

**Chart 2: Leading Personnel of CCP Propaganda Institutions, 1937-1943**

Name	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	After 1943
Liao Chengzhi 廖承志	x							
Luo Ruiqing 罗瑞卿		x						
Pan Hannian 潘汉年		x	x					
Chen Changhao 陈昌浩	x	xx	x					
Wang Xuewen 王学文		x	x					
Sha Kefu 沙可夫	x	xx	x	x	x			
Xiang Zhonghua 向仲华	x	x	x	xx	xx			
Wang Ming 王明		x	x	x	x	x		
Kang Sheng 康生		x	x	x	x	x		
Chen Yun 陈云		x	x	x	x			
Cheng Fangwu 成仿吾		x	x	x	x			
Li Fuchun 李富春		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Zhou Yang 周扬		x	xx	x	x	x	x	
Zhang Wentian 张闻天	xx	xxxx	xxxxx xx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xx		
Wang Jiaxiang 王稼祥		xx	xx	xx	xx	x		o
Li Weihai 李维汉	x	x	xxxx	xxx	xxx	x	x	x
Yang Song 杨松	x	xxxx	xxx	xx	xxx	xx		
Wu Liangping 吴亮平	x	xxxx	xx	x	xxx	xxx	xx	
Ai Siqi 艾思奇		x	x	x	xxx	xxx	xxx	x
Chen Boda 陈伯达		xx	x	x	xx	xxx	xx	
Kai Feng 凯丰	x				xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	o
Bo Gu 博古					xxx	xxxx	xxxx	xxo
Xu Teli 徐特立						xx	xx	x
Lu Dingyi 陆定一						xxx	xx	xx
Mao Zedong 毛泽东			x		x	x	x	xo
Zhao Yimin 赵毅敏			x	x	x			x
Hu Qiaomu 胡乔木						x	x	
Deng Fa 邓发						x	x	
Tao Zhu 陶铸						x		

Source: compiled after *Zuzhishi ziliao* 5.35-64 and CD-ROM edition.

Note:

Each **X** stands for one position the person in question held in the respective year in the institutions belonging to the propaganda *xitong*.

The members of the 1943 Propaganda Committee are marked by an **O**.

The last column (**After 1943**) indicates the situation after the March 20, 1943 organizational restructuring.

occurred in several key institutions, resulting from the power struggles within the CCP and the consolidation of Mao's power.<sup>105</sup>

The earlier cluster is composed of five persons holding usually two to four posts at any given time between 1938 and 1941 (Zhang Wentian 张闻天 held up to seven positions); together, they formed a network linking all important propaganda institutions of that time, with the exception of the Xinhua news agency and the *Xin Zhonghua bao* 新中华报 newspaper that were both led by Xiang Zhonghua 向仲华 (who had no posts otherwise),<sup>106</sup> and the Party school. The Party school, with Deng Fa 邓发 in charge,<sup>107</sup> was part of the organization *xitong*, and was not formally included in the propaganda sector until 1943. Only during the Rectification Campaign, when propaganda and cadre education worked hand in hand, did the Party's highest organ of education come under the control of the propaganda authorities.<sup>108</sup> With these two exceptions, the entire press and publishing operations of the CCP, as well as the PD and the institutions responsible for education, were linked by a few leading cadres, most notably by Zhang Wentian, who was nominally still the Party leader. This kind of linkage can be traced back to as early as 1938.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Reshuffles occurred in the Xinhua News Agency in November 1941, in the Party Newspaper Committee in March 1942, for *Jiefang ribao* with its inception in May 1941, in the Publishing Department in December 1941, in the Editorial Committee in September 1941, in the Propaganda Department in January 1942, in the Party school in February 1942, and in the *Wenwei* in August 1941. These changes confirm Thomas Kampen's argument that the Rectification Movement had started long before Mao made his key rectification speeches in spring 1942.

<sup>106</sup> Xiang Zhonghua (1911-1981) had led the *Hongse Zhonghua* newspaper in the Jiangxi Soviet and continued in this position in Yan'an; however, he was too junior a figure to exert real influence. After 1941 he was appointed to military positions and withdrew from civil propaganda affairs.

<sup>107</sup> Deng Fa (1906-1946) was one of the few CCP leaders with a worker background. His star had been in decline within the Party ever since 1935, and his appointment to the Party school, an institution of minor importance in the early Yan'an era, was seen as another act of demotion. See Gao Hua. *Hong taiyang shi zanyang shengqi de*, p. 377-82.

<sup>108</sup> In informal arrangements, however, the Party School could be found in the propaganda sector as early as 1940, with Zhang Wentian in charge. See Shi Zhe. *Zai lishi juren shenbian*, p. 163. The importance of the Party school was raised at the start of the Rectification movement, when it was made the centre of rectification for medium and high-level cadres, many of whom had been recalled to Yan'an in the wake of the campaign, presumably to participate in the 7<sup>th</sup> Party congress. Gao Hua. *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de*, p. 377-78; 527-34. After 1949, the Central Party school moved back to the organization apparatus; all other educational institutions, however, remained in the propaganda *xitong*.

<sup>109</sup> Chart 2 shows the distribution of portfolios and responsibilities; it does not, however, reflect the power structure within the CCP as a whole. As Stalin's unofficial emissary, Wang Ming, after his return from Moscow in Nov. 1937, enjoyed considerably more prestige than the tabulation of the propaganda institutions suggest. During the second period, Kang Sheng's influence in top decision-

Personnel changes started in the second half of 1941. At the enlarged Politburo meeting in September, Zhang Wentian was forced to admit political errors (Zhang and Wang Ming 王明 were the main targets of criticism during this stage of the campaign). Shortly thereafter, he enlisted to become head of a rural inspection team and left Yan'an in January 1942 for a tour of the rural areas of the border region, thus avoiding further criticism. He consequently gave up most of his posts.<sup>110</sup> Wang Jiaxiang was active into early 1943 when deteriorating health forced him to abandon most of his work; he did not participate in political work since summer 1943.<sup>111</sup> Li Weihai 李维汉 continued to serve on the PD and was confirmed as vice-head of the PD after the reorganization in March 1943. He gave up, however, his other posts in the propaganda sector, as the focus of his attention shifted to united front work, the portfolio with which he has been identified after 1946.<sup>112</sup> The other two persons in the earlier cluster, Yang Song 杨松 and Wu Liangping 吴亮平 were not senior enough to occupy top positions; both usually served as vice-heads or members of committees and departments in the propaganda sector and thus had important coordinating functions. Yang died in 1942 from tuberculosis, while Wu Liangping continued to work in medium-level positions. He survived the Rectification campaign and was indeed the only person

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making was crucial; his power base was located in the Social Affairs Department (Shehui bu 社会部), not in the propaganda *xitong*.

<sup>110</sup> His reports on these tours are collected in Zhang Wentian xuanji zhuanji zu et al (ed.). *Zhang Wentian Jin Shan diaocha wenji*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1994. Zhang was allowed to remain on the PB even after the 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congress but was given no positions of responsibility. His last posts were that as head of the Party Newspaper Committee, which he ceded to Bo Gu in February 1942, and as chief of the PD, where Kai Feng took over in January the same year. On his self-criticism see his biography in *Zhonggong dangshi renwu zhuan*, vol. 52, p. 1-86, here p. 51. See also Gao Hua. *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de*, p. 284.

<sup>111</sup> See Xu Zehao. *Wang Jiaxiang nianpu*, p. 332ff. Compare also. Shi Changwang. *Wang Jiaxiang zhuan*. Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 2003. Wang did not fall out with Mao, however. According to an often-cited anecdote, it was Mao who urged the delegates of the 7<sup>th</sup> Party congress in 1945 to elevate Wang to alternate membership on the CC when he had initially failed to be re-elected due to his long absence from the political stage.

<sup>112</sup> In Yan'an, United Front Work (*tongyi zhanxian gongzuo* 统一战线工作) meant chiefly the cooperation with the GMD. Since 1949, the CCP's United Front Work Department (Tongzhanbu 统战部) coordinates the cooperation with the "democratic" parties in the CCP's "coalition government" and those sectors of the bourgeoisie classified as the "national bourgeoisie." United Front Work was of paramount importance under Mao's concept of "New Democracy" but declined in significance after the mid-1950s. Li Weihai, in Yan'an a staunch supporter of Mao, headed the United Front Work Department from 1948 until late 1964. Cf. his memoirs: *Huiyi yu yanjiu*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, 1986, 2 vols.

of the first cluster who can be found in the second cluster. In August 1942, however, he was assigned work in Shanxi and transferred out of Yan'an.<sup>113</sup>

With seven persons, the second cluster is slightly larger than the first. Of these, only three had been identified in positions in the area of propaganda before 1941. Both Chen Boda 陈伯达 and Ai Siqi 艾思奇 owed their rise to their performance in the Rectification Campaign.<sup>114</sup> None of the four others had been in propaganda functions in the central Party leadership prior to 1941. Kai Feng and Bo Gu had been in Chongqing, where they had led the Propaganda Department and the Organization Department, respectively, of the CCP South China Bureau (Nanfangju 南方局); they were transferred back to Yan'an in November 1940, a transfer that did not extend but rather curtail their influence.<sup>115</sup> Lu Dingyi, in contrast, was a close follower of Mao. He had fought with the Eighth Route Army in the Taihang 太行 area, where he was responsible for propaganda. He was recalled to Yan'an only in early 1941.<sup>116</sup> Xu Teli, one of the Party elders and a one-time teacher of Mao in Hunan, was recalled to Yan'an in summer 1940 to build up several institutions of higher education until he was promoted to positions in the propaganda sector, yet he did never exercise real power there.<sup>117</sup>

For the second period in question, from the beginning of the Rectification Campaign to the PB meeting on March 20, 1943, that established the Propaganda Committee, a pattern similar to that of the earlier period emerges: a small number of key personnel in medium and top-positions of practically all institutions of the propaganda sector; these institutions are linked together into a tight network through concurrent appointments.<sup>118</sup> After March 1943, a degree of continuity was

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<sup>113</sup> See Yang Song's biography in *Zhonggong dangshi renwu zhuan*, vol. 25, p. 176-95. Yang had worked closely with Bo Gu. There is little biographical material on Wu Liangping.

<sup>114</sup> Chen Boda had been Mao's Political Secretary (*Zhengzhi mishu* 政治秘书) since 1937. On him see Wylie. *The Emergence of Maoism*. On Ai Siqi see Joshua Fogel. *Ai Ssu-ch'i's Contribution to the Development of Chinese Marxism*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1987.

<sup>115</sup> On Kai Feng see *Zhonggong dangshi renwu zhuan*, vol. 52, p. 166-189; Bo Gu's biography is in *ibid.*, vol. 53, p. 1-51.

<sup>116</sup> See Chen Qingquan, Song Guangwei. *Lu Dingyi zhuan*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1999, p. 221-92. This volume gives much information on Lu's activities in publishing and propaganda.

<sup>117</sup> Xu Teli had been in Yan'an before; prior to his August 1940 move there, he had frequently travelled between Yan'an, Chongqing, Hengyang, and Changsha. See Chen Zhiming. *Xu Teli zhuan*. Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1984, ch. 10. On his activities in Yan'an see Wang Yunfeng (ed.). *Xu Teli zai Yan'an*. Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1991.

<sup>118</sup> An exception again was the Party School that was formally included into the propaganda apparatus only after March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1943.

achieved, as the people of the second cluster assumed the top positions in the Propaganda Committee and the organs under its supervision, and held these through the turbulent later phases of the Rectification campaign until the 7<sup>th</sup> Party congress in 1945. After 1949, at least four of the second group continued to work in high-level positions in the propaganda sector: Lu Dingyi was head of the PD until the eve of the Cultural Revolution in 1966; both Xu Teli and Chen Boda were PD vice-heads for the same period; and Kai Feng, who had initially served in Northeast China after the founding of the PRC, was made a PD vice-head, too, from 1952 until his death in early 1955 (he concurrently served as head of the Marxism-Leninism Institute). The ideologue Ai Siqi moved from his positions at *Jiefang ribao* further into the field of theory and became vice-head of the Higher Party School in 1959. Bo Gu, whom Mao had forgiven his earlier “mistakes,” died in the tragic airplane accident of April 1946 that also killed Deng Fa 邓发, Wang Ruofei 王若飞, and Ye Ting 叶挺, the “April 8 martyrs.”

We thus find in the Yan’an period an accumulation of institutions that gradually grew closer and by 1943 were identified as the propaganda sector, placed under the unified leadership of the Propaganda Committee and Mao, and integrated through concurrent personnel appointments.<sup>119</sup> This matrix of institutions and personnel reached a much higher degree of integration than had been the case in earlier times, when individual Party leaders had unified different propaganda-related functions, yet without the surrounding institutional apparatus. Within the propaganda portfolio, from the Yan’an era until the present, we thus find the daily and the periodical press, publishing, broadcasting and film – the institutions usually identified as the media.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> The CCP took much longer to arrive at such a point than other socialist nations, where the Soviet Union exercised more direct influence on the process of institution building. In Eastern Germany, for example, an institutional structure controlling the media was in place 1947, two years after the end of World War II, and even before the founding of the German Democratic Republic. See Gunter Holzweißig. *Die schärfste Waffe der Partei: Eine Mediengeschichte der DDR*. Köln: Böhlau, 2002; on the formation of the organs of media control see ch. 1, as well as the chart on p. 217.

<sup>120</sup> This construction continues into the present. Compare chart 3: Organizational makeup of the CCP PD after 1994.

### *Dimensions of Propaganda*

In the preceding section, I have explained why it is necessary to take a different approach to the Chinese media, and I have introduced the propaganda *xitong* and traced its development. I will now go on to examine the components of this *xitong*: this section will investigate the different media and their particular characteristics in the Chinese imaginaire, while the last section will turn to those areas of the propaganda *xitong* that are not covered by the English term “media.” These elements are, however, crucial to understand the Chinese conception of what the media are and what they are supposed to be.

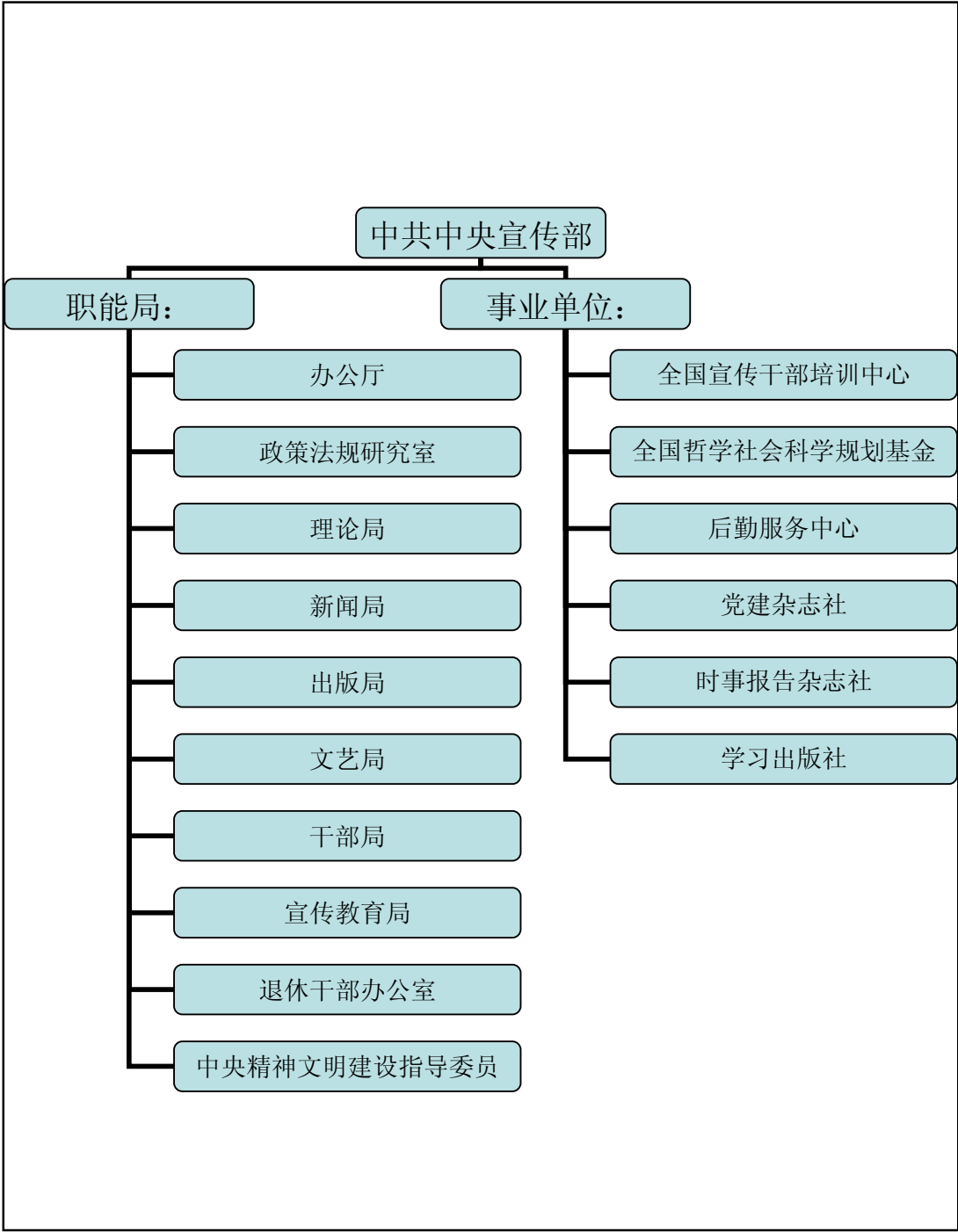
The propaganda *xitong* that had emerged in the 1940s has in general been characterized by organizational stability. While institutions have been in flux throughout the PRC, the propaganda sector as such has remained relatively stable. The highest political body in the propaganda *xitong* after 1945 has been the Propaganda Department of the Party’s Central Committee, one of the “five big departments” under the CC.<sup>121</sup> The PD oversees a vast number of activities, as can be seen from its substructure. While the PD’s organizational composition has changed over time, a number of key competences can be isolated that have been relatively stable; usually, a bureau (*ju* 局) is entrusted with the coordination of activities of a distinct field. The activities normally associated with the concept of “media” are found in the bureaus for news, publishing, broadcasting, and film. I will now turn to these functions within the PD. In the course of the discussion I will pay attention to a problem noted earlier: differences in terminology between Chinese and English can indicate problems of conceptualization in different contexts. Although most of the Chinese terms in this field are Western imports (via Japan), they cannot be regarded as direct substitutions for the Western terms in question. In some cases, the differences created by translation are minimal; in other cases, however, they are quite substantial. In the light of the organization chart of the

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<sup>121</sup> The “five big departments” are the PD, the Organization Department, the United Front Work Department, the International Liaison Department (Duiwai lianluobu 对外联络部), and the Central Investigation Department (Zhongyang diaochabu 中央调查部). Personal conversation with Michael Schoenhals. See also Kampen “The CCP’s Central Committee Departments.” Not all of the five departments did already exist in 1945.



Chart 3: Organizational Makeup of the CCP PD (1994)



Source: compiled after *Zuzhishi ziliao* 11.231

CCP PD,<sup>122</sup> a number of key terms used in English literature on the media therefore need to be discussed such as to determine the exact meaning of the Chinese terms.

The *Xinwen ju* 新闻局 is responsible mainly for newspapers. There is a problem with the word *xinwen*, usually translated as “news.” *Xinwen* is used in two different ways: first, it indicates a specific kind of content that may appear in a newspaper, such as in *guoji xinwen* 国际新闻 (International news). It is in this way that Chinese dictionaries usually define *xinwen*: “a report on events happened recently. To become news, events must undergo selection by the person transmitting them and be spread in a timely fashion through language, writing, pictures and other carriers. ‘Event,’ ‘report,’ and ‘timeliness’ are the three factors that compose news.”<sup>123</sup> The second usage is similar to the English “news” in “news media,” yet with the important difference that it indicates newspapers only (sometimes also the periodical press), but not broadcasting. *Xinwen* is thus a generic term that figures on a higher plane than newspapers, as table 4b tries to visualize. The function of the CCP PD *xinwen ju*, or the News Bureau, must be understood in this way. In Chinese official use, such as in *xinwen chuban* 新闻出版, *xinwen* refers to the print news media only (for this and the following distinctions, see Chart 4a and 4b: Media Terminology in English and Chinese). *Xinwen* had been an autochthonous term that had acquired the meaning “news” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It must be considered a semantic loan in the same way as *xinwenzhi* 新闻纸, a literal translation of “news-paper.” In analogy to *xinwenzhi*, the word *baozhi* 报纸 was formed, a term that replaced *xinwenzhi* only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>124</sup> In modern China, *baozhi* is defined as “a periodical publication carrying primarily news and commentaries. As a rule, it is published daily. It is an important tool for class struggle, propaganda, and education.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> For the following discussion, compare both chart 3 (organization of the PD since 1997) and chart 5 (the PD 1951-1954). Both are based on *Zuzhishi ziliao*, where more information on institutional evolution of the PD can be found.

<sup>123</sup> See ZDBQ, *Xinwen chuban juan*, p. 395. Other definitions, such as those in *Cihai*, do also stress the class character of news.

<sup>124</sup> On the evolution of these terms see Masini. *The Formation of Modern Chinese Lexicon*, p. 143-44, and p. 159.

<sup>125</sup> *Cihai: 1965 nian xinbianben* (1979 printing), p. 1264. The 1965 edition is particularly interesting, as it reflects the official positions and definitions of the early 1960s. Due to the onslaught of the

The terminological and organizational subordination of the periodical press (excluding newspapers) in China has been less clear than that of newspapers. In CCP terminology, the former are referred to as *qikan* 期刊 (periodicals) or *zazhi* 杂志 (magazines), *qikan* being the more official term.<sup>126</sup> Sometimes the periodical press is also called *baokan* 报刊, a term that more often serves as a generic term for newspapers and periodicals (shorthand for *baozhi qikan* 报纸期刊), especially when periodicals were subsumed under the category of “news” (see chart 4b).

The publishing bureau (Chuban ju 出版局) has jurisdiction over the production of books, and generally also over the periodical press. The word *chuban* 出版 is a loan first used in Japan (Jap. *shuppan*);<sup>127</sup> according to Chinese dictionaries it means “to edit and print writings [*zhuzuowu* 著作物] so that they become books and periodicals [*tushu baokan* 图书报刊].”<sup>128</sup> This dictionary definition is misleading, however, since *chuban* as a technical term never comprises newspapers (*baokan* is here used in the first of the two meanings given in the preceding paragraph). The translation “publishing” is therefore not really satisfactory. Books are usually called *shu* 书 or *shuji* 书籍, both terms of ancient origin but with a rather recent meaning: the mostly thin, thread-bound and wood-printed *juan* 卷 of traditional China had rather little resemblance of the modern commodity of books.<sup>129</sup> The revolution that transformed the traditional *shu* into books in the modern sense was set in motion in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and was completed by the May Fourth era.<sup>130</sup> The modern Chinese *shu*, at least in the official use, does not show much difference from the English ‘book,’ although in

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Cultural Revolution, it was printed only in 1979 in Hong Kong. The official mainland 1979 edition was modified significantly.

<sup>126</sup> *Zazhi* is a return loan that was “an autochthonous neologism invented in China in the 1860s, which later disappeared and was brought back to China from Japan.” Masini. *The Formation of Modern Chinese Lexicon*, p. 212. *Qikan* is modern word that was not in use before the 1940s.

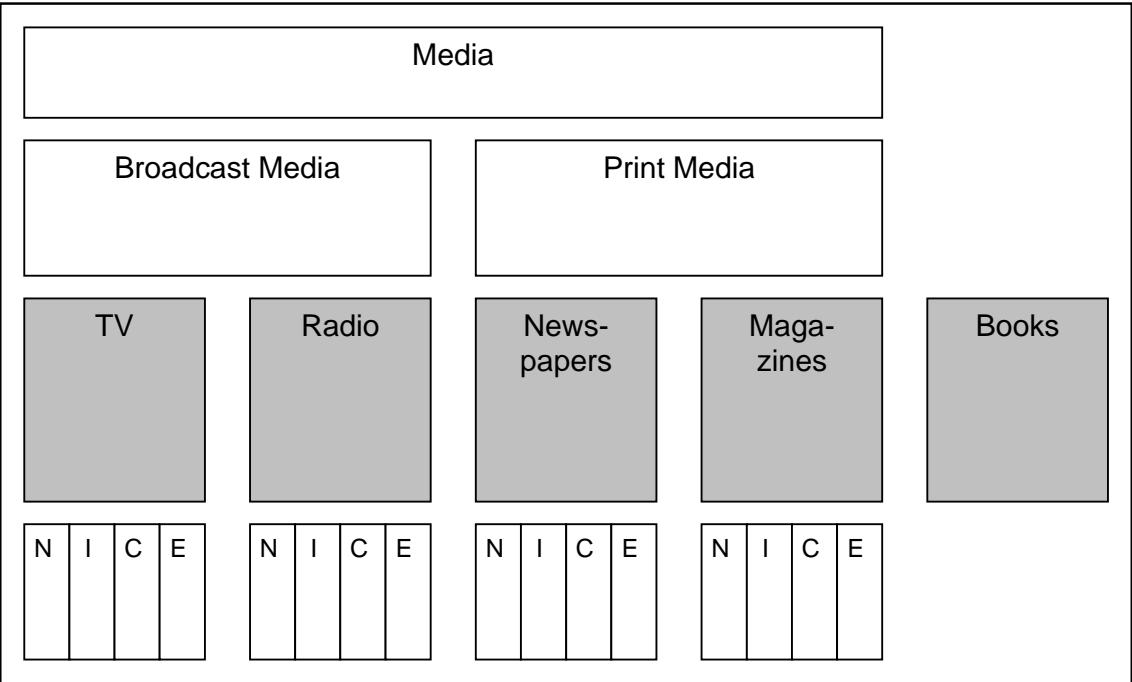
<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>128</sup> *Cihai: 1965 nian xinbianben* (1979 printing), p. 2076.

<sup>129</sup> It may be called to memory that in classical Chinese *shu* usually means “to write” or refers to a piece of calligraphy or a letter (i.e., something written), rather than to a book.

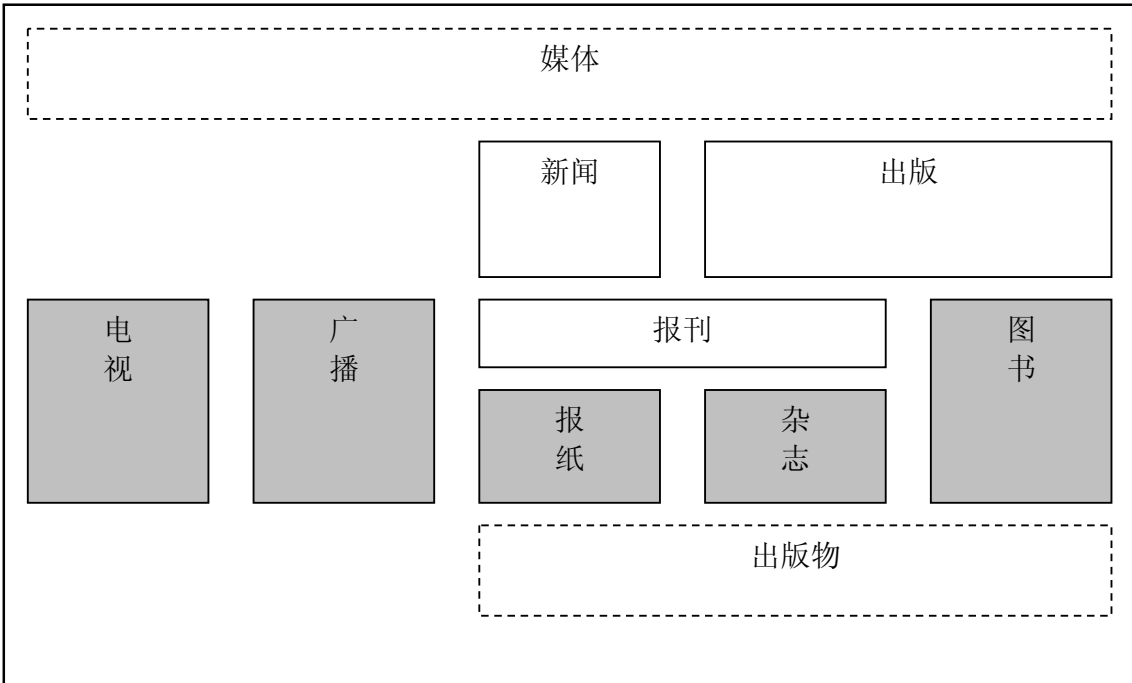
<sup>130</sup> Foreigners in China played a significant role in the changes of the Chinese publishing market, the Shanghai Shenbaoguan 申报馆, run by Ernest Major, being the most active and innovative in this respect. See Rudolf G. Wagner. “Ernest Major’s *Shenbaoguan* and the Formation of Late Qing Print Culture.” MS, Heidelberg, 1998. Similar revolutions had taken place earlier in Europe, when books in the modern sense replaced the hand-copied and leather-bound foliants of the late Middle Ages. See Lucien Febvre, Henri-Jean Martin. *The Coming of the Book: the Impact of Printing, 1450-1800*. London: Verso, 1997.

**Chart 4a: Media Terminology in English**



N = News  
 I = Information  
 C = Commercials  
 E = Entertainment

**Chart 4b: Media Terminology in Chinese**



colloquial language, single periodical issues also might be called *shu*.<sup>131</sup> In Bureaucratese books and periodicals are often referred to as *chubanwu* 出版物, an awkward term that must be rendered as “publications.” It is interesting to see that books are considered to belong to the “Chinese media sector.” The English concept of “mass media” explicitly excludes books, and they are not normally thought to be part of the “media” proper at all. The different treatment in Chinese imagination would not be understandable from a purely linguistic definition of “media,” but becomes visible from the organizational structuring of the political space, dominated by the *xuanchuan* concept.<sup>132</sup>

Within the propaganda sector, the fields of news and publishing have been administered separately for a long time. They were united under a single leadership during certain historical periods, such as in the government apparatus after 1987, when a combined News and Publication Administration (Xinwen chuban shu 新闻出版署) was formed that answers to the State Council. In the Party organization, however, the separation has been upheld (probably because the two sectors do still receive different degrees of attention in the policy formulation process, which is the domain of the Party.). The organizational arrangements reflect shifts in the relative importance of the sectors and changes in the general political atmosphere.

Apart from the media organized in the news and publishing categories, a number of new media have emerged over time, especially after 1949. These were consequently integrated into the existing structures of the PD. The earliest new medium gaining prominence was broadcasting. There had been small radio stations in both the Jiangxi Soviet and in Yan’an that were closely integrated with the local newspapers and news agencies.<sup>133</sup> It was therefore never called into question that radio was part of the propaganda field when the impact of

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<sup>131</sup> For a particularly elaborate and thoughtful definition of books see Zheng Ruqi, Xiao Dongfa. *Zhongguo shushi*. Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1987, p. 1f.

<sup>132</sup> Even in recent Chinese media literature, such as Pan Zhichang, Lin Wei. *Dazhong chuanmei yu dazhong wenhua*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2002, books are still listed among the media.

<sup>133</sup> On broadcasting in Yan’an see Zhao Yuming. *Zhongguo xiandai guangbo jianshi, 1923-1949*. Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1999 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 54-72, and the rich source materials collected in this volume. See also Yang Bo (ed.). *Zhongyang renmin guangbo diantai jianshi*. Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 2000, p. 1-12. In these early years, however, the main function of the Xinhua news and broadcasting service was the collection and transmission of intelligence, as my reading of propaganda sources from the 1930s and 1940s has shown.

broadcasting began to expand with the proliferation of receivers in the late 1950s and it became a mass medium.<sup>134</sup> The same can be said of television, which is very similar to radio broadcasting in technical terms, and which was therefore included in the propaganda sector when it first emerged (see also chapter eight).

Under the PD, a Broadcasting Bureau (*guangbo ju* 广播局) has existed during certain periods (from 1951-1954 in the form of a Newspaper and Broadcasting Bureau (Baozhi guangbo chu 报纸广播处), which was put in charge of radio and TV. Etymological definitions are easier in this case since both *guangbo* 广播 (broadcasting) and *dianshi* 电视 (television) are terms of modern origin. A rather unique feature was the development of wired radio (*you xian guangbo* 有线广播) that was promoted throughout the PRC since 1953 to make up for the lack of expensive equipment. Before and during the Cultural Revolution it became the primary propaganda tool, especially in the countryside.<sup>135</sup> Wired radio, which receives broadcasts aired by far-away radio stations and transmits them to a limited number of households using wire-corded loudspeakers, has always been managed by the Broadcasting bureau. The Bureau also overlooks television broadcasting (including cable and satellite TV). Both radio and TV are characterized by their high efficiency as media that can reach large numbers of recipients (including illiterate recipients that cannot be reached by other media), by the technical and financial expense required (high upfront investments that pay off with increasing numbers of receivers), and by the relative ease with which they can be controlled.

With a similar logic, film (*dianying* 电影)<sup>136</sup> had been placed under the control of the propaganda authorities ever since the CCP's first productions in Yan'an.<sup>137</sup> The nature of film is ambiguous: it is located on the borderline of news media and the field of literature and art. Yet since both had been made part of the

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<sup>134</sup> See the table on the production figures for radio sets in China in Alan P. Liu. *Radio Broadcasting in Communist China*. Cambridge, Ma.: MIT, 1964, p. 26.

<sup>135</sup> Early Western observers in the PRC comment on this technique which has faded into oblivion by most contemporary foreign scholars of the media field. See Alan P. Liu. *Radio Broadcasting in Communist China*, p. 11-20. George P. Jan. "Radio Propaganda in Chinese Villages" in *Asian Survey* 7.5 (1967), p. 305-15.

<sup>136</sup> There are no significant terminological differences between the English "film" and the Chinese *dianying*.

<sup>137</sup> As early as 1938 the CCP had organized a film team in Yan'an that produced mainly documentaries. See Hu Xingliang. *Zhongguo dianying shi*. Beijing: Zhongyang guangbo dianshi daxue chubanshe, 1995, p. 100f.

propaganda sector since the 1940s, the latter through the Yan'an *Wenwei* and the Literature and Art Bureau (*Wenyiju* 文艺局) of the PD today, film has been defined as a medium of propaganda: "Film is the broadest and most popular propaganda and education tool; it is one of the most powerful weapons on the cultural front, that serves proletarian politics, serves the workers, peasants, and soldiers, and serves socialism."<sup>138</sup> Attracting large audiences, film has been especially important for the propaganda sector, yet films also require even higher upfront investments than radio and TV, and need more technical sophistication. For all these reasons, film production in the PRC has always been tightly controlled by the central authorities. Film is indeed the medium most closely watched by the Party.<sup>139</sup>

A pattern of graded control thus emerges from the discussion above: among the different media forms that the single bureaus of the PD oversee, a hierarchy is discernible. At the top of this hierarchy is film, to which the strictest controls apply.<sup>140</sup> The criteria for the severity of control are evidently the number of potential audiences and the popularity of the media. On the next lower level in public impact and popularity ranges TV, with radio closely following. Newspapers range even lower in the hierarchy of controls. They exist in a grey area: successful newspapers can have a very large impact, and especially during high-profile political events the Party imposes strict controls on all central and local newspapers.<sup>141</sup> Especially regional newspapers, however, often manage to achieve a considerable amount of freedom.<sup>142</sup> Editors of journals and magazines,

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<sup>138</sup> *Cihai: 1965 nian xinbianben* (1979 printing), p. 4081.

<sup>139</sup> The potential of the medium of film for propagandistic purposes had been recognized by authoritarian regimes such as the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

<sup>140</sup> The same observation can be made in almost any country. Even in the U.S. and Europe, film is under severe pressure of censorship (for puritanical or other reasons), significantly more so than other media forms. The arguments brought forward are almost exactly the same as those applying in China. Cf. McQuail. *Theory*, p. 153, who quotes the "Motion Picture Code of Conduct" introduced in the U.S. in 1933.

<sup>141</sup> The closing ceremony of the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress is a case in point. On Nov. 15, 2002, in a rare show of unity, all central and local newspapers presented an identical front-page: it contained a unison report, supplied by the Xinhua news agency, accompanied by identical photographs at exactly the same positions on the page. See John Gittings. "New China uses old tactics" in *The Observer*, Nov. 17, 2002.

<sup>142</sup> In the 1990s, newspapers in Guangdong province have profited from the laissez-faire climate the government has advocated there to stimulate economic growth. Newspapers such as the *Yangcheng wanbao* 羊城晚报 and especially *Nanfang zhoumo* 南方周末 have established a reputation for courageous, independent-minded reporting. Yet even these newspapers must move with caution and are otherwise subject to punishments – *Nanfang zhoumo* has seen several purges of its leadership in recent years. On the paper's frequent troubles see, for example, Matthew

in turn, have much more leeway in their work: the highly fragmented market, dominated by rather specialized publications makes all-out control less feasible and less necessary. Books are found at the bottom of the hierarchy, for largely the same reasons. The impact that books can make on the public psyche is reduced by the fact that books are usually consumed in privacy (as opposed to watching TV, for example), and through the sheer number of books that reach market every year: reading preferences are so diverse that books are considered much less prone to exert public influence. Consequently, the controls for them are less severe than for any other medium. Much of what can be written and published in books would be deemed unfit for publication in the other media.<sup>143</sup>

In recent years, a growing number of new media had to be accommodated by the grown structure of the propaganda apparatus. Audiovisual media were few in number before the Cultural Revolution. In the 1980s, they were incorporated into the publishing sector: specialized publishing houses are responsible for the production of music cassettes and compact discs, and these items are listed in government regulations for the publishing sector. The Bureaucratese generic term for audiovisual media is *yinxiang chubanwu* 音像出版物.<sup>144</sup> In the same way, digital publications (*dianzi chubanwu* 电子出版物) were handled. Neither music nor film (in whatever format) nor digital books and compilations are allowed to be published by any unit (*danwei* 单位) other than a registered publishing house that must at least be listed as a co-sponsor.<sup>145</sup> It might be a point of contention whether the music and video industry should be considered part of the media in Western countries; in China, the government has opted to integrate both into existing structures of administration and control as a rather convenient way to accommodate to technical evolution. Only the advent of the Internet has challenged these structures, and chapter nine will explore the ways the Party and government have tried to deal with this challenge.

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Forney. "Killing the Messenger" in *Time*, 18 June, 2001. Compare also Zhu Defu. *Yi wu fan gu: Nanfang zhouno jizhe zhuzhong wu nian bu xi zuji*. Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi chubanshe, 2000.

<sup>143</sup> This hierarchy has been confirmed by several interviewees. Chapter four will discuss the relative impact of different media on varying 'publics.'

<sup>144</sup> See for example the most authoritative guidelines for the publishing sector, "Chuban guanli tiaoli," in effect since 1997 (there is no publishing law in the PRC). Zhongguo chuban gongzuozhe xiehui (ed.). *Zhongguo chuban nianjian 1998*. Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 1999, p. 230-33.

<sup>145</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 230 (article 8).



The Chinese media sector as outlined above is structured in ways different from the same sector in the United States or Europe. An important difference that is not immediately visible concerns the integrated production chain that all sub-sectors in the media sector practice. In the vertical organizational makeup of the PRC, sectors like publishing or news do not just consist of publishing proper, but include practically all the logistics that belong to the same chain of production. In the case of books, for example, this means that publishing (*chuban*, terminologically as well as organizationally) means not only the process of editing a book, but includes its physical production (printing and binding) as well as sales. Thus, among the work units (*danwei*) in the publishing sector, there are not only publishing houses, but also printing plants and enterprises of the entire distribution chain down to retailers. None of the latter would be considered part of the media in the West; yet in the PRC they are part of the overall system of controls. The integrated production chain was introduced into the Chinese media sector in the early 1950s, modelled after the Soviet Union.<sup>146</sup>

Summing up, we can thus say that all of the institutions covered by the English term “media” are organized within the propaganda sector. The makeup of this sector as well as the conceptual structures that were introduced at the beginning of this chapter, are defined along lines different from those in the U.S. and Europe – the structure and the logic of the Chinese media is determined by the propaganda concept. Consequently, the language used to define the individual media differs from the English usages (see chart 4a and 4b). Considering these particularities, which are crucial to understanding the internal dynamics of the Chinese media sector, it might be justified to stick to the Chinese terms throughout in order to avoid their being confused with the foreign concepts. However, since a Pinyinization would make this study all but unreadable, I will leave in place the English terminology. The particular terminological arrangements for key terms which structure the propaganda sector should be kept in mind nevertheless.

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<sup>146</sup> The emergence of the integrated production chain in the publishing sector will be discussed in detail in chapter five.

### *The Construction of Chinese Reality*

In the preceding section I have identified all those elements that are usually thought to belong to the media (and even a few more), all of which are organized in the Chinese propaganda sector. This discussion, however, has taken us only so far: to understand the Chinese media in the way they are seen by practitioners as well as by the CCP itself, it is absolutely necessary to reconstruct at this point the entirety of the propaganda sector, to establish the institutional neighbourhood of the media sector. Policies for the various components within the propaganda *xitong* parallel each other, since they originate from the same logic and have the same objectives. To understand the logic that drives the Chinese media, we thus need a comprehensive perspective of the propaganda *xitong*. In what follows I will give a short overview of the other components that make up the propaganda sector that is designed to merely illustrate parallels to the CCP's approach to the media.

Within the propaganda sector, a number of fields can be found that may seem loosely or even unrelated to propaganda. These fields include education, science, public hygiene and medicine, and sports. With the exception of some short periods, these functions were not administered by the PD, but were delegated to other organs; institutionally, however, they have always belonged to the same portfolio as propaganda in the informal organizational arrangements that dominate Chinese politics – the *xitong*. For the following discussion, I will look into one of the exceptional periods, November 1951 to ca. November 1953, when all fields of the propaganda portfolio were actually placed under the united control of the PD, thus providing us with a full panorama of the propaganda *xitong* (see chart 5). Of particular interest here are literature and art, theory, science, sport, and public hygiene.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> As said above, this particular construction existed only for a short period. At other times, the PD exerted far less direct influence. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution in particular, the CCP has gradually withdrawn from a number of functions, and administration of these areas was relegated to government bodies; the corresponding bureaus and departments of the Party were abolished. Apparently, these areas were no longer classified as core issues, and close supervision of day-to-day affairs was no longer considered to be necessary. The Party did not, however, renounce the claim to decision-making power and general guidance in these areas. Rather, these changes attest to a shift in the CCP's general approach to governance, which moved from micro-level control to macro-level management. In the propaganda sector, education, science and research, and health are today no longer coordinated by bureaus within the Propaganda Department; yet nevertheless

**Chart 5: Bureaus and Subdivisions of the Propaganda Department  
(Nov. 1951-late 1954)**

Office 办公室
Theory Propaganda Bureau 理论宣传处
Political Education Bureau 政治教育处
Current Affairs Propaganda Bureau 时事宣传处
Mass Propaganda Bureau 群众宣传处
International Propaganda Bureau 国际宣传处
Literature and Art Bureau 文学艺术处
Film Bureau 电影处
Schools and Education Bureau 学校教育处
Science and Public Hygiene Bureau 科学卫生处
Publishing Bureau 出版处
Newspaper and Broadcasting Bureau 报纸广播处
Cadres Bureau 干部处
Bureau of Administration 行政处
Party History Materials Office 党史资料室
<i>Complete Works of Stalin</i> Translation Bureau 斯大林全集翻译室
<i>Selected Works of Mao Zedong</i> English Translation Office 毛泽东选集英译室
Training Class for Propaganda Cadres 宣传干部训练班

Source: compiled after *Zuzhishi ziliao* 9.62f

Firstly, the field of literature and art (including all literary genres, music, painting, sculpture, and the performing arts) had been brought under the auspices of the CCP's propaganda apparatus at an early date through the Yan'an *Wenwei*, as mentioned above. Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" called upon literature to "serve politics" (*wei zhengzhi fuwu* 为政治服务)<sup>148</sup>, at exactly the same time when the media's function was redefined. While political uses of literature were not new in 1942, the "Yan'an talks" submitted literature and the arts to much closer political control than had been the case before, a point stressed in PRC definitions of literature: "Literature is the product of the reflection of concrete social life in people's minds, it belongs to the superstructure. In a class society, literature is a powerful weapon of class struggle. Writers of different classes or strata have a different understanding and a different reflection of real life; their works serve the interests of different classes, and [consequently] have

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they continue to be part of the propaganda macro sector, with decision-making power resting at the top of the *xitong*. Insofar, the propaganda portfolio has been stable for over sixty years.

<sup>148</sup> See Li Shiwen. "'Wenyi wei zhengzhi fuwu' kouhao de xingcheng pingshu" in *Anhui wenxue* 1980.12, p. 88ff.

different social impact and educational functions.”<sup>149</sup> The definition of literature (and other art forms) closely parallels the functional political aspect that also dominates the ideas behind the media concept.

Another key field within the propaganda *xitong* has been that of theory, namely studies in Marxism-Leninism. Since all Party policies had to be explained and promoted in the terms of “scientific Marxism” in order to prove their legitimacy, political theory and propaganda have been working hand in hand since the 1940s. In Yan’an, the Party’s popularizer of Marxist theory, Ai Siqi, was invited to join both the *Wenwei* and the *Jiefang ribao*. After 1949, a theory bureau of one kind or another (usually called *Lilunju* 理论局) has existed under the PD with extraordinary consistency. Other strongholds of theory research, such as the Marxism-Leninism Institute (*Ma-Lie xueyuan* 马列学院), renamed into Higher Party School (*Gaoji dangxiao* 高级党校) in 1955, were also closely tied to the propaganda *xitong*.<sup>150</sup>

Similarly, the education sector had been merged with the propaganda sector in the 1940s, first for cadre education, and later for general education as well.<sup>151</sup> Consequently the *xitong* has often been identified as “Propaganda-education” *xitong* (*Xuan-jiao xitong* 宣教系统). Again, the relationship becomes clear through the personnel structure: PD head Lu Dingyi concurrently was vice-head of the important Government Administrative Council Culture and Education Commission (*Zhengwuyuan wenhua jiaoyu weiyuanhui* 政务院文化教育委员会) from 1949 until the Commission’s abolition in 1954. Education and propaganda share the objective to transform people’s mind and thinking, and were thus grouped together in the same *xitong*.

In the early 1950s makeup of the PD, we find a Science and Public Hygiene Bureau (*Kexue weisheng chu* 科学卫生处). Scientific research in the PRC is centralized at the Chinese Academy of Science (*Zhongguo kexueyuan* 中国科学院, shorthand CAS) and the academy’s local branches. The centre for research in the humanities (which in China have been called “social sciences:” *shehui kexue* 社会

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<sup>149</sup> *Cihai: 1965 nian xinbianben* (1979 printing), p. 2939.

<sup>150</sup> The Higher Party School was merged during the Cultural Revolution with the Central Party School. See *Zuzhishi ziliao* 10.73. Among its heads and vice-heads, the institution counted Kai Feng, Chen Boda, and Ai Siqi, all leading cadres in the propaganda field.

<sup>151</sup> On the scope of the Party’s educational efforts in Yan’an see Mao’s remarks in “Fan touxiang tigang” in *XGWX* 2.58-64, here p. 64.

科学) was the Philosophy and Social Sciences Department (Zhaxue shehui kexue xuebu 哲学社会科学学部) of CAS and formed the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan 中国社会科学院, short CASS) in 1977.<sup>152</sup> CAS was linked to the Propaganda sector through the person of Chen Boda, who served as its vice-head from 1949 to 1966, and held concurrently the position of a vice-head of the Party's PD. The first president of CASS was Hu Qiaomu, another propaganda veteran. Vice-president Yu Guangyuan 于广远 had supervised CAS social science work as director of the PD Science Bureau in the 1950s; two other vice-presidents, Zhou Yang 周扬 and Deng Liqun 邓力群, were veteran propaganda officials.<sup>153</sup> In an even more direct link, the CAS Philosophy and Social Sciences Department had been placed under the direct leadership of the PD in 1960.<sup>154</sup> The mainstay of Chinese scientific research was thus closely tied to the propaganda authorities.<sup>155</sup>

The most puzzling arrangement concerns public hygiene and sports. What do hospitals, newspapers, and schools have in common?<sup>156</sup> The entire field of health, public hygiene, and medicine (usually summed up by the Chinese term *weisheng* 卫生), as well as sports have belonged to the propaganda portfolio since the early 1950s. Hygiene was to promote the health of the Chinese people. The official definition of sports also provides important clues: “[Sports is] an integral element of a society’s culture and education. Sports is a product of labour and has developed along with social development; it serves the political and economic

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<sup>152</sup> On CAS and CASS see Hans Kühner. *Die chinesische Akademie der Wissenschaften und ihre Vorläufer, 1928-1985*. Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1986. Pan Gangye (ed.). *Zhongguo kexueyuan biannianshi, 1949-1999*. Shanghai: Shanghai keji jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999. See also H. Lyman Miller. *Science and Dissent in Post-Mao China: the Politics of Knowledge*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996, p. 87-106.

<sup>153</sup> See Miller. *Science and Dissent*, p. 102 f.

<sup>154</sup> Pan Gangye. *Zhongguo kexueyuan biannianshi*, p. 240.

<sup>155</sup> There are numerous other bodies of scientific research subordinated to various government ministries, such as the research institutes for aviation, agriculture, or meteorology. Since the ministries in question belong to the finance and economics *xitong*, these research bodies are not controlled by the propaganda *xitong*. They are defined as institutions of applied research, and do not enjoy the same prestige as CAS and CASS.

<sup>156</sup> The Foucauldian paradigm regarding the function of public health does not stand the test of practice in the case of the CCP, as other important mechanisms producing social power, such as prisons, a central component of Foucault's project, are clearly not located within the confines of the Chinese propaganda sector, but rather in the political and legal affairs *xitong* (prisons) and the security *xitong* (re-education-through-labour camps run by the Public Security apparatus).

[purposes] of a given society.”<sup>157</sup> By linking the nature of sport to physical labour and to the categories of culture and education, the definition stresses the social character that underlies both the fields of physical and mental activities.

So what is it that unites newspapers, literature, political theory, education, and hygiene? In short, they all aim at improving of the psychological and physical health of man (*shen-xin jiankang* 身心健康). The idea of unifying mental and physical aspects of health<sup>158</sup> assumes new significance in the context of the CCP's overall objective: the formal organizational structure of the propaganda *xitong* reflects in effect an enormously ambitious project of social engineering. As the sector's institutional composition shows, it is the aim of the Party to form a socialist man who is free from pathologies of both physical and mental kind (both of which are caused by oppression forces in the “old” society),<sup>159</sup> a man healthy both in his thinking and his body who participates in and is devoted entirely to the cause led by the Communist Party.<sup>160</sup> To fundamentally transform man, he must be provided with an environment that allows his body to develop its full potential, and that feeds his mind with only the healthiest nourishment. The Chinese media are thus embedded in a project with much larger objectives that can be identified properly only if full account is taken of their environment; this is what the perspective of the propaganda *xitong* does – the space where the Party's concerns for the people's mind and for their body meet.

To understand the motivations and the mechanisms at work in the project sketched above, I find it helpful to draw on a sociological model developed by Berger and Luckmann. In their words, reality is a social construct that must be institutionalized, internalized, as well as constantly maintained.<sup>161</sup> It is defined as

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<sup>157</sup> *Cihai: 1965 nian xinbianben* (1979 printing), p. 384f.

<sup>158</sup> The reciprocity of body and mind is an ancient concept central to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). See Paul U. Unschuld. *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. On the discussions of TCM in the PRC see Volker Scheid. *Chinese Medicine in Contemporary China: Plurality and Synthesis*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002, esp. ch. 3.

<sup>159</sup> The entry “health” in *BSE* relates these pathologies to the economic exploitation of classes: “Factors that determine the health of a population are the amount of real wages, the length of the working day, the degree of intensity and conditions of work, the presence of occupational hazards, nutrition, the housing conditions...” (vol. 9, p. 235).

<sup>160</sup> “Unhealthy thinking” (*Bu jiankang de sixiang* 不健康的思想) has been a common accusation of targets in political campaigns from the 1950s through the 1990s.

<sup>161</sup> *The Social Construction of Reality*. The Berger / Luckmann approach is only to a degree able to explain the understanding of man and his environment that has informed the Chinese media

“a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition”<sup>162</sup> and is thus generally socially constructed, which means that man’s knowledge about his environment is dependent on the mediation of this environment to him by means such as conversation with others living in and accepting the same reality. This assumption is basically informed by the Marxist proposition that “man’s consciousness is determined by his social being,”<sup>163</sup> which is related to the (economic) base. The most basic mediators for the transmission of reality are signs and language: language has the capability to transcend an individual’s situation-bound knowledge and to stabilize the personal subjectivity by making possible the transfer of experiences between different persons. When this process multiplies, a shared repository of generally accepted knowledge builds up that sustains the reality of everyday life.

Beyond language and signs, both of which operate on the lowest order of human interaction, I would argue that the media serve the very same processes: first of all, they confirm to man that his own knowledge corresponds to a reality generally accepted. More importantly, they tell him how to adjust his individual subjectivity, if necessary, so as to conform to this reality. Beyond the confirmation of reality, media can also be employed in the original socialization process: they act as a tool in the effort to convince people of a particular version of reality and work towards the internalization of this reality by the addressees (Berger and Luckmann define internalization as “‘taking over’ the world in which others already live”).<sup>164</sup> The media are capable of transporting a vision of reality shared by one group to much larger audiences and make this vision into the binding explanation of the human environment.<sup>165</sup> In analogy to the observation, “knowledge is a social product *and* knowledge is a factor in social change,”<sup>166</sup> a similar dialectical relationship can be established for the media’s function: they are result of social

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concept of the 1940s; helpful is the fact that Berger and Luckmann proceed from a generally Marxist framework. Their concept is able to provide some basic explanations for the processes that underlie the workings of the Chinese propaganda apparatus and the mechanics of the media concept.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 5f.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>165</sup> Berger and Luckmann do not speak about the media and their function since their interest focuses primarily on the most fundamental issues of a sociology of knowledge. I have extrapolated the conclusions concerning the role of the media in the process of the construction of reality from Berger and Luckmann’s general arguments.

<sup>166</sup> Berger, Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*, p. 87.

processes as well as agent for the transformation of society – they contribute to the institution of a healthy vision of the world. This is what the Chinese media are supposed to do.<sup>167</sup>

If social reality can be constructed, at least partly, through active and conscious involvement of man, it is also prone to deterioration due to outside influences or pathologies (coming from competing “universes of meaning”). Social reality remains instable and is under the constant threat of being undermined. It needs to be confirmed continually if it is to remain stable and reliable. Two important processes work towards this goal: firstly, the media themselves (and all the other components of the propaganda sector) assume the function of “reality maintenance.” The confirmation of the individual’s status in his environment is a key function of the media, since “every viable society must develop procedures of reality-maintenance to safeguard a measure of symmetry between objective and subjective reality.”<sup>168</sup> Reaching out to broad audiences, the media do best suit this purpose. Secondly, the state (a player of central importance, whose functions are not directly addressed by Berger and Luckmann) can exercise its power to guarantee that challenges to reality are minimized; it can intervene on behalf of the existing version of social reality and work towards the elimination of media containing alternative realities (for example, the “bourgeois” media). Coercion – both as supervision (control) and active intervention – thus becomes a key element in the “procedures of reality-maintenance” in contexts such as the PRC, where the governing Party assumes a paramount position insofar as it defines the orthodox vision of reality and tries to steer the complex processes that work towards the implementation of that reality.

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<sup>167</sup> That is, of course, the perspective of the sender of the message, with which I am concerned primarily in this study. From the position of the receiver, however, the uses of the media may look very differently, as alternative readings and differential decoding may produce altogether different outcomes, as I have remarked above. See also Michael Schudson. *The Power of News*.

<sup>168</sup> Berger, Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*, p. 147.



It is in this context that we must understand the complementarity of fields as diverse as publishing, news, film, science, education, and health: they are part of the project to construct a new man by providing him with a healthy environment.

There is perhaps no better illustration of what this merging of the physical and psychological aspects of health means than those ubiquitous propaganda posters that have been produced for public display from the earliest days of the



Ill. 1: "Turn philosophy into a sharp weapon in the hands of the masses, 1971," courtesy of the Stefan Landsberger Collection: <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/ll.html>.

PRC to the present time.<sup>169</sup> The visual representation of the model worker (farmer, soldier etc.) has changed remarkably little: both men and women are able-bodied if not athletic, they have internalized through education the values prescribed by the Party, and they display bold optimism about their future. The most extreme examples of psycho-physical sanity are from the Cultural Revolution decade: the exaggeratedly muscular forearm, holding the Mao's *Collected Works*, symbolizes better than anything else the goal that the Party's propaganda efforts hope to achieve: bursting with strength and fully steeled, not only through physical training, but also through ideological conviction.

The men (and, very importantly, women) on the propaganda posters represent a new kind of personality: the socialist man that has liberated himself from the bondages of the earlier "capitalist" society, he has achieved freedom in the way defined by the Communist Party. This process of reform and self-reform

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<sup>169</sup> See Harriet Evans, Stephanie Donald (ed.). *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999; Stefan Landsberger. *Chinese Propaganda Posters: from Revolution to Modernization*. Amsterdam: The Pepin Press, 1995. Parts of Landsberger's collection are online at <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/>.

could not succeed without the intervention of the CCP which fights for this “liberation” (*jiefang* 解放, the term that has even become the synonym for the CCP takeover in 1949) and introduces changes in the economic realm, the “basis” in orthodox Marxism. The “superstructure” to which the institutions of the propaganda sector belong, plays a crucial assisting role: before the revolution, when overthrowing the ruling classes is the main goal, the Party works in the realm of the superstructure to raise the revolutionary consciousness of the people.<sup>170</sup> After revolution, the main goal shifts to economic construction and to defending the power of the new ruling classes.<sup>171</sup> Since the power of the proletariat is consolidated at the economic base, attacks from class enemies can be directed only at the superstructure. Beyond the task of making the mental world outlook of the people fit the new economic and political realities that have emerged after revolution, work in all those fields that belong to the superstructure assumes a crucially important position as the bulwark of defending the socialist system against its enemies.<sup>172</sup> To prevent an erosion of the system from inside, the superstructure, represented by the propaganda *xitong*, is engaged in nothing short of a “cultural revolution.”<sup>173</sup>

The media are thus designed to be part of a much larger project in social engineering and political struggle. This construction has deeply influenced not only the way in which the media have been perceived of – and, to a degree, are still perceived – but also the way in which the media have been managed in the

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<sup>170</sup> The Communists effort to raise people’s consciousness through work in the realm of the superstructure figures prominently in Lenin’s “What is to be Done?,” one of the core texts to be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>171</sup> The exact definition of the main goal after revolution, of course, has been hotly debated during the 1950s and ever since. While Soviet orthodoxy prescribed economic construction to be the task of the day, and the main contradiction under the conditions of socialism were supposed to be that between man and nature, Mao Zedong, under the influence of Stalin’s policies from the 1930s, began to place increasing emphasis on the continuation of class struggle. The rise of class struggle reached the apex in 1962 when Mao proclaimed “Never forget class struggle!” (*Qianwan bu yao wangji jieji douzheng* 千万不要忘记阶级斗争). On the debate see Stuart R. Schram. “Mao Tse-tung’s Thought from 1949 to 1976” in Roderick MacFarquhar, John K. Fairbank (ed.). *The Cambridge History of China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, vol. 15, p. 1-106.

<sup>172</sup> The following two chapters will provide evidence for this understanding of the media’s role. I am grateful to Rudolf Wagner for pointing out this argument to me.

<sup>173</sup> Revolutions in culture had been launched since the May Fourth Movement. After 1949, the goal of a cultural revolution was to bring the cultural realm, supposedly a stronghold of “feudalism,” into line with the advanced productive forces. Consequently, the initial onslaught of the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” did indeed target the entire cultural realm, ranging from literature and art to historical research. Not surprisingly, the first major institution to come tumbling down under the siege was the PD.

course of the second half of the twentieth century. We must now proceed from the institutional evidence for the peculiar Chinese conception of what the media are and should be to more concrete textual evidence, turning to the contents of this conception. In the next chapter, I will reconstruct the CCP's media concept.

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In this chapter, I have been looking for the conditions that influenced the formation the CCP's media thinking. An investigation of the Chinese media is first of all confronted with the problem that the concept of the "media" – a generic term of Western origin – has entered the Chinese language only recently. While the institutions usually defined as media do definitely exist in China, they are conceived of and categorized in a way that differs significantly from Western media concepts. These crucial differences have received too little attention in the literature on the field.

To define the Chinese media sector, I have chosen a functional approach that stresses the role of the media as a carrier of public communication. Such an approach must necessarily look at the media from the broad perspective of the social environment in which they are embedded. Media do not exist in a conceptual vacuum but are firmly rooted in social reality. They are formed by this environment but can also be employed to shape their surroundings.

The Chinese media are part of a larger complex that can be identified through an investigation of the political organizational structures. The organizational perspective has found the institutions we are used to call "media" to be assembled under the propaganda *xitong* or sector. Under the auspices of the CCP Propaganda Department, the most important institution in the propaganda *xitong*, there also can be found a number of media that are not usually considered to be "mass" media in English, such as books, but that are undeniable part of the Chinese media sector.

The Chinese media in turn find themselves within the propaganda *xitong* in an environment with an even more peculiar pattern: literature, the arts, education, science, and public hygiene, among others, do belong all to this *xitong* as well. The organizational structure of the *xitong* thus provide information concerning the

functions and the logic that govern the propaganda *xitong* in general and the media in particular: they are supposed to reshape the mental outlook of the people along the lines defined by the CCP. The media are thus “serving” the particular purposes of the Party.

The Chinese propaganda *xitong* is a historical product. The institutions that make up the propaganda *xitong* grew only gradually into a coherent and interconnected network of political and administrative agencies. This matrix took shape in the late 1930s and the early 1940s, and has been a stable entity in the institutional landscape in the PRC ever since.

As the CCP's Yan'an era is the period in which the propaganda *xitong* first emerged in the Party's organizational landscape, this period is also of crucial importance for the formation of the ideas, strategies, and concepts that have guided the Party's propaganda activities throughout the PRC. The next chapter will therefore take a closer look at the Yan'an period and investigate how the modern Chinese media concept was formed, what sources of inspiration it drew on, and by what kind of worldview and what an image of man it was informed. It is the very special nature of the modern Chinese media concept that has brought about the control of the media in the People's Republic of China.

## Chapter Two

### The Yan'an Laboratory: The Formation of the CCP's Media Concept

*"The party paper is not just a collective propagandist and agitator, but also a collective organizer"*  
(Lenin)

*"The party paper is our sharpest and most powerful weapon"*  
(Stalin)<sup>1</sup>

The CCP has never formulated a coherent media theory. This does not mean that the Party's media work is unreflected or that it lacks conceptual considerations. As the chapters in part two of this study show, the CCP has very clear ideas of what the media are, how they are supposed to function, and how they relate to the Party-state and to the population. While these ideas fall short of the reflected and systematic rigour of what could be called a theory, they do add up to a logically coherent concept. Since the CCP did never write down in explicit terms the media concept that took shape during the Yan'an period, my aim in this chapter is to make these implicit features explicit.<sup>2</sup>

Yan'an, the capital of the CCP's base area in Northern Shaanxi, became the laboratory where the Party conducted a wide range of experiments in governance and administration. Regrouping after the Long March and the loss of most of the other base areas, the CCP entered a period of introspection: unresolved issues had accumulated over almost a decade in areas as diverse as leadership, personnel, ideology, strategy, and policies in numerous fields. Propaganda and the media were but one issue that was, however, closely interrelated with almost all other questions. After the arrival in Yan'an, the CCP rapidly built up a thriving press and publishing sector, notwithstanding the difficult material conditions in the Shaan-Gan-Ning (Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia) Border Region. Even more important were the reflections that led to a conceptualization of the Party's media, a concept both theoretically informed and tested in practical application. The CCP's media concept merged recent ideological imports from the Soviet Union with influences from other foreign sources and traditional Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted after "To our readers," editorial, *Jiefang ribao* (JFRB), Apr. 1, 1942.

<sup>2</sup> Gao Hua sees the Yan'an era as the time of the formation of "Mao's news principles" (*Mao shi xinwenxue yuanze* 毛氏新闻学原则). See *Hong taiyang shi zenyang sheng qi de: Yan'an zhengfeng yundong de lailong-qumai*. Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2000, p. 372-77. For reasons that will become clear in the course of this chapter, I consider it inappropriate to attribute the formation of the media concept to Mao alone.

ideas about the communication between those in power and the people (these influences and ideas will be discussed in chapter 3). The CCP emerged from Yan'an strengthened, with administrative experience and with a set of policy options that were put into practice after 1949. As is the case for other policy fields, the most crucial moment for the formulation of the media concept was the Yan'an Rectification Campaign.

No single factor explanation suffices to describe adequately either the causes or the course of the Rectification Campaign (*Zhengfeng yundong* 政风运动, *zhengfeng* being a shorthand for “zhengdun dangde zuofeng” 整顿党的作风, “rectify the working styles of the Party”).<sup>3</sup> Most often cited are the constant and complex power struggles that accompanied the rise of Mao and the consolidation of his power; an approach, however, that is problematic. Historians such as Kampen and Chen Yongfa overemphasize this argument, reducing their narrative to a single factor. Gao Hua's account, too, is driven primarily by the desire to understand the legacies produced by Mao's rise to power; all the same, his study shows clearest of all that factional disputes and infighting always arouse out of differences over policy and strategy. To discount the heated debates over diverse policy packages, from approaches to the economic administration of the border region to the correct degree of cooperation with the GMD, can only obscure the complexity of the CCP's evolution in the Yan'an era, and doing so misjudges the importance of these policy choices for the path taken after 1949. The decisions reached in Yan'an had far-reaching consequences for the development of the PRC, as this study aims to show. On the other end of the spectrum, Apter and Saich discount the power struggle in favour of a linguistic model. Their discursive approach is an important contribution for drawing attention to the issue and the uses of language, yet their hypothesis discredits itself when the authors portray Yan'an as a happy “learning community,” ignoring the later phases of the Rectification Campaign. Chen Yongfa, Gao Hua, and the biographers of Kang

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<sup>3</sup> For studies dealing with the Rectification Campaign see the works of Gao Hua, Kampen, Chen Yongfa, Apter and Saich, Compton, Wylie, and Selden mentioned in ch.1. Compare also Frederick C. Teiwes. “The Origins of Rectification: Inner-Party Purges and Education before Liberation” in *CQ* 65 (1976), p. 15-53; Patricia Stranahan. *Molding the Medium: The Chinese Communist Party and the Liberation Daily*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1990, and “The Last Battle: Mao and the Internationalists' Fight for the *Liberation Daily*” in *CQ* 123 (1990), p. 522-37; Merle Goldman. *Literary Dissent in Communist China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967, ch. 2.

Sheng have shown in minute detail that more often than not “study” was a disguise for hard-core indoctrination, endless rounds of criticism and self-criticism under maximum psychological pressure, and in many cases outright “red terror.” In light of the Rescue Campaign (the bloody later stage of Rectification since spring 1943), the “revolutionary simulacrum” is a euphemism. The account of Apter and Saich therefore remains an exercise of primarily theoretical nature.

Besides the issue of power, other problems factored into the mix of unresolved questions the Party faced in Yan’an: according to Kampen, the CCP’s history still was still awaiting an authoritative assessment. Wylie stresses Mao’s desire to enthrone himself as the Party’s main theoretician. Goldman sees the need to impose discipline on the large number of intellectuals that had arrived relatively recently in Yan’an, and the circumstances reinforcing this need: a difficult economic situation caused by GMD and Japanese blockades of the border area, and by setbacks in CCP economic policies that put a strain on the supply situation of Yan’an, exacerbated by natural calamities and bad harvests.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the national and international situation in 1941 needs to be mentioned: the CCP had suffered great losses in the Southern Anhui incident (*Wannan shibian* 皖南事变), where GMD forces had betrayed and almost completely wiped out the Communist New Fourth Army. Consequently, the future of the United Front (and the United Front policy, a policy closely linked to Mao) was in greater doubt than ever. The Soviet Union was engaged in the European war and devoted less and less attention to the Far East. The United States still hesitated to enter the war, allowing the Japanese to increase their pressure on all fronts. In view of these circumstances, Selden speaks of “crippling defeats verging on annihilation.”<sup>5</sup> The situation was of grave concern in any case. The Rectification Campaign was designed to address these difficulties, to resolve the leadership problem, and to promote intra-Party discipline, thus preparing the CCP for a time when it could once again take the initiative.

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<sup>4</sup> As Chen Yongfa has shown, the CCP was desperate enough to encourage poppy production in the border area, exporting significant amounts of opium to other areas of China in order to finance its government operations. “The Blooming Poppy under the Red Sun: The Yan’an Way and the Opium Trade” in Tony Saich, Hans van de Ven. *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1995, p. 263-98.

<sup>5</sup> Selden. *China in Revolution*, p. 144.

The campaign's high tide in spring and summer 1942 has drawn most attention. The drive against dissident writers was carried out in public and received ample press coverage in the Party media. The rectification drive, however, had started much earlier: on May 19, 1941, Mao delivered a speech to a conference of high-level cadres that has become known as "Reform Our Study" ("Gaizao women de xuexi" 改造我们的学习). Most Western and Chinese scholars agree that this speech signalled the beginning of a major ideological campaign that was carried out on two levels: both high cadres (*gaoji ganbu* 高级干部) and normal cadres and Party members (*yiban ganbu he putong dangyuan* 一般干部和普通党员) had to undergo rectification.<sup>6</sup> The Yan'an press played a key role from the very start of the campaign. Only four days before Mao's speech, the CC had announced a major reshuffle of the Party newspapers, and the next morning, *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报 (JFRB), the new official organ of the CCP CC,<sup>7</sup> published its first issue. JFRB played a crucial role in the Rectification Campaign: it became the platform where practically all important discussions of the campaign were publicized. Not only were the speeches of Mao Zedong and other CCP leaders on the campaign issues published in JFRB, but the paper also printed and reprinted most of the officially defined rectification documents.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the voices of the main targets of the campaign's second phase, the writers Ding Ling 丁玲 and Wang Shiwei 王实唯, had appeared on its pages. This made JFRB itself into an object of criticism during the campaign. The paper's reorganization, effective from April 1, 1942, was accompanied by an elaborate discussion of the role and the functions of a Party newspaper.

In this chapter, I will concentrate on the discussions concerning the Party media before, during, and after the JFRB reshuffle. The events of spring 1942

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<sup>6</sup> This is the characterization given in the most recent official history of the CCP: Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi. *Zhongguo gongchandang lishi, 1921-1949*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2002, vol. 1.2, p. 780.

<sup>7</sup> See "Zhongyang guanyu chuban *Jiefang ribao* deng wenti de tongzhi" in Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu bangongting, Zhongyang dang'anguan bianyanbu (ed). *Zhongguo gongchandang xuanchuan gongzuo wenxian xuanbian* (hereafter XGWX). Beijing: Xuexi chubanshe, 1996, 4 vols., here vol. 2, p. 227: "All policies of the Party shall be transmitted to the entire nation through JFRB and the Xinhua news agency."

<sup>8</sup> 19 out of 22 officially designated rectification documents were published on JFRB's pages. Fifteen of these are translated in Compton. *Party Reform Documents*.



were the result of a protracted process rather than a sudden innovation.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore necessary to investigate the CCP's propaganda work in the Yan'an era in a more comprehensive fashion. I will reconstruct the development of the major arguments by relying chiefly on Party documents, statements of the Party leaders, and JFRB editorials concerning propaganda;<sup>10</sup> as these sources do most directly reflect the normative concepts and the visions that the Party leadership developed in the Yan'an period, the analysis of key documents will take precedence over an analysis of newspaper contents.<sup>11</sup> Over the course of several years, a number of issues crystallized – the media's "Party character," their educational mission, their mass character, as well as their function in class struggle – that all became parts of the media concept. I will illustrate this gradual process by short summaries of the media concept (as it can be extrapolated from the documents analyzed in its different stages) at the end of the sections of this chapter. Furthermore, I will relate the ideas found in the CCP documents to their sources in the Marxist-Leninist canon. I propose that the ideas imported from the Soviet Union were not homogenous in nature; rather, the incorporation into the CCP's media concept of ideas borrowed from Plekhanov to Lenin to Stalin, created a tension within the concept that was responsible for the concept's flexibility, but also for the conflicts arising from its implementation in later years.

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<sup>9</sup> In this point, I contend with Patricia Stranahan's argument that the discussions surrounding JFRB were but a power struggle in disguise. Thomas Kampen has expressed serious doubts concerning Stranahan's general assumption of a two-line struggle within the Party between the so-called "Bolsheviks" or "Internationalists," and the "Maoists." In my own readings on the propaganda sector, I have found no compelling evidence of such a struggle, which seems to me primarily a product of the CCP's own historiography.

<sup>10</sup> Several collections of documents have recently become available to the researcher, including XGWX and Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan xinwen yanjiusuo (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang xinwen gongzuo wenjian huibian*. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1980, 3 vols. (hereafter XGWH). However, since these collections, because of their selection criteria, do themselves contain an official narrative, they must be backed up by other documents found, for example, in the various collected works (*wenji* 文集) editions of CCP politicians. The Yan'an rectification documents collected and translated by Compton are an important source, too. Another problem is that much of the material in the official collections has been heavily edited, especially in cases where the texts in question have already been published elsewhere (such as the speeches of Mao Zedong). It is thus necessary to use the originals (often from JFRB) where possible, or to double-check the documents with the originals, if these were published.

<sup>11</sup> An extensive content analysis is found in Stranahan. *Moulding the Medium*.

## *Media and Education: The Chinese Leninist Perspective*

JFRB and its predecessors, the weekly *Jiefang* 解放 and the *Xin Zhonghua bao* 新中华报 newspaper,<sup>12</sup> were not the only papers published by the CCP. After the CC had established itself in Yan'an, the number of publications there gradually increased. Several specialised journals and magazines were founded that focused on the needs of various target groups: *Zhongguo qingnian* 中国青年 addressed the youth, *Zhongguo gongren* 中国工人 was dedicated to the workers, and *Zhongguo funü* 中国妇女 to women.<sup>13</sup> The journal *Gongchandang ren* 共产党人 was a restricted circulation publication directed to Party members.<sup>14</sup> Several more journals appeared in Yan'an and in other CCP base areas.<sup>15</sup> The United Front with the GMD allowed the CCP – at least initially – to extend its publishing activities.

In the field of theory, the CCP had since its earliest days followed a number of more or less reflected ideas about the media that guided all of its publications, both internal (*neibu* 内部) and openly circulated (*gongkai* 公开) journals, notwithstanding their particular content and respective audiences. It was on these ideas that the conceptualizing efforts in Yan'an built on. The most prominent was “party character” (*dangxing* 党性, or *partiinnost* in Russian).<sup>16</sup> In the “Terms of

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<sup>12</sup> Not to be confused with *Xinhua ribao*, the official CCP newspaper published in Wuhan and later in Chongqing. *Xin Zhonghua bao* was founded in January 1937 as the organ of the Shaan-Gan-Ning border region government and became the CCP CC organ on Feb. 7, 1939. Since this reorganization, the paper was published every three days (previously every five days). See “Jinian *Xin Zhonghua bao* xin kan yi zhounian” in Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xinwen gongzuo wenxuan* (hereafter MZDXGW). Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1983, p. 49-51.

<sup>13</sup> *Zhongguo qingnian* was founded on April 16, 1939 (See “*Zhongguo qingnian* fakanci” in XGWH 2.29-30). *Zhongguo gongren* published its first issue on February 7, 1940 (See “*Zhongguo gongren* fakanci,” written by Mao Zedong, in *Mao Zedong xuanji*, vol. 2), and *Zhongguo funü* appeared on June 1, 1939. All three were closed due to “limited technical conditions” March 1941. The main newspapers, however, kept operating. See “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu tiaozheng qikan wenti de jue ding” (March 26, 1941) in XGWH 1.96. Gao Hua links this step directly to Mao Zedong and his desire to silence inner-Party voices he did not agree with, yet I believe that the difficult economic situation of the border area at that time played a role, too. See *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de*, p. 367.

<sup>14</sup> *Gongchandang ren* was founded in October 1939 and published the last issue in August 1941. The “Fakanci” was written by Mao Zedong. An edited version of this was included in *Mao Zedong xuanji*, vol. 2.

<sup>15</sup> About twenty are listed for Yan'an alone in the period 1938-1945 in Cao Guohui. “Yan'an shiqi de chuban gongzuo gaishu” in Song Yuanfang (ed.). *Zhongguo chuban shiliao: xiandai bufen*. Ji'nan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001, vol. 2, p. 282-316, esp. p. 293-97. For the CCP's propaganda activities in the Jin-Cha-Ji 晋察冀 region see Timothy Cheek. *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, ch. 2.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Party character’ is defined as the natural tendency of all people to further and to defend the interests of their particular class. In this understanding, all human activities are permanently determined by their class (or party) character. *Partiinost* applies especially to social sciences,

Admission into the Third Communist International” (July 1920), the Comintern had required all prospective member parties to place all their publications under direct Party control.<sup>17</sup> The CCP’s authority over newspapers and journals published under its auspices was thereafter never called into question. In 1930, for example, Li Lisan commented: “the function of the Party paper is to expound on the Party’s programme and its political line, to gather all people who share the same political position and support the same political line, and to merge them into a united Party with orderly ranks that carries out a unanimous struggle.”<sup>18</sup> Li Lisan emphasizes the crucial importance of Party papers for the work of the Party in an underground setting like that of the early 1930s: it would be almost impossible to hold together the fragmented and decentralized Party without the help of newspapers. The Party newspapers are the means whereby the Party’s directives, policies, and programmes can reach lower level cadres in the most reliable fashion; distortions and misrepresentations that result from oral transmission can thus be minimized. A precondition, however, is that the papers closely follow the Party’s prescriptions and remain under its direct supervision.

In Yan’an, the same general principles applied to the Party press that were effective in the early 1930s. The first major CCP directive on newspaper work in the Yan’an area underlined points very similar to those stressed by Li Lisan:<sup>19</sup>

“The Party papers are reflecting all Party policies; from now on, the local Party organs must draw upon the articles of important responsible comrades in the Party papers and journals, take them as the Party’s policies and working guidelines, and study them. The following [kinds of] articles from the Party papers must be discussed and studied in the [Party] branches and in Party committees on all levels:

- (1) editorials in [*Xinhua ribao*];
- (2) articles of the responsible cadres of the Politburo in *Xinhua [ribao]*,<sup>20</sup> *Jiefang*, and *Qunzhong*.

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philosophy, and literature and art – and, of course, to propaganda. For details see the entry ‘partiinost’ in *Bol’shaia Sovietskaia Entsiklopedia* (hereafter BSE). See *Great Soviet Encyclopedia: A Translation of the Third Edition*. New York: Macmillan, 1973, vol. 19, p. 295-97.

<sup>17</sup> See V. I. Lenin. *Collected Works* (4<sup>th</sup> English ed.). Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966, vol. 31, p. 206-11.

<sup>18</sup> “Dangbao,” published on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1930, in the CCP organ *Hongqi*. Repr. in XGWH 3.126-27. Li echoes here ideas expressed by Lenin in “What is to be Done?”, see below.

<sup>19</sup> “Zhongyang guanyu dangbao wenti gei difang dang de zhishi” (dated Apr. 2, 1938) in *Jiefang* 36, p. 21. Repr. in XGWX 2.16.

<sup>20</sup> The directive is unclear when it speaks of “the Xinhua newspaper” (“Xinhuabao”) in (1) and simply “Xinhua” (2): the text might also refer to *Xin Zhonghua bao*. I consider it more plausible, however, that the paper in question was the Wuhan (and later Chongqing) *Xinhua ribao*, because in 1938, *Xin Zhonghua bao* still was the organ of the Shaan-Gan-Ning border region government, and not that of the CC.

The party paper acts as the voice of the Party, especially of the Politburo, and communicates policies down to the Party branches, where they are to be studied, adopted to concrete problems, and implemented. Under United Front conditions, communication was easier than during the civil war, when the CCP acted from underground:<sup>21</sup>

Since in the past the Party was for a long time working in secret and could not distribute a national Party paper, [information] concerning the Party's different policies could be transmitted only in secret mimeographed publications; this has led to the comrades not understanding the function of the Party papers. Under the new conditions prevailing today the Party has already set up nationwide newspapers and journals, and therefore it is necessary to correct these old ideas and to make every comrade take seriously the Party papers, read them, and discuss the important articles in them.

Under the new circumstances that the Party found in Yan'an, there is a slight shift in focus: while bringing and holding together the Party members was a key concern in Li Lisan's explanation of the paper's purpose, the stress now lies on reading and studying the paper to understand the correct Party policies, and thus to unify the Party membership ideologically.

This latter point became more pronounced as the CCP moved to consolidate its ideological line and to demand conformity from its members. The Party papers' proper function became even more pronounced three years after the 1938 directive, in 1941, when *Xin Zhonghua bao*'s anniversary editorial proclaimed: "Only because of the implementation of a real new democratic polity in the Border Region and because human rights enjoyed full legal protection, our paper was able to give full scope to its sacred duty of directing opinion."<sup>22</sup> This "sacred duty" has found its most pronounced expression in the formulation "mouthpiece," literally "throat and tongue" (*houshe* 喉舌): the newspapers became the organs that gave a voice to the Party – without this voice a mute Party leadership would be unable to address its members.<sup>23</sup> *Xin Zhonghua bao* thus was "not only one of the organs of the CCP CC, but also the organ of the Border Region Party [Committee], and

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<sup>21</sup> "Zhongyang guanyu dangbao wenti gei difang dang de zhishi," p. 21. Repr. in XGWX 2.16.

<sup>22</sup> "Jinian ben bao xin kan liang zhounian" in *Xin Zhonghua bao*, Feb. 6, 1941. Repr. in XGWH 3.47-49.

<sup>23</sup> The "throat and tongue" formulation seems to be an indigenous Chinese invention that has older roots; it has been used at least since the late Qing period in relation to the press I am grateful to Barbara Mittler for this information. There is no direct equivalent in Russian or Japanese.

the *mouthpiece* of the Border Region government.”<sup>24</sup> The mission of the newspapers under CCP control is not to print individual opinions, but rather to represent the collective opinion, the line of the Party leadership. Even when individuals are writing on its pages, they speak for the Party, and not for themselves.<sup>25</sup>

These core elements of Communist newspaper theory had been imported from the Soviet Union. In their writings, the CCP officials in charge of propaganda claim legitimacy for their concepts by quoting from the highest authorities in the international Communist movement, namely Lenin and Stalin. The number of texts quoted by the CCP leadership is surprisingly small: a limited core of texts constitutes the canon that informed the CCP’s thinking in the area of the media. For Lenin, these were his “What is to be Done?” and “The Character of our Newspapers.”<sup>26</sup> A few texts associated with Stalin, such as the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* rounded up the compendium. Taking frequency of citation as an indicator, by far the most important of these texts is Lenin’s long tractate “What is to be Done?”

The polemic “What is to be Done?” was first published in March 1902. According to Lenin’s original plan, the booklet “was to have been devoted to a detailed development of the ideas expressed in the article ‘Where to Begin’ (*Iskra*, No. 4, May 1901).”<sup>27</sup> *Iskra* (“The Spark”) was an émigré journal founded in Munich in 1900. Lenin elaborated many of his core ideas in this early period in *Iskra*; the journal itself thus plays a prominent role in Leninist press history.<sup>28</sup> For the Chinese Communists, “What is to be Done?” became a must-read article and one of the most frequently quoted writings of Lenin. It was first translated into Chinese in Moscow, where it appeared in the third volume of the 1933 Chinese edition of

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<sup>24</sup> “Jinian ben bao xin kan liang zhounian” in *Xin Zhonghua bao*, Feb. 6, 1941. Italics added.

<sup>25</sup> As John Fitzgerald has detailed in his study on GMD propaganda, the same principles also made a significant impact on Nationalist media theory and practice – not least through the CCP’s presence in the GMD propaganda institutions during the First United Front. *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, esp. ch. 6-7.

<sup>26</sup> V.I. Lenin. *Collected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960. For “What is to be Done?” see vol. 5, p. 347-529. “The Character of our Newspapers” can be found in *ibid.*, vol. 28, p. 96-98.

<sup>27</sup> “What is to be Done?” p. 349.

<sup>28</sup> Even a Chinese mainstream dictionary such as *Cihai* contains an entry on *Iskra*: “The first Marxist, national, political newspaper founded and led by Lenin.” See *Cihai: 1965 nian xinbianben* (1979 printing), p. 2978, entry ‘Huoxingbao.’

Lenin's *Selected Works*.<sup>29</sup> Yet even prior to this edition, "What is to be Done?" was part of the repertoire Chinese communists quoted from, which suggests that it belonged to the curriculum taught at the Moscow academies where much of the Chinese leadership of the 1930s had undergone training.<sup>30</sup> The function of the press figures prominently in "What is to be Done?;" it is therefore understandable that the Chinese Communists referred to Lenin's text to claim legitimacy for their own press activities.

In the booklet's last chapter, "The 'Plan' for an All-Russian Political Newspaper," Lenin sketches his ideas of a newspaper in the service of Party propaganda. Lenin is engaged in a dialogue with opponents who had attacked his "Where to Begin"<sup>31</sup> as an abstract intellectual exercise. Against this accusation, Lenin holds that the considerations concerning the character of a proletarian newspaper must take precedence over practical organizational work at the grassroots level. He defends his earlier positions and stresses: "...the whole point is that *there is no other way of training* strong political organisations except through the medium of an All-Russian newspaper."<sup>32</sup> According to Lenin, a powerful propaganda organ is the precondition for the construction of a revolutionary party, and not a result of these construction efforts: "The publication of an All-Russian political newspaper must be *the main line* by which we may unswervingly develop, deepen, and expand the organization."<sup>33</sup> The creation of party newspapers is an essential step in the organizational construction of the party and in the political struggle towards the party's revolutionary goal. By speaking of "the main line," Lenin elevates the importance of propaganda work in the overall context of party work. In a quote from the earlier *Iskra* article, Lenin illustrates his point:<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Published by the Cooperative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers. For this information see Cao Honglong (ed.). *Liening zhuzuo zai Zhongguo: 1919-1992 nian wenxian diaoyan baogao*. Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1994, p. 13-14.

<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, I have never seen a detailed description of the curriculum taught at Zhongshan University or the other Comintern schools in Moscow.

<sup>31</sup> See "Where to Begin" (orig. published in *Iskra* 4, May 1901), in *Collected Works*, vol. 5, p. 13-24.

<sup>32</sup> "What is to be Done?" p. 499. Italics in the original.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 501.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 502f. Italics in the original.

A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser. In this respect *it may be compared to the scaffolding* erected round a building under construction; it marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, permitting them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organised labour.

Two important arguments are presented here: the collective character of the newspaper's voice, and the precedence of propaganda over organizational affairs.

The party newspaper is the voice of the party in a collective sense: it does not express the opinion of an individual party member, but rather that of the entire party collective. The CCP used this argument, for example, to criticize the Party journals of the 1920s that were led by strong individuals and were accused of promoting but the particular opinions of their patrons. In the Leninist understanding, the party press could give expression only to the positions of the collective leadership.<sup>35</sup> This is the case even when individual party figures are writing in the party press: they do not voice their particular opinions but speak in the name of the party.<sup>36</sup> A party paper thus is not even a collection of different opinions within the party, but must give expression to the party's singular, unified voice. This latter interpretation came to prevail in the Soviet Union as well as in China.

The relationship between the "two wings" of Party work, organization and propaganda, had always been problematic in China. Internal criticism routinely lamented the lack of interest that many Party cadres showed in propaganda affairs.<sup>37</sup> Party organization, dealing with personnel questions, is much more suitable than propaganda as a battleground for Party infighting and jockeying for leadership posts, and has been seen by many cadres as a road to get ahead politically. Lenin's text, and especially the formulation of the newspaper being "not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, but also a collective organiser" thus has become the *locus classicus* in all references concerning the relationship between organization and propaganda in the communist party's work.

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<sup>35</sup> Imagination and reality are prone to conflict. *Iskra* was in its own time very much the platform for Lenin's particular opinions. The reasons why this fact could be glossed over so completely in later historiography are discussed in the last section of this chapter.

<sup>36</sup> The most prominent example is, of course, Mao Zedong Thought, which has been treated in the PRC not simply as Mao's writings, but as the collective product and heritage of the Party. For this purpose, Mao's speeches and articles underwent significant revisions in the early 1950s before their inclusion in the *Selected Works* volumes. The logic behind this effort was to purge traces of Mao's personal style.

<sup>37</sup> See for example "Zhongyang xuanchuanbu guanyu chongshi he jianquan ge ji xuanchuan bumen de zuzhi ji gongzuo de jue ding" (dated Oct. 14, 1940), which is discussed in detail below.

A May 1930 article in the journal *Hongqi*, for example, started with the Lenin quote to remind CCP members of their responsibilities towards the Party paper:<sup>38</sup>

Lenin has said: the party paper is not only a collective propagandist and agitator, it is also a collective organizer. From this sentence of Lenin we can understand what an important function the party paper has.

Our Party is the vanguard of the proletariat, and the Party paper is the banner of this vanguard, it is the lighthouse of the entire Party. Every single member of our Party shall not only support our banner, but shall strive to increase the influence of this banner even more and to let it shine even brighter, so that its rays reach right into the middle of the broad toiling masses of workers and peasants.

In this rhetorically powerful piece, the party press is defined as an instrument that is directed outwards – to the working classes; the article stresses its function as the Party’s propagandist and agitator. The very same quotation has been repeated over and over in more or less bombastic language. Deng Yingchao refers to Lenin on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> issue of *Hongse Zhonghua* in 1933.<sup>39</sup> Bo Gu, too, quotes Lenin in a long article of the same year.<sup>40</sup> Another quote from the same Lenin text gained prominence in China: “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.”<sup>41</sup> This statement corresponds with the former quote when it defines theory, in a dialectical relationship, as a precondition for action, just as propaganda is a necessary precondition for the organization of a revolutionary party. Chen Yun refers to this latter quote from Lenin in 1939,<sup>42</sup> and a year later Mao Zedong uses it in his “On New Democracy” (see below).<sup>43</sup> By the early Yan’an era, Lenin’s text – used across all factional divides – had become a cornerstone of the CCP’s propaganda thinking.<sup>44</sup>

While the “propagandist und organizer” quote was frequently used in CCP documents to stress the importance of propaganda work and to increase the

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<sup>38</sup> “Dangyuan dui dangbao de zeren” in *Hongqi*, May 10, 1930. Repr. in *XGWH* 3.131-33.

<sup>39</sup> “Ba *Hong Zhong* huoyue feiwu dao quan Zhongguo” in *XGWH* 3.157-59.

<sup>40</sup> “Women yinggai zenyang yonghu Hongjun de shengli: ping women duiyu yonghu Hongjun de xuanchuan gudong gongzuo” (1933) in *XGWH* 3.165-74; the quote appears on p. 169 bottom. For another 1933 article, called “Yuan *Hongse Zhonghua* cheng wei jiti de xuanchuanzhe he jiti de zuzhizhe” (dated 10 Aug. 1933). See Wu Baopu, Li Zhiying, Zhu Yupeng. *Bo Gu wenxuan – nianpu*. Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1997, p. 92f.

<sup>41</sup> “What is to be Done?,” p. 369.

<sup>42</sup> “Xuexi shi gongchandang ren de zeren” (dated Dec. 1939), in *Chen Yun wenxuan*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1995, vol. 1, p. 121-23.

<sup>43</sup> “Xin minzhuzhuyi lun.” Orig. published in *Zhongguo wenhua* 1940.1, p. 1-24, as “Xin minzhuzhuyi de zhengzhi yu xin minzhuzhuyi de wenhua.” The quote appears on p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> “What is to be Done?” was a standard reference not only in China, but also in the Soviet Union. The definition for ‘newspaper’ in *BSE* contains the ubiquitous “propagandist and organizer” quote. See vol. 5, p. 302.



Party's grip of the press, the influence of "What is to be Done" on CCP propaganda work goes much further. Rather than being used just as a quarry exploited to lend ideological legitimacy the Chinese leaders' arguments, the world view and the definition of the Party's role and character that figure so prominently in Lenin's text, profoundly influenced the CCP. "What is to be Done?" must be seen as a key document for the understanding of the CCP's self-perception.

Lenin's polemics are directed against two competing currents within the Russian social-democratic movement. On the one hand, Lenin attacks the "revisionists," the Russian followers of Eduard Bernstein who insist on focussing their work on the issue of social reforms. The other group, whom Lenin calls "Economists," promote agitation at the grassroots level, in the factories, and oppose Lenin's position as elitist, theoretical, and doctrinaire. Rejecting both groups, Lenin argues for a powerful, centralised party that is able to coordinate the various local activities and thus to create synergies in the revolutionary struggle. This party must be led by professional, experienced revolutionaries, as he explains in his principles of party organisation:<sup>45</sup>

I assert: (1) that no revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organisation of leaders maintaining continuity; (2) that the broader the popular masses drawn spontaneously into the struggle, which forms the basis of the movement and participates in it, the more urgent the need for such an organisation, and the more solid this organization must be ...; (3) that such an organization must consist chiefly or people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity; (4) that in an autocratic state, the more we *confine* the membership of such an organization to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult will it be to unearth the organisation; and (5) the *greater* will be the number of people from the working class and from the other social classes who will be able to join the movement and perform active work in it.

In this crucial passage, Lenin develops the model of an "avant-garde within the avant-garde:" the labour movement is led not by workers' committees set up spontaneously, but rather by professional revolutionaries. These professional revolutionaries may originally come from the working class (such as August Bebel, leader of the German Social Democratic Party in the 1890s) but also from the intelligentsia (such as Marx and Engels, Lenin himself, and also the overwhelming

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<sup>45</sup> "What is to be Done?," p. 464. Italics in the original.

majority of the Chinese Party leaders).<sup>46</sup> There are simple, practical reasons for the need for such an avant-garde: a factory worker with an eleven hour labour day will not have the time and the energy to do revolutionary work. The professional revolutionaries in the party, in contrast, devote all their attention to the enterprise of the revolution; they consolidate their political consciousness, and only then can this consciousness be carried into the working class: due to their lack of insight, the workers are capable of spontaneous actions only that have a trade-unionistic character, but are not genuinely social-democratic. On their own, the broad masses of the workers are unable to reach revolutionary consciousness and must be enlightened from without.<sup>47</sup>

Lenin's remarks concerning the role of the press must be seen in this context. As a tool in the hands of an avant-garde organisation, the Leninist press assumes an enlightening function: it supplies the working classes with the intellectual material needed to raise the worker's consciousness. In the course of this enlightenment process, the press thus figures prominently in its role as agitator and propagator. At the same time, the press is the bond that holds together the elite itself through its organizational functions. A deeply hierarchical world view speaks from the Leninist party concept: a professional revolutionary elite faces a proletariat caught in ignorance and stupor that are constantly reinforced through the mechanisms of exploitation. Only the party and its propaganda can help the working classes, by way of education, to liberate itself.

The Leninist concepts presented in "What is to be Done?" were positively received by the Chinese Communists because they were well suited to the Chinese situation. In the early 1930s, the CCP found itself in a precarious situation very similar to the underground fight of the Russian social-democrats. Lenin himself wrote from abroad, and that is where many prominent Chinese Communists lived in the late 1920s and early 1930s – the personal identification with Lenin and the Russian revolution must have boosted the CCP leaders' confidence. In Yan'an, the CCP found itself in a rural backwater, living among an illiterate, superstitious peasant population. For the Chinese Communists, most of

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<sup>46</sup> On the origins and class background of many of the Soviet-trained CCP leaders see Kampen. *The Chinese Communist Leadership*, p. 19-23

<sup>47</sup> Uses of the press for purposes of enlightenment were common worldwide in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I will expand on this issue in chapter 3.

whom had lived in the cosmopolitan urban settings of Shanghai or Beijing, not to speak of Moscow, for most of the previous fifteen years, Lenin's portrayal of the party as an enlightened elite, with a mission to educate the working classes and thus to slowly raise their political consciousness, must have been an argument even more convincing to the CCP in this new setting. When large numbers of peasants were recruited as Party members, the need for education within the Party became an urgent problem.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the link between education and propaganda was established in China with even more emphasis than in the Soviet Union. It was not until the Yan'an era that the idea of education to transform the people's consciousness of their social being emerged as a key function of propaganda (see also chapter one). In the propaganda documents of the early 1930s the issue of education still ranges rather low. This changed in Yan'an, as earlier CCP propaganda policies came under fire. In October 1940, *Gongchandang ren* published a PD document that contained harsh criticism of the CCP's propaganda policies and the attitude of many cadres towards propaganda, and that gave an outline of the new line in this field.<sup>49</sup>

As is usual for Party documents as well as newspaper articles, the document sets out on an affirmative note but immediately thereafter addresses the main problem and its causes:<sup>50</sup>

Since the beginning of the war of resistance [against Japan], and as a consequence of the development of the Chinese revolution and the Party's organizational capacity, the Party's propaganda work has ventured into a very broad area, and the Party's propaganda organs have done much work and have yielded some notable results. However, strictly speaking, the Party's propaganda work lags very far behind the development of the revolution and the Party organization. With view to our latest inspection of the propaganda work within the entire Party organization, the CC PD considers the organization of the propaganda departments on the various levels insufficient, and their work to be incomplete; this is one important reason for the relative backwardness of the Party's propaganda work.

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<sup>48</sup> Donald J. Munro discusses the CCP's adaptation of the Leninist principle of a Party avant-garde in *The Concept of Man in Contemporary China*. University of Michigan Press, 1980; see esp. ch.4. Lenin's approach also resonated well with the self-perception of the traditional Chinese literati elite. I will elaborate on this issue in chapter three.

<sup>49</sup> See "Zhongyang xuanchuanbu guanyu chongshi he jianquan ge ji xuanchuan bumen de zuzhi ji gongzuo de jue ding" (dated Oct. 14, 1940) in *Gongchandang ren* 12; repr. in XGWX 2.166-70. The authorship of this document is unclear.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

The assessment “lagging very far behind” (*luohou... hen yuande* 落后……很远的) is an unusually drastic description of the state of CCP propaganda work; it gives a sense of urgency: the Party press should not lag behind, but rather be a vanguard and play a leading role in the revolution. The Party thus thought immediate action to be necessary. The document goes on to list the failures of the Party cadres and blames not just the propaganda cadres, but rather a general trend within the Party: “In the Party, there exists a tendency to ‘stress organization and take propaganda lightly.’”<sup>51</sup> Bookish intellectuals or Party members who had committed mistakes were transferred to propaganda positions and regarded this as a form of punishment. This trend was especially serious in the Party’s lower ranks:<sup>52</sup>

Within the Party, there are still many comrades, and even comrades taking part in the work of the propaganda departments (especially those comrades in the medium and lower level organizations), who lack a clear understanding of the scope of the work of the propaganda departments. As a consequence, a fairly serious one-sidedness becomes manifest in the work of the propaganda departments, such as the neglect of civic education and cultural activities, the ignorance of the [Japanese] enemies and [Wang Jingwei] puppets’ policy of enslavement, and the lack of attention to and analysis of the political movements and propaganda policies of the different parties and factions. For these reasons it is necessary to provide a better definition and explanation of the scope of the propaganda departments’ work.

This is what the document now turns to: a detailed account of the CCP’s propaganda work that was in place until the Rectification Movement gained momentum in fall 1941.<sup>53</sup>

Our Party’s propaganda work basically comprises two aspects: one concerns directing and carrying out propaganda of revolutionary theory and revolutionary policies (this includes the rejection and criticism of enemy theory and policies, as well as work in all aspects of culture and education); the other concerns directing and carrying out mass agitation of the day-to-day kind (this includes rejecting and exposing enemy instigation). In concrete terms, our propaganda work includes the following points:

- (a) leading and carrying out external propaganda and agitation (including propaganda and agitation against the [Japanese] enemy and the [Wang Jingwei] puppet [government]);
- (b) leading and carrying out education work within the Party: education of regular Party members and cadre education (including Party schools, cadre training classes, etc.);
- (c) directing and promoting civic education;
- (d) directing and promoting cultural activities (that is, activities in culture, literature and arts, and scholarship);

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 166f.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

- (e) leading and organizing publication and distribution of the Party papers, as well as the compilation and publication of all kinds of books, textbooks, and propaganda materials;
- (f) studying the political trends and the propaganda policies of both our enemies and our allies, as well as to propose propaganda counterstrategies for us in a timely manner;
- (g) influencing and directing non-Party cultural, educational, propaganda and agitation institutions or organizations.

Thus, all means of propaganda, including the press, are subordinated to the Party's main objective of the day, the anti-Japanese war, and to the mobilization of the people. The issue that becomes increasingly prominent is that of education: education of cadres, education of rank-and-file Party members, and civic education. As the CCP embarked on one study movement after another (the first had begun in May 1939 and included 4,000 cadres from the Yan'an area),<sup>54</sup> propaganda and education were increasingly identified. The Party claims authority over all elements of the propaganda sector – literature and arts, newspapers, books – that will be used as tools for education and study. Thus, the CCP hoped to educate the Party members as well as the people: to raise their revolutionary consciousness in the struggles ahead.

Mao Zedong placed even more emphasis on this point in his January 1940 article “On New Democracy” (*Xin minzhuzhuyi lun* 新民主主义论). In the last section, “A National, Scientific, and Mass Culture,” he explains:<sup>55</sup>

We must separate as well as combine the degree of knowledge we teach the revolutionary cadres, and the knowledge we teach the revolutionary masses; and we must separate as well as combine the raising [of cultural standards], and popularization. For the people's masses, revolutionary culture is a powerful weapon of the revolution. Before the revolution, revolutionary culture is the ideological preparation of the revolution; during the revolution, it is an essential and important front in the overall revolutionary battle. And the revolutionary cultural workers are the officers at various levels on this cultural front.

While Mao acknowledges the need for differentiated education for the avant-garde and for the masses, he urges his comrades to bridge the gap and create a unified revolutionary culture. When he declares “before the revolution, revolutionary culture is the ideological preparation of the revolution,” Mao echoes Lenin's idea of

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<sup>54</sup> Mao had outlined the rationale of the movement in an important speech on May 20, 1939: “Zai Yan'an zai zhi ganbu jiaoyu dongyuan dahui shang de jianghua.” See Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.). *Mao Zedong wenji*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993, vol. 2, p. 176-86.

<sup>55</sup> Mao Zedong. “Xin minzhuzhuyi lun,” p. 24. The original text carries no section headings, which were added later.

the role of the newspapers (he quotes “What is to be Done?” immediately after the section translated above); but Mao goes further in the second half of the sentence: the struggle in the cultural realm, that is the realm of the superstructure, is itself an essential battle in the overall revolutionary fight. If in Lenin’s text the newspapers were but the “scaffolding” – a provisional structure and temporary means to achieve the goal of preparing the Party for its revolutionary task – the components of the field of ideology (newspapers, books, propaganda booklets, education, etc., as outlined in the October 1940 PD decision) form a battlefield of their own in Mao’s understanding. It is in this field where the major battle against the old ideas will occur, and the study campaigns must be understood as steps in this direction.

The study campaigns advocated by Mao and other leading CCP personnel were aimed at transforming the personalities of the cadres involved, with the goal of binding the cadres solidly to the Party and its leadership. The Party press was to play a crucial role in this transformation process that was conducted through study and indoctrination meetings. Cadres were reminded of their duties time and again since 1940: “Current affairs are a compulsory item of regular study for all office-holding cadres (the Party papers are the main [study] material).”<sup>56</sup> A note on *Zhongguo qingnian* stressed the journal’s role as a textbook for cadre study:<sup>57</sup>

(1) *Zhongguo qingnian* is a youth journal led by the Party; recently, its editorial policy has changed, and it has [now] become a study journal addressing the areas of theory, strategy, work, and cultural life, aimed at young cadres. Because the majority of the Party’s mid-level cadres are young [cadres], and because the Party has no other suitable journal for the mid-level [cadre] study, *Zhongguo qingnian* is also a study journal for the Party’s regular mid-level cadres. ...

(3) ... The fundamental task of the youth organization is education, and therefore the fundamental task of the youth journal is: to become a weapon helping in cadre education and civic education.

The CCP press was thus assuming a more important role as it advanced to become a crucial part of the curriculum for study on all layers of the Party. As a consequence, it was in JFRB where in April 1942 most of the twenty-two texts appeared that were officially designated as study material in the Rectification Campaign. The newspapers moved into the centre of CCP politics.

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<sup>56</sup> “Zhongyang guanyu zai zhi ganbu jiaoyu de zhishi” (dated March 20, 1940) in *Gongchandang ren* 6 (1940); repr. in XGWX 2.142-44.

<sup>57</sup> “Zhongxuanbu guanyu *Zhongguo qingnian* de tongzhi” (dated Oct. 22, 1940) in *Gongchandang ren* 12 (1940); repr. in XGWH 1.95.

Albeit, the CCP newspapers were as yet less than well-prepared for such a momentous task. The October 1940 “Decision” of the PD that has been cited above had criticized the shortcomings of the Party’s propaganda work at length. The Party newspapers, that were to play a crucial role in the study and rectification campaign unfolding in mid-1941, were beset with problems and inadequacies. Furthermore, disagreement about the proper principles for newspaper making had emerged in the run-up to the campaign. A shake-up of the CCP media apparatus in Yan’an was thus inevitable. In April 1942, when rectification moved into high gear, the time had come for major reforms across the media sector: on April 15, 1942, the CCP Secretariat ordered a general restructuring of the publishing sector in Yan’an. Even more importantly, two weeks earlier, on April 1, the Party’s flagship organ, JFRB, had appeared with an overhauled make-up. From the charges levelled against the Party paper JFRB, we can reconstruct the evolving media concept that lay behind these moves. This is what the next section will do.

Before moving on, however, we can make a first, preliminary attempt to sum up the core points that have emerged as central elements of the CCP’s understanding of the media in the early Yan’an period:

- (1) The media speak with the unified voice of the party;
- (2) they are indispensable tools of party propaganda and party building;
- (3) they assist the party, the avant-garde of the working class, to raise the consciousness of the people;
- (4) the media are essentially about education.

### *Media for the Masses: Reshaping the Party Media*

The reorganization in April 1942 of JFRB, the CC organ, was a crucial event in CCP newspaper history. The restructuring (*gaiban* 改版) that was announced on April 1 in the form of an editorial entitled “To our readers” has been canonized in

official writings on media and propaganda.<sup>58</sup> For three reasons, the reshuffle of the Party's flagship newspaper in Yan'an was indeed a decisive moment: firstly, it signalled a shift in the power constellation in Yan'an that significantly weakened the group of Moscow-returned students who had controlled the Party's media and propaganda apparatus for almost a decade.<sup>59</sup> Secondly, the reorganization introduced obvious changes in the practice of newspaper making in Yan'an.<sup>60</sup> Finally, it led to a general reformulation of media thinking and provided the basis for a new conception of the media's function in the CCP's overall project.<sup>61</sup>

All the while, it is important to view the JFRB reorganization in context. Some observers have overemphasized the importance of the April 1, 1942, restructuring. The reshuffle was not an isolated event; it was neither the turning point in Mao Zedong's struggle for intra-Party power, nor was it the key event in the Party's Rectification Campaign.<sup>62</sup> Rather, the overhaul of the CCP's foremost propaganda organ was one episode in a much broader political process that saw

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<sup>58</sup> "Zhi duzhe" in JFRB, Apr. 1, 1942. Repr. in XGWH 3.50-53. The April 1 editorial and the March 16 "Circular" that ordered the reshuffle, established an enduring legacy in CCP media history. It is certainly no coincidence that RMRB chose the same title ("To our readers") for a seminal editorial on July 1, 1956, that announced a new direction for the Party's most prominent newspaper. The March 16 "Circular" was reprinted in 1990 in Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu xinwenju (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang xinwen gongzuo wenxian xuanbian*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe (for internal publication). This hastily compiled collection was published in the course of the Party's efforts to strengthen control of the media in the wake of the Democracy Movement of spring 1989. The fact that the "Circular" is one of only three documents from the pre-1949 period in this collection underlines its importance and indicates that the basic lines of argument were accepted by the Party to be valid for the media sector even after fifty years. On the background of the April 1 reforms see further Yang Fangzhi. "Jiefang ribao gaiban yu Yan'an zhengfeng" in *Xinwen yanjiu ziliao* 18 (1983.3), p. 1-5, and Wang Jing. "Dangbao shi shang di yi ci xinwen gaige: jinian Yan'an Jiefang ribao gaiban 50 zhounian" in *Xinwen yanjiu ziliao* 57 (1992.2), p. 132-54.

<sup>59</sup> Compare the discussion of personnel clusters in chapter 1. Zhang Wentian had been sidelined in the Propaganda Department after a PB meeting on Jan. 12 that "approved" his plans for a tour of the rural areas. The meeting handed over the PD to Kai Feng; day-to-day operations were to be handled by Li Weihuan. See *Mao Zedong nianpu*, vol. 2, p. 354. Zhang left on 26 January and gave up active involvement in the propaganda sector. See Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi (ed.). *Zhang Wentian nianpu*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2000, 2 vols., here vol. 2, p. 665. At JFRB, Bo Gu bore the brunt of the criticism. The infighting in the Party during the time surrounding the JFRB overhaul has been discussed extensively in Kampen. *Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and the Chinese Communist Leadership*; and Gao Hua. *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de, passim*.

<sup>60</sup> See the empirical sections of Stranahan. *Molding the Medium*.

<sup>61</sup> This point is stressed in Gao Hua. *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de*, p. 372-77. However, I disagree with Gao's summary of five "Maoist news principles." The list neglects the emphasis on "mass character" (see below) and the importance of the pre-1942 evolution of CCP thinking on the media. Furthermore, Gao tends to overemphasize the role of Mao Zedong, who had decisive influence on the formulation of the CCP's media concept, but did not work out the principles on his own. It is more accurate, I believe, to speak of the CCP's media concept, than of Mao's.

<sup>62</sup> I am taking issue here with Patricia Stranahan's argument in both "The Last Battle" and her *Molding the Medium*. I will detail my criticism on the following pages.



the Party's ideological and organizational make-over in the first half of the 1940s; JFRB was but one of many battlefields of the Rectification Campaign, and the campaign was not about propaganda and the media in the first place. It is with the evolution of the Party's media concept in mind that we must turn our attention to discussions surrounding the JFRB overhaul.

The reorganization that was announced on April 1 had a considerable prehistory (see Chart 1). Since its founding in May 1941, JFRB had established working routines and a distinct style that are attributed by most observers to the ambition of Bo Gu, the paper's editor-in-chief, to emulate *Pravda*, the mouthpiece of the CPSU. Not all quarters of the Party had been satisfied with this decision, and criticism had been voiced occasionally (the older arguments were repeated during the critique of the paper after April 1, used as evidence of JFRB's refusal to reform). The issue became critical sometime in January 1942, when Shi Zhe 師哲, nominally the personal secretary of Ren Bishi and de facto Mao's translator for Russian, brought the matter to the attention of Mao Zedong.<sup>63</sup> Mao is said to have read Shi Zhe's letter to his colleagues at a PB meeting on January 24. The PB issued a decision (*jueyi* 决议) on newspaper work that corresponded with Mao's opinions.<sup>64</sup> Thus JFRB had moved into the line of fire, at a crucial point in the intensifying Rectification Campaign.

Over the next weeks, the state of the propaganda sector became a major concern for Mao. Only two days after the January 24 document, he personally drafted a set of "propaganda key points" (*Xuanchuan yaodian* 宣传要点) for the PD.<sup>65</sup> On February 1, he encouraged a young cadre to criticize JFRB's style which he called "party eight-legged essays" (党八股),<sup>66</sup> a formulation he would use a

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<sup>63</sup> This information is given in Li Zhiying. *Bo Gu zhuan*, Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1994, p. 402. The letter is mentioned in none of the three published memoirs of Shi Zhe, *Zai lishi juren shenbian: Shi Zhe huiyilu*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1991 (the official version); *Feng yu gu: Shi Zhe huiyilu*. Beijing: Hongqi chubanshe, 1992 (the unofficial account); *Wode yi sheng: Shi Zhe huiyilu*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2001. For reasons unknown, Shi Zhe hardly mentions Bo Gu at all.

<sup>64</sup> See Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.). *Mao Zedong nianpu*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2002, 3 vols., here vol. 2, p. 356-57, where a paraphrase of Mao's arguments can be found. The meeting is also mentioned in Xu Zehao (ed.). *Wang Jiaxiang nianpu*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2001, p. 124.

<sup>65</sup> Reprinted in Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.). *Mao Zedong wenji*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993, vol. 2, p. 389-91.

<sup>66</sup> See Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.). *Mao Zedong nianpu*, vol. 2, p. 360.

## Chart 2.1 Timeline for the JFRB reshuffle

Jan.	Shi Zhe letter to Mao Zedong
24 Jan.	Mao speaks at PB meeting, criticizing JFRB
26 Jan.	Mao drafts “Xuanchuan yaodian”
1 Feb.	Mao letter to young cadre Zhou Wen
Feb.	Lu Dingyi sent to JFRB
11 Feb.	Mao speaks at PB meeting, criticizing JFRB
8 March	Mao calligraphy published in JFRB
11 March	PB meeting, Mao attacks JFRB
13 March	JFRB publishes Wang Shiwei’s <i>Wild Lilies</i> , Part I
14 March	Mao note to Zhou Enlai, mentioning discussions on JFRB
16 March	PD issues “Wei gaijin dangbao de tongzhi”
26 March	JFRB publishes Wang Shiwei’s <i>Wild Lilies</i> , Part II
31 March	JFRB reform meeting; Mao speaks
1 Apr.	JFRB announces reform, publ. March 16 “Tongzhi”
2 Apr.	JFRB publ. Mao’s March 31 speech

Chart 1: Timeline of the discussions surrounding the JFRB reshuffle

week later in a major rectification speech that has become known under the title *Fandui dang bagu* 反对党八股.<sup>67</sup> In a related move, Mao reportedly sent Lu Dingyi to oversee work at JFRB sometime in February.<sup>68</sup> During several Politburo meetings in the next two months, Mao picked up the JFRB issue, and attacks on the paper and its leadership escalated. At a conference on February 11, Mao presented a long list of JFRB’s shortcomings and called for improvements in the paper.<sup>69</sup> Bo’s biographers remark that Mao’s scathing criticism greatly affected Bo, who was a man with much experience in Party journalism.<sup>70</sup> Yet the meeting agreed with Mao’s criticism and Bo Gu was forced to make amendments to his

<sup>67</sup> Published in JFRB on June 18 that year. “Party eight-legged essays” and the issue of style in newspaper articles are discussed later in this section.

<sup>68</sup> See Gao Hua. *Taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de*, p. 369. This is confirmed in Xinwen yanjiusuo Zhongguo baokan shi yanjiushi. “Yan’an *Jiefang ribao shi dagang* (zhengqiu yijian gao) in *Xinwen yanjiu ziliao* 17, p. 5-47, here p. 15. Wu Baopu et al. *Bo Gu wenxuan – nianpu*, p. 489, further confirms that on April 3 Lu Dingyi started the column “Study” (*Xuexi* 学习), a crucial section of the reformed paper that carried many materials related to the Rectification Campaign over the next months. Lu was officially installed as JFRB’s editor-in-chief on 15 August 1942. See also Stranahan, p. 533 (however, Stranahan does not mention his earlier presence and his crucial role in founding the new column *Xuexi*).

<sup>69</sup> See Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.). *Mao Zedong nianpu*, vol. 2, p. 362-63, where Mao’s words are paraphrased. The language used here is much sharper than that adopted in the PD directive issued the same day (see below).

<sup>70</sup> Chen Xi. “Bo Gu” in *Zhonggong dangshi renwu zhuan*. Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1983, vol. 53, p. 1-51, here p. 43. Adding insult to injury, Mao forced Bo Gu to publish on March 8 a calligraphy he had written for the paper, reading: “immerse with the masses, stop empty talking.” See Li Zhiying. *Bo Gu zhuan*, p. 402. Confirmed by Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.). *Mao Zedong nianpu*, vol. 2, p. 367.

editorial policies. An indication of Mao's concerns was included in a PD directive of the same day.<sup>71</sup> The directive said that<sup>72</sup>

this anti-subjectivist, anti-factionalist, anti-*dang bagu* thinking of the [Party] Center has not been implemented in the work of the entire Party, and especially in the propaganda and education organs, the implementation of these ideas of the Party has not been made the key task in our current propaganda and education work. Therefore, ... it is necessary, under [the guidance of] these ideas, to transform our propaganda and education work, to examine the education in the cadre schools as well as the education of cadres on-the-job, and to examine our newspapers and journals; it is necessary to achieve the implementation of these ideas of the Centre in the entire work of the Party.

Bo Gu was entrusted with the preparation of a draft paper on the reform of JFRB that he presented at a second Politburo meeting a month later, on March 11. Again, Mao addressed the meeting and formulated his criticism in very blunt language.<sup>73</sup> The debate had now reached a point where a new consensus over the future of JFRB began to emerge. On March 14, Mao informed Zhou Enlai in Chongqing of the discussions over the past weeks, indicating a reshuffle at the CC organ,<sup>74</sup> and on March 16, five days after the PB meeting, the PD issued an important document entitled "Circular concerning the reform of the Party papers" (*Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu wei gaizao dangbao de tongzhi* 中共中央宣传部为改造党报的通知).<sup>75</sup> The circular endorsed Mao's arguments and outlined a new course for the paper. JFRB's reorganization was imminent.

Around this time, two events happened that provided Mao with concrete material to demonstrate to the PB the urgency of the JFRB overhaul: on March 9, JFRB had published "Thoughts on March Eighth" (*San-ba jie you gan* 三八节有感), an essay by the prominent woman writer Ding Ling who was in charge of JFRB's literature and arts section.<sup>76</sup> On the occasion of Women's Day (March 8), Ding Ling reflected on the situation of women in Yan'an society and came to sobering conclusions. Even more upsetting was the publication, in the same section of the

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<sup>71</sup> "Zhongyang xuanchuanbu guanyu jinxing fan zhuguanzhuyi, fan jiaotiaozhuyi, fan zongpaizhuyi, fan dang bagu gei ge ji xuanchuanbu de zhishi" (dated Feb. 11, 1942) in XGWX 2.339-41.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 339-40.

<sup>73</sup> Mao's remarks at the March 11 meeting have not been published. For paraphrases of the most important arguments see *Mao Zedong nianpu* 2.368.

<sup>74</sup> *Mao Zedong nianpu* 2.369. For the text of the telegram see "Dangbao ying xishou dangwai renyuan fabiao yanlun" in *MZDXGW*, p. 93. Mao wrote: "There are already discussions on the improving of JFRB that shall strengthen its Party character and its [ability] to reflect the masses' [concerns]."

<sup>75</sup> XGWX 2.357-58. The "Circular" was finally published on April 1 on the paper's first page, right next to the editorial "To our readers."

<sup>76</sup> For a discussion see Merle Goldman. *Literary Dissent in Communist China*, p. 23f.

paper, of Wang Shiwei's essay "Wild Lilies" (*Ye bai hehua* 野百荷花), that catapulted the writer to his tragic fame. In "Wild Lilies" Wang Shiwei gave a scathing critique of the CCP and described Yan'an as a class society with an impenetrable hierarchy and a top leadership lacking in concern for the ordinary people.<sup>77</sup>

While some of Wang's accusations may have even matched Mao's own criticism of his colleagues, the prescriptions he indicated to cure the Party's ills did certainly not. Because of its bluntness, Wang Shiwei's essay came as a handy argument to shake up the literature and arts establishment in Yan'an, and also to accuse the JFRB leadership, and Bo Gu in particular, of tolerating erroneous tendencies on the pages of the CC's mouthpiece. All the while, the Wang Shiwei affair was but an alibi, and one among many. It was certainly not the cause and the reason that triggered the JFRB reshuffle in the first place, as has become clear from the discussion above.<sup>78</sup>

Bo Gu's leadership of JFRB was soon coming to an end. He submitted an internal self-criticism to the editorial committee, and repeated his mistakes in public at a large conference on March 31 that had been convened to discuss the reorganization of the paper.<sup>79</sup> The meeting was attended by about seventy people, including the newspaper's staff, and presided over by Mao Zedong.<sup>80</sup> In particular, Bo Gu presented the finalized draft, that had been read and revised by Mao Zedong, of the editorial "To our readers" that was to appear the next morning.<sup>81</sup> While it did not carry the name of its author, it must be read not only as an authoritative statement of those ideas that Mao Zedong had formulated for the

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<sup>77</sup> Wang Shiwei. "Ye bai hehua" in JFRB, March 13, 1942 (first part) and March 26 (second part) (the articles are signed "Shiwei"). Repr. in Zhu Hongzhao (ed.). *Wang Shiwei wencun*. Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian shudian, 1998, p. 125-32. On the Wang Shiwei affair see further Dai Qing. *Wang Shiwei and "Wild Lilies:" Rectification and Purges in the Chinese Communist Party, 1942-1944*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994.

<sup>78</sup> Patricia Stranahan directly links the Wang Shiwei affair with Mao's decision to overhaul the newspaper. This was certainly not the case. Rather, the JFRB reshuffle had a prehistory (almost entirely absent in Stranahan's account) of at least three months, as the record of PB meetings and communications shows that I have reconstructed above.

<sup>79</sup> For Bo Gu's self-criticism see Wu Baopu et al. *Bo Gu wenxuan – nianpu*, p. 488f.

<sup>80</sup> On this meeting see Wang Jing. "Dangbao shi shang di yi ci xinwen gaige," p. 135f. Mao's speech at the meeting was published in JFRB on April 2, 1942.

<sup>81</sup> For Bo's authorship of the April 1 editorial see his biography in *Renwu zhuan*, p. 43-44. It has been included in Wu Baopu et al. *Bo Gu wenxuan – nianpu*, p. 304. On Mao's redaction of Bo's draft see the note *ibid.*, p. 304.

media in the course of the Rectification campaign, but also as Bo Gu's personal self-criticism, a humiliating public confession of his mistakes.

In the discussion above I have focused on the background of the April 1942 reorganization of JFRB and on the personnel changes in the CCP's propaganda sector. I will now turn to the consequences of the reshuffle for the emergence of a new conception of newspaper making, both in practice and in theory. The editorial "To our readers" begins with the words: "Today, our paper respectfully presents our readers with a new layout; we want to use this opportunity to summarize our work of the past ten months and to put forward the future direction of this paper."<sup>82</sup> JFRB's self-criticism presents the most systematic analysis of the mistakes of the Party media; furthermore, it is an important source for the investigation into those themes in the media field that emerged in the Yan'an Rectification Campaign and that became factors shaping the Party's media concept. In what follows, I will deliver a close reading of the editorial.<sup>83</sup>

"To our readers" is an unusually elegant and rhetorically powerful text, hinting to the care with which it was prepared. It sets out with a number of questions:<sup>84</sup>

What is a party paper? Whenever this question is raised, everyone will certainly think of such well-known words as "the party paper is not just a collective propagandist and agitator, but also a collective organizer" (Lenin) or "the party paper is our sharpest and most powerful weapon" (Stalin). But we may be forgiven to ask: how can a newspaper actually become a collective propagandist, agitator, or organizer? And how exactly can it become the sharpest and most powerful weapon in the hands of our Party?

Confronting the reader with the Lenin and Stalin quotations right at the beginning is an economical approach to the problem. The quotation from "What is to be Done?" was widely known among the Chinese Communists, and the Stalin quote is being used almost as often.<sup>85</sup> Yet, and this the editorial shows, it had become a

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<sup>82</sup> "Zhi duzhe" in JFRB, Apr. 1, 1942. Repr. in *XGWH* 3.50-53.

<sup>83</sup> The editorial also sums up most of the points made by Mao in his speeches at the February 11 and March 31 meetings. I will comment on these earlier remarks by Mao wherever the comparison offers insights in the development of his ideas concerning the press in the months leading up to the JFRB reshuffle.

<sup>84</sup> "To our readers," JFRB, April 1, 1942.

<sup>85</sup> Taken from Stalin's organizational report to the CPSU's 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (dated 17 Apr. 1923). In Chinese see Li Qingfang (ed.). *Sidalin lun baokan*. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1985, p. 194-95, here p. 194. The quote has been used all over the Socialist world. In February 1950 the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, the ruling Party in the GDR) convened a seminal conference on the press under the same slogan. See Gunter Holzweißig. *Die schärfste Waffe der Partei: Eine Mediengeschichte der DDR*. Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2002, p. vii.

habit to quote the classic authors of Marxism in a mechanical way, devoid of concrete content. It is this mistake, elsewhere termed “formalism,” that the editorial hopes to make good for by elaborating on four points for a Party newspaper:<sup>86</sup>

So [a good Party newspaper] must: firstly, carry through a firm party character. It is not enough to “directly and openly adopt the standpoint of a definite social group in any assessment of events” (Lenin);<sup>87</sup> it is not enough to take the Party’s point of view, the Party’s opinion on all pages [of the newspaper], in every single article, every report, and every news item – but, and even more importantly so, the newspaper must be closely linked to all the Party’s principles, all policies, and all trends; it must breathe together with the Party. The newspaper must become the trailblazer and the vanguard carrying out the Party’s every policy and every call.

Secondly, [the newspaper must] establish close ties with the masses, reflect the masses’ feelings, their needs and demands; record the moments of their heroic struggle both happy and tragic, and reflect the suffering and bitterness they are enduring; it must convey their opinions and voices. The newspaper’s task is not only to enrich the masses’ knowledge, to expand their horizon, to raise their consciousness, and to teach and organize them, but rather it must become their mirror and their mouthpiece, the friend sharing weal and woe.

Thirdly, [the newspaper must] be brimming with combat character. The Party paper must be a fighter struggling for the Party’s revolutionary principles and line. It must engage in zealous agitation, as political events before us require – and the success of this agitation depends on its exposing all darkness and corruption forthrightly and pointedly, on its attacking all schemes and manoeuvres harmful to our anti-Japanese unity. And particularly on the ideological front the newspapers must engage in the continual and persistent struggle of ideas, must propagate Communist and democratic thought, must combat all reaction and restoration, darkness and ignorance. But at the same time, the newspapers must also be a powerful weapon of self-criticism in the hands of our Party. With a matter-of-fact attitude, with the attitude of comrades, the Party paper must criticize and censure the mistakes and weaknesses within our ranks; it must help us in overcoming and correcting them.

Fourthly, [the newspaper must] respond to the calls of Party and government, or in line with the Party’s principles spearhead the different kinds of popular movements, and continuously oversee and direct the movement’s unfolding; it must lend concrete assistance to the different kinds of popular movements and to the struggle of the great masses of workers and peasants. Under no circumstances can the Party paper become a passive recorder of what happens; rather, it must be an active advocate and organizer of all kinds of movements.

The above section shows the powerful rhetoric of the editorial; its language was crafted carefully in order to underline the importance of its message. In particular, the section sums up several arguments that figure prominently in many other writings of the Yan’an period. The CCP Party newspapers are to fulfil four requirements: party character, mass character, combat character, and organization character. “Party character” is a little satisfactory translation of

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<sup>86</sup> “To our readers.”

<sup>87</sup> This quotation is from “The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of it in Mr. Struve’s Book,” where Lenin speaks about the partisan character of the materialist worldview. See *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 333-507, here p. 401, with minor changes.

*dangxing* 党性, (or *partiinost*), that had been an integral element in CCP media thinking for two decades. The other three terms (which are even more difficult to translate), however, are of more or less indigenous origin. “Mass character” (*qunzhong xing* 群众性) manifests itself in “establish[ing] close ties with the masses.” It is with regard to this requirement that Mao attested JFRB major shortcomings and the need for improvements. Under the heading “combat character” (*zhandou xing* 战斗性), the editorial calls for a more aggressive style: a Party paper is not supposed to report from the sidelines (not even from a partisan perspective), but to throw itself actively into the political and ideological struggles of the Party. Obviously, JFRB had not shown enough edge in the promotion of the Party’s propaganda. The last point, “organization character” (*zuzhi xing* 组织性) remains the most obscure of the four requirements in the April 1 editorial. In a speech two years later, Bo Gu summed “organization character” up: “to not simply reflect reality, but rather to transform reality, to organize [mass] movements, and to direct an assigned work.”<sup>88</sup> “Organization character” is an effort to put Lenin’s remarks concerning the organizational capabilities of the Party paper into more concrete terms, it refers directly to the guiding and mobilizing function of the press in political campaigns, such as the Rectification Movement then under way.

JFRB had failed on all four fronts during the period from May 1941 to March 1942; the paper had not fulfilled its mission as the organ and the mouthpiece of the CCP CC. What follows in the April 1 editorial is an extensive self-criticism: “It must be said that JFRB has been unable to fulfil the task of becoming a truly militant party organ, it has not yet become the sharp weapon of the Party Centre that disseminates the Party line, prosecutes the Party’s policies, and delivers propaganda and organization to the masses.”<sup>89</sup> What exactly were the shortcomings of the paper? JFRB acknowledged,<sup>90</sup>

we have allocated the most space to international news while failing to record in any systematic manner the life and the struggle of the people of the whole country and the various base areas; we have carried the Centre’s decisions and directives, as well as the articles of our leading comrades, yet did so in an isolated fashion and without

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<sup>88</sup> “Dangbao jizhe yao zhuyi xie shenme wenti” (dated fall 1944) in *XGWH* 3.203-05, here p. 204. The original reads “to direct reality” (*zhidao xianshi* 指导现实), but that doesn’t seem to make sense. Since the text is based on a transcript by Hong Liu 洪流 (pseudonym?) of a speech Bo Gu gave, I assume that “transform reality” comes nearer to what the speaker had in mind.

<sup>89</sup> “To our readers.”

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

attaching elaborations and explanations; and [we provided] almost no feedback of the implementation of and experiences learned from these policies and decisions. We have given enormous amounts of space to dull and dry articles and translations, but failed to explain problems of an urgent nature in a language lively and vivid, popular and easy to understand. We did fall short of criticizing hostile ideology in an appropriate way.

JFRB admitted to being guilty of an attitude of aloofness from the masses – it had not sufficiently served the needs of the cadres and people of the border region. A particularly interesting confession is, of course, that of excessively stressing international news. As the Communist movement defined itself in internationalist terms, the CCP's inward-looking turn to local concerns reflects a decisive shift in attitude. It is a critique in particular of Bo Gu and others with experience abroad that made them alert to international developments and to directives from the Communist International – influence that Mao tried to reduce. These issues were now said to be of limited interest to a mainly rural population in a secluded base area (and to the cadres working there); consequently, the coverage of foreign affairs was to be downgraded. Mao's influence is discernible not only in this point. Several of the above points in the paper's self-criticism echo Mao Zedong's rectification talks: "given ... space to dull and dry articles and translations" takes up what Mao had mocked as "Party eight-legged essays" (*dang bagu* 党八股).<sup>91</sup> Even when the Rectification Campaign gathered momentum, JFRB had not rid itself of old habits:<sup>92</sup>

In our Party papers, we have not given to the rectification of the three styles [i.e. the style of learning (*xuefeng* 学风), the style of the Party (*dangfeng* 党风), and the writing style (*wenfeng* 文风)] the attention and place it deserves; this practice has grown into a trend, and the trend into a tide, [with the result that] important Party news have been relegated to the most inconspicuous places [on the page]. A number of explanatory articles and comments was either superficial and devoid of content, with tough language but vague meaning, or were sticking to a single point to the neglect of all others, thus distorting the original meaning, or were even full of hollow phrases – opposing the eight-legged essay with nothing else but the eight-legged essay.

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<sup>91</sup> "Fandui dang bagu," based on Mao's speech from Feb. 8, 1942, was one the 22 Rectification Documents and appeared in JFRB on June 18 that year. In this text, Mao attacks the writing style (*wenfeng* 文风) of his colleagues as dry, repetitive, and dogmatic. *Dang bagu* was said to be a symptom of subjectivist and factionalist tendencies in the Party. To counter *dang bagu*, Mao had the Party study a small booklet called *Xuanchuan zhinan* 宣传指南 that contained, next to texts from Lenin, Dimitrov and Mao, a short excerpt from Lu Xun, where the writer gives advice on writing style. *Xuanchuan zhinan* is recommended in Mao's "Fandui dang bagu" and was distributed on the day Mao made his speech. It appeared in JFRB on Feb. 15, 1942, and became one of the 22 rectification documents.

<sup>92</sup> "To our readers."



While pronouncing the “death sentence” on *dang bagu*,<sup>93</sup> the paper had failed to come up with credible evidence that it was prepared to become a model for an improved writing style. And not only with regard to its style of writing had JFRB failed: “In order to become the vanguard of anti-subjectivism, anti-factionalism, and anti-*dang bagu*, [the newspaper] itself first must become a model [in the rectification struggle], because only a model can be a vanguard.”<sup>94</sup> Yet exactly that had not happened; instead, JFRB had lagged behind the general trend. The Party paper was supposed to perform a model function in all the Party’s political campaigns: as the foremost propaganda tool, the Party organs were to set the tone for the rest of the Party. It was in this way that Lenin’s dictum of the Party paper’s double function as propagandist and organizer was to be understood.

To illustrate these mistakes, the editorial quoted several examples of JFRB’s failures in recent months:

Subjectivism (for example, the assessment of the German-Turkish agreement on the eve of the war between the Soviet Union and Germany),<sup>95</sup> factionalism (like the rejection of certain article manuscripts and [the paper’s] inability to avoid narrow-minded thinking), and *dang bagu* (like certain editorials, specialized articles, and columns) can be found all over our pages. Consequently, [our paper] has been unable to assume its proper function in the reform of the entire Party through ideological revolution.

Subjectivism is a grave political error: a form of idealism, it had led the Party to incorrect assessments under the leadership of Wang Ming and Bo Gu.<sup>96</sup> The editorial pleads guilty of committing subjectivist errors as late as June 1941: the paper’s failure to anticipate the German invasion of the Soviet Union and other miscalculations had convinced the PD of the need to distribute “Propaganda essentials” (*Xuanchuan yaodian* 宣传要点) since August 1941.<sup>97</sup> However, even

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<sup>93</sup> In an editorial “Xuanbu dang bagu de sixing” in JFRB, Feb. 11, 1942.

<sup>94</sup> “To our readers.”

<sup>95</sup> The “Treaty of Friendship between Germany and Turkey” was signed on June 18, 1941, four days prior to Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union, and allowed Germany to concentrate its troops to attack its former ally.

<sup>96</sup> This accusation has been upheld in later years: in the 1945 “Resolution on some questions concerning the history of our Party” Wang Ming and Bo Gu were criticized for subjectivism. According to Kampen. *The Chinese Communist Leadership*, p. 112, the original “Resolution” contained the accusations, but did not mention the names of Wang Ming and Bo Gu. These were added only in 1953, when the “Resolution” was included in volume 3 of Mao’s *Selected Works*.

<sup>97</sup> See “Zhongyang xuanchuanbu xuanchuan yaodian,” Aug. 2, Aug. 16, Aug. 26, 1941, in XGWX 2.277-78, 281, 282-83, all of which contain the Party leadership’s assessment of the war in Europe and the Far East, thus directly prescribing the editorial line. For the April 1 editorial, it did not matter that the Soviet leadership had been subject to the same miscalculations (without being guilty of subjectivism, of course).

then subjectivism apparently had not been overcome, so that by late March 1942, when JFRB's reform was decided upon, JFRB was still failing "to assume its proper function in the reform of the entire Party through ideological revolution."

Factionalism (*zongpaizhuyi* 宗派主义) was an equally serious accusation. The editorial suggests that JFRB had been hijacked – at least during certain times – by groups within the Party and had refused access to its pages to others;<sup>98</sup> the result was "narrow-minded thinking." The editorial, however, does not call for more democratic procedures by giving equal access to different opinions: factionalism is itself an evil that the Rectification Campaign was to fight, in order to create a unified, centralized Party that would speak with a single, unified voice (but now, the correct single voice).

Concrete manifestations of *dang bagu* had been found in editorials, but also in the columns (*fukan* 副刊), especially the "eight specialized columns" (*ba da zhuanlan* 八大专栏).<sup>99</sup> Apparently, some of the articles in the regular columns were found to be overly academic and detached from the concerns of the border region population and the average cadres in Yan'an. The column that had most incurred the leadership's wrath was Ding Ling's "Literature and Art," where Wang Shiwei's essays had appeared, but also Ding's own controversial "Thoughts on March Eighth." Only three of the eight columns resumed publication after April 1, 1942, yet with less frequency than before.<sup>100</sup>

The new layout that was introduced after April 1, 1942 reacted on the charges levelled against JFRB. For more than half a year, since the paper's expansion from two to four pages in September 1941, it had as a rule devoted the first page to important news from the European war, domestic news, and editorials. Page two had seen more international news, page three national news, and the last page was usually divided between local news of the Border Region and

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<sup>98</sup> For example, reporting on Mao's Feb. 8 speech on the "Party eight-legged essay" was delayed until Feb. 10, when a short note appeared on the bottom of page three. Only on Feb. 11, three days after the speech, the paper came up with a belated editorial "Xuanbu dang bagu de sixing."

<sup>99</sup> For a discussion of the columns see Stranahan. "The Last Battle," p. 525ff.

<sup>100</sup> "Enemy" (*Diqing* 敌情), "Science" (*Kexue yuandi* 科学园地), and "Health" (*Weisheng* 卫生) were the only columns to survive the reshuffle. They were joined in May 1942 by a new column: "Study" (*Xuexi* 学习), edited by Lu Dingyi.

columns.<sup>101</sup> After April 1, the first page contained important national, international, and local news, and editorials.<sup>102</sup> Page two featured news from the Border Region, page three international news, and page four a few columns, study materials, documents, and the occasional literary item. All these changes can be traced to the accusations and to the paper's confession of its mistakes. Albeit, they are just the surface reflection of much more profound changes taking place. An alteration of layout was certainly not what Mao and the rest of the Party leadership present at the February 11, March 11, and March 31 meetings on JFRB's reforms had in mind.

Towards the end of the April 1 editorial, a sketch of the paper's new conception of its own role is emerging:<sup>103</sup>

Our Party is a Party representing the people; for us, there are no other interests than those of the people. We want to make our newspaper the common platform for all people and all parties of the entire nation resisting against Japan; we welcome all anti-Japanese individuals and parties to use our pages so as to advance all proposals and measures that might be beneficial to our unity against Japan, and to eliminate all obstacles harmful to the great enterprise of resistance and reconstruction.

The crucial point in this passage is the word “people” – *renmin* 人民. Mao had indicated that he thought of a “people's newspaper” – *renmin de baozhi* 人民的报纸 – in a much more literal sense than most of his colleagues: “Our newspapers must localize, must reflect the local situation. The Party papers must reflect the masses and [thus] carry out the Party's policies.”<sup>104</sup> The masses mentioned by Mao are in a very concrete sense the people living in the Border Region, and it is for this reason that the paper must “localize” (*difanghua* 地方化) in order to become the people's paper. In an equally literal sense we must understand the term “reflect” (*fanying* 反映): the newspaper is part of a two-way process: *ying* 映 is to be understood as the bright sunlight that shines on the people in form of the Party's policies – which are carried by the paper because of its party character. The paper's mass character now reverses this direction and informs the Party of

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<sup>101</sup> See Stranahan, who has carried out an extensive content analysis of JFRB. “The Last Battle,” p. 524. On the period after April 1, 1942, see *Molding the Medium*, p. 7.

<sup>102</sup> In imitation of the practice of *Pravda*, JFRB had run daily editorials before the reshuffle. This practice had been criticized and it was discontinued under the new editorial line.

<sup>103</sup> “To our readers.”

<sup>104</sup> Taken from *Mao Zedong nianpu*, p. 368. Mao's remarks from March 11 have not been published and are not marked as a quotation in *Nianpu*, but the language suggests strongly that the compilers are quoting literally from the meeting transcript.

the effects its policies have on the masses. In the concept of the “mass character” of the newspapers we can find a dialectical argument similar to that of democratic centralism, where the people are to provide input for the Party, which crystallizes these inputs, moulds them into policies, and returns them to the people.

Of the four requirements for a newspaper – party character, mass character, combat character, and organization character – two stand out in importance: party and mass character. The demand that newspapers adhere closely to Party policies and follow the prescriptions of the Party centre, the requirement to speak with a unified voice for the entire Party, seems hardly an innovation. It had in fact been a key feature of Communist media policy since the founding of the CCP<sup>105</sup> and had been made a requirement in the Communist movement outside China at a much earlier date. Yet Mao’s insistence on party character, a central theme in his addresses to the Politburo meetings preceding the JFRB reforms,<sup>106</sup> was more than just a matter of degree, as the theme of class struggle became ever more important for Mao.<sup>107</sup> The Yan’an Rectification Campaign thus gave a new interpretation of a trend that has been noted above as one of the features of media thinking in Yan’an.

The most innovative of the four elements listed in the April 1 editorial was mass character. Party character and mass character were closely interrelated. Mao had indicated this when he remarked:<sup>108</sup>

Newspapers must concentrate on the affairs of their own country. This is one expression of party character. Now our JFRB has not yet sufficiently manifested our Party character; the most obvious sign of this is that our newspapers have allotted most space to reprinting news from foreign and domestic bourgeois news agencies and [thus] have spread their influence. Propagation of our Party’s policies and of the masses’ activities, in contrast, has been few and far between, or has been assigned to the least important places [of the page]. JFRB must focus its attention chiefly on China’s war of resistance, on the activities of our Party, and on the construction of our base areas; it must reflect the masses’ activities and substantiate [the flow of] information for the lower levels.

The newspaper’s Party character lies exactly in its concern for local affairs and the affairs of the masses of the Border Region, supposed to be its primary readership. The slogan that was coined in the Yan’an era to give expression to this approach

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<sup>105</sup> Compare chapter one for this point.

<sup>106</sup> See *Mao Zedong nianpu*, p. 362, 368.

<sup>107</sup> I will comment on the growing influence of Stalin’s thinking on Mao in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>108</sup> Mao’s remarks at the February 11 politburo meeting, in *Mao Zedong nianpu*, p. 362.

was “a newspaper run by the entire party” (*quan dang ban bao* 全党办报) – as opposed to “a newspaper run by journalists” (*jizhe ban bao* 记者办报). Writing from hindsight, the JFRB editorial commemorating the newspaper’s 1000<sup>th</sup> issue, in February 1944, stressed this point. With a long quote from the April 1, 1942 editorial, the general political line of the reshuffle is confirmed. The reforms have brought about the desired results: “After the reshuffle, our paper has carried out reforms in line with the Centre’s principles. Our most important experience from the twenty-two months since then can be summed up in just one sentence: ‘a newspaper run by the entire Party.’”<sup>109</sup> The demand that the newspapers get involved with the masses and go down to the masses had been put into more concrete terms since 1942. The reshuffle had – at least partly – succeeded in shaking up the mindset of the Yan’an newspaper corps, not few of whom had come from the cosmopolitan professional journalism of Shanghai and elsewhere. Where intellectuals were allowed to remain in their positions, the message that they must reach out to their audiences had been driven home. The 1944 editorial declared:<sup>110</sup>

Our newspaper is the newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party, is the newspaper of the great people’s masses; this is the first characteristic of our paper. Our journalists must work for the anti-Japanese people’s masses, and in the first place work for the workers, peasants, and soldiers. This means that we are different from certain other newspapers, we do not bow and scrape for the interests of a few people, or for their tastes. And this means that we do not tolerate any contempt for the workers, peasants, and soldiers, and the anti-Japanese great people’s masses, or any misrepresentations of their activities. We demand a truthful coverage of their lives, their activities, and their views.

We are running a newspaper in the countryside, this is very different from running a paper in the large cities; this is the second characteristic of our paper. And just because of this point, certain methods appropriate for [newspapers in] the cities cannot likewise be used here.

Again, “mass character” in the very concrete sense means that the Party paper must focus its work on the concerns of the local population, in this case a rural, unsophisticated population. The overwhelming majority of basic level cadres in the Border Region were peasants themselves who had been newly recruited into the Party. The CCP was struggling to raise levels of literacy and introduce a basic

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<sup>109</sup> “Ben bao chuangkan yiqian qi,” JFRB editorial, Feb. 16, 1944. Repr. in *XGWH* 3.65-69.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

understanding of Marxist principles. Intellectual exercises were unsuited for a newspaper that was intended to serve as a medium of instruction on a large scale.

The first step towards the implementation of the “mass character” concept was to call on CCP members to participate in the work of the Party papers: “mobilize the entire Party to [take part in] running the newspaper” was the slogan driven home by another JFRB editorial with the programmatic title “The Party and the Party Paper.”<sup>111</sup> After admonishing the paper’s own staff to adhere strictly to the Party’s line and policies, to be vigilant in the face of the political enemy, and to “breathe the air the Party leadership breathes, breathe the air the entire Party collective breathes,”<sup>112</sup> the editorial cautions: “But in order to produce a good Party paper, to make the Party paper a collective propagandist and collective organizer, the above measures alone are not enough. There is another aspect, another important condition: the Party must mobilize the entire Party [membership] to join in running the newspaper.”<sup>113</sup> The CCP now rushed to fill Lenin’s famous dictum with concrete content and urged its members to devote more attention to their newspapers. The goal the Party had in mind was to make readers and authors become one: the hierarchical relationship implicit in the character of the newspaper should be eliminated as far as possible, in favour of a more participatory concept. Since 1942, the CCP leadership issued numerous statements and circulars that urged the Party members to become more actively involved in the production of the Party papers, and especially JFRB. In a JFRB editorial, Hu Qiaomu urged his fellow comrades:<sup>114</sup>

The responsible cadres of all the Party’s departments, every Party member, and all of our supporters, please keep in mind: making our newspaper better and better – this is also your inescapable responsibility! It is your responsibility to change your passive attitude towards the Party paper; it is your responsibility to supply the Party paper with the manuscripts it needs and to arrange the masses to write contributions; it is your responsibility to train yourself and the people surrounding you, to become competent correspondents. Only if everybody roll up their sleeves will we be able to produce an

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<sup>111</sup> “Dang yu dangbao,” JFRB editorial, Sept. 22, 1942. Repr. in *XGWH* 3.54-58. The editorial was written by Bo Gu. See Wu Baopu. *Bo Gu wenxuan – nianpu*, p. 312-16.

<sup>112</sup> “Dang yu dangbao.”

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> “Ba women baozhi ban de geng hao xie,” JFRB editorial, July 18, 1942. Repr. in *Hu Qiaomu wenji*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1992, vol. 1, p. 76-79. For similar statements see “Zhonggong zhongyang Xibeiju guanyu JFRB gongzuo wenti de jue ding” (dated Sept. 9, 1942), in *XGWH* 1.132-34, here p. 133. The Sept. 22 editorial written by Bo Gu is a reaction to this directive. Another example is “Zhonggong zhongyang Jin-Sui fenju guanyu *Kangzhan ribao* gongzuo de jue ding” (dated Oct. 1, 1942), in *XGWH* 1.135-36, here p. 136.

even better newspaper, and only then can we make headway with our struggle on this front.

The frequency of these calls to the journalistic frontlines, however, also shows the reluctance of the majority of rank and file Party members to accept the cumbersome task of journalistic work. In an effort to make the Party leadership set a good example, the CC resorted to rather desperate methods, such as asking its high-ranking cadres to deliver fixed monthly quotas of articles to the Party papers: in September 1942, Mao drafted a proposal that assigned Peng Zhen a monthly workload of 15,000 characters in articles (on Party building), and 12,000 characters each to Chen Boda (on politics, economics, and international affairs) and Chen Huangmei 陈荒煤 (literature). Mao requested: "in principle, no article should exceed 4,000 characters in length; any articles longer than that should be the exception."<sup>115</sup> In anticipation of the sixth anniversary of the Lugouqiao 卢沟桥 incident that marks the beginning of the anti-Japanese war, the CC Secretariat ordered Lin Biao 林彪, Peng Dehuai 彭德怀, Liu Bocheng 刘伯承, Deng Xiaoping, and other generals of the Communist armed forces to write commemorative articles and instructed them: "you will be notified later on the subject of your articles from the Xinhua news agency; they should normally not exceed 5,000 characters in length. Please make lively and vivid descriptions and analytical conclusions; avoid dull and boring tables and statistics. Please send the articles to the Xinhua main branch by way of the Xinhua broadcastings before June 20."<sup>116</sup> The articles were to be inspected and approved (*shending* 审定) by the CC and then broadcast to the various base areas for use in the local newspapers.

Yet having only the high-level cadres take more seriously their responsibilities towards the Party press was not enough. To increase the "mass character" of JFRB, it was necessary that "everybody roll up their sleeves,"<sup>117</sup> and in particular the Party rank and file in the (few) factories and the villages were called upon to join the CCP newspaper work. The strategy developed to bring the newspaper down into the villages and onto the factory floor was the system of

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<sup>115</sup> "JFRB di si ban zheng gao banfa" in *MZDXGW*, p. 101-03. Altogether sixteen cadres were assigned fixed monthly quotas.

<sup>116</sup> "Zhongyang shujichu guanyu jinian kangzhan liu zhounian xuanchuan gongzuo de zhishi" (dated May 31, 1943), in *XGWX* 2.503.

<sup>117</sup> Hu Qiaomu. "Ba women baozhi ban de geng hao xie."

“worker and peasant correspondents,” or *gong-nong tongxunyan* 工农通讯员. Of all the CCP strategies adopted after the April 1942 reshuffle to strengthen the newspaper’s “mass character”, the promotion of the correspondents system was by far the most important, and that with the most lasting impact.<sup>118</sup>

Correspondents were literate workers or peasants, often ordinary Party members, who received basic training in journalistic writing but remained on their regular posts. They would contribute reports, articles, and observations from their own perspective. The material they provided would be processed by editors at the newspaper desk and rewritten into articles prior to publication. The rationale behind this strategy was the supposed authenticity of these reports from the basic level. In 1944, Deng Tuo explained to propaganda workers of the Jin-Cha-Ji border region: “only when the masses themselves write about their lives and their struggle will [the articles] be really truthful and lively; and only when the masses can by themselves write correspondents reports, will our correspondents system reach its apex.”<sup>119</sup> A maximum of authenticity was to be guaranteed through this mode of writing:<sup>120</sup>

In this process, we first of all demand from our correspondents that all reports and correspondences should, as far as possible, be approved by the masses; if you write about some place and some people, you should read it to these people or let them read it, and thus get their corrections and revisions, and only if you can make sure that your report or correspondence really comes from the masses, only then can you be satisfied.

By setting up correspondent networks the CCP tried to integrate as large as possible a number of people from “the masses” into journalistic work. The newspapers should focus on the masses as its readers, and the best way to do so was to make them write about what was of concern to them.

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<sup>118</sup> On *tongxunyan* see Lorenz Bichler. “Organized Spontaneity: The Chinese Communist Party and its Grassroots Correspondents” in *Asiatische Studien* 51.4 (1997), p. 963-69; and the same author’s “Public Secrets: Propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party and Correspondents (*tongxun yan*) in Shanghai after 1949” in Gabór T. Rittersporn, Malte Rolf, Jan C. Behrends (eds.). *Sphären von Öffentlichkeit in Gesellschaften sowjetischen Typs: Public Spheres in Soviet-Type Societies*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003, p. 357-85.

<sup>119</sup> “Gaizao women de tongxun gongzuo he baodao fangfa” in *XGWH* 3.216-23, here p. 218. Deng, who was in charge of *Jin-Cha-Ji ribao*, gave his speech on April 14, 1944; it appeared in a supplement (*zengkan* 增刊) of that paper on May 16 the same year.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*



The mass line of newspaper work, however, would go only that far. A democratization of the Party papers was intended only within the limits of “democratic centralism.” Professional propagandists always had to polish the material provided by the basis. Even more importantly, they were responsible for the “correctness” of the resulting articles, i.e. for the correspondents’ reports being in agreement with the Party line and the current policies. Lu Dingyi indicated the need for refinement publicly in an article in JFRB, where he reminded the Party’s professional journalists: “With regard to manuscripts from people who are either labouring themselves or are leading [ordinary] labour, you must bear in mind that it is only natural that their writing skills are not good; your task is, on the one hand, to learn from them and to respect the facts they write down, and on the other hand to be their teacher or ‘hairstylist.’”<sup>121</sup> Other, internal documents are more blunt with regard to the role of this “hairstylist” (*lifayuan* 理发员). A directive of the CC Jin-Cha-Ji Branch Bureau (*fenju* 分局) gave detailed instructions on methods and procedures of censorship of correspondents’ articles:<sup>122</sup>

In order to guarantee the correctness and truthfulness of the articles published in our Party papers, the paper’s office will refuse any article of importance that has not been inspected [*shencha* 审查] by the [CC] Branch Bureau PD (the same applies to important manuscripts coming from reporters dispatched by the paper itself or to manuscripts received from various sources). The Party committees and organizations on the various layers must take seriously the inspection of correspondents manuscripts; The [CC] Branch Bureau PD [in turn] will return any manuscript that is not signed and stamped by the responsible cadre in the Party committee or government (such as county head or chairman of the Anti-[Japanese] Union [*kanglian* 抗联]). While the focus of censorship varies on the different levels, all must pay attention to correctness (for example: is [the article] in accordance with the Party policies? Does it reveal any secrets? Does it really deserve the praise of the Party paper?), and truthfulness (for example: are there any exaggerations? Are the [numbers in reports on] battle successes of the militia correct and not exaggerated? The county level bears the main responsibility for this [latter] point).

The directive establishes several layers of censorship at both local and branch bureau levels. Censorship comprises both political and military aspects, as well as journalistic questions. While rank and file Party members were encouraged to join Party journalism, and local newspapers and propaganda bureaus were urged to

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<sup>121</sup> “Women duiyu xinwenxue de jiben guandian” in JFRB, Sept. 1, 1943, repr. in *Lu Dingyi wenji*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1992, p. 331-40.

<sup>122</sup> “Zhonggong zhongyang Jin-Cha-Ji fenju guanyu dangbao gongzuo de zhishi” (dated Feb. 3, 1944) in *XGWH* 1.145-47, here p. 146.

establish “correspondents networks” (*tongxun wang* 通讯网),<sup>123</sup> the implementation of the mass line did not automatically mean that “the masses” had more of a say in the paper’s content.

The correspondents system was no invention of the Yan’an era. Worker and peasant correspondents had been supposed to “reflect the demands of the worker and peasant masses” and to “represent the voices of the broad labouring masses”<sup>124</sup> since at least the early 1930s. In the difficult environment of the Jiangxi Soviet, *Hongse Zhonghua*, the CC organ, had relied on an extensive system of correspondents spanning the entire Soviet: “Our *Hongse Zhonghua*... has established correspondents and distribution networks; [thus] it can reflect the militant mood of the masses from the entire Soviet, and it can reach any place on the map of our Soviet – the masses fall over one another to read it. It has already become the broadcaster arousing the fighting enthusiasm of the millions of masses in the Soviet, and it has received the support of the broad masses!”<sup>125</sup> The correspondents network and the distribution network of the CCP organ were closely interrelated in order to expand the reach of the paper in rural south-eastern Jiangxi to a maximum. However, the correspondents system had not been developed to its full potential in Yan’an. When Mao Zedong and the CCP set out to search for ways to reform the mode of newspaper making, they decided to push to prominence a strategy that had been successfully applied in the Jiangxi Soviet.<sup>126</sup>

The roots of this strategy, however, must be sought in the Soviet Union. *Pravda*, the CPSU organ, had made extensive use of correspondents throughout its history and was praised as a model for China:<sup>127</sup>

If *Pravda*, before the [October] Revolution, was able to publish over 11,000 reports from worker correspondents in a single year, then the number of correspondents reports in our papers must be called poor and meagre – not to mention their quality. This is, first of all, because of the poor guidance and organization from our editorial

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<sup>123</sup> Tao Zhu, who was in charge of propaganda at the army’s General Political Department, for example, urged the army to emulate the model of JFRB in expanding its base of contributors. See “Guanyu budui de baozhi gongzuo,” where Tao promoted the slogan “the entire army runs newspapers” (*quan jun ban bao* 全军办报). See XGWH 3.206-15.

<sup>124</sup> See “Dangyuan dui dangbao de zeren,” an article published in the CCP organ *Hongqi* in its May 10, 1930 issue. Repr. in XGWH 3.131-133. The quotations appear on p. 131.

<sup>125</sup> “‘Hong Zhong’ bai qi de zhandou jinian,” in *Hongse Zhonghua*, Aug. 10, 1933. Repr. in XGWH 3.151-54. The article was written by Li Fuchun, the secretary of the CCP Jiangxi Provincial Committee. Li had held several propaganda posts in his early career.

<sup>126</sup> On worker-peasant correspondents in the Jiangxi Soviet see also Yan Fan. *Zhongyang geming genjudi xinwen chubanshi*, p. 39.

<sup>127</sup> “Ba women de baozhi ban de geng hao xie,” by Hu Qiaomu, JFRB editorial, July 18, 1942.

office; yet it is also true that many of our journalists, our correspondents, and the personnel in the offices and departments are not yet good in taking the things that happen every day, so rich and full of educational value, and to make news articles and reports of them for the newspapers.

In this JFRB editorial, Hu Qiaomu laments both the reluctance of basic-level cadres to join the making of the Party paper, and the hesitation of professional journalists to embrace the Soviet model. Worker and peasant correspondents had been part of the Russian Communist newspaper system. A “Worker-peasant correspondent movement” started after 1924 which increased their number into the hundreds of thousands.<sup>128</sup> The function of correspondents in the Soviet Union was the same as in China. In the editorial, Hu Qiaomu quotes Lenin’s text “The Character of our Newspapers” as a reference lending authority to his arguments in favour of the correspondents system: “Less political ballyhoo. Fewer highbrow discussions. Closer to life. More attention to the way in which the workers and peasants are *actually* building the *new* in their everyday work, and more *verification* so as to ascertain the extent to which the new community is *communistic*.”<sup>129</sup> This is the last paragraph of an article written in 1918 where Lenin criticizes newspaper work in the Soviet Union and urges the Soviet papers to give more stress to work at the basic level. Hu is less interested in Lenin’s critique than in his vision of the ideal newspaper: Lenin’s proposals did fit the Chinese concerns of 1942 remarkably well; a translation of this article appeared in JFRB just two days after Hu Qiaomu’s editorial.<sup>130</sup> Lenin’s stress on popular issues seemed to confirm the mass line promoted by the CCP in newspaper work, part of which was the correspondents system.

It was the “mass character” that received most attention in Yan’an newspaper theory. The “mass line” (*qunzhong luxian* 群众路线) emerged as a key feature of CCP media thinking in Yan’an and was implemented across the propaganda sector. Not just the newspapers were urged by various means to give up what was perceived as intellectualism and detachment from the rank-and-file.

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<sup>128</sup> See Artur W. Just. *Die Presse der Sowjetunion: Methoden diktatorischer Massenführung*. Berlin: Carl Juncker, 1931, p. 72-106, and the statistical material there. I am grateful to Lorenz Bichler for drawing my attention to this volume. Useful information on worker-peasant correspondents is also found in Maerkusi. *Sulian de chuban*. Shanghai: Shidai chubanshe, 1950, *passim*.

<sup>129</sup> Lenin. *Collected Works*, vol. 28, p. 96-98, here p. 98. Italics in the original.

<sup>130</sup> “Lun women de baozhi,” in JFRB, July 20, 1942 (Title in later translations changed to “Lun women baozhi de xingzhi”).

Only weeks after the JFRB reshuffle, the Party convened the “Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art.” In his two addresses to the conference, Mao Zedong put forward what became the foundations of CCP policy for the entire sector of literature and art, an important sub-sector of the propaganda *xitong*.<sup>131</sup> The core idea of Mao’s addresses, that literature and art are to “serve the people” (*wei renmin fuwu* 为人民服务) could not be called into question for approximately four decades (interpretations varied over time, yet always more in degree than in substance). The mass line for literature and art parallels that in the newspaper sector in both its formulation and in the ways it was implemented.<sup>132</sup>

The “mass character” has emerged as the most prominent characteristic of the Yan’an newspaper reforms of 1942. “Mass-ization” (*dazhonghua* 大众化) had reached, besides newspapers, practically all other elements of the propaganda sector. The focus on the people of the border region as the main newspaper audience, and their integration into the process of newspaper making, however, did not compromise the other major concerns of CCP media thinking: Party control, and the media’s mission as an educational and enlightening tool. The different demands, resulting from different ideological sources, that were combined in the media concept could still be moulded into a coherent whole; as a result, the Party’s grip over the media was strengthened by the 1942 reshuffle at JFRB. Yet simultaneously other ideas were imported into China that subsequently became parts of the media concept: Stalinist ideology had a decisive impact on Chinese media thinking of the Yan’an era. Before moving on to address this latter complex, which in fact proved much more difficult to play in concert with the other elements of the Chinese media concept, I will try to supplement the earlier outline of the concept in the light of the elements discussed in this section (in italics):

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<sup>131</sup> “Zai Yan’an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua.” Originally published in JFRB, Oct. 19, 1943. Translated in Bonnie MacDougall. *Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art:” A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, 1980. The literature on Mao’s Yan’an talks is too numerous to be listed here. For one discussion see Goldman. *Literary Dissent*, ch. two.

<sup>132</sup> The similarity of the language used to convince both news workers and writers and artists to “go down” to the masses, to participate in their daily lives, and to learn from them, is striking. For but a few examples see Kai Feng: “Guanyu wenyi gongzuozhe xia xiang de wenti,” in JFRB, March 28, 1943; repr. in XGWX 2.469-80; Chen Yun: “Guanyu dang de wenyi gongzuozhe de liang ge qingxiang wenti,” in JFRB, March 29, 1943; repr. in XGWX 2.481-88; and Nie Rongzhen: “Guanyu budui wenyi gongzuo zhu wenti,” in *Qunzhong* 9.2 (Jan. 25, 1944); repr. in XGWX 2.549-55.

- (1) The media speak with the unified voice of the party;
- (2) they are indispensable tools of party propaganda and party building;
- (3) they assist the party, the avant-garde of the working class, to raise the consciousness of the people;
- (4) *they do so by focussing on the concrete concerns of the masses and becoming one with the masses;*
- (5) the media are essentially about education.

#### *Media for the Party: Control and Class Struggle*

“Party character,” or *dangxing*, is the first of the four points in the list of the April 1 editorial explaining the JFRB reshuffle. This is no coincidence. The “mass character” of the paper had been the point where JFRB showed the biggest deficits and it does therefore feature prominently in the discussion surrounding the emergence of the new media concept. *Partiinost* was much less controversial: the paramount role of the Party in media issues had long since been accepted; there was little need to drive home this point. However, since a central concern of the Yan’an Rectification Campaign was to strengthen discipline and control over all provinces of Party life, the centralization and streamlining of the command structures in the media sector was one of the key goals of the Party.

These efforts, and the Rectification Campaign itself, were driven to a considerable degree by another ideological import from the Soviet Union: Stalin’s vision of history and the centrality of class struggle. Under the influence of the radical ideas that arrived in Yan’an since the late 1930s, the CCP came to an interpretation of the role of the media that was even more radical than that of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), since it was translated from the post-revolutionary Soviet state into the pre-revolutionary setting of China. These ideas were to have enduring influence on the CCP’s conception of the media.

The Party's efforts to put in place a more rigid system of control figures prominently in both the newspaper and the publishing sector. In contrast to newspapers, the area of book publishing was much less suited for popularization. Books require higher reading skills and more sophistication from readers than newspapers do, and their production is even more dependent on skilled intellectual labour. Mass participation, such as through the correspondents system, was not an option for the CCP's publishing sector. Since 1937, the CCP had built up publishing structures in Yan'an, though these were of rather small scale. Xinhua shudian 新华书店, the Party's publishing outlet in the capital of the border region, had initially been formed around the distribution activities of the *Jiefang* magazine and maintained close contact with the journal, and later with JFRB.<sup>133</sup> Xinhua published many translations of the writings of Lenin and Stalin, pamphlets of the CCP CC and the Chinese Party leadership, but also translations of other works of mostly Soviet origin such as Leontev's introduction *Political Economy (Nachal'nyi kurs politicheskii ekonomii)*.<sup>134</sup> One of the first advertised publications was a series on Leninism (*Liening congshu*).<sup>135</sup>

When the Rectification Campaign gathered speed in spring 1942, pressure on Xinhua shudian increased, and in April that year the Party decided a major overhaul of all the publishing activities in Yan'an. The official decision to do so, however, came only a month after the crucial meeting that ordered the JFRB reshuffle; the immediacy given to the JFRB issue indicates the higher importance that the CCP attached to newspapers, as opposed to books. Nonetheless, grave faults had been found in the publishing sector as well, as the "Circular on the Unification of Publishing Work in Yan'an," issued on April 15, 1942, made clear:<sup>136</sup>

The publishing work in Yan'an currently lacks an organ for unified planning and unified administration; for this reason, in [publishing] work, there have occurred many instances of [publications] not being in accordance with the propaganda policies of the [Party] Center, and of one-sided emphasis, waste and replication, and confusion and

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<sup>133</sup> On the origins of Xinhua shudian see ch.5 of this study.

<sup>134</sup> See the useful bibliography of titles distributed by Xinhua in Zhao Shengming. *Xinhua shudian dansheng zai Yan'an*, p. 266-75.

<sup>135</sup> A reproduction of this ad from April 1937 can be found in Zhao Shengming. *Xinhua shudian dansheng zai Yan'an*, plates. The *Liening congshu* series was published in 1937 and included *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution (Dve taktiki sotsialdemokratii v demokraticeskoi revoliutii)*, and *State and Revolution (Gosudarstvo i revoliutsiia)*, among others.

<sup>136</sup> "Zhongyang shujichu guanyu tongyi Yan'an chuban gongzuo de tongzhi" in XGWX 2.367.

ineffectiveness. Thus, it has been decided that the Central Publishing Bureau [Zhongyang chubanju 中央出版局] will unify the responsibility of guiding, planning, and organizing the regular editorial, publishing, and distribution work of the different sectors [*xitong*] in all of Yan'an; the Central Propaganda Department will be responsible for the unification of the inspection [*shencha*] of all regular books and newspapers published and distributed in Yan'an (with the exception of books and newspapers published directly by the Central Committee Secretariat and the Standing Committee of the [CC] Northwestern Bureau). In agreement with the Central Propaganda Department and the respective departments concerned, the Central Publishing Bureau shall decide in proper time on the general direction and the concrete plans for editorial, publishing, and distribution work, and guarantee their fulfilment. Yet the correct principle for editorial, publishing, and distribution work is centralized leadership and decentralized management; consequently, the independent work of the different organs mustn't be weakened in the future, but should rather be strengthened.

The problems identified by the "Circular" can be summed up in two points: non-compliance with central policies, and a lack of systematic, rational organization of work. The latter certainly was a nuisance, and the Party's ire about what it perceived to be waste caused by a lack of coordination is understandable under the strained material conditions of war-time Yan'an. The "lack of coordination" caused by a market system became an important argument several years later, when the Party put in place a planned economy.<sup>137</sup> More disturbing, though, was the accusation that Xinhua was not in line with the policies of the Party Center. In the course of the Rectification Campaign, strict compliance with all of the Party's policies featured ever more prominently on the agenda. The publishing sector, as an element of the Party's propaganda machine, was a crucial field where the need to speak with a unified voice was particularly important.

Unity (*tongyi* 统一) consequently is the most conspicuous argument in the April 15 "Circular:" the very first sentence demands unified planning and unified management. 'Unity' here is to be understood as a form of rational organization, whereby the rational element is provided by the Party's leadership. The pre-eminence of Party policies is to be established in the entire publishing sector. At the same time, however, the "Circular" cautions of too high a degree of centralization: the concept of "centralized leadership and decentralized management" (*jizhong zhidao, fensan jingying* 集中指导, 分散经营) is a repudiation of bureaucratic forms of management. Too much centralization of tasks is not desirable; rather, the implementation of decisions reached centrally is

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<sup>137</sup> The shift towards a planned economy in the publishing industry will be discussed in chapter five.

left to autonomous agencies. In this way, responsibility is devolved, while the Centre reserves for itself the potential of control and direction. It is remarkable that this strategy of limited decentralization and responsibility emerged so early – possibly a consequence of the bad experiences some in the Party leadership, notably Mao Zedong, had made with the monopolization of power in the hands of an all-intrusive leadership group detached from base level work, and with the bureaucratic structures associated therewith. The CCP never set up the vast kind of bureaucratic propaganda apparatus that centrally controlled all aspects of the media in the Soviet Union. The principle of “centralized leadership and decentralized management,” as an economical mode of management with a high potential of control, is a feature of the Chinese media sector that will appear time and again in later chapters of this study.

In concrete terms, the administration of the publishing sector was entrusted to not one, but two agencies. This arrangement reflects very well the “centralized leadership and decentralized management” principle. The CC Publishing Bureau was to oversee the technical aspects of publishing, but was not to exert political control. Its task was to coordinate the various publishing activities by the multiple bodies in Yan’an that produced their own pamphlets, and, first of all, to provide a planned environment for Xinhua, the Party’s main publisher. Political control (“leadership”) was the PD’s exclusive sphere of responsibility, thus confirming its authoritative position in the propaganda sector. The division of “administrative” (*xingzheng* 行政) and “leadership” (*lingdao* 领导) tasks later became the general organizational pattern in the PRC.

Control of publishing meant, in the first place, censorship (*shencha* 审查). Through centralized censorship, the PD was to ensure that publications emerging from Yan’an would henceforth be in compliance with central policies. All publications in Yan’an were subject to the PD’s direct censorship, with the exception of those books and periodicals published directly by the CC (apparently, the CC had its own publications under close scrutiny).<sup>138</sup> Censorship was the

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<sup>138</sup> It must be remarked that the universal censorship mentioned here, if indeed it was implemented according to the letter of the April 15 “Circular,” was one of the very few periods when the CCP practiced full-scale pre-publication censorship. As I will discuss in later chapters, during most of the time, the PD was satisfied with just having the potential to intervene, and trusted lower level organs to play by the rules. Compliance, of course, had to be generated by other means.



ultimate means to strengthen Party control over the media, to enforce their “Party character.” The Rectification Campaign led to the tightening of the Party’s grip over the media. The Party was to speak with a unified voice to its own Party members, to the population of the Border Region, and to both people and enemy beyond the CCP base area’s borders.

The creation of such a unified voice was the rationale behind the restructuring of Xinhua shudian and the Yan’an publishing industry in April 1942.<sup>139</sup> It was also the reason for the introduction of more explicit means of control in other parts of the propaganda sector, to which I will return now. In the last section, we have noted the strict and elaborate rules of censorship that applied to the handling of contributions from worker peasant correspondents. However, censorship and other control measures appeared in the course of the Rectification Campaign also for other kinds of reporting. The stress on the “mass character” of newspapers was counterbalanced by the insistence on their “party character.”

Non-compliance with policies of the Party Center had been quoted as one of the reasons for the structural reforms of the publishing sector in the April 15 “Circular.” The CCP repeatedly voiced the same complaints with regard to newspapers, especially those published at lower levels. In October 1942, Mao Zedong instructed the secretary of the CC Jin-Sui Branch Bureau on the following affair:<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Very little information is available on the events immediately preceding and following the structural reforms, which apparently took effect on May 1, 1942, the day when the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region Xinhua Bookstore’s new offices were inaugurated outside Yan’an’s Southern gate (See Zheng Shide. “Wushi chungiu hua Xinhua,” p. 115). The importance of the event was underlined by a visit of Mao Zedong to Xinhua (confirmed in Zhao Shengming. *Xinhua shudian dansheng zai Yan’an*, p. 75. This source relies on eyewitness accounts; *Mao Zedong nianpu* doesn’t mention Mao’s visit). However, neither Zheng Shide nor Zhao Shengmeng mentions the April 15 “Circular,” which was probably published for the first time in 1996, and even then only in the *neibu* collection XGWX. In the absence of additional sources, the reasons for the secrecy surrounding the “Circular,” and the fate of Xinhua in the Rectification Campaign must remain speculation.

<sup>140</sup> “Jingchang zhuyi zhangwo xinwen zhengce he shelun fangzhen” (dated Oct. 28, 1942) in *MZDXGW*, p. 98.

The Northwest Shanxi branch of the Xinhua news agency on [October] 18 has transmitted to Yan'an Deng Baoshan's 邓宝珊<sup>141</sup> congratulatory telegram on the occasion of the New Army's<sup>142</sup> fifth anniversary. In addition to ordering the [Xinhua] Yan'an main branch not to publish it, we ask you to strengthen your guidance of the Northwest Shanxi branch and the *Jin-Xi ribao* 晋西日报. Telegrams like this one can be transmitted orally only, but cannot appear in print, in order to avoid negatively influencing Deng Baoshan's position. Moreover, the Branch Bureau must pay constant attention to all the news policies and the editorial direction of the news agency and the newspaper; it must strengthen its grip, so that our propaganda is entirely in keeping with the Party's policies.

The CCP's relationship with the GMD in the coalition government was a volatile issue that required many diplomatic skills. The local propaganda cadres had ignored the policy mandating distance to the GMD. By giving publicity to commander Deng's favourable view towards a CCP-affiliated militia, the paper might cause trouble for Deng, who could be regarded (by the GMD authorities) as too close to the Communists. Likewise, the CCP might be seen as making compromises with GMD generals – an argument that Mao does not make explicit in his telegram, but that sounds plausible in light of his remark that news of the kind of Deng's telegram “can be transmitted orally only, but cannot appear in print.” Mao feared damage to the CCP as well as for Deng; the cooperation with parts of the GMD military was to be kept secret.

A directive of the CC Secretariat from October 1942 lists a series of incidents, where local newspapers were at variance with central policies:<sup>143</sup>

Recently, there have been, in the propaganda of various localities, several cases [of articles being] not in accordance with current Party policies, such as a report from the Xinhua Taihang 太行 Branch Bureau on the Consultative Conference's [Canzhenghui 参政会] telegram calling to convene a national affairs conference [*guoshi huiyi* 国是会议],<sup>144</sup> or a report of the [Xinhua] Shandong Branch Bureau on the 111<sup>th</sup> division of the Northeast Army opposing GMD personnel, or an anti-GMD news article of the [Xinhua] Subei [= Northern Jiangsu] Branch Bureau... . None of the above is in accordance with the current policies of our Party.

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<sup>141</sup> “Deng Baoshan was commander of the GMD army's 21<sup>st</sup> army group [*juntuan* 军团], stationed with his troops in Yulin 榆林, Shaanxi province.” Note in *MZDXGW*.

<sup>142</sup> “The New Army [*Xinjun* 新军] was an anti-Japanese militia of the people of Shanxi province, recruited under the leadership and the influence of the CCP in the early period of the anti-Japanese war.” Note in *MZDXGW*.

<sup>143</sup> “Zhongyang shujichu guanyu baozhi tongxunshengongzuo de zhishi” (dated Oct. 28, 1942) in *XGWX* 2.467. The directive is based – almost verbatim – on a draft by Mao Zedong. For the draft see *MZDXGW*, p. 97.

<sup>144</sup> After the New Fourth Army Incident of 1941, the CCP had begun to withdraw from this United Front organ; Yan'an's anger probably resulted from the Taihang branch's breach of the boycott.

All of these reports concerned the sensitive CCP-GMD relationship. The directive advised local Party organs: “The CC Northwestern Branch Bureau has already issued a decision on newspaper work, and the various local [CCP organs] should act likewise... to make sure that the news agencies’ and newspapers’ propaganda absolutely corresponds to Party policy, to ensure the strengthening of the Party character of our propaganda..., and to overcome the mistaken trend of disobedience among propaganda personnel.”<sup>145</sup> Closely following the Party line and the particular Party policies was a matter of *partiinost*. The strong language of the “Directive” which accused the newspapers in question of disobedience, literally of “clamouring for independence” (*nao dulixing* 闹独立性) underlines the seriousness of this issue in the eyes of the Party leadership. Since the onset of the Rectification Campaign, the CCP gradually moved to tighten the control over the media.

While the discussion of the guiding principles for the Party media and the motivations driving them remains rather abstract in the openly published media and even in many Party documents, there is a harsher ideological reality in the background. The context is provided by the “Rescue Campaign,” the cruel and bloody witch-hunt into which the Rectification Campaign had evolved in its later stages.<sup>146</sup> A short essay written by Li Weihuan sometime in late 1943 sheds light on the worldview that shaped and drove the evolution of the CCP’s media concept in the Yan’an era. This essay, entitled “On Propaganda War and Disclosures [on the Enemy]”<sup>147</sup> deserves closer investigation, since it addresses a number of questions that loom in the background of many of the documents analyzed above; it thus provides the link to the worldview the CCP was subscribing to an increasing degree in the Yan’an era: the Stalinist interpretation of Marxism-Leninism.

In his essay, Li Weihuan discusses the “strategic principles” of propaganda. Most of these, such as the creative use of both established and innovative means of propaganda, the insistence on truthfulness of CCP propaganda, and the

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<sup>145</sup> “Zhongyang shujichu guanyu baozhi tongxunshu gongzuo de zhishi.”

<sup>146</sup> The most revealing accounts of this dark chapter of the CCP’s Yan’an era are Chen Yongfa. *Yan’an de yinying*; and Gao Hua. *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de*, ch. 11-13.

<sup>147</sup> “Guanyu xuanchuan zhan yu jielu,” in *XGWH* 3.197-202. The compilers provide neither a clear source nor a date for this essay, which suggests that it was not published; however, it seems to have been circulated in Yan’an, since the author is given with Luo Mai 罗迈, a pseudonym Li did not use after 1949 and that would hardly have been attached to the document if it were notes of an entirely private nature. In 1943 Li was a CCP PD vice-head.

technique of exposing and making use of the enemy's internal contradiction, all sound rather familiar. Yet Li goes beyond the usual framework when he provides a new definition of the context, "propaganda war:"<sup>148</sup>

Propaganda war means not simply normal propaganda, but also includes day-to-day agitation. Propaganda war means not simply normal ideological and political activities, but also includes activities in culture, education, and literature and art. The propaganda war is carried out not only in the ideological and political realms, but also in all [other] areas such as military affairs, the economy, and culture. In the propaganda war, one must not just propagate, explain, and disseminate one's own stuff [*dongxi* 东西] (i.e. that of one's class, party, nation or country), but also unmask and oppose the stuff of others.

Propaganda war combines all the areas that have been identified in chapter one as belonging to the propaganda *xitong*: "It is not hard to imagine that a propaganda war cannot prevail if it is limited to one field or one aspect. Therefore, propaganda war is a comprehensive war in the ideological realm."<sup>149</sup> Li wants to mobilize the entire realm of the superstructure into a comprehensive political effort, an effort he simply designates as "war." By explicitly calling the struggles on the propaganda front a "war," Li Weihan equates their importance with that of the ongoing anti-Japanese war. This might sound presumptuous at a time when the CCP had mobilized thousands of troops in the bloody war against Japan (and, against the GMD). Yet this is exactly what Li Weihan had in mind. He quotes an anonymous Japanese source to the effect that "propaganda war and military war are equally important."<sup>150</sup> The equation of the military and propaganda sides of the conflict is justified: "Propaganda war generally is a war between different classes, different political parties (that represent different classes), different nations (suppressing nations and suppressed nations or coalitions of different nations), and different countries, in ideology, thinking, and ideas."<sup>151</sup> With the introduction of class struggle, Li Weihan proposes a new rationale for the acuteness of the propaganda war. Propaganda serves not only to advertise the Communist Party's ideological position, to educate and unite the masses in preparation of the struggle with the CCP's enemies (as Lenin's concept of a Party newspaper had mandated in his "What is to be Done"). Rather, the ideological realm, the superstructure, is a battlefield no less important than others in the revolutionary war that is the mission

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 197f.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

of the CCP. The revolution is being won – and lost – on the political and military as well as on the ideological frontlines. Class struggle moved into the centre of Party propaganda.

The Yan'an Rectification Movement did not only aim to strengthen the Party's organizational structure and discipline, it also promoted an ideological view at least partly at difference with the CCP's previous interpretations of Marxism. The campaign installed Mao Zedong thought as the Party's guiding ideology<sup>152</sup> and thus brought to the fore a thinker with considerably less background and reading in the original writings of Marx and Lenin. It was Mao's writings that dominated the reading canon of the movement: no less than seven of the twenty-two official Rectification Documents were works of Mao, while none was from Marx and only one fragment of the "Propaganda Guide" was from Lenin. Yet in this official canon, Stalin's works featured much more prominently (four texts), as did another work of Stalinist provenience: the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course (Istoria Vsesoiuznoi Kommunisticheskoi partii, Bol'shevikov)*. The *Short Course* has exercised an influence on Chinese Communist thinking that can hardly be overestimated.<sup>153</sup> The worldview advertised in this product of Stalin's historians has penetrated not only CCP Party historiography, but many other fields, including the media sector.<sup>154</sup>

To be sure, Stalinism was not entirely new to China and at least Mao Zedong had been profoundly influenced by some theories associated with Stalin. Probably the most influential theoretical booklet of its kind was Ai Siqi's *Dazhong*

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<sup>152</sup> It was Wang Jiaxiang who finally elevated Mao to the position of pre-eminent ideologue in his article "Zhongguo gongchandang yu Zhongguo minzu jiefang de daolu," which appeared in JFRB, July 5, 1943. In this eulogy, Wang not only speaks of the "wise leader" (*yingming de lingxiu* 英明的领袖) Mao Zedong, but also identifies Mao Zedong thought as "Chinese Marxism." Repr. in XGWX 2.505-15.

<sup>153</sup> On the influence of the *Short Course* in China see Rudolf G. Wagner. "The *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course*, in Mainland Chinese and East German Historiography and Historical Action." Unpublished MS, Heidelberg, 2002. I am grateful to the author for allowing me to quote from his MS, and, in the first place, for bringing to my attention the *Short Course*. On the subject see further Wang Chaomei. "*Liangong (bu) dangshi jianming jiaocheng* dui Zhonggong dangshi jiaoxue he yanjiu de yingxiang (zuotanhui fayan zhaideng)" in *Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu* 1989.1, p. 7-16, and Lou Shenghua. "*Liangong (bu) dangshi jianming jiaocheng* zai Zhongguo de yingxiang" in *Dangshi yanjiu ziliao* 1997.1, p. 24-29. On the *Short Course* in general see N.N. Maslov. "Short Course of the History of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik): An Encyclopedia of Stalin's Personality Cult" in *Soviet Studies in History* 28.3 (Winter 1989-90).

<sup>154</sup> I am grateful to Rudolf Wagner for pointing out to me the particular significance of the Stalinist vision of class struggle for the CCP's media thinking, and for helping me to understand the basic logic of Stalin's ideas.

*zhexue* 大众哲学 (*Philosophy for the Broad Masses*).<sup>155</sup> This short book first appeared serialized in the leftist journal *Dushu shenghuo* 读书生活 in 1934-35 and was published in book form in 1936. Ai Siqi explains key concepts of Marxist theory (called “new philosophy” throughout the book to mislead the GMD censors) in an easy, accessible language and illustrates them with examples from everyday life. The volume proved to be highly approachable for readers not trained in philosophy or theory and thus saw numerous printings and editions in the period from 1936 to 1950. One of Ai Siqi’s avid readers was Mao Zedong: according to Joshua Fogel, Mao read *Dazhong zhexue* and consequently organized Ai’s move to Yan’an, where he lectured at the Marxism-Leninism Institute.<sup>156</sup> *Dazhong zhexue* contains many Stalinist influences, the most important of which is the stress on the theory of “two-line struggle,” to be discussed below.<sup>157</sup> The concept was closely associated with Stalin and became an integral part of the theoretical framework of Chinese socialism. The strength of Ai Siqi’s book, however, was also its weakness. While its popular character made it a useful introduction to Marxism-Leninism, it could not be more. It was not suited for the education of cadres, who were expected to meet higher standards of sophistication. Consequently, *Dazhong zhexue* is mentioned in none of the numerous Party documents from the Yan’an period containing reading lists and study recommendations. The CCP-affiliated *Dushu chubanshe* published more than a dozen editions of the book, with the last appearing in 1950. Thereafter other, more sound introductions into Marxist theory were at hand, and *Dazhong zhexue* was considered outdated.<sup>158</sup> Among the theoretical works with a more lasting impact on China, and also on Chinese media theory, was the *Short Course*.

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<sup>155</sup> Shanghai: Dushu shenghuo she, 1936. Original title *Zhexue jianghua* 哲学讲话, changed into the later title since the fourth printing in 1936. A reprint of the 10<sup>th</sup> edition (1938) can be found in “Minguo congshu” bianweihui. *Minguo congshu*, 1<sup>st</sup> series, vol. 1. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1989.

<sup>156</sup> Joshua A. Fogel. *Ai Ssu-ch’i’s Contribution to the Development of Chinese Marxism*. Cambridge, Ma.: The Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1987, p. 61-71. On Mao reading *Dazhong zhexue* “by the light of an oil lamp in his Yenan cave” see p. 62. The book is mentioned repeatedly in Gong Yuzhi, Jiang Xianzhi, Shi Zhongquan. *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo*. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1996 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), for example p. 61, p. 66f.

<sup>157</sup> See *Dazhong zhexue*, ch. 19.

<sup>158</sup> Joshua Fogel also notes that by 1950 Mao’s own thought had evolved and many of Ai’s conclusions were no longer entirely in line with current interpretations of Marxism. *Ai Ssu-ch’i’s Contribution*, p. 59.

The compilation of an authoritative Party history had been decreed by Stalin in 1932 and was commissioned, not to professional historians, but rather to high-level Party leaders and propagandists.<sup>159</sup> When it appeared in 1938, the *Short Course* carried the remark “Edited by a Committee of the Central Committee of the CPSU(B) and approved by the Central Committee of the CPSU(B), a remark added in reaction to an intervention by Stalin himself.” The volume thus acquired an official status of authority unmatched by any other publication. The CCP reacted suit to the publicity given the *Short Course* in the Soviet Union and started serialization in *Jiefang*, the CCP CC organ, in 1939; in the same year Xinhua shudian published a two-volume edition of the book.<sup>160</sup>

Apart from the Comintern’s promotion of the *Short Course*, the interest of the CCP leadership in the book was responsible for its rapid proliferation in China. The *Short Course* became one of the most-quoted Soviet works in Yan’an. An April 15, 1939 article in *Jiefang* written by Kai Feng, a PD vice-head, stressed the “historical and international meaning of the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course*.”<sup>161</sup> In December of the same year, Chen Yun advocated the study of the “Conclusion” of the *Short Course*,<sup>162</sup> and this proposal was supported by Mao in 1941: “In the study of Marxism-Leninism, the *CPSU Party History* [*Liangong dangshi* 联共党史, the standard Chinese acronym for the *Short Course*] is to be used as principal material [*zhongxin cailiao* 中心材料], everything else is supplementary material. The *CPSU Party History* is the best synthesis and conclusion of the world Communist movement of the past hundred years, it is a model of how to combine theory and practice, and so far the only perfect model of its kind in the world.”<sup>163</sup> Mao reiterated his support for the intensive study of the *Short Course* a little later: “Implement the reform of our study system, smash all the old stuff. Study theory and methodology of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, with the *CPSU Party History* as the centre of our study; read

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<sup>159</sup> The following paragraph is based on Wagner, “*Short Course*.”

<sup>160</sup> See Zhao Shengming. *Xinhua shudian dansheng zai Yan’an*, Appendix, p. 268.

<sup>161</sup> Kai Feng. “*Liangong (bu) dangshi jianming jiaocheng de lishi yiyi he guoji yiyi*” in *Jiefang* 69 (April 15, 1939), p. 1ff.

<sup>162</sup> Chen Yun. “Xuexi shi gongchandangyuan de zeren” in *Chen Yun wenxuan*, vol. 1, p. 121-23.

<sup>163</sup> “Gaizao women de xuexi” (May 19, 1941) in JFRB, March 27, 1942. Rudolf Wagner has observed that in the *Mao Zedong xuanji* edition the phrase “everything else is supplementary material” has been deleted. See “*Short Course*,” n. 18.

many speeches and articles opposing subjectivism.”<sup>164</sup> It is remarkable that Mao wanted the *Short Course* to become “the centre of our study” (*xuexi de zhongxin* 学习的中心). In later speeches, such as “Fandui dang bagu,” Mao quoted the *Short Course*, and in April 1942, its last chapter, “Conclusion” was included in the 22 rectification documents; it was reprinted in JFRB on April 11 with an accompanying note: “Because there have not been printed enough [copies] of the *CPSU Party History*, we publish here today the six points of the Conclusion.” The *Short Course* had thus become part of the official canon of the Rectification Campaign.

The *Short Course* is an account of the history of the CPSU from its origins to 1936, the eve of the Great Purges. The book’s historical importance, however, looms much larger, and is related to the peculiar perspective adopted in the *Short Course* and to the worldview that informed this perspective. The *Short Course* portrays the CPSU’s history as a series of political struggles between two lines, one being the correct line represented by the paramount Party leader (Lenin and, after Lenin’s death, Stalin), and the other that of the Party’s enemies. In this bipolar model, there is no room for discussions or competition of opinions: written with hindsight from the winner’s perspective, all opinions deviating from that of the leader are denounced as plots intended to undermine the Party. Since as a general rule the Party has one and only one correct opinion, all other opinions are manifestations of class struggle: they belong to representatives of the bourgeoisie who either oppose the Party from without, or, especially after the successful revolution, have sneaked into the Party to undermine it from within. Advocates of political positions identified as conflicting with that of the main Party leader are thus unmasked as that of traitors who may have wormed their way into the Party and lived there unrecognized for decades; such people may have even risen to positions high in the party leadership, as did Trotsky and Bukharin. It is especially after the revolution that class struggle thus sharpens, because the bourgeoisie has

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<sup>164</sup> “Fandui zhuguanzhuyi he zongpaizhuyi” (dated September 9, 1941). This little-known text, a speech Mao gave at an enlarged conference of the Politburo, contains many arguments Mao later elaborated upon in his rectification speeches. It was first published in *Wenxian he yanjiu* 1985.1. Repr. in Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.). *Wenxian he yanjiu: 1985 nian huibianben*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1986, p. 1-6.



been weakened and can no longer openly confront the proletariat; it consequently redoubles its efforts to destroy the Party from within.<sup>165</sup>

The *Short Course* explicitly stresses its authoritative nature in being more than a mere account of history. Rather, the *Short Course* is a textbook of Marxist-Leninist theory in its own right. From the volume's narrative, section two of chapter four stands out both by its unusual length (with thirty pages, this section is about as long as most of the chapters in the *Short Course*) and by its character. Totally dissociated from the surrounding discussion of the CPSU's experience under the repressive Stolypin government (1907-1912), this section bears the title "Dialectical materialism and historic materialism." It is a highly condensed summary of the most important elements of Marxist theory. While Stalin paid close attention to the writing group that produced the *Short Course*, this section is said to have been written by Stalin personally.<sup>166</sup> It gives the book its very Stalinist note in coming forth with Stalin's master interpretation of the entire complex of Marxism-Leninism. The Chinese Communists thus held in their hands a manifestation of orthodoxy coming directly from the very leader of the international Communist movement.

With the emphasis on the sharpening of class struggle, the *Short Course* presents a version of Marxist-Leninist theory more radical and more aggressive than the kind of Marxism-Leninism that had hitherto been known in China. The most prolific translators and mediators of Marxist theory, many of whom later were (falsely<sup>167</sup>) labelled the "Twenty-eight Bolsheviks," were trained in the Soviet Union at a time when internationalist influences were still widespread at the Comintern-controlled schools – before the elevation of Stalin's writings to their later paramount position, and before the bloody purges that were justified by Stalin's theories. The *Short Course* thus brought to China the Stalinized version of

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<sup>165</sup> Stalin seems to have drawn in part on Lenin's "The State and Revolution" (another text that was widely read in China). See *Collected Works*, vol. 25, p. 385-497, esp. the passage on p. 417 where Lenin speaks of the time after the revolution as "a period of an unprecedentedly violent class struggle in unprecedentedly acute forms" (this passage was inserted into the text by Lenin for the second edition in 1918). The interpretation of the above ideas as class struggle becoming more fierce after the revolution than before, however, seems to be Stalin's.

<sup>166</sup> See Rudolf Wagner. "Short Course." Stalin's authorship is confirmed by Isaac Deutscher. *Stalin: A Political Biography*. New York: Vintage Books, 1960, p. 381-82.

<sup>167</sup> The existence of any such group has been denied by Yang Shangkun, supposedly a member of this group himself. See "Guanyu 'Ershiba ge ban Buershiweike'" in *Bai nian chao* 2001.8, p. 10-22. Thomas Kampen has proven wrong the myth of the "Twenty-eight Bolsheviks" in much detail in *The Chinese Communist Leadership*, passim.

Marxism-Leninism in a crystallized form, and it did so not in a political vacuum, but in the context of intense political infighting in both the Soviet Union and in the CCP. Far from being pure ideology, the *Short Course* came to serve as a guide to action: due to the time lag, the CCP was only now approaching historical stages the Russian party had lived through much earlier; the CCP thus would make use of these experiences, taking a “shortcut,” especially with view to the current and future struggles in the Party.<sup>168</sup>

The section of the *Short Course* that was made part of the must-read canon of the Rectification Campaign was the “Conclusion.” This point is indeed very significant for the Chinese reading of the *Short Course*: as a party still engaged in revolutionary struggle, the most important part of the volume should supposedly be those chapters dealing with the CPSU’s pre-1917 experience. The Conclusion, however, sums up the *entire* experience of the CPSU; by reprinting the Conclusion and making it mandatory study material, the CCP hoped to learn from the *entire* experience of the CPSU – both pre- and post-revolution. Performing a leap in time, the CCP leaders hoped to profit from the hindsight of their Soviet brethren and carried into their own revolutionary struggle elements that were supposed to play a role not until much later. This interpretation is confirmed by Mao Zedong. In his “Fandui dang bagu,” Mao mentions the *Short Course* and its Conclusion: “It often happens that enemies and hostile thinking infiltrate into the Party, just like the forth point in the “Conclusion” of the *CPSU Party History* says. It is beyond doubt that we must confront such people with methods of ruthless struggle and relentless attack, because these scoundrels are about to use these very methods against the Party; [so] if we practice lenience towards them, we just walk into their poisonous trap.”<sup>169</sup> Both the third and the fourth of altogether six points made in the Conclusion deal with the need to “smash” (in the Chinese translation *fensui* 粉碎) the Communist Party’s enemies – with the important distinction that point three speaks about petit-bourgeois groups and parties outside the CPSU, and before the revolution, whereas point four deals with enemies inside the Party in the post-revolutionary setting: “We cannot possibly tolerate opportunists in our middle, just

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<sup>168</sup> This argument is advanced by Rudolf Wagner in “*Short Course*.”

<sup>169</sup> “Fandui dang bagu,” in JFRB, June 18, 1942.

as a healthy organism cannot tolerate cancers.”<sup>170</sup> Mao thus calls upon the CCP to take as a guide to action in the Rectification Campaign the Stalinist visions of sharpened class struggle: he hopes to ferret out the enemies that have sneaked into the CCP even before they may be able to start their subversive activities and do harm to the CCP. Mao calls on the Party to engage in “ruthless struggle” against the enemies wherever they may be found – that is, especially in the superstructure.

As a part of the superstructure, the media assume a crucial position within the Stalinist ideological framework. Stalin’s often-quoted *bon mot* that the newspapers were the “sharpest weapon of class struggle” must be extended: the media were not only a weapon but also an arena of class struggle. When the bourgeoisie is too weak to confront the proletariat openly, that is in the economic realm (that is, *after* revolution), then class struggle shifts to the superstructure. In China, this argument was extended to the period *before* the revolution: in addition to economic and military assaults, the CCP has to guard against being undermined in the realm of the superstructure. Three years later, the 1945 “Resolution on Some Questions in the History of Our Party” confirmed this reading, explaining the CCP’s history as a series of line struggles between a correct position (that of Mao) and other, incorrect positions that were associated with influences of bourgeois thinking, called “tendencies” (*qingxiang* 倾向). The CCP did not wait until after revolution to sum up the experiences of its history, as the CPSU had done. Rather, it set out to identify the internal enemies at a much earlier point: why allow traitors and enemies to lie dormant within the Party until after the revolution, when they will inflict harm on their colleagues and the revolutionary enterprise? The fear of enemies within the own ranks, I argue, contributed significantly to the fierceness of the Rectification Campaign,<sup>171</sup> and it did also account for the tightening of the Party’s grip on the media: if it is the media where the assault of the bourgeoisie will occur after revolution, then these attacks must be anticipated and prevented from their very beginnings through heightened

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<sup>170</sup> Translated from the Chinese edition of the “Conclusion” appearing in JFRB, April 11, 1942.

<sup>171</sup> Compare in particular the documentation of the campaign’s excesses in Gao Hua. *Hong taiyng shi zenyang shengqi de*, and Chen Yongfa. *Yan’an de yinying*. Many of the excesses of the campaign are attributed to Kang Sheng, who is said to have been a particularly diligent student of Stalin’s conspiracy theories.

control of the Party media. Intensified class struggle thus had reached the CCP's Yan'an media apparatus.

Once the struggle between two lines, representing two classes, was defined as the central factor in politics, the role of the media was imagined in a new fashion. The CCP would henceforth concentrate an unprecedented degree of vigilance on the media: by demanding the strengthening the media's "Party character," the CCP hoped to use the media under its control as a tool in the increasingly fierce class struggle, while at the same time trying to prevent any attempts to undermine the Party from within, through the media. This understanding of the media's nature, however, goes beyond earlier conceptualizations: with the element of class struggle, distinctly Leninist notions (such as the educational approach), rather indigenous concerns (the mass character), and a strong Stalinist argument (sharpened class struggle) came together. These elements did not necessarily conflict, but they produced an inherent tension within the media concept. As I will show in the chapters in part two of this thesis, varying interpretations of the media concept resulted mainly from stress placed on different elements of the media concept. When these interpretations came to clash, the results could be disastrous.

With the double nature of the media, resulting from the vision of sharpening class struggle and the Stalinist rationale behind it, all major elements of the modern Chinese media concept have been identified. We can now update once again the earlier, preliminary summary of the core points. From the CCP documents and writings on propaganda from the crucial Yan'an era, we thus have reconstructed the modern Chinese media concept, whose final version reads:

- (1) The media *must represent* the unified, *single* voice of the party;
- (2) they are indispensable tools of party propaganda and party building;
- (3) they assist the party, the avant-garde of the working class, to raise the consciousness of the people;
- (4) they do so by focussing on the concrete concerns of the masses and becoming one with the masses;
- (5) the media are essentially about education;
- (6) *they are a weapon as well as a battleground of class struggle and must fight against any attempt of the enemy to gain ground in the superstructure.*

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have identified the key arguments in the CCP's media thinking that were developed in the Yan'an period. These include the media's "party character" (*dangxing*, or *partiinnost*), their "mass character," their generally normative mission as a tool for enlightenment of the population in the hands of an avant-garde party, and finally the dual role of the media in the context of class struggle: while they are a "sharp weapon" in the hands of the Party, they are also the Party's vulnerable point, because the realm of the superstructure is especially exposed to attacks of the enemy. Tight control of the media is thus the only way to prevent severe harm being done to the Party's mission. All of the above themes have figured prominently in the Leninist and Stalinist interpretations of Marxism and have come to China by way of translation and mediation. Yet all efforts to "sinify" it notwithstanding, Marxism-Leninism has been an imported ideology.

The discussion in this and the preceding chapter has revealed a form of eclecticism at work: Soviet concepts of agitation, propaganda, and the use of the media were not transferred lock, stock, and barrel from the Soviet Union to China. Rather, the CCP emphasized some aspects of Soviet propaganda politics, but did not or only reluctantly draw on others. Differences of emphasis are clearly

discernible. Soviet observers, especially after the ideological break between the two nations that occurred in the late 1950s, have treated these differences as “deficiencies” – as failures to grasp the complex nature of the Soviet propaganda apparatus.<sup>172</sup> In the 1950s, there had been tendencies to bring the CCP’s governing apparatus more in line with the Soviet model, as I will demonstrate in chapter five. Yet over the longer term, the particularities of the Chinese media system and of Chinese media thinking have prevailed; as a result, the Chinese propaganda sector has never been an exact copy of its Soviet counterpart. The “deficiencies” hypothesis is therefore little satisfactory.

Instead, I propose that we must ask why some aspects of Marxist media theory were accepted in China with more ease than others. Why would the Chinese Communists so willingly accept the avant-garde nature of the Party in relation to the people? What appeal did the Stalinist methods hold for the Chinese Communists? To answer these questions, I argue, we must look closer at the other end of the interaction between China and the Soviet Union, we must investigate the nature of the soil in which the Marxist seeds were planted. We thus need to further examine the Chinese polity of the 1920s outside of the CCP’s realm, the international environment of modern China, and finally those elements of traditional Chinese political culture still at work in the first half of the twentieth century. The goal of this strategy will be to identify possible factors that might have contributed to the adoption of particular aspects of Marxist media thinking in China. I will attempt to do so in the next chapter will do.

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<sup>172</sup> The most elaborate collection of the arguments of both sides is *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965.

### Chapter Three

## Selection, Imagination, Transnational Flows: The Media Concept and the Legacy of Traditional Political Culture

*But if you regard [the Xiangyue lectures] as mere conventionalities ... then above there will be no praising of the Son of Heaven's [effort to] transform the people through enlightenment, and below the masses of ordinary people will not be prompted to renew their ways...<sup>1</sup>*

*Publication of newspapers originated among Westerners, and has been introduced to China. We have seen the Hong Kong newspapers printed in Chinese characters, and their form and content are excellent. Now we emulate the idea...<sup>2</sup>*

In the last chapter, I have established the core elements of what I call the “Modern Chinese Media Concept.” I have throughout related them to sources from the Marxist-Leninist tradition, thus suggesting that media thinking in the PRC is rooted firmly within the world of Marxist philosophy and its practical application, as realized in the Soviet Union. There seems to be no other single most important source for Chinese media thinking. Nonetheless, the modern media concept did not emerge in a conceptual vacuum, and the process of importing an ideology from a foreign source cannot but leave its traces on the ideology itself: existing alternative models in the host environment, linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as immediate local circumstances, all bear on the product that is finally emerging, in this case the Chinese media concept. In chapters one and two I have pointed at some of the intricacies of this process, such as when commenting on the Chinese preference for the term “propaganda” where Soviet sources place emphasis on “agitation,” or with view to the particular importance of the Stalinist interpretation in China over other streams of Marxist philosophy. However, I have not yet tried to address the crucially important questions: *why* a party paper, *why* “propaganda,” and *why* Stalinism?

In this chapter, I will attempt to do two things. On the one hand, I will try to situate the debates in the CCP that were tracked in chapter two within a broader national and international context that will allow us to understand the emergence of the Chinese media concept in relation with journalistic and political trends beyond the framework of the interwar-era Communist International. This widening

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<sup>1</sup> Tian Wenjing. *Zhouxian shiyi*, p. 9a. Repr. in Guanzhen shu jicheng bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.). *Guanzhen shu jicheng*. Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1997, vol. 3, p. 666.

<sup>2</sup> “Ben guan gaobai” in *Shenbao*, April 30, 1872.

of the scope shows that the model of the press developed by the CCP, rather than being a propagandistic aberration from a global liberal-press mainstream, was in fact very much in tune with the times; it reflects opinions common in China at that time, as well as an awareness of international trends (beyond the Soviet model) of media thinking. On the other hand, a very different set of factors was instrumental in shaping modern Chinese thinking about the nature of the media and their function. I am speaking here of aspects of traditional Chinese political culture.

If we accept that Chinese media thinking is not a one-to-one copy of Soviet or otherwise inspired concepts, but rather a Chinese version developed from these models (or, a “sinified” version), if we treat Chinese media thinking as a product in its own right rather than a variety of a binding stereotype, then further explanation is necessary: what is it that makes the Chinese media thinking Chinese? Or, to be more precise, why have some elements of the broader horizon of Marxist thought found their way into China and into the Chinese media concept, while others were transformed, watered down or simply rejected?<sup>3</sup> The discussion in chapter two is unable to provide answers for these questions. The present chapter will therefore attempt to explain the genesis of modern Chinese media thinking in terms of its indigenous roots, of its cultural configuration in Chinese tradition. I am interested here less in the long-term continuities of the modern-day PRC with its imperial predecessors than in the processes that made *some* Marxist-Leninist concepts and ideas surrounding the media acceptable in China as plausible answers to concerns that had long predated their arrival. Different components of the “package” of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism corresponded to a larger or smaller degree with ideas, perceptions, or concerns of traditional Chinese thinking. I thus argue that especially those elements of imported media thinking were accepted in China (or were stressed by Chinese theoreticians and practitioners) that could be imagined within the context of traditional Chinese thought.

In this chapter I will map one influential element of the political culture of late imperial China, the *Sacred Edict* (*Shengyu*), that prescribed a model of ethical propaganda and moral reformation that provided important points of departure for modern political thinking. Two later sections of this chapter discuss the importation

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<sup>3</sup> These issues are also crucial in the debate concerning the emergence of Maoism as a Chinese form of Marxism, or, as CCP orthodoxy will have it, as “the combination of Marxism-Leninism with the practice of the Chinese revolution.”



to China in the nineteenth century of modern ideas that were indispensable for the development of those figures of thought that shaped the CCP's media concept. The instances discussed are the emergence of "sinified" religious propaganda in the course of the Taiping rebellion (1850-1864), and the emergence of a modern Chinese press in Shanghai and Hong Kong since the 1870s. First, however, I will attempt to briefly map some aspects of the international dimension of discussions concerning the nature of the media, and the way these discussions were received in China.

*Persuasion: The National and International Marketplace of Ideas*

The CCP's media concept is unique in its selective appropriation of certain lines of the Marxist tradition, mediated through Leninism and Stalinism, and forging these various ideas into a coherent whole that took into account the CCP's concrete needs in the remote, rural border region of Northern Shaanxi. All the while, the CCP did not exist in a vacuum; while it tried to isolate the majority of its cadres and the population in Yan'an from influences beyond its control, the Party itself interacted constantly with the external environment, both on political, social, and economic levels, and on the marketplace of ideas. The functionalist, elitist, and propagandist nature of the CCP's media concept rejects another ideal type of the press – the classic liberal press, the commercial, non-partisan, reasoning press that characterizes Habermas' public sphere and that is portrayed in Fred Siebert's *Four Theories of the Press*.<sup>4</sup> It is, however, hard to find such a press in China at the time when the CCP formed its media concept. In fact, it is difficult to find even isolated proponents of such a press model in the 1930s and early 1940s, and arguably throughout the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> The CCP polemics were

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<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989. Fred S. Siebert et al. *Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet Communist Concepts of what the Press Should Be and Do*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956.

<sup>5</sup> There were exceptions, however, such as the often-praised *Dagong bao* (1902-1938), led by Zhang Jiluan and Wang Yunsheng – to mention but one example. On *Dagong bao* see Sophia L. Wang. "The Independent Press and Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of the *Dagong bao* in Republican China," in *Pacific Affairs* 67.2 (1994), p. 216-41; Hung Chang-Tai. "Paper Bullets: Fan Changjiang and New Journalism in Wartime China," in *Modern China* 17.4 (1991), p. 427-68; Wang Ke-wen. "Zhang Jiluan, the *Dagongbao*, and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941," paper presented at the Historical Society for Twentieth-Century China meeting, Singapore, 26-28 June, 2005.

directed at a press concept that enjoyed little support in China, and in many foreign nations at the time.

The CCP shared many ideas and a significant part of its world outlook with its foremost political and ideological rival. The GMD, itself a Leninist party, had established press structures after its 1924 reforms that were in line with Comintern recommendations. In particular, the GMD had centralized control over the Party press, and in 1928, *Zhongyang ribao* became not only the organ of the Central Executive Committee, but also the mouthpiece of the national government.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the GMD became increasingly intolerant of alternative opinion, trying to suppress dissent through a harsh censorship regime.

Before the Northern Expedition (1926-27), during the period of cooperation between GMD and CCP, both parties shared common goals, including the perception for the need for unity and discipline in propaganda affairs. They disagreed only on propaganda content.<sup>7</sup> In 1925, Mao Zedong was named head of the GMD propaganda department, a position from which he tried to unify the various Party newspapers through means such as “propaganda outlines.”<sup>8</sup> Prescriptive terminology and analyses of current affairs were to become a common feature in Yan’an. In short, his tenure<sup>9</sup> as the head of GMD propaganda affairs provided Mao with an apprenticeship that offered valuable lessons for the organization of the CCP press in Yan’an.

In the 1930s, the GMD gradually tightened control over a commercially driven, but often partisan and politically connected press<sup>10</sup> through legislative and administrative means. In December 1930, a press law was promulgated that banned attacks on the governing GMD, subversion of the national government, as well as any book and article upsetting public order and morality from appearing in

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However, Zhang’s efforts to protect his paper against harassment forced him to cultivate “a warm, personal relationship with Chiang Kai-shek.” See Stephen R. MacKinnon. “Toward a History of the Chinese Press in the Republican Period,” in *Modern China* 23.1 (1997), p. 3-32, here p. 10

<sup>6</sup> On the emergence of the GMD Party press see John Fitzgerald. “The Origins of the Illiberal Party Newspaper: Print Journalism in China’s Nationalist Revolution,” in *Republican China* 21.2 (1996), p. 1-22. Compare also Fitzgerald. *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996; and MacKinnon. “Toward a History of the Chinese Press in the Republican Period.”

<sup>7</sup> See Fitzgerald. *Awakening China*, p. 237f.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239-42. These “Outlines” must be regarded as direct precursors of the “Propaganda Essentials” distributed in Yan’an, which I have discussed in chapter two.

<sup>9</sup> Mao was dismissed from his post after only five months, in March 1926, after Chiang Kai-shek became the GMD party leader.

<sup>10</sup> Compare MacKinnon, “Toward a History of the Chinese Press in the Republican Period,” p. 8-11.

print.<sup>11</sup> More laws were to follow, with increasing severity of punishment. In 1935, the GMD set up a Censorship Committee under its Propaganda Department, and in 1939, the Wartime Press Censorship Bureau of the National Military Council was set up. It was followed in 1940 by the Central Commission for the Censorship of Books and Periodicals.<sup>12</sup> Press control reached an all-time high during the war years, as the GMD tried to make sure that no other voice beyond its own might be heard in China.<sup>13</sup>

The ultimate goal of GMD propaganda and press control was, as John Fitzgerald has argued, to build cohesion first within the Party, and then across the entire nation, to awaken the Chinese people, transform them, and forge them into a modern nation state.<sup>14</sup> In the process, tutelage of this backward people was deemed indispensable, as were controls that would stem corrupting and dissonant influences, such as those of the CCP. The ideas that guided GMD propaganda in the 1920s and 1930s ring a familiar tone.<sup>15</sup>

The GMD press, however, was just part of the larger context in which the CCP media developed. The media industry in China in the 1920s and 1930s was dazzling with foreign interests.<sup>16</sup> Some of these were driven primarily by business

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<sup>11</sup> An English translation is reprinted in Thomas Ming-Heng Chao. *The Foreign Press in China*. Shanghai: China Institute of Pacific Relations, 1931, p. 107-14.

<sup>12</sup> On these institutions see Lee-hsia Hsu Ting. *Government Control of the Press in Modern China, 1900-1949*. Foreign journalists, too, were subjected to Chinese censorship. See Chinese Ministry of Information (ed.). *China Handbook 1937-1945: a Comprehensive Survey of Major Developments in China in Eight Years of War*. New York: Macmillan Press, 1947, Chapter XVIII: The Press, p. 506-20, esp. p. 511, 516-20. For a careful study of literary censorship in Republican China see Michel Hockx. *Questions of Style: Literary Societies and Literary Journals in Modern China, 1911-1937*. Leiden: Brill, 2003, ch. 7.

<sup>13</sup> The GMD referred to other coercive measures as well. The assassination in 1934 of Shi Liangcai, the editor of the *Shenbao*, is but one example. Comp. also Chiang Kai-shek's July 1932 conflict with the *Shenbao*, in MacKinnon, "Toward a History of the Chinese Press," p 16f.

<sup>14</sup> *Awakening China*, passim.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Nathan traces these ideas back to Liang Qichao: "The natural harmony of the political order could not be realized immediately if the people were backward. They must be trained as citizens first; until then, freedom would lead only to disorder. Liang thus laid down the rationale that would be used to justify authoritarianism, and the acceptance of authoritarianism, throughout China's democratic era." *Chinese Democracy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p. 59-66. Quotation taken from p. 62f. I will return briefly to Liang Qichao at the end of this chapter.

<sup>16</sup> On the foreign press see the special issue of *China Review* 4.1 (2004), especially the contributions by Bryna Goodman, "Networks of News: Power, Language, and Transnational Dimensions of the Chinese Press, 1850-1949," in *ibid.* p. 1-10; and "Semi-Colonialism, Transnational Networks and News Flows in Early Republican Shanghai," in *ibid.* p. 55-88. A good first-hand account is Chao. *The Foreign Press in China*; see further Stephen R. MacKinnon and Oris Friesen. *China Reporting: An Oral History of American Journalism in the 1930s and 1940s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, esp. ch.2; Peter Rand. *China Hands: The Adventures and Ordeals of the American Journalists who Joined Forces with the Great Chinese*

motives, others by political and propaganda agendas; more often than not, it is hard to draw a line between the two. While ideas of a liberal press and editorial independence were promoted in China by foreigners and Chinese graduates from American journalism schools alike,<sup>17</sup> the foreign owned press in China was often a bad example to go by.

First of all, none of the Chinese newspapers stationed correspondents abroad to gather news.<sup>18</sup> Rather, they received news dispatches from foreign news agencies operating in China.<sup>19</sup> The British Reuters and the United Press in particular were formidable players on the market; yet especially in North China, the Japanese agencies – in succession: Kokusai, Rengo, Nippon Dempo, and Domei – had a large market share. The professional power of a giant such as Reuters, and the high transmission costs for cables within China, however, meant that well into the 1930s many Chinese newspapers received not just their foreign news, but also the bulk of their *domestic* news from a foreign provider.<sup>20</sup> In this situation, Reuters was never far from being accused of biased reporting and influence peddling – similar allegations had been made as early as World War I by enemy nations such as Germany.<sup>21</sup> The Japanese news agencies were funded by the Foreign Ministry's Information Department and engaged into an aggressive price war with Reuters in the 1930s.<sup>22</sup> Rengo, for example, was formed in 1926 as a joint venture between the Toho agency and the Kokusai News Agency, the latter being a consortium of major Japanese newspapers and subsidized by the

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*Revolution*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995; Rudolf G. Wagner. "The Flow of News: Interactions Between the Official Chinese Gazettes, the Chinese-Language Commercial Papers, and English-language China Reporting in China and London," paper presented at the XIV<sup>th</sup> EACS Conference, Moscow, 26-28 Aug., 2002. On foreign involvement in the early Chinese press of the Qing period see Wagner. "The Early Chinese Newspapers and the Chinese Public Sphere," In *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 1.1 (2001), p. 1-33, here p. 15; and Wagner. "The Role of the Foreign Community in the Chinese Public Sphere," in *China Quarterly* 142 (1995), p. 423-43.

<sup>17</sup> See especially Luo Wenhui. "Misuli daxue xinwen xueyuan dui Zhonghua minguo xinwen jiaoyu yu xinwen shiye de yingxiang," in *Xinwenxue yanjiu* 41 (1989), p. 201-10.

<sup>18</sup> The following paragraphs draw heavily on Chao. *The Foreign Press in China*.

<sup>19</sup> The Central News Agency (Zhongyang she) was founded in 1924 and later became the official news agency of the Nanjing government; however, because of its closeness to the GMD it was widely treated with suspicion. Since it delivered news in Chinese only, it failed to make much of an impact, as both Chinese and foreign papers regarded the English dispatches as more credible. See Chao. *The Foreign Press in China*, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> On foreign news organs as catalysts for information from China for Chinese citizens in nineteenth and twentieth century China see Wagner. "The Early Chinese Newspapers and the Chinese Public Sphere," p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Chao. *The Foreign Press in China*, p. 41f.

<sup>22</sup> See Peter O'Connor. "Endgame: The English-Language Press Networks of East Asia in the Run-up to War, 1936-1941," in *Japan Forum* 13.1 (Apr. 2001), p. 63-76, here p. 69.

Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To better penetrate the Chinese market, Rengo operated a Chinese service in Shanghai that directly supplied the Chinese language papers for much below market rates.<sup>23</sup>

The involvement of foreign interests on the newspaper market is even more complicated. To avoid persecution from the government, virtually all Chinese newspapers had been registered as foreign companies in the concessions of Shanghai, Tianjin, Hankou, and other cities. All the while, Chinese-language and English-language publications were closely connected.<sup>24</sup> The English-language press in China has been described as consisting of three large, informal transitional networks that tied foreign-owned publications in China (British, American, and Japanese) closely to their counterparts in Japan.<sup>25</sup> The actual ownership patterns were in many cases instable, with frequent sales and consequent changes in the editorial line. The *Shanghai Mercury* was founded in 1879 as a British-owned evening paper, but was acquired by a Japanese consortium in 1903; in 1931, it was sold to the *Shanghai Evening Post*, an American paper.<sup>26</sup> An especially curious case is the *North China Standard*, an influential English-language, Japanese-controlled paper in China; it was founded in Beijing in 1919 to promote Japanese interests in China and to compete with the American-owned *Peking Leader*.<sup>27</sup> Japanese direct investments in Chinese press operations were probably the most visible, such as in the Beijing-based *Shuntian shibao* and the *Shengjing shibao* in Mukden, but other nations invested heavily in the press sector as well: the French authorities in Shanghai subsidized several papers as well, so as to make the official French voice heard in China, as did other nations.<sup>28</sup> The Soviet TASS, banned in China since 1929, distributed its dispatches secretly and free of charge to newspapers in Beijing and Harbin.<sup>29</sup>

Chinese readers in the 1920s and 1930s had every reason to have doubts about the ideal of a liberal and non-partisan press. When the *Shanghai Evening*

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<sup>23</sup> Chao. *The Foreign Press in China*, p. 32-37.

<sup>24</sup> MacKinnon writes that "the relationship between the Chinese press and the Western correspondents became so symbiotic that it is impossible to conclude who influenced whom most." "Toward a History of the Chinese Press," p. 14. The best treatment of this issue is Goodman. "Semi-Colonialism, Transnational Networks and News Flows in Early Republican Shanghai."

<sup>25</sup> See O'Connor. "Endgame."

<sup>26</sup> Chao. *The Foreign Press in China*, p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28. On the Japanese English-language press in China see also O'Connor. "Endgame."

<sup>28</sup> Chao. *The Foreign Press in China*, p. 89.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105f.

*Post* was acquired by an American consortium in 1928, the new owners let it be known that their only aim was “establishing it as an independent journal, with no especial purpose of propaganda and policy to serve except that of giving correct, unbiased information.”<sup>30</sup> The need for such an announcement itself reflects better than anything else the natural and experience-based expectation with which readers approached foreign-owned – and probably Chinese – newspapers.

The sometimes complicated ownership structure of the media in China allows not many conclusions as to editorial positions. Especially the commercially oriented publications with a larger circulations, Chinese and English alike, were often critical their respective governments.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, the partisan press had been growing since the early twentieth century, and by the 1920s and 1930s an increasing number of publications acted as mouthpieces for British, Japanese, Chinese, and other interests.<sup>32</sup> Even more importantly, foreign-owned newspapers were often perceived to represent the interests of their own government, even when they were not. Theories of propaganda had gained worldwide currency since World War I; the spread of fascism in particular furthered the interest in propaganda, publicity, and the ideological justifications for political interventions into the public sphere. The most aggressive theories of propaganda came from Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union, countries that also demonstrated how theory could be translated into the everyday practice of press management.<sup>33</sup> Yet reflections were under way in the U.S. and elsewhere, too, as to how to respond to the developments in the press sector in continental Europe.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted after Chao. *The Foreign Press in China*, p. 65.

<sup>31</sup> The United Press representative in Beijing, Randall Gould, was at one time banned from the weekly news briefings for American reporters by the American minister in China. Gould had angered the embassy repeatedly with his news dispatches. See Chao. *The Foreign Press in China*, p. 83. For earlier examples Goodman. “Networks of News,” p.2; and the detailed study of Rudolf Wagner. “The *Shenbao* in Crisis: The International Environment and the Conflict Between Guo Songtao and the *Shenbao*,” in *Late Imperial China* 20.1 (1999), p. 107-38.

<sup>32</sup> Chao, a contemporary observer employed by Reuters, provides numerous examples.

<sup>33</sup> For an early discussion of these activities see the contributions of Marx (on Germany), Zurcher (Italy), and Maxwell (Soviet Union) in Harwood Lawrence Childs (ed.). *Propaganda and Dictatorship: A Collection of Papers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936.

<sup>34</sup> See the essay of George Catlin in *ibid*. A pioneer of the implications of propaganda for modern democratic nations is Harold D. Lasswell. See his *Propaganda Technique in the World War*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1927. For a much longer and more systematic study of the origins, the methods, and the techniques of propaganda see Harold D. Lasswell and Dorothy Blumenstock. *World Revolutionary Propaganda: A Chicago Study*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1939. For an overview over the enormous literature on the subject existing by that time see Harold D.

These international theorizations were an outcome of the war itself. Analysts on both sides tried to find explanations for success and failure in part in the warring parties' efforts in publicity, propaganda, and public opinion leadership. At the same time, experiences from the practice of commercial persuasion, that is advertising, played a significant role in the formulation of new approaches to "public opinion leadership." An especially interesting example is the experience of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) and its influence in China and Japan.

The CPI was founded in April 1917 as an agency in charge of domestic and external public relations for the U.S. government.<sup>35</sup> Its creation was a compromise formula at the height of the war, when American military commanders called for strict censorship regulations. The agency under its chairman George Creel was nonetheless mistrusted by wide segments of the U.S. public and was abolished in 1919. The CPI conducted propaganda (a term that itself avoided) on behalf of the U.S. government, explaining the war effort to a reluctant public at home, and to allies and enemy nations abroad. In China, the CPI was represented by Carl Crow, who later used his experiences as a publicity manager to set up a highly successful advertising agency in Shanghai.<sup>36</sup>

In the course of disputes with his domestic critics, Creel developed elaborate arguments for a proactive form of publicity work that made use of latest technologies (film and radio) and popular appeal to influence public opinion.<sup>37</sup> It is for these rather modern features that the CPI drew the attention of propagandists

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Lasswell, Ralph D. Casey, and Bruce Lannes Smith. *Propaganda and Promotional Activities: an Annotated Bibliography*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1935.

<sup>35</sup> On the CPI see George Creel. *How we Advertised America: The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information that Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920; James R. Mock, Cedric Larson. *Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939; compare also the "Creel Report," the official report submitted by the CPI at the time of its dissolution: United States, Committee on Public Information. *Complete Report of the Chairman of the Committee on Public Information, 1917;1918; 1919*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920. I am grateful to Rudolf Wagner for bringing the CPI and its China-related activities to my attention.

<sup>36</sup> On Carl Crow see Paul French. *Carl Crow: A Tough Old China Hand*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006. Crow writes about his work for the CPI in *I Speak for the Chinese*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937, p. 15-17 and 27-28. Crow is best known for his *Four Hundred Million Customers: The Experiences – Some Happy, Some Sad – of an American in China, and what they Taught Him*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937; and his *Foreign Devils in the Flowery Kingdom*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940. Japanese observers took great interest in this book; it was translated only months after its publication and published as *Shina no yoki: Bei-Ei no Shina shinryakutan*. Tokyo: Owabi, 1942.

<sup>37</sup> These ideas are spelled out in the "Preface" and ch. 1 of *How we Advertised America*.

abroad, including those of Japan and China. For observers in Shanghai and Yan'an, even the United States, the paragon of the liberal press model, thus seemed to endorse forms of state-managed publicity and propaganda if doing so benefited the overall strategic needs and the interests of the government. Such perceptions of overseas trends blended nicely with the practice of partisan newspaper making and overt and covert propaganda that characterized the Chinese public sphere in the 1920s and 1930s. In this context, the adoption of a Leninist press model by the CCP seems like a rather natural choice.

The underlying reasons for the worldwide prevalence of illiberal theories of the press and propaganda in the interwar years must be sought in the widespread belief in the transformative power of ideas, in the positivist endeavour to transform man himself and his basic nature. The spread of social Darwinism, biologism and eugenics that gave rise to the CCP's project of the "socialist new man" (as discussed in chapter one) was not limited to China, but was a global phenomenon. The faith in the changeability of man, and in particular the positivist belief in the power of the state and its ability to mold its citizens according to its ways, had worldwide currency.<sup>38</sup> Once people's minds were regarded not as autonomous and sovereign entities, but rather as inherently formable, they were subject to the increasingly refined techniques of specialists including advertisement agents, public relations officers, and party propagandists. In this setting, the idea of a liberal, bipartisan press was obviously on the defensive.<sup>39</sup>

The proper environment in which the modern Chinese media concept took shape, however, can go only so far in explaining the peculiar model adopted by the CCP in the Yan'an period. As indicated in the introduction of this chapter, it is necessary to look at the ideas, concepts, and patterns of thought in traditional Chinese political culture that favoured the importation of some elements of Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist political philosophy over others. While some aspects of the canon easily found their way into CCP thinking and were "sinified," others were rejected, or at least faced an uphill battle in China. I argue that those elements of foreign media thinking were most likely to be incorporated in the CCP's press

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<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of these ideas compare Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

<sup>39</sup> Some of these concerns are echoed in Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, part VI (ch. 20-23).



theories that could be imagined within the parameters of premodern political culture, and that seemed to provide novel answers to problems predating their arrival in China. Other components of the “original” that lacked some sort of *pendant* facilitating their conception and acceptance in China were not necessarily refused, but found it much harder to explain their relevance and their purpose, and thus gain acceptance in China. In the next section, I will look into one crucial element of Chinese political culture, the *Sacred Edict (Shengyu)* and its relevance for the imagining the role of the press in the twentieth century.

### *Propaganda in the Service of Imperial Confucianism: the Shengyu*

Can a political movement as fiercely anti-traditionalist as that of the Chinese Communists be analyzed in terms of traditional thinking? Most of the CCP leaders came from the radical wing of the May Fourth movement and had received their dose of iconoclastic enlightenment. However, no matter what their particular attitude towards the Chinese cultural heritage was (which for the most part was openly hostile; more sympathetic views of China's past sometimes took decades to emerge, such as in the case of Mao Zedong), a significant part of the CCP leadership was familiar with traditional Chinese political culture and thinking. Some of them were born in the final years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and received at least some classical education in their early youth.<sup>40</sup> Others came to maturity amidst the intense cultural debates of the May Fourth Movement and, through the arguments brought forward against what was now denounced as “feudal” thinking, got some understanding of the object under attack. Education thus provided most of the individuals involved in the formation of the modern Chinese media concept with an understanding of the traditional roots of Chinese thinking and its main concepts, especially those regarding the nature of the relationship between the state and the people, the obligations of the state, and the patterns of communication in this relationship. I thus argue that, other factors aside (such as the needs of day-to-day

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<sup>40</sup> For example, the biographers of Mao, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, and Deng Xiaoping report of the youngsters being educated in the Chinese classics. See Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.). *Mao Zedong nianpu, 1893-1949*, Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993 3 vols., here vol. 1, p. 2. Hu Hua. *The Early Life of Zhou Enlai*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980, p. 2. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.). *Zhu De nianpu*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980, p. 4-5. Maomao. *Wo de fuqin Deng Xiaoping*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993, p. 55.

politics), this general cultural predisposition facilitated their choices, conscious or unconscious, in the politics of the media sector under consideration here.

In the following discussion, I will stay as close as possible to the general object of this study, namely the media of normative propaganda. The nearest we can get to in late imperial China, I suggest, is the famous “Sacred Edict,” or *Shengyu* 圣谕. Since the discussion in the last chapter has drawn heavily on administrative documents advising the Party’s propaganda organs in their work, I will try to use the closest traditional equivalents at hand for my discussion of the *Shengyu*, these being Qing administrative handbooks on governance compiled for local officials, and especially the sections on normative propaganda therein.<sup>41</sup>

The Manchu Qing dynasty had taken over from its Ming predecessors the vision of a centralized, autocratic state.<sup>42</sup> After assuming power in 1644, the Qing rulers set out to address many of the evils that had plagued the last decades of the Ming and that had been the object of wide-spread criticism of the intellectual elite: corruption, violent factional infighting that threatened the effectiveness of the bureaucracy, and the excessive power of the imperial eunuchs. In the ideological realm, the early Qing emperors pushed back the influence of Daoist and Buddhist teaching and reinstated a version of Neo-Confucianism that they claimed was closer to the ideas of the Song dynasty thinkers like Zhu Xi 朱熹. The foundations of a Neo-Confucian state ideology had been laid in their home state in the Northeast even before the Manchu’s ascendancy to imperial power; after 1644 they brought their vision back into the Chinese heartland and made their version of “Imperial Confucianism”<sup>43</sup> into the universal ideology of the empire. The scholarly elite, many of whom had been fiercely anti-Qing and had supported the resistance of the Ming loyalists in the South, was won over to the new dynasty by the sheer successes of Qing governance, and by the integration of ever larger numbers of scholars into ambitious, state-sponsored projects of intellectual effort such as the

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<sup>41</sup> I am grateful to Pierre-Étienne Will, who has brought to my attention this kind of material. My choice of the handbooks discussed relies heavily on Prof. Will’s as yet unpublished guide to late imperial administrative handbooks.

<sup>42</sup> William T. de Bary. “Chinese Despotism and the Confucian Ideal: A Seventeenth Century View” in John K. Fairbank (ed.). *Chinese Thought and Institutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 163-203.

<sup>43</sup> James Legge’s phrase. See “Imperial Confucianism” in *China Review* IV (1876), p. 147ff, 223ff, 299ff, 363ff.

compilation of the official *Mingshi* 明史 (1682-1735), the *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今图书集成 (1706-25), and the *Si ku quanshu* 四库全书 (1772-82).<sup>44</sup>

On the local level, the Qing rulers extended their power into the villages by enforcing the system of local governance.<sup>45</sup> The Baojia 保甲 and Lijia 里家 systems were an attempt to organize on the village-level local self-defence and the collection of taxes and duties, respectively.<sup>46</sup> Both systems had roots going back as far as the Song dynasty, but were implemented with new vigour under the early Qing emperors. On the ideological level the Shunzhi 顺治 emperor (r. 1644-61) introduced the system of the *Xiangyue* 乡约 lectures as early as 1652.<sup>47</sup> Officially adopted in 1659, the system required the public reading of imperially sanctioned moral principles and exhortations in all villages in the empire on the first and fifteenth day of every lunar month. Going back to a suggestion from Zhu Xi, the *Xiangyue* system could claim highest ideological legitimacy.<sup>48</sup> The lectures' content, however, was of contemporary nature: the *Liu yu* 六谕 ("Six [Maxims] Hortatory Edict") was a creation of the Shunzhi emperor and admonished the people.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> On the intellectual developments of the early Qing period see Benjamin A. Elman. *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge, Ma.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984. R. Kent Guy. *The Emperor's Four Treasuries: Scholars and the State in the Late Ch'ien-lung Era*. Cambridge, Ma.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1987. Frederic Wakeman Jr. *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, ch. 13-15. Thomas A. Metzger. *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977. See also Wang Hui. *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi*. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2004. On a more general note, compare Philip Kuhn. *Origins of the Modern Chinese State*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. Donald J. Munro. *The Concept of Man in Early China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969. Thomas A. Metzger. *The Internal Organization of the Ch'ing Bureaucracy: Legal, Normative, and Communication Aspects*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1973.

<sup>45</sup> Hsiao Kung-chuan's seminal study on rural China provides a wealth of information on local governance, with a focus on the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the following section I have made use of this work, and esp. ch. 6 "Ideological Control: the Hsiang-Yüeh and Other Institutions." Hsiao Kung-chuan. *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960.

<sup>46</sup> See Hsiao Kung-chuan. *Rural China*, ch. 2-4.

<sup>47</sup> For the date 1652 see Hsiao. *Rural China*, p. 616, n. 5.

<sup>48</sup> On the origins of the *Xiangyue* see Philip A. Kuhn. "Local Self-Government under the Republic: Problems, of Control, Autonomy, and Mobilization" in Frederic Wakeman, Carolin Grant (eds.). *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, p. 257-98, here p. 260f.

<sup>49</sup> Translation after Hsiao. *Rural China*, p. 186. Chinese text from *Qing huidian shili*, juan 397, 1b. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991, 14 vols., here vol. 5, p. 422.

(1) "Perform filial duties to your parents;"	孝顺父母
(2) "honour and respect your elders and superiors;"	恭敬长上
(3) "maintain harmonious relationships with your neighbours;"	和睦乡里
(4) "instruct and discipline your sons and grandsons;"	教训子孙
(5) "let each work peacefully for his own livelihood;"	各安生理
(6) "do not commit wrongful deeds."	无作非为

In 1670 the Kangxi emperor came forward with a new set of maxims that were henceforth to be used in the biweekly instructions of the population. The 16 maxims of the *Shengyu* were the officially designated content of the *Xiangyue* lectures until the end of the dynasty 250 years later. These sixteen maxims read:<sup>50</sup>

(1) "Esteem most highly filial piety and brotherly submission, in order to give due importance to human moral relations;"	敦孝弟以重人伦
(2) "behave with generosity toward your kindred, in order to illustrate harmony and benignity;"	笃宗族以昭雍睦
(3) "cultivate peace and concord in your neighbourhoods, in order to prevent quarrels and litigations;"	和乡党以息争讼
(4) "give importance to agriculture and sericulture, in order to ensure a sufficiency of clothing and food;"	重农桑以足衣食
(5) "show that you prize moderation and economy, in order to prevent the lavish waste of your means;"	尚节俭以惜财用
(6) "foster colleges and schools, in order to give the training of scholars a proper start;"	隆学校以端士习
(7) "do away with errant teachings, in order to exalt the correct doctrine;"	黜异端以崇正学
(8) "expound on the laws, in order to warn the ignorant and obstinate;"	讲法律以儆愚顽
(9) "explain ritual decorum and deference, in order to enrich manners and customs;"	明礼让以厚风俗
(10) "attend to proper callings, in order to stabilize the people's sense of dedication [to their work];"	务本业以定民志
(11) "instruct sons and younger brothers, in order to prevent them from doing what is wrong;"	训子弟以禁非为
(12) "put a stop to false accusations, in order to protect the honest and good;"	息诬告以全善良
(13) "warn against sheltering deserters, in order to avoid being involved in their punishment;"	诫匿逃以免株连
(14) "promptly remit your taxes, in order to avoid being pressed for payment;"	完钱粮以省催科
(15) "combine in collective security groups ( <i>baojia</i> ), in order to put an end to theft and robbery;"	联保甲以弭盗贼
(16) "eschew enmity and anger, in order to show respect for the person and life."	解雠忿以重身命

<sup>50</sup> I have given preference to the translation in Wm. Theodore de Bary, Richard Lufrano (ed.). *Sources of Chinese Tradition 2: from 1600 Through the Twentieth Century* (Second edition). New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, 73f. Hsiao's translation is in *Rural China*, p. 187f. Chinese text from *Qing huidian shili*, juan 397, 2b-3a, Zhonghua shuju ed., vol. 5, p. 422f. The most detailed study of the *Shengyu* is Victor H. Mair. "Language and Ideology in the Written Popularizations of the *Sacred Edict*" in David Johnson et al (ed.). *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p. 325-59.

Both the *Liu yu* of the Shunzhi emperor and the *Shengyu* were short and to the point; their aim was to bring the highly condensed essence of the official Neo-Confucian ideology to a predominantly rural population. These peasants usually had little or no literacy, but the proven potential for unrest and upheaval; they were therefore regarded to be in need of moral rectification and control. The *Shengyu* was the Kangxi emperor's comment and elaboration on the *Liu yu*; likewise, later rulers saw the necessity for further elaborations and explanations. In 1724, the Yongzheng 雍正 emperor (r. 1723-35) wrote the *Shengyu guangxun* 圣谕广训, a much longer comment on the *Shengyu*, that was to be used in the village lectures. In the course of time, other popular elaborations on the *Shengyu* appeared, such as the *Shengyu xiangjie* 圣谕像解 ("Illustrated Explanations of the *Shengyu*") compiled by Liang Yannian 梁延年 in 1681.<sup>51</sup> All these editions served the same purpose: to propagate a uniform ideology in an easily comprehensible way to reach a maximum amount of the population and thus to establish ideological control. It is in this point that I consider the *Shengyu* and its exegeses of interest for the study of modern Chinese propaganda.<sup>52</sup>

The first three maxims of the *Liu yu* are concerned with enhancing proper social relations, as are those of the *Shengyu*.<sup>53</sup> filial duties and respect towards elders, especially within the clan, had been considered cornerstones of Confucian ethics for centuries. In the *Shengyu's* paraphrase of the third maxim, however, we witness a shift in emphasis. The *Liu yu* had admonished the peasants to "maintain harmonious relationships with your neighbours," which certainly was a good in itself in conjunction with the first and second maxim. The *Shengyu* now made explicit the purpose of this maxim: "to prevent quarrels and litigations." Judicial duties belonged to the most onerous tasks of local official in late imperial China; legal battles and disputes consumed both time and administrative energy. To settle arguments through mediation and to avoid litigation by the local officials was clearly in the interest of the latter; the maxim thus acquires an administrative

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<sup>51</sup> Repr. by Jiangsu fushu, Guangxu ren-yin (1902). On the *Shengyu xiangjie* see Mair. "Language and Ideology," p. 330-32.

<sup>52</sup> The relevance of the *Shengyu* has been commented upon earlier, for example by Timothy Cheek. *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, p. 17. Cheek does not, however, substantiate his observation.

<sup>53</sup> See the tabulation in Hsiao. *Rural China*, p. 187f.

flavour. A similar process can be observed with regard to maxim five, where “let each work peacefully for his own livelihood” is reformulated in the more concrete terms of “agriculture and sericulture” that are to provide “a sufficiency of clothing and food” and thus enhance social stability.

The trend towards explanations serving primarily the concerns of officials can also be seen on a more general level. Hsiao Kung-chuan has observed that while only one maxim of the *Liu yu*, the last (“do not commit wrongful deeds”) addressed public order, this number had risen to six in the *Shengyu* (maxims eight and twelve through sixteen).<sup>54</sup> With the introduction of the *Shengyu*, the *Xiangyue* lectures thus became more openly an instrument of ideological control of the countryside: “One is tempted to surmise that whatever had been the attitude of the Shunzhi emperor, imperial Confucianism had become, in the hands of his successor, less an influence to make men good than a method to dissuade them from becoming elements dangerous to the security of the empire.”<sup>55</sup> Admonitions such as “do away with errant teachings” (a paraphrase for the doctrines of secret societies, the notorious vehicles of peasant uprisings), the prohibition of sheltering deserted soldiers or criminals on the run, or even the demand to pay taxes promptly are blunt administrative measures with only the thinnest veil of moralist packaging. The Yongzheng emperor’s *Shengyu guangxun* placed even more stress on ideological control of the peasant population.<sup>56</sup>

The method of justifying administrative policies by packaging them in ideological terms, with the intention to increase the control over the people, is familiar to us from modern-day CCP policies. In both late imperial and modern China, an authoritarian claim lies behind this technique. It is the claim that the Party / the emperor has a higher insight into the proper needs of the day and can therefore demand submission from the people. The source of this insight is the correct ideology. Consequently, it is in terms of this ideology (Confucian moral ethics or Marxism) that the policies in question are explained when they are handed down. In both cases, the ideology is associated directly with the source of the message (the policies in question), that is, the emperor and the CCP. The medium derives legitimacy from its very closeness to the source of the message –

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. This trend is also discussed in Mair. “Language and Ideology.”

<sup>55</sup> Hsiao. *Rural China*, p. 188.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

thus the designation of the CCP papers as the Party's "mouthpiece" (*houshe* 喉舌). The sixteen maxims have been formulated by the emperor himself and are his own words addressing the masses, hence their designation as the "sacred" (*sheng* 圣) edict. This sacred character of the *Shengyu* must be taken literally: a handbook for officials giving advice on how to perform the *Xiangyue* lectures calls for incense to be burnt during the ritual.<sup>57</sup> What I want to stress here is the similarity of the attitude adopted by both the CCP and the imperial government with regards to the role of ideology in the face of their respective populations, and the ways this ideology is made to work. This view, I suggest, is of an authoritarian nature.

In conjunction with this authoritarian character, the paternal general attitude of the *Shengyu* is remarkable. This becomes obvious in the Yongzheng emperor's preface to the *Shengyu guangxun*.<sup>58</sup> Directly addressing his audiences, the emperor proclaims: "We wish you, soldiers and people, to respect the sublime intentions [our father] Shengzu 圣祖 [the posthumous name of the Kangxi emperor] had in rectifying your moral attitudes [*de* 德] and enriching your well-being."<sup>59</sup> Do not regard it [the *Shengyu*] as instructions and commands of empty words, but exert yourselves in unanimity to become people decent and frugal, and do all you can to eradicate all dishonest and violent practices." A "decent and frugal people" (*jin shen jie yong zhi shuren* 谨身节用之庶人) is an almost verbatim quote from the *Shuren* 庶人 chapter of the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝经).<sup>60</sup> Borrowing from the *locus classicus* mandating the deference of the young towards the elders, the

<sup>57</sup> Huang Lihong. *Fuhui quanshu*. Kangxi 38 (1699), *juan* 25, p. 9a. Repr. in *Guanzhen shu jicheng*, vol. 3, p. 501.

<sup>58</sup> The Chinese text I have used is in *Qing huidian shili*, *juan* 397, 4b-5b, Zhonghua shuju ed., vol. 5, p. 423f. Alternative translations can be found in William Milne (trsl.). *The Sacred Edict, Containing Sixteen Maxims of the Emperor Kang-he, Amplified by his Son, the Emperor Yoong-ching*. London: Black, Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen, 1817; and A. Théophile Piry. *Le Saint Edit: Étude de Littérature Chinoise*. Shanghai: Bureau des Statistiques, Inspectorat Général des Douanes, 1879. The latter book also provides the Chinese text.

<sup>59</sup> "To rectify the moral attitudes and enrich the well-being" (*zheng de hou sheng* 正德厚生) is a quotation from the *Da Yu mo* 大禹谟 chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚书. James Legge translates: "there are the rectification of the people's virtue, the conveniences of life, and the securing abundant means of sustentation [*hou sheng* 厚生] – these must be harmoniously attended to." *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 3: *The Shoo King*. Repr. Taipei, 1972, p. 56.

<sup>60</sup> See Ruan Yuan. *Shisan jing zhushu*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980, vol. 2, p. 2549: "...being decent and frugal, in order to nourish your fathers and mothers – this is the piety [*xiao* 孝] of the people."

Yongzheng emperor thus sets up a father-son relationship between himself and the people. Yet he goes even further: of his own father's noble intentions when proclaiming the *Shengyu*, the Yongzheng emperor says, "and he viewed you, his people, just like newborn infants." The term *chizi* 赤子, which I have rendered here as "newborn infants," is a *topos* in Chinese literature found already in the *Shangshu* 尚书, where in the *Kanggao* 康诰 chapter the king says: "[Deal with them] as if you were guarding your own infants, and the people will be tranquil and orderly."<sup>61</sup> This turn in the logic of the *Shangshu* is particularly interesting, because it relates exactly to what the Qing emperors had in mind with the *Shengyu*: to bring about the obedience and submission of the populace by taking care for their moral and material needs ("rectifying the moral attitudes and enriching the well-being"). The *Shengyu* served the former purpose.<sup>62</sup>

We are presented here with a figure of thought absolutely compatible with that observed earlier in the discussion of Lenin's "What is to be Done?": Lenin justified the need for an avant-garde party with the backwardness of the Russian population. He did not believe in their potential for self-liberation; instead, only the intervention of the party would bring enlightenment to the people. Without the help of professional revolutionaries, the people would remain stuck in ignorance, doing harm to their very interests. A comparable attitude speaks from the preface to the *Shengyu guangxun*: it is not the people themselves who take care of their material and spiritual concerns; rather, the emperor is responsible for them. It is he who must "rectify their moral attitudes and enrich their well-being." The Yongzheng emperor explains that he "wishes" (*yuan* 愿) the people to show gratitude for his father's (and, by implication, his own) best intentions that are in fact but the people's own interests. Taking the *Shengyu* for empty words, they are warned, would be only to their disadvantage. The elitist approach towards the people in Lenin's writings can thus be understood in the familiar terminology of Chinese tradition.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Trsl. after Legge. *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 3: *The Shoo King*, p. 389.

<sup>62</sup> Quotations from the *Shangshu* are generally frequent in the text corpus surrounding the *Shengyu*. This is not difficult to understand, given the ideological nature of the *Shangshu* and the book's predilection for universal ethical claims and statements.

<sup>63</sup> The elitist approach took on paternal and even descending tones, in particular in the various interpretations and paraphrases of the *Shengyu*. See Mair. "Language and Ideology," esp. p. 339f and the table on p. 356.



In one of the administrative texts, the inability of the ordinary people to care for their own affairs and to behave properly is lamented in similar terms:<sup>64</sup>

[The emperor] pitied the small people (*xiao min* 小民) who might in their ignorance violate the laws, and he therefore printed and proclaimed the legal regulations, so that every family and each household might know them and reform themselves. They look up with respect and see the emperor caring for them just like he cares for his own children. [In this way] they are aroused and stirred up and their benevolence (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 义) unfold ever more completely. Every district and county official who wants to be like a parent to his people must first of all teach and instruct them.

It was common that laws and regulations were read and taught in conjunction with the *Shengyu* at the *Xiangyue* lectures (see below). The author of this text, Tian Wenjing 田文镜, uses the expression “caring for [the people] just like he cares for his own children” (*bao chi zhi huai* 保赤之怀), which is very similar to that used in the preface of the *Shengyu guangxun*. Likewise, the officials in charge of the lectures become the “parents” of the supposedly immature people. “Father and mother officials” (*fumu guan* 父母官) was a common designation of local officials at the district and county levels in late imperial China. The people, in contrast, are likened to children: immature and in constant need of guidance and instruction. An expression frequently used for the unenlightened people, living in ignorance and stupor is *yumin* 愚民 – literally, the “stupid people,” a term occasionally even used by officials directly addressing the illiterate masses, mostly peasants.<sup>65</sup>

It is these masses that the *Shengyu* and other works of the same genre address. The instruction to read aloud the same text every two weeks to make the masses remember the very words of the emperor shows little confidence in the people’s ability to easily absorb the teachings and employ them on their own. The constant repetition of the text served this purpose, as did the composition technique: the strictly parallel seven-word sentences were easy to remember and to recite. The elaborations of the *Shengyu* equally paid attention to their accessibility for semi-literate peasant masses with little education.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Tian Wenjing. *Zhou xian shiyi* (1730), p. 8a. Repr. in *Guanzhen shu jicheng*, vol. 3, p. 666.

<sup>65</sup> The official Liu Heng 刘衡 (1776-1841), for example, states bluntly: “The ordinary people are dull and stupid 百姓颡愚.” *Yong li yong yan*. *Juan* 2, p. 3a. Repr. *Guanzhen shu jicheng*, vol. 6, p. 201. The “stupid people” and their newly found potential were intensely discussed in the press in last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. See Andrea Janku. *Nur leere Reden: Politischer Diskurs und die Shanghaier Presse im China des späten 19. Jahrhunderts*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003, ch. 6.

<sup>66</sup> *Shengyu guangxun*, Preface.

Fearing that the common people [lit. small people (*xiaomin* 小民)] might [for a while] hold in esteem [the *Shengyu*] and practice it[’s teachings], but after some time become negligent, we once again solemnly enjoin [them], so as to claim back their attention. We have treated with utmost reference the sixteen maxims of the [Sacred] *Edict* and expounded their meaning and investigated their words. The result is a total of 10,000 characters, which we have called the *Shengyu guangxun*. We have quoted copiously from many sources, going back and forth, and attending to minute details; we have made their meaning abundantly clear in a rich but straightforward and plain language.

Fearing that the people might prove unable to comprehend the message of the *Shengyu*, the *Shengyu guangxun* sets out to clarify the “Sacred Edict’s” meaning in “rich but straightforward and plain (*pu* 朴) language.” The concern is similar to that of the Chinese Communists, who advocated the “mass character” of their propaganda to better reach the masses: the CCP demanded its authors to write straightforwardly (in contrast to the laborious style of *dang bagu*), and to use a plain idiom, *baihua* 白话, the standard colloquial language that was officially instituted as the national standard. The administration in Qing China went even further, when later edicts allowed the *Shengyu* to be read in dialects, or, if necessary, to be translated by interpreters.<sup>67</sup>

Another method to overcome the barrier of illiteracy was the compilation of illustrated editions of the *Shengyu*. One especially fine example is Liang Yannian’s *Shengyu xiangjie*, a work appearing only eleven years after the proclamation of the Kangxi emperor’s *Shengyu*. In the preface, Liang first praises the emperor’s best intentions.<sup>68</sup>

The son of heaven rules the people on behalf of heaven.<sup>69</sup> The methods (*dao* 道) he employs to govern them are certainly numerous. Since ascending to the throne, the plans that our emperor devised untiringly, labouring from dawn till dusk, have already seen their implementation and have brought about visible results. And in the ninth year of Kangxi [1670] he has proclaimed the sixteen maxims of the [Sacred] *Edict* that are to be used as the source for changing the people’s habits and customs. [The sixteen maxims are] a grand and magnificent design that leaves nothing to be desired. Ah, how great, isn’t this method [*dao*] unsurpassed?

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<sup>67</sup> See Hsiao. *Rural China*, p. 191. However, not all of the *Shengyu* paraphrases were written in the vernacular, and their forewords in particular were written in *wenyan* style, indicating that at least some of them targeted local officials rather than the masses as their main readership. See Mair. “Language and Ideology,” esp. the table on p. 356.

<sup>68</sup> Liang Yannian. *Shengyu xiangjie*. Jiangsu fushu printing, Guangxu ren-yin [1902]. Preface, p. 3a.

<sup>69</sup> Literally “to shepherd the people on behalf of heaven” (*wei tian mu min* 为天牧民) The “heavenly shepherd” (*tianmu* 天牧) is a quotation from the *Lü xing* 吕刑 chapter of the *Shangshu*. Legge translates: “The king said: ‘Ah! you who superintend the government and preside over criminal cases throughout the empire, are you not constituted the shepherds of Heaven?’” *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 3: *The Shoo King*, p. 598. I am grateful to Lothar Wagner for his help with this passage.

The county magistrate Liang extols the emperor's untiring efforts to care for his people, a motif we have already commented on above. The product of this incessant service to the people is the *Shengyu*, the best of all possible methods an emperor can think of to rule his people. Benevolent care is the way to "change the people's [long-standing] habits and customs." In view of such a splendid work, what is the author's own intention? Liang goes on to explain his undertaking:<sup>70</sup>

Generally speaking, it is the responsibility of a magistrate to carry on the efforts in the betterment of the people. When I, [Liang] Yannian, was humbly serving in Fanchang 繁昌 [a county in Anhui province], I could think of no better method than proclaiming the [Sacred] Edict to create respectfulness. Not long after assuming office, I therefore received the sixteen-point [Sacred] Edict that had been proclaimed by the former Commissioner and Provincial Governor with the surname Jin 靳,<sup>71</sup> and devoted myself to reading it. [It contains all the] lofty motions and thought of the Duke of Zhou and of Confucius, it is splendidly written and absolutely complete. It is just that I felt that the composition [might be all too] elegant, and the small people might not necessarily grasp all of it; in all humbleness I therefore added notes and explanations and then hurriedly had it printed for distribution, in order to bring together the entire county; every family should pass it on and each household should recite it. Day after day and month after month, summing up to years, it should be common with the people, who should [thus] have some knowledge about their proper direction.

If the "small people" (*xiao min* 小民) are to gain "some knowledge about their proper direction," they must be able to understand the *Shengyu* at first hand (a quite realistic point of view not necessarily acknowledged by all officials). Yet even the conciseness of the *Shengyu* and its seven-character maxims might pose a problem for many of the illiterate population. Liang thus saw the need for further explanations, if the *Shengyu* was to be popularized successfully among the people of the whole empire (Forty years later, the Yongzheng emperor arrived at a similar conclusion). Liang Yannian wanted to make sure that "every family" and "each household" would grasp the meaning of the Holy Edict; he explains his method to make the *Shengyu* easier to understand for the masses:<sup>72</sup>

But there are mountain lads and village kids who do not know a single character, as well as women and girls, who might not understand [even an annotated edition of the *Shengyu*]. Therefore I have imitated collections such as the *Yangzheng tujie* 养正图解

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<sup>70</sup> *Shengyu xiangjie*. Preface, p. 3a-b.

<sup>71</sup> Jin Fu 靳辅 (1633-1692), the governor of Anhui province. See Arthur W. Hummel. *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (hereafter *ECCP*). Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943, vol.1, p. 161-63. The *Shengyu* apparently was passed down through the bureaucratic ranks.

<sup>72</sup> *Shengyu xiangjie*. Preface, p. 4b.

<sup>73</sup> and the *Renjing yangqiu* 人镜阳秋,<sup>74</sup> and have compiled the *Shengyu xiangjie*. I have drawn [pictures of] the deeds of the people of old and placed [these illustrations] beneath each maxim; then I have added the original text [of the stories accompanying the illustrations] below. Righteous words and virtuous deeds thus follow one after another, with some rough explanations, easy to understand.

In compiling the *Shengyu xiangjie*, Liang Yannian relied on a tradition of illustrated works compiled especially to bring important contents such as moral treatises, to audiences that were either illiterate or had little education, but that were especially in need of “being transformed.”<sup>75</sup> *Hua min* 化民 was a pattern Liang Yannian used and that also resonated with the Chinese Communists 250 years later: the need to educate the populace while taking into consideration the limited educational opportunities, especially of the peasants. In Yan’an, the CCP made use of the woodcut industry producing popular new year posters.<sup>76</sup> These posters had a function very similar to the Qing dynasty illustrated moral treatises: to popularize ideological messages down to the very grassroots. This is exactly what Liang Yannian had in mind when he spoke of “mountain lads and village kids,” as well as “women and girls,” whom he considered to belong to the same educational category. The real, as opposed to the stated purpose of the *Shengyu xiangjie* might be debatable, since the illiterate peasant population would hardly be able to purchase an expensive illustrated print in 20 *juan*. The buyers might rather have been more affluent families who used the book to teach their children. Nevertheless, the *Shengyu xiangjie* proved to be a success story, since more than two hundred years later, officials in Jiangsu province considered this work to be a tool effective enough to justify the expenses of a reprint in 1903.

“Transforming the people,” educating them and leading them towards a path of moral correct behaviour, and, by the same token, requiring them to respect the laws and the authority of the officialdom, had another motivation. The seventh of the *Shengyu*’s sixteen maxims had admonished the people to “do away with errant teachings, in order to exalt the correct doctrine.” The concern with orthodox

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<sup>73</sup> A Ming dynasty illustrated treatise on political ethics by Jiao Hong 焦竑.

<sup>74</sup> By Huang Yingzu 黄应组 (b. 1563), another popular illustrated book from the Ming dynasty.

<sup>75</sup> Illustrated moral treatises were produced not only for the illiterate peasant education, but also for children. One very fine example is the *Dijian tushuo* 帝鉴图说, compiled in 1573 by the grand secretary Zhang Juzheng 张居正 as a textbook for the juvenile Wanli 万历 emperor.

<sup>76</sup> See Hu Qiaomu. “Cong chunjie xuanchuan kan wenyi de xin fangxiang,” JFRB editorial, Apr. 25, 1943. Repr. in *Hu Qiaomu wenji*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1992, vol. 1, p. 95-100.

ideology was a crucial issue for the central bureaucracy at the court in Beijing as well as for local officials, as the proliferation of “errant teachings” – in particular the teachings of militant sects inspired by Daoist or Buddhist doctrines – constituted a permanent potential threat to social order and a headache to officials working at the grassroots. The propagation of the *Shengyu* and the text body associated with it must thus be understood as a form of counter-propaganda reacting to the rapidly increasing flow of popular religious tracts. *Shanshu* 善书 were printed locally through private initiatives and were distributed freely to the populace.<sup>77</sup> As a master tract compiled by the emperor, the *Shengyu* was aimed to stem the tide of unregulated publications circulating in the provinces.<sup>78</sup> The claim to represent orthodoxy against heterodox teachings is another quality that makes the *Shengyu* functionally comparable to the propaganda emanating from the CCP Party center.

In the discussion above, I have concentrated on the *Shengyu* and the body of texts surrounding it. I will now turn to the administrative handbooks from the Qing dynasty, usually called *guanzen shu* 官箴书.<sup>79</sup> As the treatises in this genre advise officials on how to perform the various duties on their job, I consider them to be an approximate equivalent of the Party documents that were my main source in chapter two. The handbooks are internal sources that explain the relevance of the policies in question, here propaganda of Confucian ethics; they advise officials on the proper execution of their duties with regard to these policies, and give exact prescriptions on how the *Xiangyue* lectures are to be performed. They also contain discussions about eventual problems the official in charge should be prepared to encounter. There is one important difference, however, to the CCP materials used in the previous chapter: the intrabureaucratic communication of the propaganda sector documents the vertical flow of information within the *xitong*, based on

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<sup>77</sup> On *Shanshu* see Cynthia Brokaw. *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

<sup>78</sup> I am grateful to Rudolf Wagner for pointing this issue out to me. See also the discussion in Pei Huang. *Autocracy at Work: A Study of the Yung-cheng Period, 1723-1735*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974, p. 187-204 (a discussion of the seventh maxim can be found on p. 193f), and Victor Mair. “Language and Ideology,” p. 343-46. However, as Brokaw points out *shanshu* were not necessarily hereditary tracts undermining the central authority: “By the late seventeenth century, then, the ledgers, once texts of rather doubtful origin and suspect use, had become comprehensive reflections of an elite vision of social order.” *The Ledger of Merit and Demerit*, p. 240. The generally supportive character of *shanshu* (very much like the *Shengyu*) is indeed the central argument of Brokaw’s chapter four.

<sup>79</sup> On this genre see Will. *Official Handbooks and Anthologies*.

official directives. The administrative handbooks, in contrast, were written by officials for officials; they are thus a kind of horizontal communication and mostly have a non-official character. The Qing handbooks can therefore be treated only as functional equivalents of the Party materials used in chapter two. They are, however, an invaluable source because of the amount of detailed information they provide.

The *Shengyu* and the *Shengyu guangxun* were read and explained to the people at the *Xiangyue* lectures. How were these lectures to be performed? Tian Wenjing's *Zhouxian shiyi* 州县事宜, a brief handbook commissioned by the Yongzheng emperor,<sup>80</sup> instructs local officials: "On the first and fifteenth of each month [the official] must go the venue [of the lecture] personally, together with the officials in charge of education, the Assistant Magistrates, and the other officials; he must assemble the soldiers and the people, and respectfully read and explain the *Shengyu guangxun* point by point. He must use simple comparisons and examples, so that everybody knows [their meaning]. Additionally, he must proclaim the printed laws and regulations in a way everyone can understand them."<sup>81</sup> The latter point is especially interesting, because it makes evident the *Shengyu* was employed by the official as an administrative tool: more important than the moral betterment of the people was apparently the aim to control them. Ideological control was supported by legal control: the *Xiangyue* lectures were a convenient opportunity to conduct legal education and to make the penal code and other regulations and legal provisions known to the populace.

The *Xiangyue* lectures required the personal involvement of the county magistrate and other local officials; the magistrate would assume the leading role: he was to read and paraphrase the *Shengyu guangxun*. In the villages outside the county seat, village elders and local respectables were to assume the role of the magistrate: "In the larger towns and villages lecturing sites shall be set up, and members of the local gentry who are honest and trustworthy and have formerly committed no crimes shall be elected to the post of lecturer (*yuezheng* 约正) and take over the charges of lecturing in turns. Yet the seal-holding official must from time to time visit [the lecturing sites] and inspect [the lectures] to stress their

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<sup>80</sup> For background information see Will. Official Handbooks and Anthologies, entry "Zhouxian shiyi."

<sup>81</sup> Tian Wenjing. *Zhouxian shiyi*, p. 8a-b. Repr. in *Guanzhen shu jicheng*, vol. 3, p. 666.

importance.”<sup>82</sup> To increase the penetration of the *Xiangyue* lectures even beyond the counties, the lowest formal administrative division of the empire, trustees had to be found in the villages to act as proxies for the imperial officials. The efforts of the Qing court to bring its moral vision to the very grassroots are remarkable.

Another well-known handbook, Huang Liuhong’s 黃六鴻 *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書, gives a more detailed explanation for the need to elect village lecturers:<sup>83</sup>

The district and county magistrates carry responsibility over financial, grain supply, and juridical [affairs], they cannot travel to the villages of the four [directions]. The villagers in turn have their obligations in agriculture and sericulture, in trade and commerce, and cannot travel to the [local] seats of government. Therefore every town shall set up a lecturing site. Alternatively, several towns together may pay for one, or use a spacious temple or nunnery. Likewise, every village and every clan shall either especially build [a lecturing site] or go to the village temple and ancestral halls. The only condition is that [these places] are clean so that the imperial edicts can be honoured there, and that they are spacious enough to accommodate the audience.

Population movements were a cause of concern for the officialdom, and to keep the rural population in their own villages was an administrative precaution. Having too many of the people visiting the county seat to attend the lectures was not only impractical, but also dangerous. The village lecturers would thus bring the moral exhortations directly to the addressees. Local resources were mobilized for the service to the emperor; townships, villages, and even clans were thus integrated into a nationwide framework of moral ideological education. Performed ubiquitously and synchronically throughout the empire, the *Xiangyue* lectures were indeed a vision of momentous proportions.

Choosing the right personnel for the performance was a crucial point for the success of the enterprise. So what were the criteria for the selection of the lecturers? The *Fuhui quanshu* comments:<sup>84</sup>

The public readings of the [Holy] Edict are called *Xiangyue*. For the *Xiangyue* lectures, virtuous elders who are respected by the masses must be selected and made lecturers. There are lecturers and vice lecturers who are called *jiangzheng* 讲正 and *jiangfu* 讲副. The lecturer and vice lecturer oversee the performance of the lectures. For the reading itself, two young people or students must be chosen with clear and loud voices. These young people must be good at reciting, they mustn’t make mistakes when reading

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 8b. Repr. p. 666.

<sup>83</sup> Huang Liuhong. *Fuhui quanshu*. Juan 25, p. 8a. Repr. *Guanzhen shu jicheng*, vol. 3, p. 501. The *Fuhui quanshu* has been rendered into English by Djang Chu as *A Complete Book Concerning Happiness and Benevolence: A Manual for Magistrates in Seventeenth-Century China* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1984). However, since this volume is incomplete (for reasons explained in the foreword), and in most places must be considered a paraphrase rather than a translation, all the following translations are my own.

<sup>84</sup> *Fuhui quanshu*, p. 7a-b. Repr. p. 500.

characters, they must clearly separate the single sentences; their voices must be clear and loud so that even those farther apart can understand what they say.

For the *Xiangyue* lectures peasant activists were recruited, both young and old – the young for their physical qualities, the old for the respect they enjoyed with the local population. The government relied on these activists to transmit the message of its moral propaganda to the population. This mechanism had the double function of being economical by saving the local administration scarce resources, and of mobilizing an active portion of the population that could also be relied upon in other areas of local self-government such as village self-defence (through the *baojia* system) or tax collection (by way of the *lijia* system).

In chapter two, we have noted similar efforts of the CCP to mobilize activist elements from among the populace for the Party's moral-ideological project: the worker-peasant correspondents. Due to the difference between spatially limited oral agitation, such as the *Xiangyue* lectures, and the correspondents' contributions to printed newspapers that were distributed beyond the borders of a single locality, comparability is limited to functional aspects. With regard to the economic use of scarce financial resources, and the Party's efforts to mobilize the rural population, the *Xiangyue* lectures are of interest for the study of modern-day propaganda. To mention is first and foremost the objective of both the imperial government and the CCP: to make its respective message become the people's own message and thus to increase the chances for the internalization of this message by the audience, the massive peasant population of rural China.<sup>85</sup>

Functional similarities of the traditional peasant activists cum lecturers, and the modern worker-peasant correspondents can be found in one more respect: the notorious distrust of the government towards its own grassroots agents. The stress on the need to control the correspondents and to carefully censor their contributions has been addressed above in chapter two. The administrative handbooks do likewise comment on the need to supervise the local lecturers: "The lecturers and vice lecturers elected in the townships, as well as the village heads and clan chiefs [performing these duties], must have their names reported in writing, through the townships, to the district and county [government]. Only after

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<sup>85</sup> This process is also detailed in Donald J. Munro. *The Concept of Man in Contemporary China*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2000, esp. ch. 3.



the candidate[’s names] have been examined and ascertained by the district and county [government] can they assume their lecturing responsibilities.”<sup>86</sup> Control of the lectures of the imperial *Sacred Edict* reached down to the lowest levels of the transmission chain. The danger of these procedures – a danger well-known to the modern counterparts – was to stifle the grassroots initiative that should be nurtured in the first place, and thus to reduce the effectiveness of the lectures.

Doubts about the effectiveness of the *Xiangyue* lectures are indeed justified.<sup>87</sup> For one, the imperial court did simply underestimate the sophistication of the rural population: even the “stupid people” would be annoyed if they were made to listen to the same text every two weeks, for years on end. Repetition propaganda runs the risk of having paradoxical effects. Concentration might lapse: “If the country bumpkins (*xiangyu* 乡愚) both old and young jostle and shout, how can they listen to the words of heaven and respectfully watch [the ceremony]?”<sup>88</sup> The lectures were equally soporific for the officials involved, among whom even the good-willed could not but come to see them as a hassle that was executed in a mechanistic way. As this became evident, the handbooks for officials cautioned their readers:<sup>89</sup>

But if you regard [the *Xiangyue* lectures] as mere conventionalities: if you beat the gongs and pluck the *gai* 盖<sup>90</sup> in the early morning hours of the first and fifteenth day, and then go to the temple of the city god; if you sit there in your official attire without muttering a single word, like a wooden idol; if the master of ceremony and the local nobility recite the *Shengyu*, and the speaker does not explain its meaning and the audience does not understand its details; if both officials and people are in disorder and noisily run away [as soon as the lecture is over] – then above there will be no praising of the Son of Heaven’s [effort to] transform the people through enlightenment (*qiyou* 启牖), and below the masses of ordinary people will not be prompted to renew their ways upon the impression [of the *Shengyu*]. Such are the careless routines of mediocre officials, and this is what we call neglecting one’s duties of office while taking the pay.

Tian Wenjing wants to warn incoming officials not to perform the biweekly *Shengyu* lectures in a superficial manner; yet his vivid portrayal seems to describe a common practice. Many officials throughout the empire fulfilled their duties with only little enthusiasm. The Qianlong 乾隆 emperor issued edicts in 1736, 1737,

<sup>86</sup> Huang Liuhong. *Fuhui quanshu*. Juan 25, p. 7b. Repr. *Guanzhen shu jicheng*, vol. 3, p. 500.

<sup>87</sup> See also the discussion in Hsiao. *Rural China*, p. 194-201.

<sup>88</sup> Huang Liuhong. *Fuhui quanshu*. Juan 25, p. 6a. Repr. *Guanzhen shu jicheng*, vol. 3, p. 500.

<sup>89</sup> Tian Wenjing. *Zhouxian shiyi*, p. 9a. Repr. in *Guanzhen shu jicheng*, vol. 3, p. 666.

<sup>90</sup> *Ming luo zhang gai* 鸣锣张盖. A few instances of this expression can be found in the *Siku quanshu* database. I have been unable, however, to determine what musical instrument (if at all) is meant by *gai*, which may be dialect word.

and 1743 to urge officials to give the *Xiangyue* lectures their due attention.<sup>91</sup> The ambiguous character of the lectures becomes evident from the fact that the emperor had to repeat his calls once and again: while the public readings of the *Shengyu* were seen as a highly effective means of moral propaganda, the very effort to lend them as much dignity as possible turned them into a ritual that easily became a perfunctory ceremony devoid of meaning.<sup>92</sup> The idea to make propaganda from the masses, for the masses ran into problems similar to those encountered by CCP two centuries later: the tension between the “mass character” of the newspaper, ensured by the participation of local activists (the peasant correspondents), and the paper’s “party character,” their submission to the Party’s monopoly of policy interpretation; the balance was particularly hard to strike.

Returning to the argument made in the introduction to this chapter, that “the Marxist-Leninist concepts and ideas surrounding the media were accepted in China as plausible answers to concerns that had long predated their arrival,” I want to summarize briefly those points that have been identified in the discussion of the *Shengyu* as being of relevance for the formation of the modern Chinese media concept: as a cultural backdrop they enabled the Chinese Communists to understand and conceptualize certain components of Marxism, an imported ideology, as “useful” to deal with core questions of governance. The first of these is the Leninist demand that the media are the unified, single voice of the Party. Authoritarian thinking was rooted in the Chinese polity and the utterances of the imperial court demanded the unswerving respect of the populace: the Kangxi emperor’s moral maxims were the “Sacred” Edict and their reading was even to be accompanied by the burning of incense. The emperor insisted in absolute uniformity of the biweekly lectures across space and time in the confines of his empire. From this perspective, the Party’s claiming absolute authority over newspaper content was only plausible. Secondly, Lenin’s conception of the general relationship between Party and people could equally be understood in the traditional political *imaginaire*: the emperor confronted an illiterate “stupid people”

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<sup>91</sup> See Hsiao. *Rural China*, p. 186. See *ibid.* p. 196f on further edicts by later emperors with the same intention, and the futility of these efforts.

<sup>92</sup> Foreign observers, too, had the impression that popular interest in the readings was rather low. See the letter to *The Chinese Repository* quoted in Mair. “Language and Ideology,” p. 353.

that were in need of moral exhortation, that awaited their own transformation. The impetus towards betterment, the raising of the consciousness could come from no other source than the emperor, or, the Communist Party. From the parochial character of the state-people relationship results, thirdly, the normative mission of propaganda: education. Ironically, the high-pitched moralizing tone of both imperial Chinese propaganda and its modern Communist counterpart, carried in itself the potential for subversive readings and other forms of distortion: both were and are prone to exploitation, overt or covert, for very different purposes, such as the promotion of stability and subjugation under the government's administration and its policies (for example, by tying the *Xiangyue* lectures to public readings of the penal code). Finally, we have noted the similarity in functional terms, of both the Qing official's reliance on peasant activists for the performance of the *Xiangyue* lectures in the villages, and the CCP's promotion of their newspapers' "mass character" that was put into practice through the system of worker-peasant correspondents. In each case, traditional Chinese political culture offered a rationale for the logic and correctness of the Marxist-Leninist principles of propaganda.

As I have cautioned above, the similarities observed should not lead us to perceive the modern Chinese media system entirely in terms of Chinese tradition: all too obvious are the differences. These differences concern, on the one hand, the methods and functions of modern politics – modernity had deeply affected even a rural backwater such as Yan'an in the 1930s and 1940s. The relationships of state, society, and individual could no longer be imagined from the context of Chinese tradition. More importantly, it would be inappropriate to suggest that concepts and ideas rooted in traditional Chinese culture reached the twentieth-century Chinese Communists unchanged or in any "pure" form. To the contrary, traditional Chinese thinking was subject to ever accelerating processes of transformation due to the increasing interaction with Western ideas in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The heritage that reached the Chinese Communists was Chinese in nature but had incorporated many ideas and suggestions from abroad that had altered or reinforced trends of traditional thinking. These processes of transformation and modification must be acknowledged in the effort to track down the traditional roots of modern Chinese media thinking. One such episode, which I

will discuss in the following section because of its relevance to the logic and the production of propaganda, was the Taiping rebellion.

### *Taiping Propaganda*

The Taiping rebellion (officially 1850-1864) stands out in the history of the nineteenth century not only for the widespread devastation the rebellion and its suppression caused, and for its staggering human death toll,<sup>93</sup> but also for the fundamental changes it effected in the Chinese political culture: the authority of the central state was undermined, the legitimacy of Manchu rule over the majority Han population thrown into doubt, and finally their suppression gave rise to the foreign-equipped peasant militias under the control of local commanders like Zeng Guofan 曾国藩, the very forces that eventually brought down the dynasty fifty years later.<sup>94</sup>

In the ideological realm, the Taiping movement had no less far-reaching consequences: in the areas under Taiping control, the Confucian classics remained unavailable for as long as twenty years; the orthodoxy of the Qing rulers was replaced by the Taipings' own ideology. Different from many millenarian sects, the sources and vehicles of most of China's peasant uprisings, the Taiping did not draw on Buddhist- or Daoist-inspired folk religion, but rather denounced these as superstition: "In recent times, the perverse Buddhist monks falsely propagated fantastic stories concerning this devil of Hades, and, moreover, the strange book called *Yuli ji* 玉历记 is palmed off upon the world. Those of this world who read books mechanically are often deceived by their statements..."<sup>95</sup> For their purposes, the Taipings did not draw on Chinese tradition and its rich store house of folk

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<sup>93</sup> The number has been put at up to thirty million people. See, for example, Rudolf G. Wagner. *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: the Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion*. Berkeley, Ca.: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1982, p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> On the Taiping Rebellion see Franz Michael. *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966, vol. 1-3. Jen Yu-wen. *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973. Wagner. *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision*. Jonathan D. Spence. *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996. Thomas H. Reilly. *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004.

<sup>95</sup> Zhongguo shixuehui (ed.). *Taiping tianguo*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1957, 8 vols., here vol. 1, p. 93f. Quoted in Rudolf G. Wagner. "Operating in the Chinese Public Sphere: Theology and Technique of Taiping Propaganda" in Chun-Chieh Huang, Erik Zürcher (ed.). *Norms and the State in China*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993, p. 104-38, here p. 112. The *Yuli ji* was a popular moral treatise of the *shanshu* 善书 genre. See *ibid.*, p. 111.

religion, but rather turned to foreign sources. The adoption of an entirely foreign ideology, Christianity, sets the Taiping movement apart from other contemporaneous uprisings and constitutes a decisive turn in Chinese history: the large-scale import of foreign thinking was a courageous enterprise, as is demonstrated by the rejection for several more decades of any such step by the Manchu and Han elites. Only after 1900 did Western thought begin to be accepted in any comprehensive and systematic fashion as a state ideology in China.

The Taipings, however, did not entirely reject Chinese traditional values and patterns of governance; rather, these were reinterpreted to fit the Taiping worldview. This is demonstrated, for example, by the refusal of Taiping leader Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 to burn the Confucian classics altogether: he proposed that they were rewritten and purged of any references not in accordance with the preachings of the Heavenly Kingdom. Purified versions of the *Daxue* 大学 were circulated in the Taiping capital Nanjing, as was an edited version of the military treatise *Wu jing* 武经. Hong himself worked on a new rhyme book to replace older versions circulated for centuries.<sup>96</sup>

Another point of interest is the Taiping's treatment of the *Shengyu*. The *Shengyu* had been proclaimed by the Manchu emperor and was revered as the essence of the official state ideology, Imperial Confucianism. The *Shengyu* would thus be expected to be a main target drawing the Taiping's wrath, who identified the Manchus with the biblical devils. However, as Rudolf Wagner has pointed out, the *Shengyu* is not criticized or banned in any known Taiping sources.<sup>97</sup> There were certainly aspects associated with traditional Confucian culture, such as foot-binding, that were sternly opposed by Hong Xiuquan and his followers, but the strict logic of the moral exhortations and the commandments made in the *Shengyu* seem to have been too compelling to the Taiping leadership, too convincing in the light of their own vision of governance, to evoke open criticism of the individual maxims. It was, however, considered unfit for the populace; the Xiangyue lectures were therefore discontinued.

This understanding is confirmed by a reading of Taiping texts with functions comparable to that of the *Shengyu*. For this purpose I will turn to the odes of the

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<sup>96</sup> See Wagner. "Operating in the Chinese Public Sphere," p. 134-37.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

*Taiping zhaoshu* 太平诏书. This official declaration was released by the Taiping court in Nanjing in 1852, but its components are said to have been written by Hong Xiuquan in 1844-45, that is at a very early point in the movement. Upon publication the *Taiping zhaoshu* was circulated widely in many different editions; it was brought to the attention of foreigners and translated for the *North China Herald* newspaper as early as 1853.<sup>98</sup> The first part of the *Taiping zhaoshu* is entitled “An Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World” (*Yuan dao jiu shi ge* 原道救世歌). The “Ode” addresses six wrongs among men that are to be corrected in order to save the world: licentiousness, disobedience to parents, killing, robbery and thievery, witchcraft, and gambling. The tone of this “Ode” as well its general attitude are surprisingly close to that of the *Shengyu* and, even more, to the Shunzhi emperor’s *Liu yu* that was the predecessor of the *Shengyu*.

A point in case is the second of the six wrongs identified by Hong: disobedience to parents. The “Ode” reads:<sup>99</sup>

Our fathers have given us life; our mothers have nursed us;  
The travail and anxiety they endured in rearing us cannot be described.  
Can we not be filial in sustaining them, exhausting loyalty and sincerity?  
The man of true filial virtue loves his parents all his life.

The parallel to the *Liu yu*’s first maxim, “Perform filial duties to your parents” (*xiao shun fumu* 孝顺父母) is obvious. With regard to the *Shengyu*, I have noted above a utilitarian turn as compares to the earlier *Liu yu*: the *Shengyu*’s first maxim “Esteem most highly filial piety and brotherly submission, in order to give due importance to human moral relations” (*dun xiao di yi zhong renlun* 敦孝弟以重人伦), adds the ruler’s desire for stable social relations as a rationale to the original maxim. The *Taiping zhaoshu*, I argue, contains similar considerations (albeit not in the maxim on the second wrong). These considerations concerning the relationship of subjects and ruler are articulated most clearly in the second part of the *Taiping zhaoshu*, called “Ode on the Hundred Correct Things” (*Bai zheng ge* 百正歌). Whereas the first ode seems to address the people in general, this

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<sup>98</sup> The translation by W.H. Medhurst appeared on June 11-18, 1853. Information on the *Taiping zhaoshu* comes from Michael. *The Taiping Rebellion*, vol. 2, p. 24. The translations below are taken from *ibid*. The original text is found in Zhongguo shixuehui (ed.). *Taiping tianguo*, vol. 1, p. 85-99.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88. Trsl. p. 27.

second piece is directed more explicitly to the ruler. The objective of this “Ode” is presented at the very beginning:<sup>100</sup>

An ode on the hundred correct things,  
Singing of the hundred correct things.  
The truly correct enjoy heavenly emoluments;  
The truly correct stand in awe of Heaven’s decree.  
The truly correct may become dukes and marquises;  
The truly correct practice virtue and uprightness.  
The truly correct gain the submission of demons and respect of men;  
The truly correct make the people peaceful and the country stable.  
The truly correct make the evil plotters flee to distant places;  
The truly correct invite Heaven’s favourable response.

To “make the people peaceful and the country stable” is the aim of ruler, and he does so by setting straight (or making correct, *zheng* 正) the people’s moral attitude. In the Taiping sources, reverence to Heaven and to God, to “stand in awe of Heaven’s decree,” is the basic condition for human well-being. Yet in the Heavenly Kingdom, the representative of Heaven on earth is none other than the Taiping ruler, and the decrees in question are issued through him. Reverence and obedience to Heaven also means obedience to the Taiping ruler.

In turn, the ruler must take care of the people entrusted to him. The Shunzhi emperor admonished his people: “do not commit wrongful deeds” (*wu zuo feiwei* 无作非为, maxim six). The “Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World” contains a number of items that can be classified as “wrongful deeds:” licentiousness and gambling are certainly examples of incorrect behaviour, as are murder and theft. Yet gambling does harm not only to the soul of the sinner, it also upsets social harmony and stability, and thus arouses the concern of the of the Taiping leader. Likewise killing and thievery: the source for these demands is obviously the biblical Ten Commandments, but there is another layer of meaning at work, that transcends the moral agenda of the individual and brings in the same administrative concerns that I have established above for the *Shengyu*.

Addressing the third wrong, the “Ode” reads:

For men to destroy one another is extremely lamentable,  
Hence in former days there was no wanton killing.

Franz Michael’s translation of “wanton killing” (*shisha* 嗜杀) is very thoughtful, as it hints at a crucial point in the ode’s argument. The ode doesn’t outright ban killing,

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 90. Trsl. p. 31-32.

but only killing for improper purposes. Whereas the sixth commandment of the Christian bible outlaws the killing of men altogether, the Taipings were less than reluctant to slaughter their enemies; streams of blood, and even the killing of women and children, were usual sights whenever the Taiping troops had conquered Chinese cities.<sup>101</sup> Capital punishments were declared for a variety of crimes. So what the ode declares illegal is not killing of humans in general, but unauthorized killing, that is, killing by private persons. It is Heaven's exclusive prerogative to decide on life and death. This argument is exactly in line with the laws of the Qing empire that granted the exclusive right of capital punishment to the imperial court: "[the decision on] life and death is the power of the court" (*sheng-sha nai chaoting zhi da quan* 生杀乃朝廷之大权). Minor legal matters could be dealt with at lower administrative layers, or even transferred to clan jurisdiction. The Qing court, however, aggressively defended the right to watch over capital punishments and severely censored clans that had transgressed the limits of their jurisdiction.<sup>102</sup> Under the guise of religiously inspired moral exhortations, we are thus presented with instructions on correct behaviour that would directly benefit the ruling classes – in both mainstream Qing thinking, and in Taiping propaganda.

Further parallels can be observed with regard to style and language of the *Shengyu* and the odes of the *Taiping zhaoshu*. The *Shengyu* was written in seven-character sentences of strictly parallel construction, so as to facilitate its recitation and memorization. The "Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World," too, uses sentences seven characters in length; those of the "Ode on the Hundred Correct Things" have mostly six characters, yet the parallel constructions are even more obvious here, as is evident from the ode's initial lines quoted above. Taiping moral propaganda was thus in agreement with many of the basic assumptions of the official Qing writings, and also emulated the style of imperial Confucianism consciously or unconsciously.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> See Jen. *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, p. 117-18, for the massacre after the fall of Nanjing.

<sup>102</sup> The Yongzheng emperor allowed clan jurisdiction in an edict of 1727. This right was withdrawn by the Qianlong emperor after a series of squabbles with powerful clans, especially the Huizhou 徽州 merchants of Anhui, who had overstepped the limits. See Wang Hui. *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi*, ch. 4. Quotation taken from *ibid*.

<sup>103</sup> Barbara Mittler has come to similar results in her reading of the Taiping version of the *Sanzijing* 三字经. I am grateful to her for pointing sharing this insight with me.



I will comment no further on the continuities of propaganda in the nineteenth century; rather, I want to address now the stunning openness of the Taiping towards thinking that was obviously foreign in origin. The Taiping made use of foreign thinking – the Christian religion – as well as of the practical applications of this thought. Thus, they bridged with apparent ease the gap of “substance” (*ti* 体) and “use” (*yong* 用) that the reformers a generation later grappled with. The spread of their religion to all Chinese was a matter of special concern to the Taipings. In order to proclaim their gospel and to convert their compatriots, the Taipings accepted many a recent foreign invention that would increase their communicative potential. An especially interesting document is a policy proposal with the title “A New Treatise on Aids to Administration” (*Zi zheng xin pian* 资政新篇) that was composed in 1859 by Hong Ren’gan 洪仁玕.<sup>104</sup> Hong had arrived in Nanjing shortly before from Hong Kong and had been appointed Taiping chief of staff. He was placed in charge of the administrative apparatus that was in great disarray. Hong proposed, among other things, to set up a modern communications system. He mandated the construction of railways and inter-provincial highways: “First of all, twenty-one highways should be built in the provinces as arteries of the country, for when there is communication, the country will be free from illness.”<sup>105</sup> As he had worked with British missionaries for a long time, Hong was in a position to make recommendations thus far-reaching, and yet so detailed. Given the state of the transportation system in Qing China, his idea to construct wide roads that would allow a modern postal system to function properly and with high speed, was certainly revolutionary. His insight “when there is communication, the country will be free from illness” (*tong ze guojia wu bing yan* 通则国家无病焉) is a signal of the Taiping’s preparedness to modernize the country if the realization of their vision required them to do so.

Among the means of modern communication exploited in the service of religion are also newspapers: “newspapers should be published to report regularities and changes in current affairs and the rise and fall of prices; faithful

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<sup>104</sup> Zhongguo shixuehui (ed.). *Taiping tianguo*, vol. 2, p. 523-41. Trsl. in Michael. *The Taiping Rebellion*, vol. 3, p. 748-76. See also the introduction to this document in *ibid.*, p. 748-51. For Hong Ren’gan’s biography see *ECCP*, vol. 1, p. 367-69.

<sup>105</sup> Zhongguo shixuehui (ed.). *Taiping tianguo*, vol. 2, p. 533. Trsl. p. 764.

reporting is the only requirement... The papers should bear the place of publication, the name of the publisher, the date of publication, and the price, so that they can be bought by people far and near.”<sup>106</sup> Hong had seen British newspapers in Hong Kong, which were his model.<sup>107</sup> It is remarkable that Hong comments here on the role of the newspapers in a public sphere: they are an independent institution, with “faithful reporting” being “the only requirement.” Hong elaborates on this latter point:<sup>108</sup>

Newspaper supervisors should be established in all provinces. These offices shall have responsibility but no authority, and a person holding such an office must be a man of integrity and faithfulness. He shall not be subject to the control of other officials, nor shall he assume control over others. Other officials shall not be permitted to comment on the reward or punishment of this official, who will be charged exclusively with collecting newspapers, bearing names and seals, from the eighteen provinces and all other quarters, to be presented to the Sovereign for his sacred perusal.

In this short paragraph, Hong presents a description of the basic philosophy of modern newspapers in a public sphere model, and links them to the traditional Chinese framework of *yanlu* 言路. The newspapers are free from supervision, as is the official who is placed in charge of them – it is interesting to see the official supervisor here, who is in fact nothing else but the personification of the sum of all newspapers. Reporting faithfully all “regularities and changes in current affairs,” the newspapers (either directly or through the mediating newspaper supervisor) are the crucial source of information for the public. The public here is identified with the ruler, who is the implied addressee of all information flows which are presented to the Sovereign, or literally, to the “sacred glance” of the emperor’s eye (*shengjian* 圣鉴). The revolutionary concept of a modern newspaper is here packaged in a familiar institution, the *yanlu*. The “avenues of speech” traditionally signify those channels at the emperor’s disposal that serve to inform him of what happens in his empire, in an allegedly objective manner, and outside of the regular channels of bureaucratic information flows; they are the means through which the ordinary people can turn with their views and complaints directly to the emperor. As Andrea Janku has shown, Chinese publicists referred to the *yanlu* tradition

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 534. Trsl., p. 767.

<sup>107</sup> On the early press in Hong Kong see Natascha Vittinghoff. *Die Anfänge des Journalismus in China, 1860-1911*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002, ch. 2.

<sup>108</sup> Zhongguo shixuehui (ed.). *Taiping tianguo*, vol. 2, p. 534. Trsl. p. 767.

again about a decade after the “New Treatise” when they explained the mission of the first Chinese newspapers to the public.<sup>109</sup>

Hong Ren’gan’s proposals of modernizing the institutions of the Taiping empire were bold, but did get nowhere near implementation. On the last proposal, the introduction of newspaper supervisors, Hong Xiuquan commented: “This proposal should not be carried out now, lest the demonic devils contrive to set us against each other. It will not be too late to carry out this proposal after the remnant demons are annihilated.”<sup>110</sup> The highest Taiping leader found some of the innovations way too progressive to fit the immediate needs of the increasingly troubled Taiping empire. In fact, the Taiping set up a less than liberal polity, and rather tended to suppress other voices.<sup>111</sup> Other elements of Taiping propaganda, however, had a more lasting impact, an impact directly relevant for the evolution of the modern Chinese media concept.

As has been noted in chapter one, the English term propaganda was originally used in religious contexts: the “propaganda of the faith” was the area where methods and techniques were developed that served the spread of religious ideas. Many of these methods were later transferred into the secular realm of politics and publicity. A similar process has taken place in China: the Taiping had adopted techniques of religious propaganda such as the use of religious hymns.<sup>112</sup> Ceremonial music was known in Chinese tradition, too, but the musical tunes the Taipings introduced for the spread of their belief were of Western origin. The purpose of collective singing by lay groups was to form feelings of community, and was taught by Western missionaries in China. The Taipings adopted this technique and perfected it in their own propaganda. Other forms of oral and written propaganda employed by the Taipings include the printing and distribution of pamphlets and booklets, some of them even produced with modern machinery

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<sup>109</sup> See Janku. *Nur leere Reden*, ch. 4.

<sup>110</sup> Zhongguo shixuehui (ed.). *Taiping tianguo*, vol. 2, p. 534. Trsl. p. 767.

<sup>111</sup> “Once opened and institutionally secured, [the public sphere] not only gave the advocates of common sense, rationality, and a free interplay of ideas the necessary leeway to operate, but also the opponents of these ideals. Religious fundamentalists and Communists to just name the examples that come to mind most readily, made use of the same leeway to spread their own ideas with the ultimate aim to establish a social order that would prohibit their deluded opponents to spread theirs. ... For all players in the Chinese public sphere it was thus clear that the adversaries had no legitimacy for their claims and values.” Wagner. “Operating in the Chinese Public Sphere,” p. 116-17.

<sup>112</sup> On this point see Wagner. *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision*, p. 89f.

and movable type that resulted in better and cheaper editions.<sup>113</sup> The Taipings thus brought to China on a large scale propaganda techniques that later found their way into secular uses – modern propaganda in China proceeded from religious to political forms, just as it did in the West.

The most important ideological contribution of the Taiping uprising, however, a contribution that played a key role in the formation of the modern Chinese media concept, was the institution of a teleological worldview based on a concept of linear time. Without either of these, the socialist revolution could not have been imagined. The Taiping rebellion, as Rudolf Wagner has shown, was driven by its vision, the vision of Hong Xiuquan in 1837 and in the consecutive years. This vision became the road map for the construction of a thisworldly Heavenly Kingdom; its followers showed no doubts about the accuracy of the vision, but rather searched their environment for signs that might be interpreted in such a way as to support the vision. Even aspects that initially remained obscure and could not be explained by the biblical pattern of interpretation that Hong Xiuquan discovered and adopted during his stay with the American Baptist missionary Issachar J. Roberts, were treated as parts of the vision that were only momentarily beyond human comprehension.<sup>114</sup>

The Taiping vision mandated the erection of the Heavenly Kingdom on the sacred soil of China as a precondition for salvation. It was this search for salvation that drove the Taiping forward in their conquest of more than half of Chinese territory; the Taiping movement was deeply messianic in nature. Millenarian cults and movements were not new to Chinese thinking: to the contrary, many Buddhist or otherwise inspired peasant uprisings in the course of Chinese history had operated with millenarian concepts.<sup>115</sup> For example, the Eight Trigrams uprising of 1813 was a millenarian movement that was inspired by folk religion passed on in the so-called “White-Lotus Society.” The Taipings, however, went beyond these earlier millenarian movements with a crucial concept they had learned from the

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<sup>113</sup> See Wagner. “Operating in the Chinese Public Sphere,” p. 126f., on Taiping printing and publication projects.

<sup>114</sup> Wagner. *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision*, passim.

<sup>115</sup> On millenarian movements in China see Susan Naquin. *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976. Daniel L. Overmeyer. *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Protestant missionaries' explanation of the Christian religion: a strictly linear concept of time. The teleological worldview of the Taipings could hardly have been imagined within a framework of cyclical time.

Traditional Chinese thinking, as has often been commented upon, operated within a cyclical imagination of the world.<sup>116</sup> In the Qing dynasty, there were in fact individual efforts to see time in a more continual perspective, such as in the writings of some protagonists of the New Text school.<sup>117</sup> Yet the mainstream of Chinese thought was constantly fixated backwards into the past and tried to reconstruct a political and social vision that would approach the “system” of those of ancient, namely the Three Dynasties (Xia 夏, Shang 商, and Zhou 周). The social and political arrangements of antiquity had been set up by the sagely rulers of the past, but knowledge of these systems had been lost and the systems had deteriorated over time. The last remnants of the wisdom of those of old were to be found in the classics compiled, edited, and commented upon by Confucius, the last sage, who was not a ruler but was “transmitting without acting himself” (*shu er bu zuo* 述而不作).<sup>118</sup> Consequently, a great deal of the discussions in Chinese intellectual history dealt with the question of how to correctly read the classics and interpret the “traces” (*ji* 迹) of ancient wisdom found therein. The most noble goal was to reach an understanding of the correct handling of governance that would finally allow the reconstruction of the ancient “unity of *dao* and governance” (*dao zhi he yi* 道洽合一).<sup>119</sup>

History was believed to move in circles, with sages appearing at regular intervals (usually every five hundred years) to renew the knowledge about the *dao* and the correct implementation of the instructions of those of old. For the political system this meant a cyclical movement from moral and political unity through a long period of gradual decline and final breakdown, to the appearance of a new sage. Later dynasty founders (or their consultants) therefore claimed legitimacy for their rule as the institution of a new cycle of history. Cyclical patterns were at work

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<sup>116</sup> On time conceptions in China see the contributions to Huang Chün-chieh and Erik Zürcher. *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*. Leiden: Brill, 1995.

<sup>117</sup> On this issue see Wang Hui. *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi*, ch. 5.

<sup>118</sup> *Lunyu* 7.1.

<sup>119</sup> The intricate arguments of these discussions have been traced in much detail by Wang Hui in his *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi*.

also in shorter intervals, such as in the sexagenary cycles of heavenly stems and earthly branches (*tian gan di zhi* 天干地支) used to count years. Cyclical concepts of time, albeit on a much larger scale, are found in Buddhism, too, where the souls move through birth and rebirth in the Samsára, the circle of life, death, and re-incarnation that ends only with the soul's entrance into the Nirvána.

The Taiping also referred to traditional Chinese conceptions when they argued that the Christian religion would fit the needs of China because China itself had a distant Christian past; the true religion had only been forgotten. It was Confucius who was accused of derailing China from the correct path, a sin for which he was flogged in Heaven by the Heavenly Father in the presence of Hong Xiuquan.<sup>120</sup> Anecdotes like this notwithstanding, the source of the Taiping's inspiration did not lie in the distant past, as did that of the Confucians, but was rather transmitted to the Taipings through God's direct intervention, in the form of Hong Xiuquan's vision. This made superfluous the philological efforts to interpret the traces of the ancient sages, because all information about the political and social arrangements of the worldly Heavenly Kingdom came from a source located outside of history. The fixation of thinking thus changes diametrically; salvation was to be found no longer in the past but in the immediate future. History was no longer an endless circle of renewal and deterioration of sagely rule (or human suffering in the Samsára cycle of reincarnation), but became a continuous, linear flow that moved on a path prescribed by orthodoxy towards a clear-cut, precisely formulated goal: salvation. In the course of the adoption of a linear understanding of time, preached by the Christian religion with its counting of time in years since the birth of Christ and the expectation of Judgement Day, a teleological worldview could be instituted in China.

Their vision went so far as to tell the Taipings explicitly how to achieve their ultimate goal, the advent of God and the erection of the Heavenly Kingdom in the latter-day Israel that was identified with no other place than China.<sup>121</sup> All the adherents of Hong Xiuquan, the self-proclaimed younger brother of Jesus Christ were to do, was to drive Satan back into hell, from where he had conquered the souls as well as the territory of humanity. As the Taipings thought of the translation

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<sup>120</sup> See Wagner. "Operating in the Chinese Public Sphere," p. 107.

<sup>121</sup> The following paragraph relies on Rudolf Wagner's detailed account of the Taiping's effort to translate their vision into action in *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision*, chapters four and five.

of their vision into reality in rather practical terms, Satan was not hard to find: it was the Manchus who had occupied China and erected their rule over the children of God, the Han population. The Taipings identified the Manchus as the biblical inhabitants of hell and consequently addressed them as “devils” (*yaomo* 妖魔). They had to be driven back into hell, which was no other place than the province of Zhili 直隶 that surrounded Beijing (the province was officially renamed into “Demon’s Den,” Zuili 罪隶, in 1853).<sup>122</sup>

The Taiping’s identification of the Manchus with the biblical devils, in conjunction with the teleological worldview and an insistence on the literal interpretation of scripture, had disastrous consequences. As Satan was the ultimate evil and the only obstacle on the way to salvation, there was not the least reason for leniency. In their desire to free the Chinese lands from the demonic rule of the Qing, the Taiping developed a religiously motivated radicalism that was in part responsible for the enormous death toll mentioned in the introduction to this section. When the Manchus were collectively de-humanized, it did no longer matter if the Taiping armies were confronted with men, women, or children, soldiers or civilians.<sup>123</sup> Killing innocent Manchus was not an ethical transgression in the sense of the third wrong of Hong Xiuquan’s “Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World,” but rather the only way to guarantee the advent of God on earth, and thus the salvation of “mankind,” that is, the Han-Chinese population exclusive the Manchus. The all-out assault on the enemies of the Taipings could be justified in this way. The fatal logic of Taiping radicalism, as well as the underlying ideas that drove their desire to eliminate their enemies – the teleological worldview in conjunction with a linear understanding of time – represents a figure of thought that has become deeply relevant in modern China, because the introduction of socialism to China was dependent on the acceptability of a teleological worldview.

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<sup>122</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 109. For the document in question see “Bian yaoxue wei Zuili lun” in Zhongguo shixuehui. *Taiping tianguo*, vol.1, p. 281-300. Trsl. in Michael. *The Taiping Rebellion*, vol. 2, p. 276-94.

<sup>123</sup> Consequently, there were not even efforts to convert the Manchu. See Wagner. *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision*, p. 64-66.

Teleological thinking is a crucial tenet of Marxism, and even more so in Leninism, where the decisive step from capitalism to socialism – the road towards the salvation of mankind, Communism – is to be passed consciously through revolution. The logic to carry out revolution in order to proceed to a higher stage on a continuous, prescribed road towards an ultimate utopian goal, as opposed to rebellion for the sake of a return to sagely forms of governance found in antiquity, does resemble that figure of thought that was underlying the Taiping rebellion's drive for power. What I want to suggest here are the parallel moments of both the Taiping ideology and the Leninized version of Marxism that was the main source of the CCP's ideology.<sup>124</sup> I do not wish to imply that the Taiping uprising was the precursor of the Chinese Communist movement of the twentieth-century, or to treat Taiping thought as a proto-Leninist ideology. As explained in the introduction to this chapter, I want to propose that the existence of a precedent in the form of what I have called the Taiping ideology's figure of thought, made it possible (or easier) for the abstract concepts of a Western philosophical-political system such as Marxism to be conceived and understood in China, and in the consequence to be internalized and sinified by the CCP.

A similar point, finally, can be made for the very radicalism and violence found in the both the Taiping and Communist movements. The Chinese Communist movement was certainly too secular to identify the class enemy with the devil – although during World War II the Japanese, the incarnation of imperialism (according to Lenin the highest form of capitalism) were made to bear the epithet “devils” (*guizi* 鬼子). However, in China's semi-feudal pre-revolutionary setting, the ruling classes were the main obstacle on the road to historical progress, just as the Manchu “devils” stood in the way of salvation. The same argument qualified for the time after the revolution, when remnants of the old ruling elites, who were supposedly fighting even more aggressively against the system to stage a comeback, must be eradicated. Consequently, even extreme violence against those classes identified as “oppressors” of the people was justified if it only served revolution; lenience would only prevent the thorough implementation of revolutionary measures. Radicalism was legitimated by the teleological nature of

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<sup>124</sup> It is not surprising, thus, that the Taiping rebellion has earned a largely positive assessment of the official CCP historiography (albeit for different reasons), the religious or superstitious motivations of the Taipings notwithstanding.



the CCP's ideology that promised a Communist utopia to the Chinese people. The Party shared this logic with the Taipings.<sup>125</sup>

Yet I would like to go even further in my argument. For the Taipings, the conflict with the Manchus was the transfer to the battlefield of a struggle in the ideological realm, the field of the religion that had inspired and motivated their uprising in the first place: the fight between God and Satan. In the Stalinist view, we find the imminent attack of the bourgeoisie exactly here, in the superstructure: the remnants of the old ruling classes will regroup again and again and launch their attacks on the Party's rule by undermining the ideological foundations of this rule. Stalin argues here differently from the Taiping's line of thought, but both share the notion that the defence of their respective ideologies justifies a ruthless struggle against all potential enemies. For Stalin the superstructure was the battleground itself, while it did not occur to the Taipings that they might be attacked from this direction and that their vision might be undermined from within; for them, the ideology itself was but the *ultima ratio* of their fight. Yet in both cases, the very nature of the radicalism, and the absence of restraint in the choice of the means for their struggle, is motivated not only by the enemy being identified as the obstacle for salvation, but is linked directly to the struggle in the ideological realm and to the paramount position of the ideology itself.

For both the Taipings and the CCP, the correct interpretation of their respective orthodoxies was of crucial importance. The Taipings derived their vision of the Heavenly Kingdom from their ideology, so any deviating interpretation would endanger the entire Taiping project. In a similarly vein, the superstructure was the Achilles heel for the CCP, the point where class enemies in disguise of Party members might prepare to derail the Communist revolution. Ideological deviations therefore, were absolutely intolerable, as they touched on the core beliefs of the Party, and were thus systematically persecuted. In both cases, the link between a teleological vision and the importance of ideological orthodoxy produced a particular fierceness against not only external enemies (Manchus, GMD), but also – and especially so – against any deviation within their respective movements.

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<sup>125</sup> For an argument along similar lines see Barend J. ter Haar. "China's Inner Demons: The Political Impact of the Demonological Paradigm" in Woei Lien Chong (ed.). *China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: Master Narratives and Post-Mao Counternarratives*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, p. 27-68.

The Taiping religion did not replace traditional Chinese conceptions of governance, of the relationship between ruler and the ruled, and of the general nature of man. When the uprising collapsed the Qing emperors tried with new verve to impose their ideological vision on the Chinese polity. Even the *Shengyu* experienced a revival.<sup>126</sup> Yet after two decades of turmoil, the Taiping movement had made known in China (and especially in Southern China, where the majority of the Communist leadership came from) a number of modern concepts that were to reappear almost a century later in very different fashion. By that time, the ideas discussed in this chapter had long since blended into Chinese thought and were no longer recognized for their foreign origin. A legacy of the Taiping uprising, they had become enclaves of modern thinking in Chinese political culture. The evolution of the CCP's media concept in Yan'an, however, was helped by these early interventions of Western ideas and the consequent enriching and transformation of the Chinese heritage.

#### *The Late Qing Press and the Evolution of the Chinese Public Sphere*

By the time the Chinese Communists developed their media concept in Northern Shaanxi, ideas of state tutelage and propaganda were widespread in China and abroad; there was little room for a bipartisan press and the liberal idea of newspapers that would open their pages to multiple contending and voices and open-ended deliberation. Such a press, however, had existed in China, and what Fred Siebert calls the "liberal theory" of the press had been a powerful idea just a few decades earlier. The functions and the potential of modern mass media had been introduced to China almost a hundred years before the CCP reformed its media apparatus in Yan'an, and alternative concepts of the press had thrived for several decades. It was only in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that these ideas lost their influence. In the remainder of this chapter, I will take a brief look at the early Chinese liberal press and its eventual decline.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> See Hsiao. *Rural China*, p. 197, 201, 204-05.

<sup>127</sup> I have profited greatly from the discussions with members of the research group "Early Chinese Public Sphere" at the Institute of Chinese Studies, Heidelberg University, as well as from their research. The following section draws on this body of recent research.

Not the first, but arguably the most influential early modern newspapers in China were the Shanghai *Shenbao* 申报, founded in 1872, and Wang Tao's 王韬 *Xunhuan ribao* 循环日报, set up in Hong Kong two years later.<sup>128</sup> In a process that has been detailed by Barbara Mittler and others, the *Shenbao* entered the public sphere in Shanghai and introduced to China the principles of a modern, liberal, and commercially-driven press, all the while negotiating the new ideas with existing media such as the *Jingbao* 京报, or court gazette,<sup>129</sup> to make these ideas culturally acceptable in their new environment.<sup>130</sup> The *Shenbao* explained to Chinese audiences in and beyond Shanghai the ideas and conceptions of the liberal press model that had emerged in Europe after more than a century of constant struggle – a struggle against the notoriously intrusive tendencies of governments worried about their influence and reputation.<sup>131</sup> The *Shenbao* became an instant success and was able to defend its position as the most influential Chinese newspaper well into the twentieth century. On the following pages, I will therefore concentrate on the *Shenbao* to trace the emergence of the concept of a liberal commercial press in China – the concept that was rejected later in favour of a concept that stressed propaganda over deliberation.

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<sup>128</sup> See Rudolf G. Wagner. "The Early Chinese Newspapers and the Chinese Public Sphere" in *EJEAS* 1.1, p. 1-33. Vittinghoff. *Die Anfänge des Journalismus in China*. Barbara Mittler. *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872-1912*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004. On Wang Tao and the *Xunhuan ribao* see Paul A. Cohen. *Between Tradition and Modernity: Wang T'ao and Reform in Late Ch'ing China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974, p. 73-81. Elizabeth Sinn. "Fugitive in Paradise: Wang Tao and Cultural Transformation in Late Nineteenth Century Hong Kong" in *Late Imperial China* 19.1 (1998), p. 56-81; and Sinn. "Emerging Media: Hong Kong and the Early Evolution of the Chinese Press" in *Modern Asian Studies* 36.2 (2002), p. 421-65.

<sup>129</sup> On the *jingbao* see Sir Rutherford Alcock. "The Peking Gazette" in *Fraser's Magazine* 7.38 (1873), p. 245-56, 7.39, p. 341-57; and Jonathan Ocko. "The British Museum's Peking Gazette" in *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i* 2.9 (1973), p. 35-49. Comp. also Mittler. *A Newspaper for China*, p. 177-208. As a court gazette, the *Jingbao* showed parallels with similar papers issued by European courts in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and modern government information bulletins. Parallels in content and editorial line might even be seen in comparison with *Zhongyang ribao* and *Renmin ribao*, the main spokespersons for the GMD and CCP governments, respectively. However, none of the latter was created to be a government gazette, as the *jingbao* was; rather, both were in fact party papers of the advocacy press type turned into government organs after their respective publishers proved victorious in the civil wars of the 1920s and 1940s (see also the argument in Wagner. "The Early Chinese Newspapers and the Chinese Public Sphere," p. 10-12). This difference had important implications for the papers, their editorial line, and the perception of their role. I will come back to this issue in the conclusion to this chapter.

<sup>130</sup> On the *Jingbao* in the new context of the modern press, in particular its reprint on the pages of the *Shenbao*, see Mittler. *A Newspaper for China?*, p. 174-207.

<sup>131</sup> This process and the role of the newspapers in the formation of the European public sphere is the central subject Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

The *Shenbao* was founded in 1872 by a young British merchant, Ernest Major.<sup>132</sup> Before starting the *Shenbao* in Shanghai, Major had lived in Hong Kong for more than a decade, where he had perfected his command of Chinese. He was in search of an investment opportunity and thus started the Shenbaoguan 申报馆 with one explicit motive: to establish a profitable commercial venture. With this idea in mind, Major proved to be at the height of contemporary newspaper theory: in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, an ideal had formed of a free press, privately owned and run according to market-principles, and thus protected from interference by government authorities.<sup>133</sup> Major was determined to bring this model to China. In Shanghai, he contacted young and energetic intellectuals to become the core of his staff: located in Jiangnan 江南, China's cultural centre and the region with the highest density of schools and academies preparing candidates for the imperial examinations, Major could draw on a pool of learned elites (the *wenren* 文人) to become both his staff and the readers of his paper.<sup>134</sup> The first issue of the *Shenbao* appeared on April 30, 1872.

The first problem for Major to solve was to introduce his potential readers to a new and foreign product, the newspaper, to explain its character and its intention, and to convince his readers that they needed such a daily paper. To address his readers, Major chose the equally novel medium of the editorial. A number of early *Shenbao* editorials elaborate on the functions and the character of the newspaper. On the following pages, I will read these editorials as normative texts trying to establish a particular newspaper concept in China. The conception of the role of the press that can be reconstructed from these texts is clearly at variance with that promoted by the CCP in Yan'an, and other contemporary ideas of the press.

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<sup>132</sup> On Ernest Major see Rudolf G. Wagner. "Ernest Major's Shenbaoguan and the Formation of Late Qing Print Culture." Paper presented at the conference "Creating a Multiethnic Identity: The Shanghai Concessions, 1850-1910," Heidelberg, June 7-9, 1998. I am grateful to the author for permission to quote from this paper. The involvement of Major, a foreigner, with the *Shenbao* must be considered the chief reason why many histories of the press produced in the PRC have, for ideological reasons, discounted the influence and the importance of the *Shenbao* on the modern Chinese press.

<sup>133</sup> For this particular newspaper concept see Fred Siebert. *Four Theories of the Press*, p. 39-72. See also Denis McQuail. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) London: Sage Publications, 2000, ch. 2-4, 7.

<sup>134</sup> On the background of the early Chinese journalists see Vittinghoff. *Die Anfänge des Journalismus in China*, ch.3. On the topic of *wenren* see also Janku. *Nur leere Reden*, ch. 2.

In the *Shenbao*'s founding issue, Ernest Major turned to his readers with a leading article entitled "Announcement of our house" (*Ben guan gaobai* 本馆告白).<sup>135</sup> In this short piece the "Proprietor of the *Shenbao*" (*Shenbao zhuren* 申报主人, this being the signature of the article) advertises his paper and outlines a few basic principles. The article sets out:

Today there occur under heaven many events which might be recorded. Yet all too many of them are buried and remain unknown. Why is this? It is because there is nobody who takes enough interest in them to record them, and so remarkable occurrences and unpretentious actions remain hidden and untold. This is exceedingly regrettable.

The author starts his discussion by addressing the intrinsic value of information itself. The newspaper thus centres around the message, the piece of information it relates to the readers. This is in fact a remarkable beginning: in their primary function, the newspaper is nothing else but a marketplace of information where the reader acquires knowledge about events that have occurred "under heaven," that is, everywhere in the world, and that might be of interest for him. This view contrasts sharply with the CCP's understanding discussed in the last chapter: in the CCP's eyes, the value of information depends always on the speaker, whereas the *Shenbao* emphasizes the message itself. Without the newspaper, the events reported in the articles would not be recorded, or literally, passed on (*chuan shi* 传世). "Passing on" knowledge, especially that concerning the ways of the Sages of old, is an important category to which Major refers here. In this respect, China indeed is in a deplorable state:

Tracing this situation into the past, [we find that] from antiquity down to the present there have been abundant works by historians and belletrists, minutely detailed accounts of mountains and geography [both works of fantasy and real accounts].<sup>136</sup> But what they record are all tales of former ages and stories of the past. Moreover, this literature is vast and varied and its style is high and archaic, so that none but the gentry can understand it. Those who are not scholars cannot even read it.

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<sup>135</sup> Translated in Roswell. S. Britton. *The Chinese Periodical Press, 1800-1912*. Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, Ltd., 1933, p. 64-65. The translations below follow Britton; I have modified his translation where necessary. For an argumentation along similar lines see an editorial a week later: "Shenjiang xinbao yuanqi" in *Shenbao*, May 7, 1872, also signed "Shenbao zhuren" (i.e., Major). Both editorials have been discussed, in much more detail than is possible here, in Vittinghoff. *Die Anfänge des Journalismus in China*, ch. 2; and Mittler. *A Newspaper for China?*, ch. 1. My own reading concentrates on but a few aspects that are of direct relevance for the discussion of the CCP's media concept, the main topic of the present study.

<sup>136</sup> *Shanjing dizhi* 山经地志. The former alludes to the *Shanhaijing* 山海经 and refers to fantastic geographical accounts, whereas the latter means more sober works of the gazetteer kind.

We find two complaints here: the first concerns the obsession with things past; affairs of recent origin are hard pressed to prove their value as compared to the things handed down from antiquity. The modern newspaper is to redress this bias. The focus on information is thus accompanied by a similar focus on recent affairs. Secondly, Major comments on the language barrier posed by the style of classical writing, a point he further elaborated in later sections of the editorial. In a commercial hub like Shanghai, where quick and easy access to information was crucial for merchants both big and small, this problem might have been seen especially clearly. In the past, there had in fact been a form of literature written in a more accessible style, yet these genres had their own peculiar limitations:

Every age has produced its legends and novels, such as the *Bowu zhi* 博物志 of Zhang Hua 张华<sup>137</sup> and the *Soushen ji* 搜神记 of Gan Bao 干宝.<sup>138</sup> The *Qixie* 齐谐 recorded the strange (*zhiguai* 志怪),<sup>139</sup> and Yu Chu 虞初 collected elegant literature.<sup>140</sup> All these works can be read easily, but the things they present are fabulous and preposterous. They are all elegantly composed, so they are useful only to help Confucian scholars cultivate their 'pure conversations' (*qingtan* 清谈); they cannot necessarily be appreciated by both those of culture and the ordinary folks.

The language barrier remains high even in the case of vernacular fiction. Worse yet, this kind of literature has no practical use at all. It satisfies the human interest in the strange and fosters those elegant conversations of the upper classes – the *qingtan* – that were led for the sake of arguing itself, being devoid of any aim for practical application (at least in the polemical view of the author). It is against this background that the modern newspaper is advertised:

When we cast for something which records and narrates recent events in a style simple though not vulgar, and which reports current affairs precisely yet in sufficient detail, so that scholars and officials as well as peasants, artisans, traders and merchants all can understand, then we find nothing so suitable as the newspaper (*xinwenzhi* 新闻纸). Publication of newspapers originated among Westerners, and has been introduced to China. We have seen the Hong Kong newspapers printed in Chinese characters, and their form and content are excellent. Now we emulate the idea and establish the *Shenbao* here in Shanghai.

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<sup>137</sup> Zhang Hua, 232-300. The author was known in his time for his broad knowledge of the most varied subjects. His *Bowu zhi* collects miscellaneous tales of marvellous nature.

<sup>138</sup> Gan Bao, 4<sup>th</sup> cent. The *Soushen ji* is a collection of marvellous and sometimes fantastic tales. It is an early precursor of the modern *xiaoshuo* 小说 genre.

<sup>139</sup> The *Qixie ji* 齐谐记 was a collection of *zhiguai* novels from the 5<sup>th</sup> century by an unknown author. On *Zhiguai*, or tales of the supernatural, see Judith T. Zeitlin. *Historian of the Strange. Pu Songling and the Classical Chinese Tale*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. Rania Huntington. *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2003.

<sup>140</sup> Yu Chu, fl. Western Han dynasty. His work *Zhoushuo* 周说, which has not been transmitted, has traditionally been treated as the precursor of *biji xiaoshuo* 笔记小说.

Here is a characterization of the modern newspaper: concentrating on the news value and the paper's timeliness; accurate, brief, and detailed reporting; and an appeal to all classes of society, through a style "simple though not vulgar." These are the major principles that were to guide the production of the *Shenbao*.<sup>141</sup>

From the perspective of the CCP's media concept, these principles are of interest for what is absent here, for what the *Shenbao* does not claim to be. First of all, we are not told for whom in particular the "Proprietor of the *Shenbao*" wants to speak. The newspaper is a Western medium, a fact that Ernest Major does not conceal. Yet he writes in Chinese for Chinese readers, and in the editorial he adopts a distinctly Chinese habitus through the frequent references to Chinese cultural and literary tradition.<sup>142</sup> This is the case here, too. By adopting an explicitly Chinese perspective, Major tried to distinguish himself from the Western powers that control the city of Shanghai. He does not want the *Shenbao* to be seen as the voice of the foreigners.

Neither does the *Shenbao* represent the position of the Chinese authorities, as the *Jingbao*, the official court gazette, was doing. In an editorial that appeared about two months later, the *Shenbao* explained the difference between the *Jingbao* and the modern newspaper:<sup>143</sup>

The new(s)papers (*xinbao* 新报) of the Western countries transmit the affairs of all countries, from the court above to the smallest hamlets below. Every deed and every word, each and every thing will be recorded in the papers, be it good or bad, refined or coarse. The Chinese *dibao* 邸报 [another term for *jingbao*] are very different from these. The *dibao* are made to spread the political affairs of the court only, but do not record the petty chatter of the smallest hamlets. And that is why the majority of those who read them are literati and officials, while peasants and craftsmen, merchants and traders are dissatisfied with them. Therefore, the *dibao* are not as good as the foreign newspapers, which everyone enjoys to read. The *dibao* are published for those above, while the new paper is made for those below.

The court gazette is a medium of top-down communication; it carries important information which is, however, not relevant for all layers of society. The new papers are broader in scope and thus have multiple functions: firstly, they switch

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<sup>141</sup> See also the discussion in Mittler. *A Newspaper for China?*, Introduction.

<sup>142</sup> A chief method for the introduction of radical ideas in a way that makes them acceptable in the host environment is their packaging into Chinese rhetorical conventions. These methods have been discussed by Andrea Janku and Barbara Mittler. On the techniques of quoting and the use of classical allusions see Mittler. *A Newspaper for China?*, ch. 2, esp. p. 123-34.

<sup>143</sup> "Dibao bie yu xinbao lun" in *Shenbao*, July 13, 1872.

from the vertical to a horizontal direction of information by informing businesspeople and ordinary citizens on matters of their own environment and of their peculiar concerns. Yet they can also function in a vertical way, simply turning around the flow of information: through the newspapers, the court may hear of bureaucratic malpractices and thus be in a position to act more swiftly – as the editorial stresses, the modern newspapers can assume the function of the *yanlu*, the “avenues of speech,” through which the emperor hears about problems and remains in touch with the situation in his empire. In another editorial, Ernest Major likens the *Shenbao* to “the rule that the [sages] of antiquity investigate rumours and ask about the mores (*tan feng wen su* 探风问俗).”<sup>144</sup>

The *Shenbao* tried to combine these different functions. An important move was the decision to reprint the *Jingbao* on the pages of the *Shenbao*.<sup>145</sup> By reprinting the *Jingbao* in full (and with technology superior to that of the traditional *baofang*), the editors of the *Shenbao* hoped to make their paper attractive to China’s officialdom. Furthermore, the *Shenbao* made use of the cultural capital of the *Jingbao* by reprinting it.<sup>146</sup> The *Shenbao* would thus become a newspaper for all social strata, containing a broad range of information, and presenting itself as an open forum.

It is here where the major difference to the CCP media concept lies: the *Shenbao*’s audience is defined in an inclusive, not an exclusive way; the paper refuses to speak on the behalf of any particular group; it is not a mouthpiece but a platform open to all. Consequently, the *Shenbao* could not be made into a weapon of class struggle, or even an arena for such a conflict, as the CCP saw their media. Finally, has the *Shenbao* an educational character? Major’s insistence on an easily accessible language and on the expansion of the readership does certainly reveal a project of enlightenment (next to commercial considerations). But in the *Shenbao*’s case, it is the people who enlighten themselves through access to a broad variety of information; Major’s didactical approach is not of the top down

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<sup>144</sup> “Shenjiang xinbao yuanqi” in *Shenbao*, May 7, 1872.

<sup>145</sup> In the paper’s “Regulations” that followed the initial editorial, the *Shenbao* told its readers: “Since the *Jingbao* is the official publication of the court, it is only appropriate that our paper gives it due respect and publicity; we will therefore reprint it daily [in the *Shenbao*] without any omission.”

<sup>146</sup> This is argued in Barbara Mittler. *A Newspaper for China?*, ch. 3.



kind. The educative mission of the CCP press, in contrast, is determined by the Party that sets the goals and the direction of the press.

Ernest Major had a clear vision concerning the policies and intentions of his venture. Returning to the initial editorial, we find the following elaborations:

The political situation of the empire, changing customs, important developments in foreign relations, prosperity and depression in business and trade, and all that evokes surprise and astonishment and pleasure or that refreshes people's ears, none of these things will be omitted.

A broad scope in reporting and completeness in coverage are fundamental demands of a newspaper: political and social developments, as well as all business-related news deserve the attention of the journalist. In contrast to the traditional writings that Major had mentioned in the earlier paragraphs of the editorial, the newspaper is characterized by a strictly utilitarian approach. Whatever may be useful for the readers will appear in the paper – as long as it satisfies another criterion: truthfulness.

We shall apply our best efforts to convey only confirmable news, and without misrepresentation; also to make the news understandable. We shall not indulge in empty and vainglorious talk, neither shall we write about exaggerated and absurd things.

The *Shenbao* rejects unfounded rumours or reports that cannot be confirmed (and might arouse the wrath of those concerned): the paper thus tried to avoid being drawn into intrigues and factional quarrels. The rejection of “exaggerated and absurd things,” however, proved to be a matter of interpretation. The *Shenbao*'s style, like that of other contemporary newspapers, was modelled more often than not after existing Chinese forms of prose-writing, and did by no means exclude stories about supernatural phenomena, heavenly retribution, and even ghosts – all of these found their ways into the paper's pages. It was not until very late in the century that rigid demands to separate fact and fiction were established and became (at least in theory) the requirement for any respectable newspaper.<sup>147</sup> In the inaugural editorial, however, Major stated that

...we hope that those interested in current affairs may get from our paper the gist of daily events, and those engaged in business will not be misled by any reports in our paper. Thus, the publication of this paper is a profound advantage to the world.

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<sup>147</sup> On fact and fiction in the early *Shenbao* see Mittler. *A Newspaper for China?*, p. 86-104. See also Elizabeth Sinn's comments on style in the *Zhongwai xinwen qiribao* in “Emerging Media: Hong Kong and the Early Evolution of the Chinese Press” in *Modern Asian Studies* 36.2 (2002), p. 421-63, esp. p. 456-59.

It is the serious political and economic news that the *Shenbao* hopes to bring to the reader. The latter was especially important in the treaty port of Shanghai: reliable business information would make a competitive advantage for the traders and entrepreneurs, who, Major hoped, would become a steady source of income for his venture. He therefore tried to establish the reputation of the *Shenbao* from the very first issue, guaranteeing the quality of information. Only thus could the paper be useful, or of advantage (*you yi* 有益). Yet the *Shenbao*'s usefulness did not end at Shanghai's city limits. Major had set his goals much higher: he conceived of the *Shenbao* as a paper of nationwide circulation:<sup>148</sup>

Now the world is very large, and its interests and affairs are myriad. The people live scattered and cannot see one another. So is there any one person who can know thoroughly all of the world's affairs? However, since the emergence of newspapers, all of the world's affairs which are worthy of record are in fact disseminated throughout the world. Since the emergence of newspapers, whoever glances at them *can know of the world without even leaving his house*. Is this not excellent?

The *Shenbao* assumes a communicative function that furthers interaction between the remotest places. Reading the newspaper will make one able to understand even complex affairs going on far away (for example at the court in Beijing). The author stresses his argument by the allusion to a well-known *Laozi* 老子 quotation (text in *italics*): "knowing the world without leaving one's house" (*bu chu hu, zhi tianxia* 不出户，知天下).<sup>149</sup> The *Laozi* text speaks about the ruler and the ideal mode of his rule. The *Laozi* chapter ends: "The sage knows [everything] without going there [himself], he can call things by name without looking at them, his [intentions] succeed through non-action" (*shengren bu xing er zhi, bu jian er ming, bu wei er cheng* 圣人不行而知，不见而名，不为而成). The newspaper's reader familiar with the *Laozi* text is thus likened to the sage ruler; his affairs (business affairs, social matters, political intentions) will succeed due to his reading the

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<sup>148</sup> This point is also stressed in the "Regulations" ("Ben bao tiaoli" 本报条例) that followed the editorial, where Major explicitly encouraged potential agents in other cities to come forward and distribute the paper. He promised them a fixed portion of sales revenues and even offered to take back unsold issues at no cost for the agent – evidence of Ernest Major's efforts to bring Western business practices to China.

<sup>149</sup> *Laozi* 47.

newspaper. The functions of the modern newspaper are made plausible to the reader in terms of the Chinese tradition in which they are embedded.<sup>150</sup>

Yet the reading of the newspaper alone would not be enough to bring into play its communicative function. Rather, Major reminded his readers, their participation would be instrumental in unfolding the full potential of the newspaper:

If however we only carry on this enterprise according to the rules at the time of its foundation, we fear that it will be confined in geographical scope and limited in knowledge, with many an omission. Therefore we hope that our readers everywhere will come forward and instruct us, and rectify our errors – we do sincerely hope that this happens.

The readers' cooperation and participation in the making of the *Shenbao* is explicitly welcome. Ernest Major hoped to tap the pool of talent in the Jiangnan region for his paper and told them of the London papers, where "the words and characters come all from the pens of gifted men, so that the readers do not feel annoyed."<sup>151</sup> The *Shenbao* offered the Chinese literati a platform to voice their opinions and proposals. In this way, the paper would profit from contributions, while the *wenren* living in and around Shanghai could engage in public discussion. The press would thus assume the function of the traditional Chinese *yanlu*: it would open up a new avenue of remonstrance and, through the cooperation with the traditional elites, promote the public concern for public matters. Major repeated his call for manuscripts in the *Shenbao* regulations that were attached to the initial editorial, where he asked people from near and afar to send "items short and long, ... such as bamboo twig poems (*zhuzhici* 竹枝词), long songs, and reports." The *Shenbao* was explicitly interested in articles on "state affairs, livelihood of the people, agriculture, hydrology," but warned that there would "generally be no remuneration" for unsolicited contributions.

The founder of the *Shenbao* had in mind the successful European newspapers as a model for his own paper. Major was not the only one convinced of the suitability of the European model for China. In 1874, Wang Tao spoke out in praise of the *London Times*.<sup>152</sup> In turn, the Western-managed papers in China came to acknowledge the *Shenbao*'s efforts to establish an independent, modern

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<sup>150</sup> As Barbara Mittler points out, the *Laozi* passage was popular with Chinese writers trying to promote modern means of communication in China. The same passage is quoted in Zhang Zhidong's 张之洞 *Quanxue pian* 劝学片 of 1898. See Mittler. *A Newspaper for China?*, p. 20f.

<sup>151</sup> "Shenjiang xinbao yuanqi" in *Shenbao*, May 7, 1872.

<sup>152</sup> See Mittler. *A Newspaper for China?*, p. 18f.

press in China. The English-language *Celestial Empire* wrote in 1874: “Now the Shun-pao owes its success so far to the fact that it is a pure money speculation, and therefore an undertaking intelligible enough to all Chinamen ... all who have read their Shun-pao with regularity, even for a few months, are comparatively enlightened.”<sup>153</sup> Within a remarkably short time, the *Shenbao* had established itself as a reliable, indigenous source of information and inspiration.

Together with the newspaper itself, the *Shenbao* had brought to China a distinctly modern concept of the press, modelled after the British and American liberal ideal: managed as a profitable enterprise; centring on the intrinsic value of information; guaranteeing the timeliness, accuracy, completeness, and diversity of this information; accessible for and appealing to broad and diverse audiences; and generally open to the various voices and the different directions of information flows within the public sphere. At the same time, as Barbara Mittler has argued, the *Shenbao* had succeeded to package and sell this foreign medium in a way that allowed the Chinese readers to appropriate the newspaper as a thing of their own. The modern press had become part of everyday life in China.

### *Conclusion*

The liberal press ideal that was introduced to China in the 1870s came under pressure in the last decade of the century from two sides: the 1890s saw an explosive growth of newspapers issued by partisan groups that were trying to promote their positions in the reform debates. The spread of these “advocacy papers,” often sponsored by influential officials, blurred the lines between private and public newspapers, and for the first time proliferated beyond the foreign concessions into the Chinese hinterland. After the 1898 reform movement in particular, the Chinese court that for decades had refused to involve itself in the modern press, began to see the need to set up its own organs, replacing the traditional government gazettes. Under the polemical attacks of both the court and the reform factions, especially those of the exiled Liang Qichao, the commercial

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<sup>153</sup> *The Celestial Empire*, Nov. 12, 1874. Quoted after Janku. *Nur leere Reden*, p. 70f.

press had ever more difficulty to project its image as an institution of impartiality, the “Fourth Estate.”<sup>154</sup>

However, in his urgent calls for modern press institutions Liang was as a matter of fact “integrating the two already existing newspaper models: that of the ‘liberal’ British-oriented press in the foreign concessions, and that of the authoritarian government press of the *Peking Gazette* and later official newspapers (*guanbao*).”<sup>155</sup> He called for competing opinions in the newspapers, all the while trying to exclude his journalistic colleagues from participation in the ensuing political debates. By doing so, Liang set an important precedent: the effort to turn a partisan paper into an official press organ was emulated by both the GMD and the CCP.<sup>156</sup>

A turning point for Liang’s theoretical conceptions about the role of the press and about Western-style democracy in general came after a visit to the United States in 1903.<sup>157</sup> Exasperated about what he had seen in America, Liang formulated a vision of the press that placed much greater emphasis on the state in the public sphere. In 1905 he suggested that only an autocratic government would be able to rule in the public interest and raise the people’s level of enlightenment; and only once this task was accomplished, China would be able to adopt a more participatory constitutional form of monarchy.<sup>158</sup> The press was a crucial part of this process. Yet indications for Liang’s gradual move away from a more liberal conception of the press can be found as early as 1901: “There are private newspapers, party papers, national papers, and international papers. The former *Shiwubao* 时务报 and *Zhixinbao* 知新报<sup>159</sup> had basically broken away from the category of private papers and had entered that of party papers. We may ask: at which of these four stages is the *Qingyibao* 清议报?<sup>160</sup> – In between the party

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<sup>154</sup> This argument is made in Natascha Vittinghoff. “Unity vs. Uniformity: Liang Qichao and the Invention of a ‘New Journalism’ for China” in *Late Imperial China* 23.1 (2002), p. 91-143.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>156</sup> Compare also Wagner. “The Early Chinese Newspapers and the Chinese Public Sphere,” p. 11.

<sup>157</sup> Nathan. *Chinese Democracy*, p. 58-61.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61

<sup>159</sup> *Shiwubao* (1896-98) and *Zhixinbao* (1897-1901) were two progressive papers promoting political reforms in the course of the 1898 Hundred Days Reform. Liang Qichao was involved in both ventures. Comp. Vittinghoff “Unity vs. Uniformity.”

<sup>160</sup> *Qingyibao* (1898-1901) was the Yokohama-based venture of Liang Qichao in his Japanese exile.

paper and the national paper.”<sup>161</sup> Liang thus believed the advocacy press to be a stage on an evolutionary ladder – a stage higher than the liberal press (that was by now perceived as the expression of private, unconsolidated opinions), but still ranging below a unified national press that would take the lead in political reform. Liang had thus reversed the developmental trajectory of the press in the European countries: the path from a press landscape tightly controlled by the government, through a contest between government and oppositional groups, to an ideal situation of a free public sphere that is beyond the reaches of state intervention, populated by commercial papers that oversee and scrutinize the government while enjoying the protection of laws and regulations (the ideal outlined in Habermas’ concept of the public sphere).<sup>162</sup>

Andrew Nathan shows that ever since Liang Qichao, the Chinese press was perceived not in terms of its being an impartial arbiter of opinions, but variously as an instrument for the education of an unenlightened, backward population, as a tool to propagate the policies of different advocacy groups in a competitive setting (before 1949), or those of a monopolistic Party-state (since 1949). In each case, Chinese elites regarded it as necessary to “guide” public opinion and thus to help shaping a modern citizenry.<sup>163</sup> Very much in the tradition of Liang, thus, the CCP emphasized the function of the press in an enlightenment project, a project that was conceived in a top-down manner. The CCP further stressed the class nature of the press: the standard dictionary definition of “newspaper” proclaimed that newspapers had been a weapon in the bourgeoisie’s struggle against the feudal system; in turn, “in the nineteenth century, bourgeois newspapers expanded enormously, becoming ever more a tool for supporting the capitalist system and for deceitful propaganda.”<sup>164</sup> The liberal press that had made impartiality a core quality ended up being accused of taking sides with the bourgeoisie. The fate of the *Shenbao* in mainstream newspaper historiography is a case in point: it has been denounced as an agent of imperialist “cultural infiltration,” established with

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<sup>161</sup> “*Qingyibao* yibai ce zhuci bing lun baoguan zhi zeren ji ben guan zhi jingli” in *Qingyibao* 100, p. 8a. Quoted in Janku. *Nur leere Reden*, p. 265.

<sup>162</sup> See the conclusion in Vittinghoff. “Unity vs. Uniformity,” p. 131.

<sup>163</sup> Nathan. *Chinese Democracy*, passim.

<sup>164</sup> *Cihai: 1965 nian xinbianben* (1979 printing), p. 1264, entry ‘baozhi.’

the intention to “poison the thinking of the Chinese people” and to “increase the economic exploitation of China.”<sup>165</sup>

The intense cultural debates in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially during the May Fourth period, temporarily accelerated the trend towards the party-ization (*dangbaohua* 党报化) of the Chinese press. The consolidation of the GMD’s power, however, led to a new situation: the GMD papers, outspoken advocates of their Party’s course, were lifted into a paramount position, and thus became the national papers Liang Qichao had spoken of. The GMD’s *Zhongyang ribao* 中央日报 became a *dangbao*-turned-*guanbao*, a modernized version of the *guanbao* 官报.<sup>166</sup> Other voices in the Chinese public sphere, such as those of the Communists, were consequently suppressed. After the Japanese invasion of China, the Wang Jingwei government acted likewise, as did the CCP when it rose to power. When the world view narrowed to a dualistic perspective determined by the struggle of antagonistic classes, there was no room for the ideal of a liberal press. Even worse: in the eyes of the CCP, the bourgeois advocacy papers, such as the publications of the GMD, were honest enough to acknowledge their class character and their bias openly; they were thus located in the proximity of the CCP’s own publications. The liberal press, in contrast, which claimed to be open to a variety of different voices, was seen as in reality hiding its bourgeois character; consequently, these liberal papers were potentially even more dangerous than the official GMD publications, as they tried to conceal their true nature.<sup>167</sup>

When the CCP developed its own media concept in the Yan’an years, it operated in a complex network of ideas. The immediate model for the construction of a Communist press was the Soviet Union. It was through Moscow that Marxist ideas concerning the press were transmitted to China. What finally reached Yan’an was a modified version of Marxism, or rather Marxism-Leninism, the official Soviet ideology: under the course of events in the Soviet Union, Stalinism, a rather unique interpretation of Leninism, had become the mainstream thought there in the period crucial for China. The package of Marxist thinking that became the

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<sup>165</sup> Comp. Vittinghoff, “Unity vs. Uniformity.” Denouncing the *Shenbao* was mainstream practice as late as the 1980s. The above quotations are taken from Fang Hanqi. *Zhongguo jindai baokan shi*. Xi’an: Shanxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1981, p. 38, 44, 47.

<sup>166</sup> On the GMD’s party media and their influence on the CCP’s conceptualization of their own media see Fitzgerald. *Awakening China*.

<sup>167</sup> See the *Cihai* definition above (n. 164).

foundation of the CCP's own ideology was, as I have shown in chapter two, a historical product deeply transformed by events. Yet other factors influenced the Party's choices: as shown in the present chapter, the CCP found itself surrounded, both at home and abroad, by ideas that promulgated propaganda and persuasion as the major functions of the press, rather than deliberation and bipartisanship. The CCP learned from the GMD as well from the practices of the foreign-owned press in China and from propaganda practices developed in Europe and the United States since World War I. In this environment, the CCP absorbed the Leninist-Stalinist package, but it did so in a selective manner: while some elements were stressed more in China than they were elsewhere, others were downplayed in their importance or even rejected. In this process of absorbing a foreign ideology, the cultural predisposition of the CCP leaders played an important role. For most of the major elements of the modern Chinese media concept, corresponding elements in traditional Chinese political culture can be identified that made the foreign imports plausible to the Chinese Communists and thus facilitated their being accepted. The traces of tradition in question here, however, were less Chinese than might seem in the first place. Rather, the CCP found itself confronted with a Chinese tradition with enclaves of modern thinking. In some cases, these enclaves played a crucial role in paving the way for later ideological constructs to emerge. At the end of these complex processes of cultural transfer and indigenization stands the CCP's media concept.

When the CCP defeated the GMD in 1949 and established the PRC, it found itself ruling over the entire nation. As with many other ideas, patterns, and concepts developed in Yan'an, the media concept had to be put into practice on a much larger scale than had previously been possible. Translating the theory into practice required two things to be done: first, a number of mechanisms had to be invented that would allow the normative prescriptions of the media concept to be used as a guide to action. Secondly, the media concept itself had to be applied to the myriad micro-level decisions of day-to-day administration. While the next chapter will briefly discuss the mechanics of control, the second part of this study will present a close-up view on the media concept in action.



## Chapter Four The Mechanics of Media Control

*The news workers have faith in the Socialist news work, they must uphold the Party's basic line, uphold the orientation of serving the people and serving socialism; they must liberate their thought and seek truth from facts; they must bring into full play the fine traditions and the fine working styles of the Party's and the people's news work; they must oppose money worship, hedonism, and extreme individualism, and must strengthen the cultivation of professional ethics.*

*("Chinese News Workers' Code of Professional Ethics", 1991)*

*For books that might arouse problems or where problems have been indicated by sides concerned, special inspectors are organized to carry out inspection...*

*("Circular on the Strengthening of Book Inspection," 1994)*

The media in the People's Republic of China operate within a tightly controlled space. The conditions under which they work are determined by the CCP's media concept that I have reconstructed and explained in the preceding chapters. This concept, however, is but an abstract ideological construct that helps us to understand the CCP's definition of the media and the media's proper place in the matrix of state-society relations, and within the political system of the PRC. The concept has never existed in isolation from its institutional environment; it was in fact formed in the course of the Party's practical media work in Yan'an. It can thus be treated as a stand-alone unit only for the illustrative purposes that were the objective of the chapters above. When the concept is supposed to act as a set of guiding principles for the practical day-to-day management and administration of a large-scale media apparatus, it has to be moulded into concrete institutional shapes. So when the CCP rose to power in 1949, among the first things the Party had to do was to translate the media concept into practice, and do so on a national dimension – or rather, it had to transform the existing reality in order to fit the prescriptions of that normative framework which the media concept represented. In the course of this process, the CCP developed a number of mechanisms that were established in the early years of the PRC. Adjustments and interpretations notwithstanding that were made in later years to uphold the system under changing environmental conditions, these mechanisms have generally characterized the Chinese media sector ever since. In their totality, they form a comprehensive apparatus of checks and controls, designed to guarantee the implementation of the Party's normative project, the re-education of the entire

Chinese population. Since this apparatus has developed a dynamics of its own and a tendency to function even without constant supervision, I will be speaking of the “mechanics of control.”

The question I want to answer in this chapter is: through what means is the media concept translated into practical administration measures that govern the media sector? The mechanisms in the apparatus of control operate on a meta-level; they are supposed to act as a framework for the day-to-day decisions that form the administrative basis of media work. It is through them that the media concept has become institutionalized in the political landscape of the PRC. They are not particular to any mass medium, but rather affect the entire system of public communication in the PRC. The Party’s attempt to make the media a part of a much greater normative project, as well as the determination to defend this project against any attacks from without, proceed from the prerequisite that the Party is in ultimate control over all the media – only then are the media able to fulfil the mission which the media concept entrusts them with. Pervasive controls thus emerge as the bottom line of the media concept in its practical application. The general purpose of the mechanisms I will identify in this chapter is to guarantee the Party’s paramount position in all affairs related to the Chinese media.

The mechanisms of control include in particular: the general ideological framework, the institutional structures that govern the media sector, the web of bureaucratic regulations that have been devised to administer this sector, control of the information flow, control of information access, control of public discourses, and language control. All these points will be discussed in the sections of this chapter. The interplay of these mechanisms, the mechanics of media control, has evolved as political circumstances were changing; adjustments were made in particular concerning their relative weighting. The mechanisms themselves, however, have remained remarkably stable, as becomes clear in the empirical chapters in part two of this study.

As the mechanisms I describe were not tied to any particular period, this chapter will not pretend to keep to a chronological narrative. I will consciously try to select examples and evidence from different periods and from different media forms, so as to underline my proposition that the mechanisms discussed here apply to all the media, and that they apply to them across the entire time span

since the founding of the PRC (variations in the strictness of their enforcement notwithstanding). At the end of this chapter, I will address an issue intimately linked to the mechanisms of control: censorship. In the PRC, censorship has taken on very peculiar forms that are different from censorship regimes in other socialist nations, and also from that introduced by the GMD in the Republican era. I argue that these peculiarities must be attributed directly to the CCP's media concept and the peculiar way of its institutionalization.

### *The Ideological Framework*

On the most abstract level, all media institutions, as well as the people working in these institutions, have been subject to an ideological framework that guides all their work and that provides the basic principles for decision-making processes concerning all major questions. This framework of reference was established even before 1949 and is still in place today. While at certain times paying lip service to the official ideology was sufficient for media workers to get along, at other moments anything less than outright enthusiasm would be self-destructive.

The ideological framework has been presented to media workers in a number of different packagings. First of all, the cornerstones of the official ideology have been inscribed into laws and regulations governing media work. Most of the mechanisms of control are discussed in these normative texts; in this chapter I will therefore rely heavily on such texts.

Ever since the 1980s, laws have been considered the legal documents with the highest status. However, to the present day, the PRC does not have a press law, neither has such a law existed at any time since 1949. In the publishing sector the document with the highest legal status are the "Administrative Regulations for Publishing" (*Chuban guanli tiaoli* 出版管理条例) that were passed by the State Council in 1997.<sup>1</sup> A formal publishing law had been in preparation since 1985,

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<sup>1</sup> Issued on Jan. 2, 1997, as State Council order No. 210. See Zhongguo chuban nianjianshe (ed.), *Zhongguo chuban nianjian 1998*. Beijing: Zhongguo chuban nianjianshe, 1998, p. 230-33. A slightly revised version was enacted on 1 Jan. 2002 that replaced the 1997 regulations. For the text see Xinhua wang. "Chuban guanli tiaoli," at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2001-12/31/content\\_220668.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2001-12/31/content_220668.htm) (downloaded 07 Apr. 2007).

being written under the leadership of the CCP PD. The draft reached the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) in October 1994,<sup>2</sup> but to the disappointment of many people in the publishing industry, the law was shelved after three years of deliberation, and the "Regulations" were promulgated instead.<sup>3</sup> People with insight into the discussions surrounding the drafting process report that the leadership's uneasiness with the formulation "publishing freedom" (*chuban ziyou* 出版自由) was the main reason for the long delay.<sup>4</sup> Such a formulation invariably would have to be elaborated in a law, because publishing freedom had been written into the Chinese constitution in 1982.<sup>5</sup> Yet the debate over the publishing law shows not only the CCP's wariness of the discussions that the promulgation of such a law might bring about, but also the relative weakness of the government apparatus in a sensitive field such as the media that remained under tight control of the Party and its PD. With no law in place for publishing, a formal law for the news sector, a much more sensitive field, is even farther away.

In the "Regulations for Publishing," the ideological framework is to be found in paragraph three:<sup>6</sup>

The publishing industry must uphold the general orientation of serving the people and serving socialism, uphold the guidance of Marxism-Leninism-Mao-Zedong-Thought and the theory of constructing socialism with Chinese characteristics; it must disseminate and accumulate any science, technology, culture, and knowledge that is beneficial to raising the quality of the [Chinese] nation, beneficial to economic development and the overall social progress; it must promote the outstanding culture of the [Chinese] nation, encourage international cultural exchange, and enrich and raise the spiritual life of the people.

While the second section of the paragraph expresses a number of more concrete ideas, the first sentence contains the core ideological principles.

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<sup>2</sup> On the drafting process see Liu Gao. "Qidai chubanfa de dansheng" in *Xinwen chuban bao*, Jan. 23, 1995. Repr. in *Liu Gao chuban wenji*. Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 1996, p. 551-52. In this article, Liu does still express his hope that the law might be passed soon.

<sup>3</sup> "Regulations" 条例 have a lower legal status than a "law" 法 and are usually a tool for the implementation of a law; while the latter must be passed by parliament (the National People's Congress), regulations can be issued by the government.

<sup>4</sup> Interviewee 002, summer 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Article 35: "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration." *The Constitution of the People's Republic of China (1982)*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1983, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> "Chuban guanli tiaoli", p. 230.

“Serving the people” (*wei renmin fuwu* 为人民服务) is the title of a speech given by Mao Zedong on Sept. 8, 1944. Mao spoke in commemoration of the soldier Zhang Side 张思德 who died in a collapsing coal pit, sacrificing himself for the people. In the article, Mao defines “serving the people” as “working entirely in the people’s interest.”<sup>7</sup> Even death in an accident, such as that of soldier Zhang, is worthwhile: “To die for the interests of the people weighs heavier than even mount Tai.” Since the 1940s, serving the interests of the people has been elevated to the rank of the “basic task” (*genben renwu* 根本任务) of the Party press, as well as writers and artists. This basic task was defined as “the most fundamental behavioural norm of Communist ethics, the core of the proletarian world outlook and its outlook on life, and the basic aim of the party.”<sup>8</sup> Mao’s article was said to be “an important textbook material for education in the proletarian revolutionary outlook on life;”<sup>9</sup> during the Cultural Revolution, it became one of the three “constantly read articles” (*lao san pian* 老三篇). The interests of the people must of course be understood in the Leninist sense, that is, as the objective interests of the working class as identified by the professional revolutionaries in the Party. To “serve the people” thus simultaneously means to follow the leadership of the Party. Allegiance to the CCP was also the rationale behind the demand that media workers “serve socialism,” a formula that has been added customarily to the original “serving the people” since 1980.<sup>10</sup>

Besides the “basic task,” the “Regulations for Publishing” define the official ideology: Marxism Leninism Mao-Zedong-Thought. The “theory of constructing socialism with Chinese characteristics” has been renamed “Deng Xiaoping theory” (*Deng Xiaoping lilun* 邓小平理论) after Deng’s death in 1998 and has more recently been complemented by the “important ideas of the Three Represents”

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<sup>7</sup> Orig. pub. with an introduction in *JFRB*, Sept. 21, 1944. The text in *Mao Zedong xuanji*, vol. 3, p. 1004-06, is slightly modified. The original title was “Wei renmin de liyi er si, shi si you zhong yu Taishan.”

<sup>8</sup> Such is the definition in Fan Ping, Ye Duchu (ed.). *Dang de jianshe cidian*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1989, p. 76.

<sup>9</sup> See the entry “Wei renmin fuwu” in Wang Jin (ed.). *Mao Zedong dacidian*. Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1992, p. 410.

<sup>10</sup> See Ma Weiliang. “Yingdang kandao zhe shi yige fazhan: dui wenyi wei renmin fuwu, wei shehuizhuyi fuwu kouhao de yi dian lijie” in *Yalujiang* 1982.9, p. 65-68. The new formula was promoted originally for the literature and arts field in an editorial in *RMRB*. “Wenyi wei renmin fuwu, wei shehuizhuyi fuwu” in *RMRB*, July 26, 1980.

(*San ge daibiao zhongyao sixiang* 三个代表重要思想), the shorthand for Jiang Zemin's contribution to the canon of socialist theory. All these theoretical complexes are not static, but receive their validity through the authoritative interpretation of the Party centre, in accordance with changing circumstances and the needs of the day. The CCP's monopoly on the interpretation of the official theory is a powerful means of ideological control in itself.

Earlier documents for the publishing sector (and also for other fields within the propaganda *xitong*) contain basically the same ideological prescriptions. The "Provisional Regulations for the Work of Publishing Houses" (*Chubanshe gongzuo zanxing tiaoli* 出版社工作暂行条例), a CCP PD document dated April 22, 1980, defines the orientation (*fangzhen* 方针) and the task (*renwu* 任务) of publishing houses as follows: "Publishing houses must uphold the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the Communist Party, and Marxism Leninism Mao-Zedong-Thought; they must serve the people and serve socialism..."<sup>11</sup> The first four items are known as the "four cardinal principles" (*si xiang jiben yuanze* 四项基本原则), promulgated by Deng Xiaoping in March 1979.<sup>12</sup> His speech "Uphold the four cardinal principles" was a direct reaction to the Democracy Wall movement of late 1978 and early 1979, and signalled the end of political relaxation and the reinstatement of control after a period of thaw. That the four cardinal principles were written into the 1980 document was a sign of the Party's claim to determine the limits of publishing freedom and to exercise control over this area of public communication.

This ideological framework has to be internalized by all media workers in the PRC. Different channels are employed for this purpose, such as regular study sessions, examinations, and the formal education of journalists. Journalists are supervised through multiple means; their adherence to the official ideology can be checked whenever the CCP decides to do so. This happened, for example, after the 1989 Democracy Movement, when journalists had joined the students' demonstrations. The PD reacted with efforts to reassert control: in January 1991, the Chinese News Workers Association (*Zhonghua quanguo xinwen gongzuozhe*

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<sup>11</sup> See Zhongguo chuban gongzuozhe xiehui (ed.). *Zhongguo chuban nianjian 1980*. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1980, p. 624-28, here p. 624.

<sup>12</sup> See *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1994, vol. 2, p. 158-84.

xiehui 中华全国新闻工作者协会) passed the “Chinese News Workers’ Code of Professional Ethics” that declared in the opening section:<sup>13</sup>

The Chinese news sector [*xinwen shiye* 新闻事业] is an important integral part of the socialist cause [*shehuizhuyi shiye* 社会主义事业] under the leadership of the CCP. The news workers must adapt to the requirements of the new situation; they must make great efforts to propagate Marxism Leninism, Mao-Zedong-Thought, and comrade Deng Xiaoping’s theory of constructing socialism with Chinese characteristics; they must propagate the orientation and the policies of Party and government, must report news and disseminate information, and must reflect and guide social discourse; they must strive hard to become the eyes and ears, the mouthpiece of Party and people; they must promote the Socialist market economy, the Socialist democratic legal system, and the construction of a Socialist spiritual civilization; they must exert themselves in the fight to realize the lofty goal of the Socialist modernization of our country. The news workers have faith in the Socialist news work, they must uphold the Party’s basic line, uphold the orientation of serving the people and serving socialism; they must liberate their thought and seek truth from facts; they must bring into full play the fine traditions and the fine working styles of the Party’s and the people’s news work; they must oppose money worship, hedonism, and extreme individualism, and must strengthen the cultivation of professional ethics.

The preface to the “Code of Ethics” amounts to nothing less than a confession of faith in the political principles of the CCP.

Even the most recent textbooks teach the ideological principles that are supposed to form the foundation of every journalist’s knowledge. The revised edition of *Xinwen lilun jiaocheng* 新闻理论教程, a textbook published in 2001 by Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe 中国广播电视出版社, contains the following sections in the chapter on “The party character of the news sector”:<sup>14</sup>

- “Ideologically, take the Party’s guiding ideology as the compass of the news sector, propagate the Party’s theoretical basis and ideological system;”
- “Politically, maintain close unity with the Party centre, propagate the Party’s program and line, its orientation and policies;”
- “Organizationally, follow the leadership of the Party, respect the Party’s organization principles and the discipline of propaganda.”

The logic behind these demands is clear: “Upholding the principle of party character in news work is absolutely identical with our news work upholding [the demands of] serving the people, representing the interests of the people, and

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<sup>13</sup> “Zhongguo xinwen gongzuozhe zhiye daode zhunze” 中国新闻工作者职业道德准则, in Hu Zhengrong. *Xinwen lilun jiaocheng (xiuding ben)*. Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2001, p. 282-86, here p. 282.

<sup>14</sup> Hu Zhengrong. *Xinwen lilun jiaocheng*, p. 217-23. The author is a researcher at the Journalism school of Zhongguo renmin daxue 中国人民大学.

reflecting the voice of the people.”<sup>15</sup> In the curriculum for young journalists, deference to the ideological framework is equated with Party control of the media - even in the twenty-first century.<sup>16</sup>

### *The Institutions of Control*

Understandably, the CCP does not rely on the efficacy of the ideological framework alone to translate its claim for ultimate control into political reality. An institutional network that covers both the Party organization and that of the government, on both central and local levels, serves the purposes of policy formulation, administration of day-to-day affairs and planning, as well as control of all aspects of the propaganda sector. In chapter one, I have already addressed the question of the institutional set-up of this *xitong*, primarily in the pre-1949 era; I will therefore limit the discussion here to an outline of the broad institutional structures of control in the PRC.

The divide between Party and government institutions has for long periods been of little more than theoretical nature. In the news sector, the most sensitive section of the propaganda *xitong*, government agencies existed only in the early 1950s, and again since 1987. More institutional continuity can be observed for the field of publishing, but here too the importance of the respective Party bodies has always overshadowed that of the government bodies. In November 1949, the General Press Administration of the PRC (Zhonghua renmin gongheguo xinwen zongshu 中华人民共和国新闻总署) and the PRC General Publication Administration (Zhonghua renmin gongheguo chuban zongshu 中华人民共和国出版总署) were set up. Both units worked under the Culture and Education Commission (Wenhua jiaoyu weiyuanhui 文化教育委员会) of the Government Administration Council (Zhengwuyuan 政务院), one of four such commissions

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>16</sup> Doubts are, of course, appropriate and even necessary as to the actual relevance of this ideological framework for journalism students and journalists in the twentieth century. Yet as has been said earlier, the CCP does still demand at least lip service from the journalists; if necessary, compliance can also be enforced by other, more coercive means.



created in 1949 as core cells of the government.<sup>17</sup> The General Press Administration had jurisdiction over newspapers as well as over the Xinhua News Agency.

While Hu Qiaomu was placed in charge of the General Press Administration, the General Publication Administration was headed by the veteran editor and journalist Hu Yuzhi 胡愈之.<sup>18</sup> From the personnel decisions in 1949 it is clear that the General Press Administration was considered to be much more important than the General Publication Administration: in contrast to Hu Yuzhi, Hu Qiaomu was a Party heavyweight who was concurrently chief of RMRB (until late 1949) and held the post of a vice-head in the CCP PD; most importantly, he was the personal secretary of Mao Zedong.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it is not clear how much clout Hu Yuzhi had within his own Publication Administration. It seems that the important tasks, such as the unification of the Xinhua network, were overseen by a Party bureaucrat with long CCP-membership, Huang Luofeng 黄洛峰. Huang headed the Administration's Publication Department and served concurrently as director of the CCP PD Publishing Committee. In late 1954, when the General Publication Administration was abolished, he became head of the Administrative Department for Publication Affairs (*Chuban guanli ju* 出版管理局) under the Ministry of Culture; Hu Yuzhi, in contrast, was given purely representative posts.

Faster than any other industry, the news sector was transformed: by early 1952, all existing newspapers had a cooperative ownership structure, with private shares being reduced quickly; the need for management by a government organ thus did no longer exist. Consequently, the General Press Administration was abolished in February 1952. Newspapers were henceforth administered directly by the units publishing them (the CC, local Party committees, government ministries,

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<sup>17</sup> For the evolution of these institutions see the chart in Liu Gao, Shi Feng (ed.). *Xin Zhongguo chuban wushi nian jishi*. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1999, p. 395-7. See also Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*. Beijing: Zhongyang dang'anguan, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Hu Yuzhi was a member of the China Democratic League, one of the "democratic parties" in the coalition government led by the CCP; he was appointed to the General Publication Administration as a League member. However, Hu had been a secret CCP member since at least the 1940s, although he never held a formal Party position.

<sup>19</sup> Hu's informal influence was much greater than his formal posts suggest. No decision in the PD could pass without his consent. Lu Dingyi, nominally the PD head and thus senior to Hu, admitted three decades later that he was isolated in the institution formally under his command, and that Hu Qiaomu usually acted as he pleased. See Chen Qingquan, Song Guangwei. *Lu Dingyi zhuan*. Beijing: Zhongguo dangshi chubanshe, 1999, p. 376-78.

etc.) and were instructed by the CCP PD. The Xinhua News Agency became a unit directly under the Culture and Education Commission of the State Council. After the dissolution of the General Press Administration, the Party institutions, namely the PD, assumed direct responsibility – and control.<sup>20</sup> No organ in the government hierarchy responsible for supervision of the press was restored until the establishment in 1987 of the PRC Press and Publication Administration (Zhonghua renmin gongheguo xinwen chubanshu 中华人民共和国新闻出版署, hereafter PPA).

Government organs continued to exist for the less sensitive publication sector, albeit with significantly reduced staff numbers<sup>21</sup> and changing allegiances: bodies with different names existed sometimes directly under the State Council, sometimes under the Ministry of Culture.<sup>22</sup> Here, too, the decision-making power was monopolized by the respective bureau of the CCP PD. In general, the division of labour between Party and government bodies in the media sector (as in most other political sectors) saw to it that the government organs were concerned with administrative tasks and with the coordination of planning, while the Party organs (especially the PD) were responsible for policy formulation and decision making.

Only with the establishment of the PPA in 1987, a government body was again given responsibility in the news sector, a result of the commercialization of the newspaper market which caused the administrative workload to explode. Although officials denied this, a more immediate reason for the decision to set up a new administrative body under the State Council might have been the campaign against “bourgeois liberalization,” during which pressure on the media was greatly increased.<sup>23</sup> The PPA finally brought institutional continuity to a notoriously volatile

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<sup>20</sup> Compare the argumentation in Sun Xupei in: “Jiefang chuqi dui jiu xinwen shiye de jieshou he gaizao” in *Xinwen yanjiu ziliao* 43 (1988), p. 48-61, here p. 61

<sup>21</sup> Information on staff numbers of Chinese Party and government organs is generally scarce. The General Publication Administration started with 278 cadres that remained relatively constant until 1957, when staff was reduced sharply to 21. Only after the Cultural Revolution, the number of cadres in the bodies responsible for the publishing sector reached 100 again. For these numbers see “Dangdai Zhongguo” congshu bianjibu (ed.). *Dangdai Zhongguo de chubanshiye*. Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1993, 3 vols., here vol. 2, p. 500, vol. 3, p. 94-95. The Propaganda Department had about 130 cadres in early 1950; numbers varied between 200 and 400 in the period before 1966. See *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*, vol. 9, p. 62f.

<sup>22</sup> For these developments see Liu Gao, Shi Feng. *Xin Zhongguo chubanshi wushi nian jishi. passim*.

<sup>23</sup> See the interview with Liu Gao 刘杲, the vice-head of the new institution, in “Publishing: Unified Management” in *Beijing Review* 21, May 25, 1987, p. 14-17. Liu was quoted saying “China now

sector. Its real institutional power, however, must be questioned: as a body of only vice-ministerial rank, the PPA had to succumb to the much more powerful PD in many a conflict, such as in the case of the shelved publishing law.<sup>24</sup> Yet in recent years the PD has devolved an increasing degree of its workload to the PPA, which was thus able to bolster its clout.<sup>25</sup> Through its regulatory mechanisms, the PPA wields considerable bureaucratic power over its specific sector of the media sector.<sup>26</sup>

While the PPA is responsible for general coordination, it supervises directly only a small number of central-level newspapers, periodicals, and publishing houses. The vast number of media fall under the jurisdiction of the provincial governments and Party committees. The administrative structure of the central level is reduplicated in the provinces: the provincial Party committees (*shengwei* 省委) have their own propaganda departments with subordinated bureaus in charge of press and publishing, and since the late 1980s most provincial governments have established a “press and publication bureau” (*xinwen chuban ju* 新闻出版局), to act as the equivalent of the PPA. The local bodies usually answer to the provincial committees and governments, respectively, but in important questions they may receive direct orders from the Central PD or the PPA.<sup>27</sup>

The administration of radio and television lies with the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television (Guangbo dianying dianshi bu 广播电影电视部).<sup>28</sup> A Broadcasting Bureau (Guangbo shiye ju 广播事业局) had existed since the early 1950s, first under the General Press Administration, and later directly under the State Council. The CCP PD has had a Newspaper and Broadcasting Bureau

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publishes 1574 newspapers, 5248 periodicals and has 446 publishing houses. The many units and the resulting problems call for the establishment of a department of unified management.” (p. 14).

<sup>24</sup> PPA vice-head Liu Gao played a decisive role in the drafting process.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Lynch speaks of the PPA as a “bureaucratically weak” institution. This judgment must be qualified with regard to its growing influence. See *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and ‘Thought Work’ in Reformed China*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 35.

<sup>26</sup> The PPA actively participates, for example, in China’s censorship regime. For one recent intervention see “You don’t say: China forbids seven types of content” at *China OnlineNews*, Aug. 13, 2001, at <http://www.chinaonline.com/topstories/010813/1/c01080805.asp> (printout Aug. 20, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> The closure of many a local newspaper or periodical has come only after intense pressure from Beijing. Local governments often hesitate to take such steps on their own initiative (in part also because they have financial stakes in the businesses in question).

<sup>28</sup> In March 1998, the Ministry was downgraded into a General Bureau of Radio, Film, and Television (Guangbo dianying dianshi zongju 广播电影电视总局) under the State Council. On the institutional arrangements see *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*, vol. 16, p. 870-73.

(Baozhi guangbo chu 报纸广播处) since 1951; the division of labour – policy formulation and control by the Party body, administrative affairs by the ministry – works similar to the procedures in the press and publication sectors. The new media, and especially the Internet, are managed by the Ministry of Information Industry (Xinxi changye bu 信息产业部) that was set up in 1998 – after a long impasse – through the merger of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (Youdian bu 邮电部) and the Ministry of Electronics Industry (Dianzi changye bu 电子产业部).<sup>29</sup> Information on the Party's organizational answer to the new developments in the media sector is insufficient, but given the parallel structure in the other areas of the propaganda *xitong*, it is likely that some kind of body has been set up to deal with the area of competence covered by the Ministry of Information Industry, presumably under the PD.

In recent years many administrative tasks, and especially the regulation of the personnel in the media sector, have been devolved to a number of professional associations, such as the Association of Chinese Publication Workers (Zhongguo chuban gongzuozhe xiehui 中国出版工作者协会), the Chinese News Workers Association, and the Chinese Editors' Association (Zhongguo bianji xiehui 中国编辑协会). These moves are a reflection of the CCP's shifting approach to governance. While in some cases, mostly on the local level, the professional associations have succeeded in actually speaking out on behalf of their members, which is their nominal task, most associations still function as the transmission belt of the Party's policies and thus regulate rather than represent their members.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the PLA has its own network of media; these are beyond the control of the Party or state organs; they are overseen by the Propaganda Department of the PLA's General Political Department (Zong zhengzhi bu 总政治部).

Newspapers like *Jiefangjun bao* 解放军报, and the PLA-owned Jiefangjun chubanshe 解放军出版社 are thus removed from civilian control.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Eric Harwit, Duncan Clark. "Shaping the Internet in China: Evolution of Political Control over Network Infrastructure and Content" in *Asian Survey* XLI.3 (2001), p. 377-408, here p. 387. I will have more to say on this issue in chapter nine.

<sup>30</sup> See Kenneth W. Foster. "Embedded within State Agencies: Business Associations in Yantai" in *The China Journal* 47 (2002), p. 41-65.

<sup>31</sup> Little information is available on the PLA media. For a list of the PLA's publications and broadcast media and their administration see *Zhongguo da baike quanshu – Junshi: Zhongguo*

To sum up, a network of institutions in charge of administration and control of China's media sector covers the entire political landscape of the PRC on both central and local levels. Organs in the government hierarchy are duplicated by equivalent agencies in the Party structure. In theory, the Party and government networks are supposed to practice division of labour, yet in practice the Party bureaus and departments in charge of the media sector have been clearly in the dominant position. The bureaucratic network is the most visible form of institutionalization of the Party's claim to control the media, yet not the only one: other, less obvious mechanisms have proved equally efficient.

### *Bureaucratic Regulation of the Market*

Organizationally, the Chinese media sector is controlled by the propaganda authorities; further constraints come from a number of bureaucratic guidelines and regulations that have been put in place to control both the access to the sector and the behaviour of players in the market.

Restrictions on market access are an important means of control. While the Chinese constitution grants publishing freedom, any new publishing house, journal, or newspaper needs approval from the propaganda authorities – even in the publishing sector, which is much less sensitive than, for example, the news or broadcasting sectors. While these procedures are supposed to be a mere bureaucratic routine, the approval of publishing units does in fact provide the PPA with enormous sanctioning power. The hurdles for setting up publishing houses, for instance, are high. According to the 1997 “Regulations for Publishing,”<sup>32</sup>

- (a) [the unit shall] have a designation as a publishing unit and a statute;
- (b) it shall have a sponsor unit and a necessary responsible higher-level organ in accordance with the requirements of the executive organs for publishing of the State Council;
- (c) it shall have a distinctive scope of business;
- (d) it shall have a registered capital of at least 300.000 RMB;
- (e) it shall have a permanent place of work;
- (f) it shall have an organizational structure meeting the needs of the business scope, as well as professional editing and publishing staff in conformity with the national professional standards.

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*renmin jiefangjun zhengzhi gongzuo fence*. Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1987 (for internal circulation).

<sup>32</sup> “Chuban guanli tiaoli” (enacted Jan. 2, 1997) in *Zhongguo chuban nianjian* 1998, p. 230.

Of the above, especially point (b) is crucial, as it effectively bars individuals or non-state units without connections to a recognized unit (*danwei* 单位) that can serve as “necessary guarantor” from setting up publishing houses. Only ministries and mass organizations and their subdivisions, and wholly state-owned enterprises are recognized as “guarantors” and fulfil the requirements of the PPA.<sup>33</sup>

Yet the above list contains merely the preconditions for an application for a publishing license; once the publisher applies, double approval is necessary from local and central organs of publication administration, as well as from the local Bureau of Industry and Commerce 工商局.<sup>34</sup> Taken together, these procedures and requirements provide the authorities with ample opportunity to block unwelcome entrants into the publishing business. As a last resort the PPA may even refuse approval with reference to article 9 of the “Regulations:” “The executive organs for publishing of the State Council formulate the plan for the total number, structure and distribution of all publishing units in China, and guide and harmonize the development of the publishing business.”<sup>35</sup> This requirement indeed has a highly manipulative character, as the PPA may argue that the total quota of its “plan” has already been filled up, or that the geographical distribution of publishing houses is too uneven.

The bureaucratic registration procedures for publishing houses or journals are not at all a one time affair. There are different circumstances under which publishing houses must seek renewal of their licenses, the most common reason being the amendment of any of the items mentioned in the original application: “If publishing units change their name, their host unit or their necessary responsible higher-level organ, their scope of business, if they merge or split, or if they publish new newspapers or journals, or if the newspapers or journals change names or numbers of issues per year, the publishing units shall go once more through the application procedure laid out in nos. 11 and 12 of these regulations.”<sup>36</sup> Journals are thus hit even harder than publishing houses, as almost any changes must be

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<sup>33</sup> See further “Chubanshe nian jian dengji zhidu” (dated July 27, 1994) in *Zhongguo chuban nianjian* 1995, p. 278.

<sup>34</sup> See “Chuban guanli tiaoli,” article 11, in *Zhongguo chuban nianjian* 1998, p. 230. In the Soviet Union, bureaucratic procedures were even more complicated and new publishing houses had to get their licenses approved from the Central Committee. See Gregory Walker. *Soviet Book Publishing Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 19-20.

<sup>35</sup> “Chuban guanli tiaoli” in *Zhongguo chuban nianjian* 1998, p. 230.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

reported, and in many cases new licenses must be applied for.<sup>37</sup> Renewal of licenses can also become necessary for other reasons – such as stipulated in the concluding article 56 of the 1997 “Regulations” which, without citing further reasons, requires all existing publishing units to undergo new registration within a specified time after the “Regulations” come into effect.

Besides bureaucratic harassment, the PPA can resort to measures of direct market manipulation: subsidies and other forms of logistic support can be justified by the state’s “responsibility” towards the publishing sector. In this respect the five-year plans play a special role: generous funds are handed out for mostly large-scale publication projects initiated by the government. In the 1980s, some publishers even started to mention support they had received for official five year plan projects in the imprint of the subsidized books.

Neither subsidization of publications nor restrictions on market access have been reduced after China joined the World Trade Organization: under the terms of the accession protocol, foreign enterprises are barred from investing in enterprises of the media sector. The single exception concerns book distribution, where wholesale and retail markets were opened gradually to foreigners in 2001 and 2003.<sup>38</sup> Distribution, however, must be considered the least sensitive element in the publishing chain. The CCP has effectively abolished the Xinhua bookstore’s monopoly in the retail sector in the 1980s, and retail – at least in the urban centres – has been firmly in the hands of non-state entrepreneurs since the 1990s. Xinhua only began to withdraw from its monopoly in wholesale distribution of books when China was granted WTO membership. Once a powerful mechanism to steer the nationwide availability of books, the Xinhua monopoly is no longer considered to be of crucial importance for the efforts to uphold Party control of the sector.

One more measure to control the market of publications is the administration of International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) and International Standard Serial Numbers (ISSN) that have replaced the Chinese national book numbers since 1987. Numbers are centrally controlled and are handed out by the provincial Press and Publication Bureaus for books listed in publication plans

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<sup>37</sup> See also “Qikan guanli dengji zanxing guiding” (dated Nov. 24, 1988) in *Zhongguo chuban nianjian 1989*, p. 54-56, article 14

<sup>38</sup> On the conditions for the media sector of China’s WTO accession see the “US-China Bilateral Market Access Agreement (March 14, 2000),” p. 198, 200 at <http://www.uschina.org/public/wto/market/183-203.pdf> (downloaded July 15, 2003).

which the publishing houses must report in advance; this means that only titles that have been approved will receive a standard number. Since all Chinese books and journals must bear an ISBN or ISSN,<sup>39</sup> the control of book numbers is a key instrument of publication control.<sup>40</sup> The strict control over standard numbers has produced a lucrative market for the sale of book numbers that has become a chronic problem of the Chinese publishing sector. Even respected publishers are reported to engage in this highly profitable business (they sell numbers for up to 100.000 RMB), all efforts of the publishing authorities notwithstanding.<sup>41</sup> Occasionally, ISBNs are also stolen and simply attached to illegally produced books. Theft and sale of book numbers provide avenues for illegal publishing activities in China, mostly for pirated editions. Publishers caught selling book numbers, however, are subject to heavy penalties; Chinese regulations outlaw not only the sale of ISBNs, but also the trade of items produced in such a way, thus trying to create counterincentives.<sup>42</sup> Yet while the sale of book numbers provides access to publishing opportunities for individuals and units not formally registered as publishers, this does not mean that anything whatsoever can be published: the original owner of the number must avoid trouble and therefore would be willing to lend its name only to the more inconspicuous publishing projects. Selling book numbers is thus mainly a regulatory problem; publications grossly violating the political interests of the central state are unlikely to appear with illegally traded numbers. The reason why the problem has never been solved satisfactorily might lie herein – and not in a general breakdown of central control.<sup>43</sup> Since the sale of book numbers poses no immediate danger to the Party's control of public

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<sup>39</sup> Exempted from this regulation are publications for internal distribution (see below).

<sup>40</sup> Control over ISSNs is much tighter than that of ISBNs. For this reason, some periodicals, such as the journal *Xueren* 学人, founded in 1991, have resorted to the measure of declaring themselves a book series and attaching a new ISBN to each issue. Another reason for such steps are, of course, the considerably lower fees for ISBNs.

<sup>41</sup> An embarrassing case was exposed in 2004, when *Zhongguo qingnian bao* revealed that the respected Sanlian shudian had sold ISBNs on a massive scale. "Baowei Sanlian shudian," in *Zhongguo qingnianbao*, 02 June 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Numerous regulations deal with the issue of selling ISBNs, such as "Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu, Xinwen chubanshu guanyu jinzhi 'maimai shuhao' de tongzhi" in *RMRB*, Oct. 29, 1993. Selling book numbers is also addressed in the 1997 "Regulations" (article 48). Interviewees 111 and 113 were discussing the issue of selling ISBNs with the author. See also Lynch. *After the Propaganda State*, p. 205-08; and Kong Shuyu. *Consuming Literature: Best Sellers and the Commercialization of Literary Production in Contemporary China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 65-77, 90-92. For a different account see Wu Haimin. *Shuhao mofang: chubanzhe de manxing zisha*. Beijing: Huayi chubanshe, 1995.

<sup>43</sup> Such is the argument in *ibid*.



communication, it is handled as an affair of secondary importance, notwithstanding the number of decrees issued time and again but implemented only half-heartedly. The CCP relies on other mechanisms to secure control of the media sector, such as the control of information flow and information access.

### *Control of Information Flow*

The CCP intervenes to control the flow of information. Information carried in the media is fragmented and classified into different categories of sensitivity. During the first three decades of the PRC, the distribution of information was very tightly regulated. Many of these constraints have been loosened since the early 1980s, yet factors such as globalization, commercialization, and pluralization have not led to a significant erosion of the government's grip on the media.<sup>44</sup> To the contrary, the CCP has demonstrated repeatedly that it is fully capable to enforce compliance of the media across the nation.

Since the 1980s, the Party has shifted towards a model of negative exclusion to determine the handling of media content: media contents are no longer prescribed, rather, the media are forbidden to venture into a small number of sensitive core areas without approval from the Party. These areas include foreign news and foreign affairs, as well as important national political events, such as Party congresses. While both national and regional newspapers in the PRC are comparatively free to select their sources for coverage of most domestic events, the sole legal source of foreign news is the Xinhua News Agency.<sup>45</sup> Xinhua has retained its monopoly on international news even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Chinese domestic media are forbidden to send correspondents abroad or to purchase reports from foreign news agencies.<sup>46</sup> Exceptions may be made for events of a non-political nature, such as major sports events.<sup>47</sup> These are, however, the

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<sup>44</sup> These three factors are assessed in Daniel Lynch. *After the Propaganda State*.

<sup>45</sup> I have seen no document confirming this point. Information from interviewee 002, summer 2000. A reading of various Chinese newspapers from different periods supports the existence of such a guideline.

<sup>46</sup> The Hong Kong *Mingbao* reported that in the run-up to the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, the PD issued a circular explicitly forbidding the media to use international news files from Western news agencies. See <http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/2/6/21/n197672.htm> (downloaded July 12, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> The Internet portal Sina.com obtained a permission in 1998 to send reporters to cover the soccer World Cup in France, and again to the Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000. Both events were a

exception to the rule and rather serve to underline the strictness of the enforcement of Xinhua's monopoly.

Chinese media institutions are also not allowed to cover domestic events related to foreign affairs, such as visits by foreign heads of state. Xinhua exclusively covers all state events – not only those related to foreign affairs (where diplomatic issues are at stake), but also high-profile domestic events, such as the meetings and congresses of the CCP. For such special events, Xinhua does not only provide newspapers and local TV stations with reports, but delivers complete packages, including articles, photographs, interviews, and commentary. These packages must be run by the local papers in their entirety, with little or no leeway for changes or alterations. An especially drastic case were the newspapers of November 16, 2002: on the morning after the closing ceremony of the important 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress that saw the leadership transition from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao 胡锦涛, all papers across the nation appeared with identical front pages: reports, commentary, and photographs were arranged in identical manner; apparently even the page layout had been dictated by Beijing.<sup>48</sup>

While the above is an outstanding case, interventions of the authorities into seemingly technical questions of newspaper production such as page layout are common. In 1997 RMRB published a large illustrated volume entitled *Handbook on the People's Daily's Layout*.<sup>49</sup> The volume contains reproductions of the *People's Daily's* pages, classified according to important recurring subjects such as Party congresses, major celebrations etc., each with a short description, summing up the points that require attention. The aim of the book, as stated in the foreword, is “to provide our sister publications with reference material” on how to report on major issues.<sup>50</sup> In this way, other newspaper editors may check on how to report on Labour Day parades, the anniversary of the victory in the anti-Japanese war, or the death of a Politburo member; they may find not just information on how to arrange articles and photographs, but even

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major factor in Sina's rise to become China's most popular web portal. Information from Interviewee 204, September 2002.

<sup>48</sup> See John Gittings. “New China Uses Old Tactics” in *The Observer*, November 17, 2002.

<sup>49</sup> Renmin ribao bianjibu (ed.). *Renmin ribao banmian beiyao*. Beijing: Renmin ribao chubanshe, 1997. For an updated version see Wang Wulu (ed.). *Shisi da yilai Renmin ribao banmian yanjiu*. Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe, 2006.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. (i).

recommendations concerning the appropriate typeface.<sup>51</sup> Even layout is thus not left to the editors' discretion, but is subject to instructions that classify and channel information according to rules agreed upon centrally.

So what precisely are the areas defined as sensitive, where is the line that journalists must not cross? A circular issued by the PPA in August 2001 lists seven areas that are off-limits. Content is forbidden if it:<sup>52</sup>

1. negates the guiding role of Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong [thought] and Deng Xiaoping's theories;
2. goes against the guiding principles, official line or policies of the Communist Party;
3. discloses state secrets, endangers national security or harms the interests of the state;
4. violates state policies towards minorities and religion, endangers national unity or affects social stability;
5. propagates murder, violence, lewdness, superstition and pseudo-science; content that guides people in the wrong direction, is vulgar or low;
6. spreads rumours, false news or otherwise interferes with the work of the Party or government; or
7. violates Party propaganda discipline or the government regulations on publishing or advertising.

The formulations for the above items are held intentionally vague, so as to allow the CCP to intervene and to ban almost any article published or any programme aired. Yet only seldom does the CCP in fact make use of its powers. This is not a sign of weakness or loss of control, as has been suggested by some observers,<sup>53</sup> but rather lies in the nature of the Party's approach to control: the CCP tries to secure veto powers, but uses them only if it feels that its interests are at stake.<sup>54</sup> Under normal circumstances, the mere existence of these veto powers suffices to generate pre-emptive self-censorship, a point I will return to later in this chapter.

Drastic action was considered necessary, for example, in August 2000, when the Yuanhua 远华 smuggling and corruption case was scheduled to go before the courts. On trial were over 200 officials and entrepreneurs, mostly from the city of Xiamen 厦门 in Fujian province. The charges in this largest-ever case of corruption and economic crime in the PRC concerned the smuggling of thousands

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> "You don't say" at *China OnlineNews*, Aug. 13, 2001. Similar catalogues have been issued earlier. See, for example, "Baozhi guanli zanxing guiding" (dated Dec. 25, 1990; issued by the PPA) in *Xinwen chubanshu zhengce fagui si* (ed.). *Zhongguo xinwen chubanshu fagui jianming shiyong shouce, 1949-1994*. Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 1996, p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel Lynch speaks of a "serious reduction in the Chinese central party-state's ability to control thought work or public communications flows." *After the Propaganda State*, p. 224.

<sup>54</sup> I will come back to this interpretation in chapters eight and nine.

of passenger vehicles and several million barrels of crude oil into China, next to numerous other charges. The total value of the case was estimated at about 500 billion RMB (over 50 billion dollar). Staggering as this sum might be, even more embarrassing were the ranks of the officials involved: they included a vice-minister of the Ministry of Public Security, the head and vice-head of the Chinese Customs Administration (Haiguan zongshu 海关总署), as well as numerous high-level cadres in Fujian province and Xiamen city. With ministry-level cadres in Beijing involved, the case had the potential to seriously damage the prestige of the CCP in the eyes of the Chinese population as well as abroad. When the Yuanhua case went before the courts, news releases were tightly controlled by the Xinhua news agency. To limit the “negative impact,”<sup>55</sup> the PD issued a notice banning all publishing houses and film production companies from producing books or films relating to the case. It was not until a year later that a semi-fictional account of the case appeared. *Storm: The Facts Behind Investigating the Huge Xiamen Corruption Case* belongs to the genre of reportage literature (*baogao wenxue* 报告文学) and was written by a collective of eight authors.<sup>56</sup> The book was published by the renowned Beijing publisher Zuojia chubanshe 作家出版社 that apparently had received permission to publish the official Chinese account of the case and the trial – such a move had become necessary after a sensational book on the same topic had appeared in Hong Kong from where it could easily be smuggled into the mainland.<sup>57</sup> The text of the PRC book was closely scrutinized by the authorities. The staggering initial print run of 200,000 copies demonstrates the interest of the public in the case even a year after the trial produced headlines and explains why the PD had tried to suppress any unofficial accounts.

The CCP’s efforts to control the flow of information, however, can backfire. This happened when the government tried to cover up the real dimension of the SARS epidemic in spring 2003 so as not to derail the annual session of the NPC, where the leadership transition from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao was to be

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<sup>55</sup> See “China Bans Books, Films Dealing with Upcoming Xiamen Smuggling Case” by BBC Monitoring, via Hong Kong iMail website, Aug. 11, 2000 (printed Aug. 20, 2001).

<sup>56</sup> Zhang Xianhua et al. *Fengbao: Chachu Xiamen teda zousi an jishi*. Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 2001.

<sup>57</sup> Sheng Xue. ‘Yuanhua an’ heimu. Hong Kong: Mingjing chubanshe, 2001. This book hit the markets in June, the Zuojia chubanshe volume followed in September.

completed. In the run-up to the NPC session, information of any kind was tightly controlled, and the numbers of infections in Guangdong and Beijing, the most-affected areas, were systematically underreported. The government finally broke the silence on April 20 and admitted the real amount of the epidemic. This abrupt turn had been triggered by two events: firstly, criticism of the Chinese government's handling of the crisis and doubts about the numbers officially released were mounting in the foreign press and had begun to filter into China; further denial would thus damage the credibility of the Party both internationally and at home. Secondly, some of the most courageous newspapers in Guangdong province had broken the silence imposed on them, and information was then passed on quickly throughout the country by text messaging on mobile phones.<sup>58</sup> As later analyses showed, the government's tight control of the information flow in the media had greatly aggravated the situation and prevented local authorities from adopting early quarantine measures to rein in the spread of the disease.<sup>59</sup> In turn, only an apology to the public, and frankness on the side of the government, which promised a more liberal information regime, helped to set in motion a national emergency that finally brought the disease under control. More openness and growing freedom of information as a result of the crisis, as predicted by some observers, however, did not materialize – to the contrary: public apologies were one thing, violations of media discipline another. Soon after the crisis, the editor-in-chief of *Nanfang zhoumo* was fired and was replaced with none other than the head of the Guangdong provincial PD, the very official who was responsible in the first place for the suppression of information in Guangdong, from where the epidemic had started.<sup>60</sup> On another note, *Shiji shalong* 世纪沙龙, one of the most popular Internet chatrooms visited mostly by intellectuals was forced to close for more than a week during the height of the crisis.<sup>61</sup> The logic behind these moves is

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<sup>58</sup> See John Pomfret. "Outbreak Gave China's Hu an Opening" in *Washington Post*, May 13, 2003. See also Ernest Zhang and Kenneth Fleming. "Examination of Characteristics of News Media under Censorship: A Content Analysis of Selected Chinese Newspapers' SARS coverage," in *Asian Journal of Communication* 15.3 (2005), p. 319-339; and Zhang, Xiaoling. "Reading Between the Headlines: SARS, Focus and TV Current Affairs Programmes in China," in *Media, Culture, and Society* 28.5 (2006), p. 715-37.

<sup>59</sup> See Nailene Chou Wiest. "New Page Opens on the Road to Media Reform" in *South China Morning Post*, May 20, 2003.

<sup>60</sup> See Minxin Pei. "Don't Hold Your Breath for Openness in China" in *Financial Times*, May 7, 2003.

<sup>61</sup> This step is discussed by two articles on another website:

<http://www.sinoliberal.com/note/qiufeng%20on%20century%20salon%20shut.htm> and

not difficult to understand: the government did promise more openness, quicker and more reliable information in cases of national emergency. This does not mean, however, that the media themselves can decide on the flow of information. The ultimate power to decide on the timing and the amount of information to be released lies nowhere else than with the CCP. This logic refers directly to the media concept that is applied in the twenty-first century just as it was sixty years earlier in the Yan'an era.

### *Control of Information Access*

The observations of the previous section must be qualified in one important respect. The ban on certain kinds of content does not mean that this information is not available at all. It is withheld from most of the population only. Party members or high-level cadres may receive briefings on important issues not (or not yet) discussed publicly in the press; they might also have access to more or more detailed information on certain topics than the rest of the people. In general, the amount and the quality of information one can access in the PRC is tied to one's status. It might therefore be more adequate to speak of a multi-layered public sphere, or even of several concentric public spheres, than of "the" Chinese public sphere.<sup>62</sup>

Control of information access in the PRC is as tightly reglemented as control of the information flows. The most conspicuous sign of the segregation of information is the distinction between "openly available" (*gongkai* 公开) and "restricted access" or "internal" (*neibu* 内部) publications (newspapers, journals, books).<sup>63</sup> These two categories of publications serve fundamentally different purposes.

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<http://www.sinoliberal.com/academic/nanshui%20on%20century%20salon%20shut.htm>  
(downloaded July 12, 2003).

<sup>62</sup> Such public spheres have little in common with the Habermasian public sphere. As explained in chapter one, I do not consider the model developed by Habermas as very helpful in contexts like the PRC. The public sphere here is rather a space of public communication where the state is one player.

<sup>63</sup> I have never heard of an equivalent for the Internet, such as a *neibu* net (as distinct from local area networks (LAN) that are password-protected and accessible only by specified groups). Chinese interviewees were unable to tell me if there have been any efforts to establish, for example, a protected network for medium- and high-level cadres.

Internal publications had been distributed since the Yan'an era. Publications so classified usually bear an imprint reading "for internal distribution" (*neibu faxing* 内部发行).<sup>64</sup> As a rule, such publications are not openly sold, but distributed to work units; until the 1980s, in the larger cities there were also entire bookstores or specialized sections of bookstores where internal material was sold to anyone who could identify himself as having the permission to do so.<sup>65</sup> Specialized legislation has been put in place to regulate the publication of *neibu* materials.<sup>66</sup>

However, it would be a simplification to think of Chinese publications in dualistic *gongkai* / *neibu* terms. Instead, the logic of the system creates a hierarchy of information access with many finely tuned layers. Measured by the amount of information that can be legally accessed, foreigners can be found at the bottom of these levels: until very recently, many pieces of information available to ordinary Chinese were withheld from the eyes of foreigners both abroad and in China. Publications that can not be exported are classified "for domestic distribution only" (*xian guonei faxing* 限国内发行). Until recently, books designated in this way were openly available (*gongkai*) in China, but were not sold to foreigners. Among these publications is *Cankao xiaoxi* 参考消息, which is – surprisingly – China's largest circulation daily.<sup>67</sup> As a result, until very recently, not a single library outside China had any significant holdings<sup>68</sup> of a newspaper that reached over four million Chinese readers (more than even RMRB).<sup>69</sup> Since its establishment the paper had been a *neibu* publication;<sup>70</sup> its "range of distribution" (*faxing fanwei* 发行范围) has

<sup>64</sup> Some useful information can be obtained in Flemming Christiansen. "The Neibu Bibliography: A Review Article" in *CCP Research Newsletter* 4 (1989-90), p. 13-19.

<sup>65</sup> See Harald Richter. *Publishing in the People's Republic of China: Personal Observations of a Foreign Student, 1975-1977*. Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1978, p. 15-16; 38-39.

<sup>66</sup> See "Neibu baokan guanli yuanze" (issued by the PPA, May 16, 1990) in Xingzhengyuan dalu weiyuanhui. *Dalu dazhong chuanbo fagui huibian*. Taipei: Xingzhengyuan dalu weiyuanhui, 1996, p. 39-41.

<sup>67</sup> On *Cankao xiaoxi* see Henry G. Schwarz. "The Ts'an-k'ao Hsiao-hsi: How Well Informed are Chinese Officials About the Outside World?" in *China Quarterly* 27 (1966), p. 54-83.

<sup>68</sup> An electronic edition covering the years from 1957 through 1998 is now available.

<sup>69</sup> Some selected circulation figures (in millions):

Year	1984	1989	1993	1999
参考消息	4.79	3,34	3,80	2,80
人民日报	4,30	2,90	2,79	1,92
新民晚报 (上海)	1,51	1,18	1,67	1,40
羊城晚报 (广州)	1.64	0,99	1,20	1,30

been extended twice in 1957 and 1971 and finally included all Party cadres, as the large circulation figures in 1984 suggest.<sup>71</sup> It was only in January 1985 that *Cankao xiaoxi* was re-classified as “for domestic distribution.” Ordinary *neibu* publications can reach surprisingly high print runs.<sup>72</sup>

*Cankao xiaoxi* is composed entirely of clippings from foreign newspapers and news agency dispatches that are translated usually unabridged and uncommented. One focus of the paper is the portrayal of the PRC in the foreign (including Taiwan and Hong Kong) news media, but it also contains all kinds of other information, in particular items concerning the United States and other non-socialist nations that for many years appeared only rarely in the official Chinese press. While RMRB usually relies on the Xinhua News Agency as the source of its news, *Cankao xiaoxi* draws heavily upon foreign news agencies. The paper thus has a style very different from other Chinese media and, typical for restricted distribution media, provides the readers with “undigested” information, creating a much more diversified image of the outside world.<sup>73</sup> This supply of foreign public opinion would eclipse the Xinhua monopoly if it was not news agency itself that compiles and publishes the paper.

Xinhua is not simply the main source of news articles for other papers; its functions are much more comprehensive. It is the main provider of domestic and foreign intelligence to the Chinese leadership. Xinhua compiles three other important internal publications: *Cankao ziliao* 参考资料, *Neibu cankao* 内部参考,

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Sources: Zhongguo xinwen nianjian she (ed.). *Zhongguo xinwen nianjian 1985, 1990, 1993, 1999*. Beijing: Zhongguo xinwen nianjian she. The numbers of 8-25 million given in Lynch. *After the Propaganda State*, p. 133-34, seem exaggerated and come from a little reliable source.

<sup>70</sup> Chinese sources (such as the entry “Cankao xiaoxi” in *Zhongguo da bai ke quanshu: Xinwen chuban juan*, p. 52) give 1948 as the date for the establishment of *Cankao xiaoxi*; however, the Harvard-Yenching library has a significant collection of *Cankao xiaoxi* issues from June 1944 to Nov. 1945. The issues are compiled jointly by *Jiefang ribao* and Xinhua she and carry the notice “for reference only” (*zhi gong cankao*). The Harvard-Yenching collection starts with issue 452, suggesting that publication had started at least a year earlier, i.e. in early 1943. Repr. Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe (ed). *Cankao xiaoxi, 1944.6-1945.11*. Guilin: Guangxi shifan dxue chubanshe, 2006.

<sup>71</sup> “Cankao xiaoxi” in *Zhongguo da bai ke quanshu: Xinwen chuban juan*, p. 52.

<sup>72</sup> A *neibu* volume with lectures on current affairs compiled by the Central Party School was published in April 2000 and was in its 13<sup>th</sup> printing by March 2002. The print run had reached 157,000, which is astonishing for the rather academic matter the volume deals with and the less than appealing design of the book. Zhongyang dangxiao jiaowubu (ed.). *Wu ge dangdai jianggao xuanbian*. Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 2000.

<sup>73</sup> This observation needs to be qualified, however: while the range of sources is much larger than for any other newspaper in the PRC, *Cankao xiaoxi* clearly applies selection criteria. In addition, the articles are edited: the editors will not rewrite articles, but may distort the original meaning through deletions and the composition of new headlines that create an altogether different spin.



and *Da cankao* 大参考 (called like this because it is printed in an especially large typeface to suit the needs of elderly top-level cadres with poor eyesight).<sup>74</sup> *Cankao ziliao* was and is the Chinese leadership's most important source of information on external affairs, including foreign reports on China. Until 1985, it was distributed to high-ranking cadres three times daily; the morning, noon, and afternoon editions (*shangwu ban* 上午版, *zhongwu ban* 中午版, *xiawu ban* 下午版) had 24 pages each. On July 1, 1985, the paper announced a new layout; it would be published every evening at nine o'clock and would henceforth increase its volume to 96 pages.<sup>75</sup> In this format it was still published as of late 2001, with the cover note "internal publication, do not reprint elsewhere" (*neibu kanwu, bu de zhuanzai* 内部刊物, 不得转载).<sup>76</sup>

*Cankao ziliao* covers almost exclusively international news; the sources are foreign newspapers and news agencies, as relayed by Xinhua personnel overseas. Some articles are translated in full, others in summary form. They are usually not commented, and there is no follow-up coverage on particular issues. The paper thus serves exclusively as a provider of information; any judgement on the issues reported is left to the leadership. The breadth of coverage is astonishing, including not only breaking news, but also articles on foreign social, cultural, and scientific developments. A reading of *Cankao ziliao* suggests that the Chinese leadership, contrary to some earlier estimates, was in fact very well informed about developments outside China. While *Cankao ziliao* is similar in nature to *Cankao xiaoxi*, the coverage of the former is both broader and deeper. The importance of *Cankao ziliao* can be estimated by a report in no. 1411 of June 14, 1957 (noon edition), that relays a Reuters report of the day before on the leaking of Mao's "Contradictions Speech" to the *New York Times* correspondent in Warsaw. The *New York Times* report, carried on June 14 (i.e., because of the time difference

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<sup>74</sup> A directive dated June 5, 1948, instructed Xinhua to provide reference material to the Party leadership on a regular basis. This might have been the beginning of these *neibu* publications. See "Zhongyang guanyu ge Xinhua fenshe xu fuqi gonggei ge zhong cankao ziliao renwu de zhishi" in XGWX 2.701.

<sup>75</sup> See "Notice" in *Cankao ziliao*, July 1, 1985.

<sup>76</sup> Observations on *Cankao ziliao* and the other *neibu* periodicals discussed in this chapter are based on the author's readings of these materials.

between Beijing and New York, several hours *after* the CKZL “re-”print!), triggered the release of the revised version of Mao’s speech later that month.<sup>77</sup>

Very little reliable information is available on the legendary *Da cankao*, or on *Neibu cankao*.<sup>78</sup> In format similar to *Cankao ziliao*, *Da cankao* seems to provide the top leadership with crucial intelligence on domestic affairs. Both publications still exist, and have even adopted to modern technologies: in the summer of 2003, the website of Xinhua’s Chongqing branch offered a biweekly audiovisual supplement (*Neibu cankao yinxiang ban* 内部参考音像版) to “leading comrades of district or division-level and upwards (*di-shi ji yishang lingdao tongzhi* 地师级以上领导同志).” Subscribers would receive one VCD of 55 minutes length every two weeks, containing “information on domestic and international affairs that is not suited or not yet suited for open publication, but has a relatively high reference value.”<sup>79</sup> The audiovisual supplement promised to be published “strictly respecting the directives of the [Party] centre demanding that ‘Xinhua she must do its best to publish *Neibu cankao*.’”<sup>80</sup> From this pledge and the table of contents of the supplement we can obtain an approximate understanding of objectives of *Neibu cankao*: to provide high-level cadres and especially the top-leadership with first-hand intelligence, analysis of the latest issues, emerging trends, and of course, reports by foreigners on China.

*Neibu* papers such as *Cankao ziliao*, *Neibu cankao*, and *Da cankao* are set apart from the openly circulating media by both the breadth of the information they supply to the top leadership and the higher levels of the Party, and by the fact that this information comes in a generally unmediated form: it may be fragmentary, contradictory, and in deviance from the Party line. None of this would be acceptable for the openly distributed media, for reasons that I have reconstructed in chapter two, yet the same does not apply for the Party leadership: apparently, higher political consciousness insulates long-time Party members from the danger of being corrupted by unfiltered information. They are thus allowed access to more

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<sup>77</sup> The revised version (“Guanyu zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodun de wenti” 关于正确处理人民内部矛盾的问题) was published in RMRB on June 29, 1957.

<sup>78</sup> The print run of *Da cankao* was limited to about thirty copies, while *Neibu cankao* had a print run of up to 40,000 in the 1960s. Personal communication with Michael Schoenhals, December 2001.

<sup>79</sup> See the advertisement at [www.cq.xinhuanet.com\ins\xinhua\xxfw3.htm](http://www.cq.xinhuanet.com\ins\xinhua\xxfw3.htm) (downloaded July 10, 2003).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

diverse sources of knowledge. In fact, in both their composition and their function, the *neibu* papers do resemble the liberal, deliberative press more than anything else published in the PRC.

Xinhua is the largest provider of intelligence to restricted groups, but it is no longer the only institution to do so. The editorial offices of RMRB publish a weekly information sheet called *Neibu canyue* 内部参阅 that is classified as secret (*mimi* 秘密) on the cover page. *Neibu canyue* contains sensitive material on mostly domestic issues collected by RMRB; a particularly large type face indicates that it is compiled for reference purposes for readers with poor eyesight, i.e. the elderly leadership. Articles in the periodical usually introduce a problem that is newly emerging, analyze it in a second step, and finally offer policy proposals. The journal's subscription information contains a short self-characterization:<sup>81</sup>

*Neibu canyue*, which is compiled by RMRB, was originally distributed only to leading cadres of provincial / ministry / army rank; after instructions from leading comrades of the Center and considerations by RMRB's editorial committee, [the distribution] was enlarged to leading comrades of department [*si* 司] / bureau [*ju* 局] / district [*di* 地] / city / division [*shi* 师]. After the increase in distribution, we have received support and encouragement from leading comrades at the Center and in the localities, and [the number of] units and leading comrades asking for subscriptions has increased steadily. ... *Neibu canyue* appropriately relaxes its subscription rules for organizations concerned with theory, education, and propaganda (e.g. district-level city propaganda departments, organ newspapers, and party schools, party secretaries of institutions of higher education directly under ministries, commissions, and provinces, etc.).

As many other *neibu* publications, *Neibu canyue* goes to lengths to define its scope of distribution. The usually strict rules can be relaxed for readers in professional units directly concerned by the information in question, such as is the case here for high-level cadres in the propaganda sector.

A reading of *Neibu canyue* reveals another function – besides supplying classified intelligence – of *neibu* publications: they play an important role in policy formulation processes. This function is illustrated especially well in another *neibu* publication, *Neibu wengao* 内部文稿. This semi-monthly journal is an internal bulletin of *Hongqi zazhi* 红旗杂志 (since 1988 *Qiushi* 求是), the theoretical organ of the CCP CC.<sup>82</sup> The articles in *Neibu wengao* are of an exploratory nature; they mostly deal with theoretical issues (in the widest sense, i.e. including economics

<sup>81</sup> See "Notification for the Subscription of *Neibu canyue*," taken from issue 1994/36, p. 31.

<sup>82</sup> *Neibu wengao* has been published since 1981. The issues from October 1985 to December 1986 appeared under the title *Lilun jiaoliu* 理论交流.

and social questions). The journal shows policy-making in process: the articles deal with new developments and trends in politics, economics, social affairs etc. Many articles contain policy proposals or elaborate on material taken from the journal's most interesting section, "Abstracts of important speeches" (*Yao lun zhaideng* 要论摘登). This section comprises very short, mostly colloquial statements of unnamed Party leaders that are to be understood as advances for emerging new policies, to be formulated by the theory community that is the journal's readership. Articles based on these utterances of the leadership are published in the other sections of *Neibu wengao* (hence the title) for discussion and comment. When agreement is reached over an issue and the Party leadership has approved of it, articles from *Neibu wengao* may appear in revised form in the mother journal, *Hongqi* or *Qiushi*.<sup>83</sup>

*Neibu* books, too, may be used for similar purposes. An example of this kind is a massive 760-page volume entitled "Collection of Arguments by Chinese Party and State Organs and Officials in View of the Reforms [brought about by] the WTO."<sup>84</sup> This volume collects hundreds of articles from both open and *neibu* journals on the subject in question. It bears no publisher's name and no book number, and carries the remark "internal material" (*Neibu ziliao* 内部资料). The material assembled obviously served both to inform cadres on the challenges posed by China's accession to the World Trade Organization, and to provide them with policy options. The preface to a similar volume stated that the material collected there was originally mandatory reading for the participants in a workshop on "The Chinese Reforms and Development" (*Zhongguo gaige yu fazhan* 中国改革与发展) that were now made available to a broader circle of mid- and high-level cadres and policy researchers.<sup>85</sup> The practice of compiling collections of "reference material" is indeed an established CCP policy and has been used in the PRC on countless occasions, such as during political campaigns, when "black

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<sup>83</sup> This description of policy formulation processes in *neibu* publications is based on the author's reading of *Neibu wengao* and *Neibu weidinggao* 内部未定稿, a publication with the same format and function, published bimonthly from early 1964 to mid-1966, also by *Hongqi zazhishe*.

<sup>84</sup> *Zhongguo dang-zheng jigou he gongwuyuan dui WTO yantao lundian huiji*. Beijing, 2002, 2 vols.

<sup>85</sup> *Shi nian lai yingxiang Zhongyang gaoceng jingji juece de lundian huiji*. Beijing, June 2002, 2 vols. The book carries neither publisher nor book number; its contents are classified as "internal reference material" (*Neibu cankao ziliao* 内部参考资料)

material” (*hei cailiao* 黑材料) was collected to be used in the denunciation of individuals isolated as campaign targets.<sup>86</sup>

From the discussion on the last pages, the model of a highly fragmented public sphere emerges:<sup>87</sup> the Chinese population is classified into several layers characterized by the width and depth of the information they receive. At the very bottom of this hierarchy, even below the ordinary people, foreigners are to be found. Cadres range above the people as they have access to *neibu* materials. Within this bloc, we find numerous sub-divisions: according to the respective ranks, cadres might be included or excluded from distribution keys for *neibu* material.<sup>88</sup> The top leadership has unlimited access to large amounts of information of a stunning variety. Chart one is an effort to visualize the structures of controlled information access in the PRC. Alternatively, a model of concentric public spheres could be imagined, with foreigners situated in the middle, with the smallest horizon of information (like the proverbial frog in the well), and the other groups of the population in concentric rings of ever larger size around them, the size reflecting the broader horizon of information they have access to.

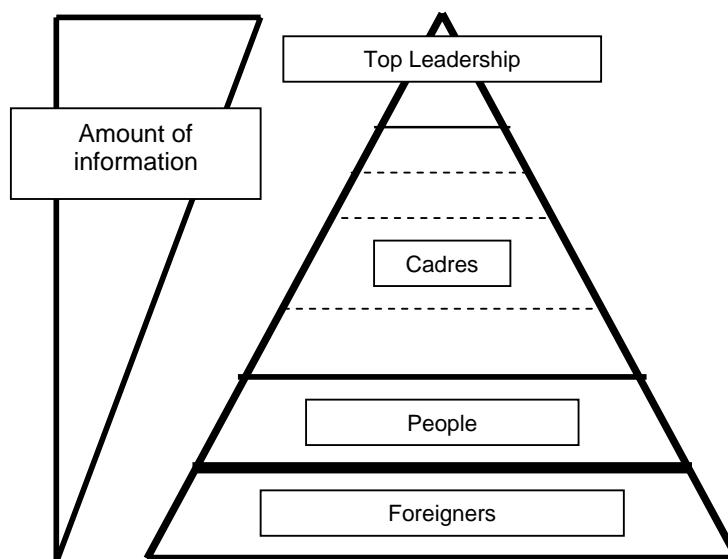
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<sup>86</sup> Among the most famous are “Guanyu Hu Feng fangeming jituan de cailiao,” published in three parts in RMRB, May 13, May 24, June 10, 1955; and *Pipan ziliao: Zhongguo Heluxiaofu Liu Shaoqi fangeming xiuzhengzhiyu yanlun ji*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe ziliaoshi, [1967], 3 vols. In the course of political campaigns, such compilations made from *neibu* materials, initially *neibu* themselves, could be made available to the public.

<sup>87</sup> As this section is based heavily on normative sources, it describes a prescriptive model rather than the empirical reality. Foreigners in China do of course have access to other sources of information; they are hardly the least informed community in China. Neither are the boundaries between the different levels drawn as sharp as the CCP would like them to be. Rather, informal channels (such as the famous “small way news” – *xiao dao xiaoxi* 小道消息) are responsible for a significant degree of the information circulating in Chinese society. What I describe here, thus, is but a model that reflects the views (or hopes) of the Chinese leadership that has devised this information structure. With this model, I hope to explain the *logic* of the system of layered or segmented information in the PRC.

<sup>88</sup> Similar hierarchies can be observed for information outside of the media system, namely in the flow of official documents. These usually carry detailed information on their respective distribution key and are classified variously as *neibu*, secret (*mimi*), crucially secret (*juemi* 绝密) etc. See Kenneth Lieberthal. *Central Documents and Politburo Politics in China*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1978, p. 15-16.

**Chart 1: The Information Pyramid**



Note: The amount of information available increases for people in higher positions. A small number of people at the very apex of the pyramid receives the most diverse and unfiltered information, whereas information given to foreigners in the PRC is most closely controlled. The permeability between the different layers in this model is uneven, information flows easier across some boundaries than across others. It must be stressed that this model reflects the theoretical rather than the actual information distribution in the PRC: due to their access to foreign news sources, foreigners in fact may have a better insight into political processes of the PRC than even people within the system, such as cadres. Conversely, the leadership might miss out on important pieces of information that are commonly known among the population, but are deliberately withheld from the leadership by cadres interested in protecting their career prospects. Thus, the above model explains the philosophy behind the media concept rather than the empirical reality, which is the subject of the second part of this study.

In this model practiced in the PRC, an ever smaller number of people receive an ever broader amount of information, information that is less edited and selected: the ordinary people are allowed to read only news reports that have been approved, have been checked on their being in line with current policies, and are finally printed in the newspapers. These people, the *yumin*, so the Party leadership believes, might be confused and misled by information from sources other than that filtered by the CCP. Too much openness in the Party's own media might even provide domestic and foreign class enemies with the means to undermine the Party and its rule. Withholding crucial pieces of information can thus be justified by security concerns (foreigners in China meet with the same kind of suspicion). According to this logic, cadres, and especially the higher leadership,

must devise counterstrategies to defeat any attempts in ideological subversion, and therefore need a maximum amount of intelligence. Thus, high-level cadres have at their disposal the most heterogeneous of sources from both China and abroad. As trained professional revolutionaries they are unlikely to be affected negatively by this non-homogenized intelligence, by information not yet interpreted, ambiguous in character, contradictory, or even misleading and false – information that is neither suitable nor necessary for the rest of the populace. The control of information access thus relates directly to the CCP's normative media concept.

### *Discourse Control*

In the PRC, state controls affect not only what is said, and to whom it is said, but also the way in which it is said. Both public discourses and the medium of these discourses, language itself, are subject to control by the CCP. Since the founding of the PRC, the Party has sought to impose an officially sanctioned linguistic code on the Chinese public sphere: rules are issued for formulations concerning practically all topics under discussion. These rules must be internalized by all participants in public discourse – the Party leadership, the personnel in the media sector, and the audiences. Consequently, deviations from official formulations or changes are detected immediately by those involved; deviating formulations are interpreted as signalling either a shift in policy or a conscious manipulation, that is, an expression of opposition. Entire fields of discourse are structured in this way – they are governed by nothing less than “master texts” that underlie the public discussion and determine how these issues can be formulated.<sup>89</sup>

While the existence of informal power structures in discursive settings and the exercise of this power through communication and the media, as well as the potential violence contained in these structures, has been discussed by Foucault

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<sup>89</sup> This argument and parts of this section follow the findings of Simone He in “Entering the World: Symbol und Wirklichkeit von Chinas Beitritt zur Welthandelsorganisation WTO (1995-2000): eine Diskursanalyse.” M.A. Thesis, Heidelberg University, 2001. I am grateful to Ms. He for permission to quote from her thesis.

and others,<sup>90</sup> the control of discursive formations through “master texts” in the PRC differs from these settings: rather than informal and hidden, the discursive setting in the PRC is characterized by entirely formalized power structures. These structures and the control of linguistic expression are openly acknowledged and their existence is justified as absolutely necessary and as beneficial to the population, who are the addressees of public discourse. It is the media concept that lends legitimacy to these structures of power.

Control of discourses operates on two levels, the level of themes and the level of formulations. Within a specified discourse, the Party authorities define those themes that will appear in the public discussion. For example, Simone He has investigated the discourse surrounding the negotiations for China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO): during the crucial years 1999-2001, a small number of themes were selected by the Party for constant repetition in all discussions of the issue (such as “excluding China from the organs of world trade is not in the national interest of the different countries,” or “under no circumstances will China sacrifice its own basic interests to enter the WTO.” With only minimal variation, these themes figure prominently in all public discussions on the WTO issue in China – Xinhua news agency releases, newspaper articles and comments, addresses of government spokespeople, and speeches by the national leadership.<sup>91</sup> This form of agenda-setting works in a highly selective way, stressing the core points of the CCP’s line on this issue, to the obvious neglect or suppression of other possible points.

A particular method to enforce the Party’s agenda-setting power are model formulations or *tifa* 提法 for the various arguments of an issue under discussion. Word clusters can be traced in newspaper and magazine articles over several years, with only minimal variation. Sticking to established formulations is crucial in the discursive system of the PRC where “the manipulation of any one formal

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<sup>90</sup> Asking “how is it that one particular appeared rather than another?” (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, p.27), Michel Foucault has pioneered the study of implied power structures in a wide variety of fields.

<sup>91</sup> He. *Entering the World*, p. 25-48, here p. 30, 40. For another example, the preparation of the master text for the Hong Kong handover in 1997, see Zhongdan Pan, Chin-Chuan Lee, Joseph Man Chan, Clement Y.K. So. “One Event, Three Stories: Media Narratives from Cultural China of the Handover of Hong Kong,” in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed.). *Power, Money, and Media: Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2000, p. 271-87, here p. 274.



element of formulation *A* is sufficient to transform it into formulation *B'* that will create a new meaning at variance with the old meaning – and, possibly, at variance with the intentions of the Party.<sup>92</sup> Formulations very often emanate from the highest echelons of the Party's formal hierarchy and are in fact quotations from speeches of the Party leadership. These quotations are unmarked,<sup>93</sup> but are recognizable for their authoritative nature due to their constant repetition. Their source – usually the national leadership – confirms the authoritative nature of formulations and reduces the leverage, for example of a journalist, to change them at will.<sup>94</sup>

In this way, the production of, say, a newspaper editorial, is an exercise in *bricolage*: to discuss an issue such as the WTO accession requires knowledge of the themes identified as necessary core elements that cannot be omitted, as well as familiarity with the “correct” (*zhengque* 正确) formulations for these issues. In the same vein, the long-winded speeches published after Party congresses for study in all government *danwei* are in effect endless series of *tifa* that cover all major policy issues and must be studied so closely because all cadres need to internalize the new discursive prescriptions. In sum, these factors lead to a high degree of formalization of the discourses concerned, a linguistic and thematic formalization that tends to increase the longer an issue is discussed. The result is a high argumentative density of the texts; even small details are invested with meaning.

Differences in the degree of formalization can be identified when texts are studied that operate in environments of a less normative nature. On the one hand, regional newspapers address a less sophisticated and informed audience, so the issues under discussion must be explained through examples and formulations beyond those sanctioned by the Party leadership. On the other end of the spectrum are specialized professional journals that discuss theoretical problems;

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<sup>92</sup> Quotation from Michael Schoenhals. *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies*. Berkeley, Ca.: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1992, p. 7. The issue of *tifa* is discussed in detail in *ibid.*, ch. 2. I will come back to this issue when discussing the implications of formalized language for the system of media control in the next section.

<sup>93</sup> An exception were utterances from Mao Zedong which were printed in bold type in books, journals, and newspaper from 1966 until shortly after the Cultural Revolution. In many cases, these were in fact not quotations, but rather *tifa*.

<sup>94</sup> Compare the discussion of *neibu* journals such as *Neibu wengao* for the production of new *tifa* in the preceding section of this chapter.

as the readership of these publications is generally smaller, they have more leeway in venturing beyond the uniform discursive limits. The degrees of formalization thus correspond roughly to the hierarchy of different media that was introduced in chapter one of this study.

Since the late 1990s, the distance between high-conformity and low-conformity discursive settings has grown significantly due to the proliferation of decentralized Internet-based media, such as chatrooms and discussion boards. In this setting, discourse control has become increasingly difficult.<sup>95</sup> Yet even here, the Party has by no means given up on control, as electronic censorship and various experiments with online activist-propagandists show. With regard to the Internet the same pattern is valid that has been identified earlier in this chapter: while leeway has grown for a large number of issue areas, a number of sensitive key issues remain off limits to public discussion;<sup>96</sup> it is in these areas that the government prerogatives of agenda-setting through *tifa* remain strongest.

Master texts that can be found in specific discourses do not stand alone; rather, they are engaged in constant interaction and dialogue with different countertexts available in the national and international public sphere. Traces of these countertexts can be found in interlocutionary elements that frequently appear in official discourses.<sup>97</sup> Formulations such as “somebody says...” (*you ren shuo* 有人说) or “somebody has spread rumours” (*you ren chuanyan shuo* 有人传言说) introduce arguments that are aimed at other opinions which are declared illegitimate or incorrect. These “other” opinions usually originate either in rumours circulating among the population, or in the foreign press. The latter has proved to be a constant headache for the Chinese government, as the flow of foreign media into China cannot be stemmed. The only way for the government to deal effectively with information that lies beyond the confines of the discourse controls

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<sup>95</sup> See He. *Entering the World*, p. 56-75.

<sup>96</sup> Compare chapter nine of this study.

<sup>97</sup> See Rudolf G. Wagner. “The Early Chinese Newspapers and the Chinese Public Sphere” in *EJEAS* 1.1 (2001), p. 1-33, here p. 15-16. Wagner discusses the dilemma of the Chinese government’s information policies during the 1989 Democracy Movement, when the population turned to the foreign media in droves to receive information not available in the Chinese media. The official press was therefore constantly preoccupied with refuting the latest rumours reported in the foreign press concerning the rift among the central leadership.

instituted in the national Chinese public sphere,<sup>98</sup> is to delegitimize it by sowing doubts concerning its credibility and to convince the public of the correctness of the arguments and formulations advocated by the CCP. This is the function of the interlocutory elements in public discourses.<sup>99</sup>

Discourse controls have significantly narrowed the spectrum of expression in the Chinese public sphere, and especially in the highly normative mass media of the central level. They allow the government to keep a considerable measure of control over the form in which the media transmit the information in the public sphere. The control of language serves the same purposes.

### *Language Control*

The final of the mechanisms employed by the CCP to control the media is the control of language itself.<sup>100</sup> Since 1949, the administration of language in the PRC has been a matter of concern for the highest leadership that led to interventions – sometimes even coming from Mao himself – into the day-to-day processes of the media. The linguistic tier is the lowest plane of control possible: the Party's ultimate goal is to achieve control over the media through the establishment of a fixed register of meaning that makes dissent all but impossible. Ideally, heterodox ideas can not be expressed because the proper linguistic means to do so do not exist. In its most extreme form, the formalized and sterile bureaucratic language of the PRC has become known as “Mao style” (*Mao wenti* 毛文体).<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> “... the Chinese government has rigorously maintained that the Chinese public sphere is coterminous with its national space.” Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> Such dialogues with other voices are in fact as old as the Chinese newspaper itself. See the discussion of this rhetoric convention in Janku. *Nur leere Reden*, ch. 5.

<sup>100</sup> Michael Schoenhals provides fascinating insights into the operation of language controls in the PRC in his *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*. For the origin of these controls see Rudolf G. Wagner. “Zhonggong 1940-1953 nian jianli zhengyu, zhengwen de zhengce dalüe” in Peng Xiaoyan (ed.). *Wenyi lilun yu tongshu wenhua*. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo chouben, 1999, p. 11-38.

<sup>101</sup> On *Mao wenti* and the struggle of Chinese writers to rid themselves of this linguistic corset after the Cultural Revolution see Li Tuo. “Xiandai Hanyu yu dangdai wenxue” in *Xindi wenxue* 1.6 (1991), p. 30-43. See also Li Tuo “Ding Ling bu jianan: Mao tizhi xia zhishifenzi zai huayu chansheng zhong de fuza jue” in *Jintian* 3 (1993), p. 222-42, where the author expands his argument from the linguistic corset to the closely related issue of fixed frameworks of reference for thinking.

The concern with linguistic issues predates the CCP's effort to control the written Chinese language. The *Lunyu* sets the "setting straight of names" (*zheng ming* 正名) into direct relation with governance.<sup>102</sup> This is but one aspect of a much broader discussion in premodern China based on the assumption that the wisdom of the sages of antiquity was hidden in the words of the classics and needed to be extracted by sophisticated means.<sup>103</sup> Since the legitimacy of any given regime in traditional China hinged on the correct understanding of the sages' words, language politics had a very high status quo and received much attention from Chinese commentators. During the early decades of the Qing dynasty, these considerations led to the establishment of the philological approach to the Chinese classics (*kaozhengxue* 考证学).<sup>104</sup>

While the objectives of the CCP are more mundane than those of their Qing predecessors, the rigor with which language is controlled has even increased thanks to the modern means of communications. Through internal channels, such as PD circulars, the CCP PD intervenes to advise the media on correct terminology. Interventions in linguistic matters and the prescription of terminology is also one of the functions of *Xuanchuan dongtai*, a crucially important internal bulletin in the propaganda sector.<sup>105</sup> For example, an item published in this journal in 1983 reads:<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Lunyu* 13.3 argues: "If the names are not correct, then words will not come straightforward; if words come not straightforward, then affairs will not succeed; if affairs do not succeed, the rites and music will not flourish; if rites and music do not flourish, then punishments will not be awarded properly; if punishments are not awarded properly, then the people are without provision on how to set hands and feet [i.e., to behave properly]" 名不正，则言不顺，言不顺，则事不成，事不成，则礼乐不兴，礼乐不兴，则刑罚不中，刑罚不中，则民无所措手足。

<sup>103</sup> On language philosophy and its relation to political philosophy in early China see Rudolf G. Wagner. *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China: Wang Bi's Scholarly Exploration of the Dark*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003, 5-82.

<sup>104</sup> On this topic see Benjamin Elman. *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge, Ma.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984.

<sup>105</sup> On the former see Schoenhals. *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*, ch. 2. On issues of language control in *Xuanchuan dongtai* see Michael Schoenhals (ed. and trsl.). "Selections from *Propaganda Trends*, Organ of the CCP Central Propaganda Department" in *Chinese Law and Government* 24.4 (1991-92), esp. "Editor's introduction" and the first section, dealing with terminology issues, p. 5-34.

<sup>106</sup> "Guanyu shiyong 'qinlao zhi fu' tifa de tongzhi" in Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu (ed.). *Xuanchuan dongtai 1983 nian xuanbianben*. Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1984, p. 254. Translation by Michael Schoenhals, taken from *Chinese Law and Government* 24.4 (1991-92), p. 29.

Propaganda Department Circular Approves of “Achieving Wealth Through Diligence”

To the Propaganda Departments of the Party Committees of the Provinces, Municipalities, and Autonomous Regions; the Propaganda Department of the PLA General Political Department; and the Party Committees and Party Groups of the units within the Central Propaganda Department system:

During a discussion in the Central Secretariat on July 11, 1983, agreement was expressed with Comrade Peng Xiao and Comrade Chen Qisheng’s suggestion that the formulation “achieving wealth through labour” be replaced by “achieving wealth through diligence,” and it was decided that this formulation first of all be employed in documents of the centre, the State Council, and the departments and committees under the centre and the State Council, and in central-level broadcasts, newspapers, and journals, and that it then be gradually popularized. At the grass-roots level, among the masses, and in the works of individual writers, however, the continued use of the formulation “achieving wealth through labour” need not be prohibited.

The Central Propaganda Department  
July 28, 1983

The new formulation had been proposed earlier that year with the argument that “diligence” is a term more inclusive than “labour” and has more appeal to people engaging in work other than physical labour – especially to the intellectuals that had been rehabilitated as a part of the working class the year before.<sup>107</sup> In this case, a PD circular was deemed important enough to be reprinted in *Xuanchuan dongtai*. It is interesting to see here the different layers of the public sphere receiving different treatment: the central media must immediately adopt the new formula, while media on lower levels are given more leeway. The formalization of language, and the need to comply with these prescriptions, is graded; the relative significance attached to the media in question determines how closely they must follow the new guidelines.

In some cases on record, the Party centre or individual top leaders of the CCP have intervened directly to affect changes of just a single character. In early 1951, the CC issued a directive that, among others, forbade the use of common geographical abbreviations such as *Yu* 渝 for Chongqing or *Min* 闽 for Fujian.<sup>108</sup> No reason was given for this bureaucratic measure; it probably served simply

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<sup>107</sup> “Jianyi shiyong ‘qinlao zhi fu’ de tifa” in Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu (ed.). *Xuanchuan dongtai 1983 nian xuanbianben*, p. 215. Translated by Michael Schoenhals in *Chinese Law and Government* 24.4 (1991-92), p. 28.

<sup>108</sup> “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jiu zheng dianbao, baogao, zhishi, jue ding deng wenzi quedian de zhishi” in Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan xinwen yanjiusuo (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang xinwen gongzuo wenjian huibian* (XGWH). Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1980, 3 vols., here vol. 2, p. 176-81.

reasons of clarity and was intended to reduce ambiguity. Similar considerations motivated Hu Qiaomu, then PD vice-head, to hold a series of “breakfast chats” with junior editors of RMRB in spring 1955.<sup>109</sup> In these meetings (the transcripts appeared in book form in 1978 to serve as textbook material), Hu discussed articles from recent RMRB issues and addressed problems, mistakes, and weaknesses in these texts. Many of the very detailed comments of Hu concern expressions and formulations used incorrectly. On a short RMRB article from May 11, 1955, for example, Hu had the following to say: “This short article contains some mistaken formulations: firstly, it says that ‘children, with the first cry at their birth, become future citizens.’ Adding the word ‘future’ is unnecessary here, because children are citizens from the very moment of their birth, this is what the constitution mandates. Secondly, the argument ‘the children belong to the state’ is not correct; people cannot belong to the state, because as citizens they live their lives autonomously.”<sup>110</sup> Both formulations are mistaken only by nuances, but these nuances could lead to misinterpretations and can therefore not be tolerated. The attention a senior politician like Hu devoted to such minute issues of language is remarkable.<sup>111</sup>

Hu Qiaomu was not the only politician to pay close attention to the linguistic level of media work,<sup>112</sup> but he was in a special position to do so, because he was involved in the first place in the formulation of the mainstream of bureaucratized language that was elevated to the position of the universal standard language.<sup>113</sup> Besides various other occupations and activities of Hu in the early 1950s, he

<sup>109</sup> See Xinwen yanjiusuo (ed.). *Tantan baozhi gongzuo*. N.p., 1978. The “breakfast chats” are collected in the second part of this volume. The book is discussed in Schoenhals. *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*, ch. 4. On the background of the talks see *ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>110</sup> *Tantan baozhi gongzuo*, p. 185.

<sup>111</sup> Hu’s interventions into language politics were no isolated incident; rather, he set precedents for similar efforts to prescribe language in later times. For some recent examples see the following volumes: An Rupan, Zhao Yuling. *Baokan yong ci bu dang 1000 li*. Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2001, 2 vols. An Rupan, Zhao Yuling. *Baokan chengyu wu yong 1000 li*. Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2001.

<sup>112</sup> Mao Zedong himself carefully read important editorials and changed passages he felt inappropriate. Mao also corrected formulations and single words. An entire section (p. 303-436) of *Mao Zedong xinwen gongzuo wenxuan* contains “corrected drafts” (*gaigao* 改稿). An especially interesting case is a June 6, 1951, RMRB editorial entitled “Correctly use the language of the motherland, struggle for the cleanness and health of the language” (*Zhengque de shiyong zuguo de yuyan, wei yuyan de chunjie he jiankang er douzheng*), *ibid.*, p. 405-11. On p. 413 is a facsimile of Mao’s handwritten corrections. This important programmatic editorial, a landmark of PRC language policy, is discussed in Wagner. “Zhonggong 1940-1953 nian jianli zhengyu, zhengwen de zhengce dalüe,” p. 29ff.

<sup>113</sup> Compare *ibid.*, p. 18 and *passim*.

participated in the compilation of Mao's *Selected Works* (*Mao Zedong xuanji* 毛泽东选集).<sup>114</sup> The first volume appeared in 1951, volume four in 1960. While this was not the first edition of Mao's works, an unusual amount of scrutiny went into the process of selecting and editing Mao's writings. All articles and speeches included in the four volumes were edited carefully: while some items experienced more significant changes, for the most part the work of the compilation committee was limited to polishing and standardizing the style. Yet it is exactly these stylistic "improvements" that are of interest for us. The changes in "Fandui dang bagu," for example, are relatively minor in nature. On one occasion, for example, "war" was changed into "war against aggression," making the meaning more precise. In many instances, the colloquial *he* 和 replaced the copula *yu* 与, used frequently in written Chinese. On the other hand, Mao's colloquial abbreviation *Ma-Liezhuyi* 马列主义 was replaced with the full form *Makesi-Lieningzhuyi* 马克思列宁主义 in hundreds of passages.<sup>115</sup> In the course of this process, Mao's texts were transformed into a highly homogenous and linguistically entirely rational body of texts that henceforth served as the single most important model of modern Chinese that was taught, studied, and emulated at every occasion for the next thirty years. "Mao style" was born – the ultimate paragon of a bureaucratized, controlled idiom against which all other utterances were measured. *Mao wenti* created a new standard in the PRC that was the precondition for the institutionalization of the linguistic control of the media.

Finally, the CCP extended its ambitions in the management of communication to the sub-linguistic level of the Chinese characters. Only ten days after the founding of the PRC the Chinese Association on Character Reform (Zhongguo wenzi gaige xiehui 中国文字改革协会) was established to explore options to simplify the Chinese characters, and possibly even their abolishment in

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<sup>114</sup> On Hu's involvement see Ye Yonglie. *Mao Zedong de mishumen*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1994, p. 60-62. In this key project (Mao himself revised the texts, Liu Shaoqi was in charge of the first three volumes) Hu was responsible especially for grammar and language. He was later entrusted with the overall responsibility for volume four.

<sup>115</sup> A very convenient tool to track these changes is the Japanese edition by Takeuchi Minoru (ed.). *Mo Taku-to shu*. Tokyo: Hokubosha, 1970, 10 vols. This edition meticulously marks all differences between the early texts, as published in JFRB and elsewhere, and the *Selected Works* versions. For "Fandui dang bagu" see vol. 8, p. 89-108; the examples can be found on p. 93.

the long term in favour of all-out Romanization.<sup>116</sup> In 1956 and 1964, the Chinese Character Reform Committee (Zhongguo wenzi gaige weiyuanhui 中国文字改革委员会), since 1954 the Association's successor body, produced two tables with simplified characters that were henceforth used in all newspapers, books, and other print products.<sup>117</sup> On the surface level, the rationale behind the simplified characters was to facilitate the efforts to erase illiteracy, but they had the additional effect to define the claims of the CCP to exert its authority over the consumption of information even on the level of characters.<sup>118</sup> Later generations that have grown up with the simplified characters increasingly feel the consequences of these efforts in political symbolism and sub-linguistic control, as the barrier to read traditional characters alienates large groups of the population from reading matter not under control of the authority of the CCP.

Through the introduction of simplified characters and the other measures of language control discussed in this section, the CCP has worked hard to create a unique form of language that is highly standardized and bureaucratized. Grammar, vocabulary, writing conventions, and even characters were to conform closely to the ideals of the Party – not only to the language of newspapers and the state television broadcasts, but also to the most various kinds of writings, including non-official communication and *belles lettres*.<sup>119</sup> The Party's success in implementing these prescriptions is striking: the degree of linguistic conformity in much of the literature produced in the PRC even today is most remarkable. This compliance

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<sup>116</sup> On this early stage see Constantin Milsky. *Préparation de la réforme de l'écriture en République populaire de Chine, 1949-1954*. Paris: Mouton & Co., 1974.

<sup>117</sup> See Wenzi gaige zazhi bianjibu (ed.). *Jianguo yilai wenzi gaige gongzuo biannian jishi*. Beijing: Wenzi gaige chubanshe, 1985. A third stage of character reform was announced in late 1977. See GMRB, Dec. 20, 1977. The proposals of this third stage, however, proved so unpopular that they never went beyond the experimental stage and were withdrawn after a short time. On this latter stage see Hans-Jörg Geduhn. *Sprachplanung in der Volksrepublik China, 1976-1980*. Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1985, ch. 5.

<sup>118</sup> The fact that the Party leadership, including Mao Zedong, concerned themselves with this issue added weight to the character reform project. On Mao's involvement see "Letter to Wu Yuzhang" (dated Aug. 29, 1949) in *Mao Zedong shuxin xuanji*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1984, p. 336-37. The context of the letter is given in *Jianguo yilai wenzi gaige gongzuo biannian jishi*, p. 6. Hu Qiaomu, too, was deeply involved in the character reform issue. See *Hu Qiaomu tan yuyan wenzi*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1999.

<sup>119</sup> The fascination of the novels and screenplays of Wang Shuo 王朔, the *enfant terrible* of the mainland literary scene after 1990, comes to a considerable degree from his mockery of this official style, which is decontextualized in his works and thus exposed in its absurdity. See, for example, the dialogues in the soap opera *Bianjibu de gushi* that is discussed in chapter eight of this study.



must explained by the sheer dearth of alternative writing styles available in the public sphere.<sup>120</sup>

### *The Issue of Censorship*

Before concluding this chapter, I will briefly discuss the important issue of censorship. Censorship has existed and does exist in the PRC. The forms, however, that Chinese censorship has taken differ markedly from censorship in other authoritarian regimes, and in the first place from censorship practices in the Soviet Union.<sup>121</sup>

In the early years of the Soviet Union, the CPSU developed an extensive censorship bureaucracy.<sup>122</sup> Glavlit (shorthand for Glavnoe upravlenie po delam literatury i izdatv, the Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs), was a centralized institution created in 1922 with the purpose “to unite all forms of censorship of printed works.”<sup>123</sup> Glavlit and its successor organizations (different name, same function) were responsible for censoring all books, journals, and newspapers in the entire Soviet Union. They did so by either receiving manuscript copies before these went to press, or by sending so-called “political editors” as plenipotentiaries to newspapers and publishing houses. Since 1931, all publications were required to carry the date of publication approval in the imprint at the end of each book, as well as a number code identifying the responsible censor. The censorship process usually included a check of the manuscript before it was sent to the print shop, the distribution of “signal copies” to higher organs, and the deposition of further obligatory copies in the main libraries. Only then would the

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<sup>120</sup> See Li Tuo's complaints in “Xiandai Hanyu yu dangdai wenxue.”

<sup>121</sup> On censorship in the PRC see especially Schoenhals. *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*, ch. 5 and *passim*; Schoenhals. “Media Censorship in the People's Republic of China” in Susan Whitfield (ed.). *After the Event: Human Rights and their Future in China*. London: Wellsweep Press, 1993, p. 61-72; Lynch. *After the Propaganda State*. See also Perry Link. *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000.

<sup>122</sup> On the institutions and methods of censorship in the Soviet Union see Peter Kenez. *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Herman Ermolaev. *Censorship in Soviet Literature, 1917-1991*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997. Walker. *Soviet Book Publishing Policy*, esp. p. 28-41. See also Walker's contribution “Soviet Publishing Since the October Revolution” in Miranda Beaven Remnek (ed.). *Books in Russia and the Soviet Union: Past and Present*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991, p. 59-91.

<sup>123</sup> Ermoleav. *Censorship in Soviet Literature*, p. 3.

formal printing permission be given. This kind of full-fledged pre-publication censorship required massive manpower, and by 1939 Glavlit had grown into a gargantuan operation employing over 6,000 personnel in Moscow and its provincial outlets, supervising all newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, the TASS news agency, and the public library system. Glavlit issued its own internal bulletin and published handbooks on banned issues. Furthermore, it cooperated closely with the GPU (the secret police); the coercive side of censorship thus loomed always in the background.<sup>124</sup>

While many countries in the socialist world emulated the Soviet system,<sup>125</sup> the CCP opted for a different path. In the PRC, no institutional bureaucratic regime of pre-publication censorship was ever instituted. Different reasons can be established for the Chinese decision not to copy this aspect of the Soviet system of governance. First, there is the question of manpower: when the CCP rose to power in 1949, its reserve of literate, trained and reliable cadres was stretched extremely thin in the effort to organize the multitude of administrative tasks. Even a field as crucial as the propaganda sector had to do with scarce resources, as the next chapter will illustrate. Born out of these circumstances of strain, however, was also a very different approach to governance: the CCP always favoured methods of indirect control of the population, as opposed to heavy-handed policing. This is obvious from the fact that the secret police and the secret service never played a role in the internal affairs of the PRC comparable to that of the GPU in the Soviet Union or the “Stasi” in East Germany, where at times roughly ten percent of the population were spying on each other and were registered with the Ministry of Public Security as “unofficial employees.”<sup>126</sup> With its political campaigns, the CCP developed in the early years of the PRC an approach to mobilizing and policing the population that proved much more effective than the bureaucratic approach of the Soviet Union: the psychological impact of the campaigns produced pressures to conform and participate that led to a high degree of compliance on the side of

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., Introduction and ch. 1. The 1939 figure is from ch. 2.

<sup>125</sup> A fascinating insight into the Polish censorship regime is given in Jane Leftwich Curry. *The Blackbook of Polish Censorship*. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.

<sup>126</sup> David Childs, Richard Popplewell. *The Stasi: The East German Intelligence and Security Service*. New York: New York University Press, 1996. On the Chinese intelligence services see Roger Faligot, Rémi Kauffer. *The Chinese Secret Service*. New York: Morrow, 1989. See also Zhong Kan. *Kang Sheng pingzhuan*. Beijing: Hongqi chubanshe, 1982.

the individual. Even without permanent controls, the very eventuality of being subjected to the psychological agony and the enormous peer pressure that campaign victims faced, did suffice to force large parts of the Chinese population into compliance for decades.<sup>127</sup> How little leeway dissenting voices could find, and how fragile and isolated the individual forays of these voices in fact were, becomes only visible in comparison to the strong traditions of dissent in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, be it the Russian *samizdat* press in the 1970s or the highly organized political opposition in Poland in the 1980s. Nothing comparable could ever develop in China after 1949.<sup>128</sup>

The mass campaign approach to governance and the techniques of psychological persuasion have shaped the propaganda sector. The numbers of staff of the CCP PD – never exceeding 500 – are dwarfed by those of the Soviet Glavlit, an institution with in fact a much narrower field of activity. Under these circumstances, comprehensive pre-publication censorship was feasible at no point in the history of the PRC,<sup>129</sup> it would outright impossible today: there are about 2,000 newspapers and 8,200 magazines in the PRC, and about 83,000 new books are produced annually<sup>130</sup> – far too many to be controlled comprehensively by any bureaucracy.

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<sup>127</sup> On the mechanics of mass campaigns see Gordon Bennett. *Yundong: Mass Campaigns in Chinese Communist Leadership*. Berkeley: Center of Chinese Studies, 1976.

<sup>128</sup> Tomasz Goban-Klas (in an otherwise disappointing book) shows to what degree media workers of the solidarity movement could free themselves of the grip of Polish state. *The Orchestration of the Media: The Politics of Mass Communication in Communist Poland and the Aftermath*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, ch. 10-12.

<sup>129</sup> The only exception here is film: even in the reform era, the number of films produced annually in the PRC never rose to a point where films could not be subjected to comprehensive and detailed scrutiny by the PD's Film Bureau. Film scripts are inspected before filming starts, and the finished films are again subject to inspection before they are allowed to be screened. In the scale of sensitivity of the different media forms introduced in chapter one, film ranks at the top, which explains the unusual amount of attention film receives. The financial and technical input required for the production of film has facilitated the CCP's efforts of control, as the non-official production of films was all but impossible until the advent of VHS systems and hand-held video cameras. Chinese film producers have turned to foreign sources of financing to avoid harassment of the propaganda authorities, and to have the possibility to show their films abroad in case they are not cleared by the PD for domestic screening. Film censorship is regulated by "Dianying shencha zanxing guiding" (issued by the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television, June 4, 1993). See Xingzhengyuan dalu weiyuanhui. *Dalu dazhong chuanbo fangui huibian*, p. 399-406. On censorship in the field of television see the section on the TV series *Heshang* in chapter eight.

<sup>130</sup> Figures (for 1999) from Guojia tongjibu (ed.). *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 2000*. Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2000, p. 752.

Yet the absence of full-scale pre-publication censorship does not mean that there are no institutionalized censorship mechanisms in the PRC.<sup>131</sup> First of all, the big central-level newspapers are compiled in close cooperation with the Party leadership.<sup>132</sup> Next, there is indeed pre-publication censorship for books on a small range of topics, such as religion, minority issues, Party history, Party and state leaders, or the Cultural Revolution.<sup>133</sup> Works on these subjects are considered sensitive enough to require an inspection of the manuscript, in some cases by specialists like those of the Central Party School.<sup>134</sup> Maps have to be checked by the National Bureau of Cartography (Guojia cehuiju 国家测绘局).<sup>135</sup> It is in these sensitive areas that the Party feels its basic interests are at stake; books on such topics thus receive special scrutiny. The bulk of publications in the PRC, however, is controlled by other mechanisms.

A PPA document issued in 1994 details the forms of censorship for books:<sup>136</sup>

The characteristics of the administration of book publishing require not only to make ex-post investigations of books already published, but also to examine the Book Publishing Title Selection Plans (BPTSP), in order to understand and to analyze from a macro-perspective the total number, structure, characteristics, and trends of books to be published. Therefore, book inspection does here include two aspects:

a. Inspection of BPTSP

Inspection of BPTSP means normally the inspection of the annual BPTSP and specially submitted BPTSPs. For specially submitted BPTSPs, in accordance with the relevant guidelines, in addition to the title selection plan, the manuscript [itself] will be inspected.

b. Inspection of books already published

Special inspection is targeted; for books that might arouse problems or where problems have been indicated by sides concerned, special inspectors are organized to carry out inspection.

Normal inspection is routine inspection of books published, with the intention of discovering problems, understanding trends, and grasping the trends of publishing.

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<sup>131</sup> There is no word in Chinese specifically referring to “suppression or prohibition of speech or writing” (this being the English definition). In official documents, a number of terms are used to characterize the activities usually associated with censorship, including *jiancha* 检查, *shencha* 审查, *shendu* 审读, and sometimes *yanjiu* 研究 and *jiandu* 监督. None of these, however, carries the same negative connotations generally implied by “censorship.”

<sup>132</sup> See esp. Wu Guoguang. “Command Communication: The Politics of Editorial Formulation in the *People’s Daily*” in CQ 137 (March 1994), p. 194-211.

<sup>133</sup> Interviewees 101, 105, 106.

<sup>134</sup> Interviewee 002, summer 2000.

<sup>135</sup> See “Ditu shenhe guanli banfa” in *Zhongguo chuban nianjian* 1997, p. 278-80.

<sup>136</sup> “Guanyu jiaqiang tushu shendu gongzuo de tongzhi” (dated June 16, 1994) in *Zhongguo chuban nianjian* 1995, p. 230-31.

The PPA conducts pre-publication and post-publication censorship. Pre-publication censorship is based primarily on publication plans (BPTSP) that all publishing houses must submit annually to the PPA; the PPA (or the local organs) then decides which of the books on the plan can be published without further notice, and which manuscripts must be submitted before publication. The annual publication plans must be handed over to the provincial Press and Publication Bureaus in December, and are consequently passed on upwards to the PPA. The publication plans must contain the title of every book to be published in the next year, the name of the author, and a short outline of the content, usually two to three lines.<sup>137</sup> The manuscripts of books listed in the “specially submitted BPTSPs” must be submitted to the PPA together with a report on their specific “problems,” as well as a proposal of how to deal with them (article 3 of the document).

Post-publication censorship can be targeted, which means the inspection of publications that have already drawn criticism; but post-publication censorship is conducted also on the basis of routine screening. The document quoted above stipulates that this screening be conducted in the form of biweekly and quarterly reports of the local Press and Publication Bureaus to the PPA (article 4). These reports shall provide up-to-date information on the latest developments in the publishing sector so as to facilitate quick responses. The reports will be reprinted in a publication called *Quanguo fapai xinshu banyuebao* 全国发排新书半月报, issued by the Information Center (Xinxi zhongxin 信息中心) of the PPA. Organizationally, a vice-head of each provincial Press and Publication Bureau is supposed to oversee post-publication censorship, which is carried out by especially appointed “book inspection teams” (*shendu banzi* 审读班子, see article 6); the names of the members of these teams, i.e. the “responsible persons,” must be reported to the PPA.

Conducting pre-publication censorship for periodicals is more difficult due to tight publishing schedules and time constraints. Newspapers and journals are therefore usually subjected to post-publication censorship. There can be exceptions, however: for half a year after the suppression of the 1989 Democracy

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<sup>137</sup> Interviews summer 2000. Very extensive publication plans have been a major tool of the coordination and supervision of book publishing in the Soviet Union. See Walker. *Soviet Book Publishing Policy*, p. 39-44.

Movement, the liberal journal *Dushu* was required to have each issue approved before publication.<sup>138</sup> Drastic measures like these, however, are the exception to the rule. The publication administration authorities normally use other means to direct the publishing policy of Chinese periodicals; circulars inhibiting reports on a specific subject are often carried in the CCP Propaganda Department's journal *Xuanchuan dongtai*. In early 1996, the propaganda authorities anticipated the interest of many magazines and publishers in the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Cultural Revolution. To avoid widespread public discussions, the CCP issued a circular in April that year, strictly forbidding any commemorative articles in journals and other activities. When the journal *Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志 defied the order, it was shut down. Yet the Party's behaviour is stereotyped and thus can be guessed in advance; in the particular case, *Dushu* magazine had anticipated the Centre's move and published its articles on that subject in February, thus avoiding any serious consequences.<sup>139</sup>

In the majority of cases, however, the CCP relies on post-publication censorship to check the compliance of the media. For this system to function properly, the CCP has developed a unique mechanism which is called the "responsibility system" (*zeren zhi* 责任制). While in a centralized censorship regime the ultimate responsibility for the content of a publication rests with the censors, the CCP has shifted this responsibility one level downwards, to the editors. Editing is consequently said to be "the key link of the publishing houses' work; to ensure good editing is the key to realize publication plans and to raise the quality of books."<sup>140</sup> In practice, the "responsible editor system" means that the editor of a particular magazine or book is responsible for its content. A 1980 document requires that "the responsible editor must carefully edit, refine, and organize those manuscripts that have been accepted. If there are any problems, like [passages that] contravene the current state laws and policies or leak party and state secrets, as well as omissions and defects of content or argumentation, the responsible editor should turn with his criticism to the author or should discuss

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<sup>138</sup> Interviewee 109.

<sup>139</sup> Interviewee 109.

<sup>140</sup> "Chuban gongzuo zanxing tiaoli," issued by the CCP PD (dated April 22, 1980), in *Zhongguo chuban nianjian 1980*, p. 624-28, here p. 625.

revisions with him.”<sup>141</sup> Chinese editors thus shoulder tasks that go far beyond the mere editing of texts: they have to judge the content’s compliance with state laws and Party principles and policies.

Under the “editor responsibility system,” editors are made responsible for anything they have allowed to pass for good. § 24 of the 1997 “Administrative Regulations for Publishing” has the editors assume legal liability: “The publishing units practice the system of editor responsibility and *guarantee* that the content of the publications is in accordance with the provisions of these regulations.”<sup>142</sup> As a rule, no book can appear without the name of the “responsible editor” (*zeren bianji* 责任编辑) appearing in the imprint information. By making the editors guarantee for the publications they handle, they are taking over censorial functions – the “responsible editor system” is in fact the key element of censorship in the PRC. If any problems are found with a given book upon publication, the authorities can track down the culprit without even contacting the publishing house. For periodical publications, the situation is slightly different: while some journals list the names of editors of single articles, most do not do so;<sup>143</sup> the editor-in-chief of a periodical is generally responsible for the content of the entire issue. The editors-in-chief of newspapers shoulder even heavier responsibilities.<sup>144</sup>

Incidents of editors being made liable for works found to have problems abound. When Zhang Xianliang’s 张贤亮 novel *Zao’an! Pengyou* 早安! 朋友 drew criticism in spring 1987 for describing the sexual psychology of middle school students, the Ningxia magazine *Shuofang* 朔方 was ordered to stop serializing the book. The authorities turned with their complaints to the journal office and the editors, who were accused of having violated guidelines concerning pornography;

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in practice editors “discuss revisions” only with the most influential authors; very often, changes are carried out without further notice to the author.

<sup>142</sup> In *Zhongguo chuban nianjian 1998*, here p. 231. Emphasis added.

<sup>143</sup> Among literary journals, for example, the renowned *Shouhuo* 收获 does not publish the names of editors of individual pieces, nor do *Dushu* 读书 or *Wenxue yichan* 文学遗产; *Dangdai* 当代 does since 1996, *Zhongshan* 钟山 since about 1994, and *Shiyue* 十月 since spring 1989. The situation looks similar for non-literary journals. Overall, the number of journals providing the names of responsible editors is on the rise, implying an increasing stress on control.

<sup>144</sup> Legislation in the U.S. follows exactly the opposite logic. In a landmark ruling in 1997, the Supreme Court declared the 1996 Communications Decency Act unconstitutional, on the grounds that it would impose too high thresholds on Internet service providers that could result in legal liability. See [http://www.ciec.org/SC\\_appeal/decision.shtml](http://www.ciec.org/SC_appeal/decision.shtml) (downloaded Dec. 1, 2005).

the author, however, was by and large left alone.<sup>145</sup> In spring 2000 the novel *Shanghai baobei* 上海宝贝 by the upstart author Zhou Weihui 周卫慧 came under attack and was consequently withdrawn from circulation; the book's publisher, the Shenyang based Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe 春风文艺出版社, an innovative publishing house with a solid reputation, was made to bear the blame. The editors of the book were fired and the entire editorial board was "rectified" (*zhengdun* 整顿).<sup>146</sup> The remarkable point, however, is that the author herself was left alone; bad press notwithstanding, she continued to write and give interviews. As so often, the condemnation of the book had the adverse effect of creating curiosity that greatly increased Zhou Weihui's publicity, producing a run on pirated copies that suddenly were available everywhere and brought the book to the attention of Taiwan and international publishers.<sup>147</sup> While denouncing *Shanghai baobei* has backfired on the surface, the penalties handed out created a strong disincentive for serious publishers (not so for illegal publishers attracted by the amounts of income generated by the hype) to engage in similar projects. At the same time, the Chinese government avoided international condemnation that would inevitably have followed the persecution of a writer. Punishing the editors is far more economical.

The "responsibility system" targets not only the "responsible editor" of a given book or magazine article, but is extended to the entire hierarchy of the media unit in question through the "three tier system" (*san ceng zhidu* 三层制度), commonly known as "triple inspection system" (*san shen zhi* 三审制): books and articles that are prepared for publication must be examined and approved on three layers within the publishing unit before going to print. These procedures are mandated by official documents guiding publishing: "To make general judgments concerning the political content and the academic (artistic) quality of a manuscript, and to decide whether or not to use it, [publishing houses] should normally adopt the three layer system of examining manuscripts, i.e., preliminary examination by

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<sup>145</sup> See "Publishing: Unified management," p. 17. On Zhang Xianliang see the articles by Perry Link, Jeffrey C. Kinkley, Yenna Wu, and Philip E. Williams in *Asia Major* 4.2, 1991.

<sup>146</sup> Interviewees 106 and 002. See also Craig S. Smith. "A 'Decadent Best-Seller' Provokes Beijing's Wrath" in *International Herald Tribune*, May 12, 2000.

<sup>147</sup> See Suh-kyong Yoon. "The Crying Game" in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Apr. 12, 2001, p. 64-66, here p. 66.



the editor (or assistant editor), re-, and final examination by the chief of the editorial board and the editor-in-chief.”<sup>148</sup> Responsibility is thus shared on the three technical levels within publishing units, with the “responsible editors” shouldering the heaviest load. Yet if a publisher is found to have overstepped the rules, the upper two layers can also be blamed.

Similar processes are at work in the newspaper system: the vice editor-in-chiefs responsible for particular sections (for example national news, literature and art, or economic news) must pass upwards their print sheets; only after approval from the editor-in-chief (who is usually also responsible for the *yaowen* 要闻, i.e. “important news” section on page one) can the paper be printed. In exceptional cases, the editor-in-chief might refer single pieces to higher levels, mostly the PD, for approval. In most cases, however, newspapers work through the responsibility system.<sup>149</sup> In recent years, the responsibility system has been further expanded to cover the new media; for the Internet it has been in place since 2002.<sup>150</sup>

On a psychological plane, the system of editor responsibility is based on the assumption that individuals in the publishing process will react to pressure exerted on them by avoiding conflict and complying with the rules. The three-tier system provides additional checks: it is considered rather unlikely that three individual editors on different hierarchical levels will take the risk to offend the authorities, even given other incentives (for example, of a financial nature). Indeed, the overwhelming majority of violations that have occurred in spite of the responsibility system seem to concern the ban on pornography, a particularly lucrative business where the expected monetary rewards make the risk worthwhile. Instances of political dissent in the Chinese media, in contrast, have been and still are few and far between. The success of the CCP’s efforts to mute dissenting political voices in the media must be attributed to a large degree to the psychological pressures of the editor responsibility system.

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<sup>148</sup> “Chuban gongzuo zanxing tiaoli” (1980), p. 625. On the “triple responsibility system” see also Chen Fong-ching and Jin Guantao. *From Youthful Manuscripts to River Elegy: The Chinese Popular Cultural Movement and Political Transformation, 1979-1989*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1997, p. 99.

<sup>149</sup> Interviewee 002 summer 2000. See also Wu Guoguang. “Command Communication.”

<sup>150</sup> Li Liang, Yu Li. “Shisi bu-wei lianhe ‘jinghua’ hulianwang” *Nanfang zhoumo*, 18 Aug. 2005, at [http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk\\_wzdetails.asp?id=4428](http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=4428) (downloaded 07 Apr. 2007).

Finally, self-censorship plays a significant role in the control of the media.<sup>151</sup> Avoidance of politically sensitive topics on the side of the authors has become especially relevant in the depoliticized setting of the reform era, when topics no longer classified as sensitive were available in abundance. Many authors' interest in political issues declined with the normalization of social relations after the Cultural Revolution and especially with the rise of consumerism in the 1990s. For a variety of reasons, only a small minority of writers is willing to address topics that at best might prove difficult to publish, and at worst will bring them into serious conflict with the bureaucracy. Authors have always tended to write only things that they could reasonably expect to be published in the foreseeable future. Writing for the drawer is an option appealing to only few writers. Even during the Cultural Revolution, when publishing was almost impossible, those writers that continued writing did so with the hope of a relaxation of the political climate. What they had in mind, however, was not a full-fledged opening up of the system, but rather a return to a situation comparable to that of the 1950s; consequently, the "implied censor" was at work even in these "manuscripts for the drawer."<sup>152</sup> This became obvious when these works could be published in the years immediately following the Cultural Revolution: most of them were felt to be written in an ideological and theoretical straightjacket all too rigid for the liberal 1980s; they had lost their appeal within a few years.

To sum up, censorship does exist in the PRC and it has taken many different forms. These forms, however, differ significantly from the heavy-handed bureaucratic censorship regimes once practiced in the Soviet Union and most Eastern European countries. These differences are related to the nature of the Chinese media concept: the media concept gives absolute power in the media sector to the CCP and also provides the rationale for this construction. The concept itself, however, is formulated in a relatively vague and open manner; it refrains from giving too rigid prescriptions. Consequently, the Party can choose whatever means available at a given time to translate the vision provided by the media concept into concrete political terms. This flexibility guaranteed the success

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<sup>151</sup> On the topic of self-censorship see Bonnie S. McDougall. "Censorship and Self-Censorship in Contemporary Chinese Literature" in Whitfield (ed.). *After the Event*, p. 73-90.

<sup>152</sup> The concept of the "implied censor," always present in a writer's back of the mind, has been advanced by Rudolf Wagner in an unpublished paper "The Implied Censor in Chinese Literature." I am grateful to the author for making this paper available to me.

of the concept in the Yan'an era, when the CCP found itself under serious material constraints; it proved to be the winning formula once again in 1949. Faced with a serious shortage of qualified personnel the Party was forced to find alternative mechanisms to control the media. As a result, the CCP built a censorship regime that was based less on comprehensive pre-publication censorship than on psychological pressures to enforce the compliance of the media. These pressures are directed at authors, who succumb to self-censorship in order to have a realistic chance of getting their manuscripts published. More importantly, editors in China's publishing houses and newspaper offices bear the brunt of publishing control: through the editor responsibility system – a genuine Chinese invention – they are made responsible for whatever they allow to pass. If, in retrospect, any book or article is found to have overstepped the limits set by the Party, the editors are held liable and may be punished. In the long run, the psychological approach to censorship proved to be not only economical, but much more effective than the Soviet model: printed public expression of dissent in the PRC never reached the scale it did in other regimes of the Socialist world.

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The above conclusions with regard to the nature of censorship in the PRC can in fact be extended to the whole apparatus of media controls: the CCP exerts control primarily through indirect mechanisms. The impact of these mechanisms may not be as obvious as the official stamp of censorship approval in Soviet books, but in the long run they have proved much more effective than the Orwellian bureaucracy of control practiced in the Soviet Union (or, for that, the control efforts of the GMD).

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the mechanics of control in the Chinese media sector. These mechanisms – the ideological framework, the administration of control, the bureaucratic regulation of the sector, the control of information flow and information access, discourse control and control of language – work in concert to provide the CCP with a tight grip on the entire Chinese media landscape: the media operate in a framework characterized by constraints of

several different layers. These restraints are geared to direct the media's day-to-day operations, and to define their general direction – to serve the Party's cause.

A key feature of the framework outlined in this chapter is its flexibility. The Party's media concept is not monolithic, and neither are the mechanics of control. It is very much up to the Party to decide which elements of the media concept to stress at a given time, and to determine the degree to which each element of the mechanics of control is to be enforced. The functional separation of control mechanisms and enforcement mechanisms is at the very root of the CCP's media management. While the demands for compliance with all features of the control network are in effect constantly, the Party can decide ad hoc on how much leeway it allows the media to put into practice the daily instructions from the Party leadership. The system works not so much through constant enforcement of all demands on all layers, but rather through the mere existence of these demands and the very potential of the Party to demand a literal interpretation when this is deemed desirable. By decentralizing responsibility but keeping up the pressure at the theoretical level, the CCP has greatly reduced the costs of control, all the while balancing the needs of a high degree of control and a maximum amount of flexibility to adapt to the demands of the actual policy process.

Under these circumstances, the media operate in a highly instable environment that, on the one hand, periodically provides them with opportunities to explore niches and pursue their own ideas, once the Party centre signals controls to be relaxed. On the other hand, they must beware of backlashes and keep their experiments within a narrowly circumscribed frame. This makes media emancipation of the Solidarnosc type all but impossible in the PRC. The separation of claims to control and actual enforcement has become especially visible in the reform era. Since the early 1980s, the CCP has withdrawn from day-to-day management of many areas of social life, resulting in a considerable relaxation of the political atmosphere, a relaxation that is apparent in the media sector as well. However, the Party has given up neither its claim to absolute authority over the public sphere and its vigilance regarding undesirable trends. The majority of the examples I have referred to in the sections of this chapter were in fact taken from the reform era, rather than the pre-1976 era. The CCP has rebuilt the control architecture only in so far as to retain control of the media sector against claims

coming from a variety of directions: market forces, globalization, a more sophisticated population, and technological change all have made inroads into the Chinese media sector. Yet neither of these has been able to seriously erode the Party's ability to ensure control. How strong controls of the media remain even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century becomes obvious in particular in those issue areas considered crucial enough to touch the basic interests of the Party. The CCP has shown once and again, with sometimes harsh interventions, that the mechanics of control are firmly in place and that they work.

The discussion in this chapter has been ahistoric by design; my aim was to provide an outline of those measures of control that media personnel in the PRC have faced and face in their daily work. The individual mechanisms of control identified in this chapter have been remarkably stable throughout the period from 1949 to the present. At the same time, however, it is clear that the above discussion has necessarily focused on the normative aspects of the system. The mechanics of control have been presented primarily as the Party sees them, emphasis has been placed on their intended, as opposed to their actual functions. I have hinted to the messy everyday business of media making, to the some complex realities, at various points in the sections of this chapter, but its main purpose has been to provide a more or less systematic sketch of the mechanics of control that, in their entirety, affect the day-to-day decisions in the media sector.

The second part of this study now turns to these concrete issues of day-to-day media work, and examines in five case studies how the CCP's media concept has affected the choices and the actions of the players in the media sector, and in how far the outcomes of these processes must be related to the media concept. The case studies, taken from very different periods covering half a century, can have only the character of illustrations. These illustrations, however, shall help us understand how media control works in the PRC.



## Chapter Five

### Books for New China: Xinhua Shudian and the Transformation of Chinese Book Publishing

*“My heart beats for my motherland and my mind is with my compatriots; full of remorse and anxiety I want to call one last time on the whole nation to persist and unite in the war of resistance, so as to introduce at the earliest possible day a truly democratic system and to establish an independent, free, and prosperous new China.”*  
(Zou Taofen, *Last Will*, 1944)

*“...when the enemy attacked southern Shandong in 1947, many bookstores upheld their work; the comrades of the bookstore in Linshu county took up weapons while continuing sales; they hid their books in the mountain gullies, grasped their guns and stood sentry together with the militia in order to protect their assets.”*  
(*Xinhua shudian baogao*, 1950)

The chapters in part one of this study have considered the origins of the CCP's media concept as well as its normative stipulations. I will now leave the Yan'an laboratory in order to see how this normative plane relates to the empirical reality of the media sector: the CCP media concept has been introduced as an auxiliary construction that I have extrapolated from the Party's writings on media issues in order to help us understand how the media in the PRC are working, and how they are related to the Chinese state and to society. This chapter addresses the earliest years of the PRC. Upon assuming power, the CCP had to translate its vision of propaganda into political and administrative practice on a national scale within the shortest possible period of time. I will illustrate this process, and the problems and debates surrounding it, through a discussion of the transformation of the Chinese publishing sector from a highly competitive, market-driven industry into a government-managed propaganda bureaucracy between 1949 and 1951.

The accelerating collapse of the GMD regime since late 1948 and the CCP takeover of key cities and entire provinces confronted the CPP with problems hitherto unknown; the construction of a functioning governing apparatus was a momentous task and, at the same time, the first major test for the Party's administrative ideas.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I will illustrate the challenges the CCP was

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<sup>1</sup> Several studies have investigated the CCP takeover and the associated problems on the ground: Ezra Vogel. *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949-1968*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969; Kenneth G. Lieberthal. *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin, 1949-1952*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980; and more recently, James Z. Gao.

facing in one particular sector of the propaganda *xitong*, the publishing industry. How did the CCP's media concept inform decision-making in the takeover process? How literally could the theoretical prescriptions be applied? Was the Party forced to amend the concept in order to meet practical needs? And how was the Chinese concept mediated with Soviet advice?

To answer these questions, I will contrast the fate of the two most important CCP-led publishing houses, Sanlian shudian 三联书店 and Xinhua shudian 新华书店, in the takeover period. Both Sanlian and Xinhua were controlled by the Party, products of the CCP's pre-1949 activities in the publishing sector, yet they represent two very different approaches to Party leadership in the media sector. Sanlian and its three predecessors had started as independent ventures, but since 1937 had been co-opted by the CCP. While they received instructions from the Party centre through CCP-affiliated or –appointed personnel in the the company's leadership, they remained nominally independent in a classic United Front approach designed win the cooperation of sympathetic non-Party groups. As the Party's most sophisticated publishing venture, Sanlian had worked successfully in the urban areas under GMD control and had gained significant experience in Shanghai's commercialized urban publishing landscape. Xinhua, in contrast, had been under direct bureaucratic control of the CCP since its inception in Yan'an and had fought side by side with the CCP in its guerrilla bases and in the liberated rural base areas.

For the Party's purposes of rapidly unifying the Chinese publishing industry and building a national administrative infrastructure, Sanlian would undoubtedly have provided the better point of departure: it was knowledgeable of the urban industrial and market-driven environment, it had a proven ability of reaching out to intellectuals (an important group whose technical expertise was crucial for the task of socialist construction), and it was financially successful (another important asset at a time of severe fiscal strain). Nonetheless, Sanlian was never seriously considered as a role model;<sup>2</sup> the Party leadership regarded Xinhua as the only

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*The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou: The Transformation of City and Cadre, 1949-1954.*  
Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

<sup>2</sup> In the early 1980s, the Sanlian model was unearthed by a group of intellectuals associated with the Sanlian tradition and presented as a "missed alternative option." This perspective, however, figuring prominently in a massive amount of retrospective literature, must be seen as a rhetorical



viable choice for the modelling of a socialist publication sector. The CCP demanded comprehensive and direct bureaucratic control, even if this would mean operational problems in the short run. Since early 1949, the operations of Xinhua were expanded rapidly to make it a national state-owned monolith and the foremost regulator of the industry. At the same time, Sanlian was dismantled; its most experienced staff was transferred – paradoxically – to either the emerging bureaucratic institutions for the publishing sector, or to Xinhua and the work units under the control of the Xinhua network.

This choice, I will show, was directly related to the media concept. The Party was ready to accept setbacks and disruptions of the industry in favour of a literal interpretation of the media concept: the media concept demanded nothing less than direct and exclusive CCP control of all media, to make them into the Party's mouthpiece, and to prevent them from being hijacked by class enemies. For these reasons, the pace of the publishing industry's nationalization moved far ahead of practically all other sectors of industry and commerce, practically skipping the transitional phase of joint management and ownerships that most other industrial and commercial sectors went through before 1956. This rush, I will argue, must be attributed to the Party's desire to transform the Chinese publishing sector from a market-driven industry into a government-managed bureaucracy as fast as possible.

On the following pages, I will first sketch the basic structure of the Chinese publishing industry in the 1930s and 1940s, so as to provide the backdrop for the processes taking place between 1949 and 1951. I will then outline the experiences of Sanlian shudian and Xinhua shudian as CCP-led publishers. The main sections of this chapter reconstruct the difficult and by no means linear process that led to the emergence of the new administrative infrastructure for the publishing sector, and the role of Soviet advisors in this process. The transformation of the Chinese publishing industry illustrates the challenges the Party faced, and the price it was ready to pay, in the effort to bring day-to-day media work in line with the normative prescriptions of the media concept.

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move employed in an (ultimately unsuccessful) effort in the 1980s to promote reforms and work towards greater independence for the publishing sector. I have discussed these issues in "People's Publishing: The Transformation of the Chinese Publishing Sector, 1942-1952," paper presented at the XIV<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the European Association of Chinese Studies, Moscow, 26-28 August 2002. In 1949, the "Sanlian approach" was not an option.

### *The Backdrop: Publishing in Republican China*

The Yan'an-based Xinhua bookstore must be regarded as both a product of, and a critical reaction to, the publishing industry of Republican China. Xinhua was the CCP's answer to the state of contemporary publishing, yet it also interacted with its environment through its publications, as well as on the level of ideas. This section provides a short sketch of the publishing sector in the Republican era.

Modern book publishing arrived in China in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ernest Major set up not only the *Shenbao*, but – driven by the pursuit of profit that had also motivated his newspaper project – also ventured into the book publishing business. Both commercial and non-commercial publishing had experienced rapid growth during the Qing dynasty. Intellectuals in the Jiangnan region, notably around Suzhou, increased their publishing activities, while private printing-shops especially in Fujian mass-produced cheap editions that were sold through agents even into far-away regions; as a result, both the availability of books and general literacy rose considerably.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the Shenbaoguan brought to China new methods of management and new technology: it produced affordable high-quality editions of the classics and other materials that were in strong demand by literati for use in the preparation for the civil service examinations. The Shenbaoguan hired intellectuals to select the texts and prepare them for printing; the editions were produced with movable letter-type and were meticulously proof-read, and consequently advertised in the *Shenbao* newspaper and sold nationwide through the *Shenbao*'s distribution network. The success of the Shenbaoguan editions showed that there was

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<sup>3</sup> On Qing publishing see Benjamin A. Elman. *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge, Ma.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984, ch. 4; Cynthia J. Brokaw, Kai-wing Chow (eds.). *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005; Kai-wing Chow. *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China*. Stanford: Stanford University press, 2004. For the Fujian publishers see Brokaw. *Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007; and "Commercial Publishing in Late Imperial China: The Zou and Ma Family Businesses of Sibao, Fujian" in *Late Imperial China* 17.1 (1996), p. 49-92. On the connection of mass print culture and literacy in Qing China see Evelyn S. Rawski. *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979.

considerable demand for books produced commercially with modern technology and management.<sup>4</sup>

The dominant players of the publishing industry of Republican China, too, relied on cutting-edge technology and high editing standards. Shangwu yinshuguan 商务印书馆 (founded 1897) and Zhonghua shuju 中华书局 (set up 1912), owed their success to their school textbooks series that conquered the market in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Both publishers were set up by intellectuals who imported foreign know-how and equipment to build publishing empires with state-of-the-art technology. Like the Shenbaoguan, they set up shop in Shanghai, the city that had emerged as the new publishing hub under the late Qing. The fusion of commerce and culture that characterized the Shanghai's economic infrastructure profoundly influenced the direction of the publishing industry. As Leo Lee has argued, the new print culture gave rise to the emergence of modernity in Shanghai, from where it spread to other parts of China.<sup>6</sup>

In the aftermath of the May Fourth enlightenment movement, numerous publishing businesses sprang up in Beijing and especially in Shanghai. Best-known today are those ventures set up by prominent intellectuals (or people who would rise to prominence later), such as Beixin shuju 北新书局 and Kaiming shudian 开明书店.<sup>7</sup> While operating on a commercial basis (frequent bankruptcies attest to this point), these publishers had the same function as the “advocacy press:” to provide an outlet for the various political voices that contended for

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<sup>4</sup> Rudolf G. Wagner. “Ernest Major’s Shenbaoguan and the Formation of Late Qing Print Culture.” Paper presented at the conference “Creating a Multiethnic Identity: the Shanghai Concessions, 1850-1910,” Heidelberg, June 7-9, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> On textbook publishing see Robert Culp. “‘China – the Land and its People:’ Fashioning Identity in Secondary School History Textbooks, 1911-37.” in *Twentieth-Century China* 26.2 (2001), p. 17-62.

<sup>6</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee. *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1999, ch. 2. The importance of printing and publishing was first established in Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin’s classic *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800*. London: Verso, 1997 (orig. 1958). On publishing in Shanghai see further Christopher A. Reed. *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Beixin (founded in 1925) was supported by Lu Xun and other writers. Kaiming was set up by Zhang Xichen, a professional publisher, but attracted the support of many leading writers, such as Mao Dun, Ba Jin, and Xia Yan. On Beixin see Li Xiaofeng. “Lu Xun xiansheng yu Beixin shuju” in *Chuban shiliao* 8 (1987.2), p. 31-32. On Kaiming see Song Yunbin. “Kaiming jiu shi: Wo suo zhidao de Kaiming shudian” in *Wenshi ziliao xuanji* 31 (1962.10), p. 1-30, and the contributions to Zhongguo chuban gongzuozhe xiehui (ed.). *Wo yu Kaiming*. Shanghai: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1985. Compare also Jan Kiely. “Third Force Periodicals in China, 1928-1949: Introduction and Annotated Bibliography” in *Republican China* 21.1 (1995), p. 129-168.

influence on the marketplace of ideas. These “advocacy publishers” were nonetheless outnumbered by the purely commercial publishing enterprises that flooded the market of Shanghai and beyond with cheap entertainment literature.<sup>8</sup> Often small and smallest scale operations, most of these businesses could survive in an environment of cut-throat competition only through specialization into narrow-defined but lucrative niche markets, such as comics publishing or martial arts fiction.

At the other end of the scale, a publishing cartel composed of the “six big” names (Shangwu, Zhonghua, Shijie shuju 世界书局, Dadong shuju 大东书局, the GMD-owned Zhengzhong shuju 正中书局, and Kaiming) rose to an oligarchic position in the 1930s. They divided up the most lucrative market segment, textbook publishing, among themselves and, by 1949, were making a staggering 70 per cent of their profits from schools textbooks.<sup>9</sup> The GMD intervened into the business of the publishing enterprises through censorship, through regulations for the publishers who were made to support the Party’s project of “tutelage” of the Chinese people,<sup>10</sup> and finally by founding its own venture, Zhengzhong shuju.<sup>11</sup> The GMD did not, however, undertake any efforts to abolish the capitalist organization of the publishing market itself. Such steps were left to the CCP. When the Communists ascended to power in 1949, they found a publishing industry that had suffered from the Japanese occupation and from civil war, but was

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<sup>8</sup> While the literature produced by these publishers, often called “mandarin ducks and butterfly fiction” (*yuanyang hudie pai xiaoshuo* 鸳鸯蝴蝶派小说), has received increasing scholarly attention, research into the journals where this fiction was published has begun only in recent years. See Perry E. Link. *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth Century Chinese Cities*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981. Denise Gimpel. *Lost Voices of Modernity: A Chinese Popular Fiction Magazine in Context*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001. To my knowledge, there are as yet no studies of the publishing houses responsible for the majority of this literature; even their names are mostly forgotten, as shows a glance at the table – reflecting the 1949 situation – in *Zhongguo chuban kexue yanjiusuo, Zhongyang dang’anguan* (ed.). *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo chuban shiliao 1 (1949)* (hereafter ZRGCBSL). Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 1995, p. 224-45.

<sup>9</sup> For the number see Hu Yuzhi’s opening report to the 1949 national Xinhua shudian conference in ZRGCBSL 1.254-66, here p. 256.

<sup>10</sup> John Fitzgerald. *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. See also Jiang Pei, Ji Yaguang. *Huimie de zhongzi: Guomin zhengfu shiqi yishi guanzhi fenxi*. Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> On publishing in Republican China see Lee-hsia Hsu Ting. *Government Control of the Press in Modern China, 1900-1949*. Cambridge, Ma.: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1974. For Zhengzhong see Dangying wenhua shiye zhuanji bianzuan weiyuanhui (ed.). *Zhengzhong shuju*. Taipei: Zhongguo gongmindang zhongyang weiyuanhui wenhua gongzuohui, 1972.

nevertheless a market-driven, profit-oriented, and highly competitive industry populated by sophisticated, consumer-centred publishers. Nothing could be further from the Party's intentions, as reflected in the media concept. I will turn now to the CCP's own experience in the Chinese publishing sector.

*Life, Reading, and New Knowledge: Sanlian shudian*

Sanlian shudian was formed in late 1948 through the merger of Shenghuo shudian 生活书店, Dushu chubanshe 读书出版社, and Xinzhi shudian 新智书店.<sup>12</sup> All three bookstores had been led by intellectuals standing in close contact with the CCP and supporting the Party's ideological program; many of them were Party members themselves. Yet while the three publishers had closely cooperated with the Party and with each other, the CCP had never tried to assume full bureaucratic control; it was content with directing them through Party members in key positions at the three publishers. Shenghuo and its partners did not act in the name of the CCP's propaganda authorities. Direct control would have endangered the very existence of the enterprises, since they were operating primarily in GMD-controlled areas, and would have risked to alienate many of the intellectuals that supported the bookstores. Nevertheless, the three publishers had successfully propagated Communist ideas and exerted great influence on urban readers, and especially on middle school and college students.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Thanks to a debate in the 1980s, led mostly on the pages of the journal *Chuban shiliao* 出版史料, much information on the three bookstores has become available. Given the biased nature of this material, I have tried to check all pieces of evidence against other sources. On the background of the 1980s debate and the political motivations behind it see my paper "People's Publishing: The Transformation of the Chinese Publishing Sector, 1942-1952." On the three bookstores see *Chuban shiliao* 1 (1982), p. 8-63; 2 (1983), p. 131-45; 3 (1984), p. 1-19; 6 (1986.12), p. 28-34, 83-84; 7 (1987.1), p. 36-37; 12 (1988.2), p. 15-16.

<sup>13</sup> Wen-hsin Yeh's excellent study describes the transition of Shenghuo from a mildly conservative bourgeois venture into a Party enterprise. See her "Progressive Journalism and Shanghai's Petty Urbanites: Zou Taofen and the *Shenghuo Weekly*, 1926-1945" in Frederic Wakeman, Wen-hsin Yeh (eds). *Shanghai Sojourners*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1992, p. 186-238, esp. p. 222-38. I am hesitant, however, to follow her description of the post-1937 Shenghuo shudian as a "Party mouthpiece," a characterization that seems to reflect primarily the estimate of post-1949 sources on which a large part of Yeh's account is based.

Shenghuo shudian was set up in 1932 around the editorial offices of *Shenghuo zhoukan* 生活周刊, an enormously popular weekly established in 1925 and run by Zou Taofen 邹韬奋 since 1926.<sup>14</sup> The founders of Shenghuo shudian thus followed a well-established pattern: many successful Chinese book publishers had developed from journal offices (e.g. Kaiming had been formed around the journal *Xin nüxing* 新女性; Beixin built on the power of the journal *Yusi* 语丝, associated with Lu Xun).<sup>15</sup> In following this pattern, Shenghuo could capitalize on the journal in several respects: first, the publishing house could bank on the reputation and the popularity of *Shenghuo zhoukan*: with its advice columns and the increasingly vocal anti-Japanese position, the journal had reached a print run of 150,000 in 1931, with subscribers coming from Shanghai and beyond.<sup>16</sup> This provided the fledgling publisher with another advantage, since it could make use of the journal's nationwide distribution channels. Finally, the journal provided the publisher with access to well-known authors that would guarantee the venture to become a success.<sup>17</sup>

Shenghuo shudian was started as a cooperative enterprise, with Zou Taofen, Hu Yuzhi and others as shareholders.<sup>18</sup> While being a commercial enterprise (as the great number of advertisements on the journal's pages reveal), profit-seeking was obviously not the bookstore's main purpose. Shenghuo's management was willing to take considerable risk for their political convictions: in 1933, for example, Shenghuo published a volume of Gorky's works (*Gaoerji chuanguo xuanji* 高尔基创作选集) that was banned immediately because Qu Qiubai figured as the translator – a well-known Communist, Qu was anathema for the GMD authorities. A mere three years later, Shenghuo republished the book

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<sup>14</sup> On *Shenghuo zhoukan* and the evolution of Shenghuo shudian see Yeh. "Progressive Journalism and Shanghai's Petty Urbanites," esp. p. 190-222. For the myth created around Zou Taofen see *ibid.* p. 186-89. On Zou see also Rana Mitter. *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, ch. 3 and *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> The founder of Kaiming shudian, Zhang Xichen 章锡琛, had left his former employer, Shangwu, to start *Xin nüxing*.

<sup>16</sup> The number is taken from Shao Gongwen. "Jinian Shenghuo shudian wushi nian" in *Chuban shiliao* 1 (1982), p. 12-23.

<sup>17</sup> Success in terms of popularity and economic success are closely intertwined. Hence, it is not easy to tell whether it was the authors who brought the journal to prominence, or vice versa.

<sup>18</sup> On Shenghuo see Shenghuo shudian shigao bianji weiyuanhui. *Shenghuo shudian shigao*. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1995. Hu Yuzhi joined the CCP in 1933; however, his membership was never publicly revealed and he remained a secret Party member to his death. See Zhang Yihe. *Zui hou de guizu*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 21.

with a slightly altered title and a different pseudonym; this time it escaped the attention of the censorship.<sup>19</sup> Shenghuo also published several Marxist classics, such as Engels' *Anti-Dühring* (*Fan Dulin lun* 反杜林论, 1937) and Marx' *Kapital* (*Ziben lun* 资本论, 1938, 3 vols.), and other leftist publications like Ai Siqi's 艾思奇 *Sixiang fangfa lun* 思想方法论.<sup>20</sup>

Shenghuo was able to establish close ties with many influential intellectuals and writers: Lao She 老舍, Zhang Tianyi 张天翼, Ba Jin 巴金, Shen Congwen 沈从文, Zang Kejia 臧克家, and Ai Wu 艾芜 all were backbone authors of Shenghuo.<sup>21</sup> While some of the writers published by Shenghuo shudian, such as Qu Qiubai or Chen Boda 陈伯达, were prominent CCP members, others were intellectuals sharing the ideas of the Communists and supporting them. The majority of the leftist-leaning writers were thus ideological allies of the CCP without being formal Party members. In the same way the main figure behind Shenghuo shudian, Zou Taofen, can be characterized: Zou was an independent-minded, fiercely anti-Japanese intellectual fostering a leftist agenda for which he went into exile and later to jail.<sup>22</sup> However, Zou refused to enter Party politics all his life until his untimely death in 1944 (Zou was 49 years old); he chose to support CCP policies and accept the Party's leadership without entering into formal organizational ties. Zou's ambiguous position – loyalty to the CCP and its goals on the one hand, disdain for Party membership and discipline on the other – was tolerated by the CCP for the moment, at the time of the anti-Japanese war and the United Front: Zou's position did not call into question the Party's leadership of Shenghuo shudian, and it proved an effective cover for propaganda operations in GMD controlled areas. Only on his deathbed did Zou go public with his political convictions and asked to be admitted to the Party.

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<sup>19</sup> This anecdote appears in Shao Gongwen. "Jinian Shenghuo shudian wushi nian," p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Cao Helong, Li Xueying (ed.). *Shenghuo, Dushu, Xinzhi Sanlian shudian tushu zongmu, 1932-1994*. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1995, p. 18-19. *Sixiang fangfa lun* was published in 1936.

<sup>21</sup> See "Shenghuo zhokanshe ji Shenghuo shudian chuban de tushu mulu" in Qian Xiaobo, Lei Qunming (ed.). *Taofen yu chuban*. Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1983, p. 220-44.

<sup>22</sup> To escape GMD persecution, Zou travelled to Europe and the United States from July 1933 to August 1935. He was arrested in Shanghai in November 1936 and released in July 1937. See Fudan daxue xinwenxi yanjiushi (ed.). *Zou Taofen nianpu*. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1982. Patriotism and opposition to Japanese aggression were themes that united the CCP and many Chinese intellectuals: on the platform of anti-Japanese resistance the Party could portray itself as the only truly patriotic force in Chinese politics and could thus claim to speak for the critical intellectual mainstream – even if these intellectuals were not Party members themselves.

The two smaller partners in the Sanlian venture have histories similar to those of Shenghuo shudian.<sup>23</sup> Dushu chubanshe was founded in Shanghai in 1936 by Li Gongpu 李公朴, Ai Siqi, and others.<sup>24</sup> While Li was not a Party member, Ai Siqi had joined the CCP in 1935; when he left for Yan'an in 1937, Huang Luofeng, another CCP member, took over the management. Next to Ai's own works, notably his *Dazhong zhexue* 大众哲学, Dushu published many translations of Soviet literature and social science books. It took an even more aggressive path than Shenghuo and sold many Soviet books, such as Lenin's *Selected Works* and the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*.<sup>25</sup> As a consequence, Dushu frequently ran into problems with the GMD authorities. Xinzhi shudian was formed in 1935 by members of the Zhongguo jingji yanjiuhui 中国经济研究会, including Sun Yefang 孙冶方 and Hua Yingshen 华应申.<sup>26</sup> Xinzhi focused on social sciences and works on political economy and published books by Chen Boda (*Zhenli de zhuiqiu* 真理的追求, 1937) and the Soviet philosopher Mark. B. Mitin (*Xin zhexue dagang* 新哲学大纲, 1937), among others.

It is important to point out that while the leadership of all three publishers was composed of CCP members or close allies of the Party, none of them held any offices in the CCP propaganda apparatus prior to 1945. They set up their respective book stores in their capacity as individual Party members; contact with the Party's formal structure was thus only indirect. This stands in marked contrast to Xinhua shudian, a creature of the Party's propaganda apparatus, or the Party's main journals that were edited by top-ranking Party members. Shenghuo, Dushu

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<sup>23</sup> CCP presence at Dushu and Xinzhi was more direct than at Shenghuo. See Xu Boxin's report to the 1949 national Xinhua conference: "Guotongqu geming chuban gongzuo baogao" (Oct. 6, 1949) in *ZRGCSL* 1.297-316, here p. 300.

<sup>24</sup> On Dushu see Fan Yong (ed.). *Zhandou zai baiqu: Dushu chubanshe, 1934-1948*. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2001. See also Fan Yong. "Yi ge zhandou zai baiqu de chubanshe: ji Dushu shenghuo chubanshe" in *Chuban shiliao* 1 (1982.12), p. 24-40.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32. Dushu received these books from the Soviet embassy in Chongqing.

<sup>26</sup> On Xinzhi shudian see Xu Xuehan. "Xinzhi shudian de zhandou licheng" in *Chuban shiliao* 1 (1982.12), p. 41-51; "Xinzhi shudian de zhandou licheng" bianji weiyuanhui (ed.). *Xinzhi shudian de zhandou licheng*. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1994. Sun Yefang had entered the CCP in 1924 and had held several minor Party positions in the early 1930s. Hua Yingshen became a Party member in 1937.



and Xinzhi were not Party publishers, but private enterprises under Party leadership.<sup>27</sup>

Patterns of more direct interaction between the three publishers and the CCP leadership emerged only when GMD pressure in Shanghai mounted. Zou Taofen started to cooperate with the Communists since 1936, after his arrest by the GMD police.<sup>28</sup> His bookstore moved to Wuhan in 1937 and later to Chongqing. After Zou's refusal to accept a merger proposal of the GMD's Zhengzhong shuju, pressure on Shenghuo worsened in 1941. The other two companies did not fare better: to evade GMD harassment, the three book stores began cooperating in Chongqing in a number of different ventures, such as the establishing of Wenlin chubanshe 文林出版社 and Emei chubanshe 峨嵋出版社, two cover operations that published books for Shenghuo, Dushu, and Xinzhi.<sup>29</sup> Another form of cooperation was Lianying shudian 联营书店, a 1944 venture that united a dozen smaller book stores, led by Huang Luofeng and Zhang Jinglu 张静庐. The arrangement for this and other projects resulting from the three book stores' cooperation in the years of the anti-Japanese war and the civil war after 1945, was to share resources, especially in the area of distribution; the publishers' editorial boards remained distinct and they maintained their particular identity.<sup>30</sup>

On the eve of their merger into Sanlian shudian, Shenghuo, Dushu, and Xinzhi thus had preserved their individual traditions and their distinct character. The CCP had assisted the leftist publishers and had supervised their work; in 1942, for example, Huang Luofeng was sent to coordinate the activities of Shenghuo.<sup>31</sup> However, the Party had never tried to assume direct bureaucratic control of the publishers or to integrate them into its own institutional framework; neither had there been efforts of a buy-out, so as to make the publishers become Party-owned or state-owned enterprises. Rather, the CCP was satisfied with the existing cooperative enterprise structures, where trusted CCP members exercised majority

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<sup>27</sup> This does not mean that cooperation between the Party and the three publishers was not close. In 1938, Xinzhi shudian set up Zhongguo chubanshe 中国出版社 in Hankou on behalf of the CCP CC Changjiangju 长江局. Zhongguo chubanshe specialized in publishing Marxist books, mainly works from Marx, Lenin, and Stalin.

<sup>28</sup> See Shao Gongwen. "Jinian Shenghuo shudian wushi nian," p. 142.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>30</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

control of shares. It was the loyalty of individual Party members and the trust and support of non-Party intellectuals that was the basis for the three publishers' allegiance to the CCP.

In 1948, however, the national situation changed in favour of the CCP and the Party began to make preparations for an eventual national takeover. Under these circumstances, a narrower interpretation of the media concept won the day. Reflecting the CCP priorities, the Party decided to formally merge Shenghuo shudian, Dushu chubanshe, and Xinzhi shudian into Sanlian shudian, an issue that will be discussed below. With the chances of victory growing, the need for undercover propaganda operations such as those of Shenghuo lost urgency, while the task of constructing a socialist nation became the focus of the Party's planning. It was Xinhua shudian, the CCP's publishing operation in Yan'an, that indicated the only viable path for the future of the Chinese publishing industry.

#### *People's Publishing: Xinhua shudian*

The origins of Xinhua shudian lie in the dark. Shortly after the Party Center had settled in Yan'an in January 1937, a Central Party Paper Committee was set up to oversee the Party's most important propaganda organ, the weekly *Jiefang*. Under this Committee sections for publishing and distribution were formed; both were housed in the caves at Yan'an's Qingliangshan 清凉山. The main duty of the Committee's distribution section was to send the Party paper to all cells, but the employees soon started retailing the Party's publications to local buyers from their office, a side-cave of Wanfodong 万佛洞. Thus were the humble origins of Xinhua shudian.<sup>32</sup>

As a cave bookstore Xinhua certainly is a curiosity, yet the pattern of its foundation reads familiar: formed around *Jiefang* magazine, Xinhua was an outlet for the direct distribution of publications of a particular ideological grouping that felt excluded from the mainstream publishing market. Consequently, Xinhua's main

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<sup>32</sup> Zheng Shide. "Wushi chungju hua Xinhua: Xinhua shudian zongdian jianshi" in Song Yingli et al. (ed.). *Zhongguo dangdai chuban shiliao*. Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 1999, vol. 4, p. 109-47. See also the debate in *Chuban shiliao* 8, p. 96-106. The earliest traces of Xinhua's existence are the imprint information in the *Jiefang* magazine, which reads "distributed by Xinhua shuju (*sic*), Yan'an county, Shaanxi."

task was to sell books, pamphlets, and other propaganda publications, among them many translations from Soviet works. One of the first advertised publications was a series on Leninism (*Liening congshu* 列宁丛书) published under the name of *Jiefang* magazine's editorial office.<sup>33</sup> Xinhua does not seem to have published any books on its own account in this early time.

Xinhua's founding differs from the establishment of other publishing houses in two important aspects. Firstly, Xinhua was located in the remote hinterland, cut off from the pressures of competition that other bookstores with ideological messages faced. Yan'an was the CCP's showcase of a reformed community; market rules did not apply to enterprises here in the same way as they did for any a Shanghai-based publisher, giving the Party leeway to experiment with new organizational forms. Xinhua was in the exceptional situation to have an economic as well as an ideological monopoly. Secondly, both in the early years and later, Xinhua remains name- and faceless. In striking contrast to the Shanghai-based publishing houses that all evolved around the strong personalities of their founders or their main contributors, there is for all practical purposes no information on Xinhua's personnel. Neither in contemporary sources nor in later literature is the management of Xinhua discussed. Xinhua was a bureaucratic enterprise not based on the ambitions of any individual, but rather on the needs of the Party as a collective. The same observation can be made for the later period leading up to 1949: while Xinhua apparently received its instructions directly from the PD, we see very few cadres with experience and leadership qualities emerging from the Xinhua network. The downside of the collective nature of the bureaucratic Party enterprise that was Xinhua shudian should become apparent in 1949.<sup>34</sup>

In April 1942, the CC ordered a reshuffle of publishing work in Yan'an to establish closer control over this crucial area of the propaganda sector. Two weeks after the April 15 Circular,<sup>35</sup> Xinhua announced a reorganization and, in a

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<sup>33</sup> A reproduction of this advertisement from April 1937 can be found in Zhao Shengming. *Xinhua shudian dansheng zai Yan'an*. Xi'an: Huayue wenyi chubanshe, 1989, plates. On the early years of Xinhua see *ibid.*, ch. 1.

<sup>34</sup> None of the (few) cadres mentioned by name in the accounts of Xinhua's early history did play any role in the publishing sector in the PRC. The only familiar names are those of the CCP leadership, including those of Mao Zedong and Zhu De – their direct contact to Xinhua supports the observation of the publisher's closeness or even the oneness with the Party.

<sup>35</sup> "Zhongyang shujichu guanyu tongyi Yan'an chuban gongzuo de tongzhi" in XGWX 2.367. Translated and discussed above in chapter two.

symbolic act, moved to a new address in Yan'an's bustling market street outside Nanmen 南门 where it was given a spacious retail outlet with a proper signboard carrying its name, calligraphed by Mao Zedong, who reportedly paid a visit to the bookstore.<sup>36</sup> The Rectification Campaign had not only provided the impetus for Xinhua's restructuring, but also proved to be an important factor for the growth of the bookstore and its rising significance: the campaign required cadres in the Party and the army to undergo intensive study and training in political and ideological issues that led to sharply increased demand for study materials such as books and journals. As a consequence, the number of publications distributed by Xinhua in 1943 nearly tripled against the year before.<sup>37</sup> The campaign also gave a boost to Xinhua's own publication activities, which had been marginal before 1942.

In the course of the Rectification Campaign, Xinhua grew not only in Yan'an itself, but also expanded into other CCP base areas.<sup>38</sup> In what became known as "follow-the-army-bookstores" (*sui jun shudian* 随军书店), Xinhua sent propaganda cadres that carried books with them to accompany the units of the Eight Route Army whenever possible. In other regions where underground guerrilla troops had established base areas, Xinhua shipped books to these areas to support both the army and the local Party organizations in their political and propaganda work. Wherever CCP rule was more stable and the local Party committees had more resources at their disposal, Xinhua established local branches. In the North China area, a Xinhua shudian had already existed since 1941; branches in other "liberated areas" followed.<sup>39</sup> Due to war time conditions, Xinhua's contact with these local bookstores was rather sporadic, and as a matter of fact they were led by the local governments and army commanders.<sup>40</sup> So while the CCP was able to centralize control over the publishing activities in Yan'an and the surrounding area

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<sup>36</sup> As I have mentioned in chapter two, this latter information can not be verified. Taken from Zhao Shengming. *Xinhua shudian dansheng zai Yan'an*, p. 75.

<sup>37</sup> See the useful bibliography of titles distributed by Xinhua in *ibid.*, p. 266-75.

<sup>38</sup> Information in this and the following paragraphs relies in the account in Zheng Shide. "Wushi chunqiu hua Xinhua," and on the articles in *Chuban shiliao* 2 and 8.

<sup>39</sup> Frequently, the formation of local bookstores followed the pattern of the Yan'an bookstore: the publication of local newspapers and propaganda material led to the establishment of distribution agencies that developed into bookstores.

<sup>40</sup> For one example see Shi Yucai. "Taihang diqu de baokan chuban gongzuo" in *Chuban shiliao* 2 (1983.12), p. 8-12. The author started his career at Xinhua's branch in the Taihang 太行 range and was the only Xinhua man to occupy important administrative posts in the publishing sector in the 1950s.

quite effectively, administrative unification proved impossible for the other areas; rather, operations were conducted in a highly decentralized way.

The CCP's hopes for an improvement of the political environment after the end of the anti-Japanese war did not materialize, and Xinhua's range of operations remained confined to the "liberated areas." Worse was to come when the GMD general Hu Zongnan 胡宗南 took Yan'an in March 1947, and many CCP institutions, including Xinhua, took a heavy blow. By that time, however, the Party's publishing activities had expanded into all other base areas so that the destruction of Xinhua's original facilities did not mean the end for its activities. By 1947, Xinhua had branches in the Northwestern, Northern, Eastern, and Northeastern regions. The Northeastern Xinhua branch was called Dongbei shudian 东北书店 and changed its name to Dongbei Xinhua shudian 东北新华书店 only in 1949.<sup>41</sup>

During both the anti-Japanese war and the ensuing civil war, the Xinhua cadres had to deal with very difficult working conditions. Running a publishing venture in the rural backwaters, far from the sophisticated audiences and the technical infrastructure of the cities was a challenge itself, but the war aggravated the circumstances under which the Xinhua personnel worked, especially in the partisan areas. Accounts and memoirs published in the PRC abound of tales like the following: "... when the enemy attacked southern Shandong in 1947, many bookstores upheld their work; the comrades of the bookstore in Linshu 临沭 county took up weapons while continuing sales; they hid their books in the mountain gullies, grasped their guns and stood sentry together with the militia in order to protect their assets."<sup>42</sup> While stories like these read like romanticized war accounts, the extremely harsh conditions which the Xinhua people endured during these years were Xinhua's legacy; it was on this basis that Xinhua people from the rural base areas hoped to claim the leading positions in the publishing sector for themselves when the CCP moved into the cities, the centres of the publishing industry, in 1949, and when the sector was reorganized: by way of reference to their revolutionary credentials, the Xinhua hardcore tried to fight off claims from the

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<sup>41</sup> Short outlines of the histories of the local Xinhua branches can be found in "Xinhua shudian baogao," in *ZRGCBSL* 2.859-76.

<sup>42</sup> From *ibid.*, p. 864. For a similar account, yet expanded to more than 250 pages, see Wang Yi et al. *Zhanzheng niandai de Shandong Xinhua shudian*. Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1990.

more sophisticated and experienced urban publishing personnel. Yet while their model of publishing came to prevail in the PRC, the Xinhua people lost out in the allocation of jobs in the publishing sector after 1949.

### *Books for New China: The Process*

Through Sanlian and Xinhua, the CCP had collected experience with two different modes of publishing in the revolutionary period. Xinhua stood for a fully Party- or state-owned operation under the direct leadership of the CCP, whereas the Sanlian model relied on indirect Party leadership through individuals who might or might not be Party members; their enterprises were privately or cooperatively owned. Many people in the urban-based publishing industry looked at the nearing CCP victory with unease, hoping for mode of coexistence with the CCP that would resemble the Sanlian model.<sup>43</sup> That was in fact what the CCP had promised under the slogans of “new democracy” and the coalition government, and what came to implemented in most industrial and commercial sectors in the first years after the takeover.<sup>44</sup> Not few of the Sanlian cadres, too, hoped for an arrangement that would allow them to retain a degree of independence and their corporate identity – in return, they would put their expertise, their close connections with the urban intelligentsia, and the prestige of the three bookstores at the CCP’s service, as they had in the two decades before.

The Party leadership, however, moved much more quickly to define the future outlook of the publishing sector; the decision-making process was clearly informed by the media concept that did not allow for the sector to keep on working

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<sup>43</sup> Even in the carefully selected source collections that have recently been published in the PRC, some sense of the private publisher’s hopes and ideas (and, if necessary, resistance against the CCP’s plans) can be gained. The larger publishing houses such as Shangwu in particular, were brave enough to stand up to CCP policies as late as 1950. I will refer to some of these instances below.

<sup>44</sup> Compare the “Common Program of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference” (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi gongtong gangling) that was passed on Sept. 29, 1949, two days before the founding of the PRC, and served as the normative foundation of the CCP-led coalition government. Of interest for the publishing industry was in particular article five that granted press freedom, and article 49, which defined the role of the media in broad terms. See Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.). *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992, vol. 1, p. 1-13. Translated in Harold C. Hinton. *The People’s Republic of China, 1949-1979: A Documentary Survey*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1980, vol. 1, p. 51-55. Background information on the “Common Program” is found in Bo Yibo. *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu (xuiding ben)*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1997, vol. 1, p. 29-36.

as an industry. A first indication of this direction was the merger of Shenghuo, Dushu and Xinzhi into Sanlian shudian. Under mounting pressure from the GMD authorities, Shenghuo shudian, Dushu chubanshe, and Xinzhi shudian had all transferred the core of their operations to Hong Kong in fall 1947: Shanghai was no longer safe after several arrests in June that year, and after the Shanghai municipal committee of the GMD had accused Dushu and Xinzhi of pro-Communist activities.<sup>45</sup> In the British territory of Hong Kong, under colonial administration, the bookstores felt safe from GMD persecution – a form of safety the Chinese publishing industry had enjoyed in pre-war Shanghai, but that did no longer exist there. While underground activities continued in Shanghai, Chongqing, Wuhan, and Beijing, many important personnel transferred to Hong Kong: with Xu Boxin 徐伯昕, Huang Luofeng, and Shen Jingzhi 沈静芷 the managers of the three bookstores had set up shop in Hong Kong by late 1947.

In the British colony, the three Party-affiliated publishers cooperated closely to rebuild their operations that were in tatters after a decade of war and persecution. To speed up this process, and to strengthen its grip over the three publishers, the Party Center decided in June 1948 to unite its scattered forces. In a telegram, Zhou Enlai ordered the Sanlian cadres to shift the focus of their work to publications aimed at workers, peasants, and soldiers, and to move their personnel and activities to the “liberated areas.”<sup>46</sup> The three bookstores that had emerged as the backbone of the Party’s publishing activities in the areas not under CCP control, were now to be prepared for the tasks ahead: the future Sanlian shudian would be needed when the Party moved into the cities, notably Shanghai and Beijing, the centres of the Chinese publishing industry. First of all, the three bookstores were to be merged into one publishing house, so as to concentrate their resources. The Party’s most senior man in the publishing sector, Huang Luofeng, was given the order to conduct the merger talks.

Little information is available on the talks themselves, which lasted for more than three months. A working committee was set up for the merger talks that was led by Hu Sheng 胡绳, the man in charge of the Cultural Affairs Committee of the

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<sup>45</sup> See Fan Yong. “Yi ge zhandou zai baiqu de chubanshe,” p. 39.

<sup>46</sup> See Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.). *Zhou Enlai nianpu, 1898-1949*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1989, p. 775-76.

CCP CC Hong Kong Bureau (Zhonggong zhongyang Xianggang fenju wenwei 中共中央香港分局文委). The other members were Shao Quanlin 邵荃麟, also of the Cultural Affairs Committee, and the general managers of the three bookstores.<sup>47</sup> Huang Luofeng is named as the driving force behind the process in all sources; given that he was the most senior CCP member among the five men except Shao (who lacked experience in publishing affairs and was invited because the three bookstores were led by the Party cell headed by Shao), such an arrangement could be expected. No information is available on what happened during the three months of talks. This dearth of information itself signals that the talks were more difficult than the Party was ready to admit: although the three publishers had cooperated for a long time, they had distinct histories and identities, and apparently Huang encountered more resistance than anticipated. Only one document is available that sheds light on the situation at Sanlian in fall 1948: “Before the merger, some cadres could not quite straighten out their thinking, and generally there were some rather mistaken opinions. For instance, some comrades at Shenghuo shudian felt offended and were not very willing to abolish the old brand name of Shenghuo and to change it for Sanlian shudian; some comrades at Dushu chubanshe and Xinzhi shudian were very unhappy because they thought they were swallowed up by another bookstore.”<sup>48</sup> Behind the polite formulations it is obvious that resistance against the merger was widespread among the rank and file employees; objections must have been considerable among the management, too, given the length of the talks. The merger was further complicated by the difficult ownership structures of the three bookstores, and the fact that it was not simply three publishing houses that had to be united; rather, Shenghuo, Dushu, and Xinzhi had set up dozens of smaller ventures, either alone or together, in Guiyang, Chongqing, Shanghai, and elsewhere. The shareholder and investment structures must have been exceedingly complicated.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See Shenghuo shudian shigao bianji weiyuanhui. *Shenghuo shudian shigao*, p. 400. Compare also Wang Fangzi. “1937-1949 nian de Xianggang chubanye” in *Chuban kexue* 2000.4 at <http://www.cbkx.com/2000-4/52.shtml> (downloaded July 22, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> See “Shenghuo, Dushu, Xinzhi Sanlian shudian gongzuo baogao” (report at the first national Xinhua conference, dated Oct. 8, 1949), delivered by Shao Gongwen, in *ZRGCSL* 1.370-82. Shao’s comments on the difficulties of the merger are on p. 372.

<sup>49</sup> Altogether 80 different ventures with Sanlian capital are listed in Ma Zhongyang, Su Kechen. *Chubanjia Huang Luofeng*. Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1991, p. 190-93. All of these had



In the end, however, the Party's demand won the day, with the three publishers accepting the rather awkward name Shenghuo – Dushu – Xinzhi Sanlian shudian 生活·读书·新知三联书店 as the compromise formula for the new enterprise. On October 26, the Sanlian General Administration (Sanlian zongguanlichu 三联总管理处) was established in Hong Kong; Xu Boxin and Shen Jingzhi became general manager and vice manager, and Huang Luofeng headed the committee in charge of the General Administration.<sup>50</sup>

In the meantime, during fall and winter 1948, the national political and military situation had changed decisively in favour of the CCP. Much faster than expected would Sanlian now be confronted with new tasks. In early April 1949, the Sanlian General Administration moved from Hong Kong to Beijing, just six weeks after the CCP had taken the city. Once in Beijing, it quickly came under the influence of the Publishing Committee and the rapidly growing clout of Xinhua.

While Sanlian in Hong Kong still tried to implement the terms of the merger agreement and to overcome the difficulties of cooperation, events in the North proceeded at a speedy pace: on February 3, the PLA marched into Beijing and thus took the city that had been selected to become the administrative centre of New China. Only three weeks later the first cell of a national institution in control of publishing was established: the Publishing Committee (*Chuban weiyuanhui* 出版委员会) was an interim body set up under the Propaganda Department of the CCP North China Bureau to plan the institutional structure that was to govern the publishing sector in the new state.<sup>51</sup> The Party's policy toward publishing was formulated in March by the Central Committee: "Publishing work must be unified and centralized, but on the basis of decentralized management; conditions allowing and being favourable, [publishing] can proceed in a planned and gradual

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to be brought under the roof organisation of Sanlian. *Shenghuo shudian shigao*, p. 400-02 provides a few details on the process of restructuring capital, dept, and stock.

<sup>50</sup> Wang Fangzi. "1937-1949 nian de Xianggang chubanye."

<sup>51</sup> An interim body, the Linshi chuban weiyuanhui choubenhui 临时出版委员会筹备会, had started work a week earlier, on February 16, to take charge of day-to-day affairs in the publishing sector. The Publishing Committee held its first meeting on February 22 in the presence of Zhou Yang. See "Linshi chuban weiyuanhui choubenhui di yi ci tanhua hui jilu" (Feb. 16) in *ZRGCBSL* 1.14-15; "Linshi chuban weiyuanhui choubenhui di san ci tanhua hui jilu" (Feb. 19) in *ZRGCBSL* 1.19; "Chuban weiyuanhui di yi ci huiyi jilu" (Feb. 22) in *ZRGCBSL* 1.22-28.

manner towards unification and centralization.”<sup>52</sup> This formulation is relatively vague: centralization is quoted as a goal, but both the degree of centralization and the speed of the process were still open to debate. The Party’s desire to establish centralized control of the publishing sector was clear, so as to make the media unified and single voice of the Party. Much less clear, however, were the terms on which this first stipulation of the media concept would be implemented: as I will show presently, rather than being a linear process, the institution of Party control was characterized by experimenting, trial and error, and repeated zigzags.

The Publishing Committee was placed in charge of the activities of the Party-controlled publishers (i.e., mainly Xinhua) in the North China region and consequently played a crucial role in the unification process. The unification of Xinhua’s scattered operations was a protracted process that started from the bottom with the formation of larger administrative entities from the outlets in single areas. According to Huang Luofeng, the Central Committee decided in August 1948 to set in motion the process of centralizing the Party’s publishing activities.<sup>53</sup> Since Xinhua’s operations were most developed in the North China region, unification started here with Zhou Yang, the head of the Propaganda Department of the CCP CC North China Committee, laying out a blueprint in February 1949: a handful of local entities in Shijiazhuang, Baoding, Zhangjiakou, Taiyuan, and elsewhere were to be upgraded into main branches (*zongfendian*). Only after the formation of these branches would the Northern China main branch be established that would later become but one branch under the national organization. Zhou further explained: “The leadership relationship of the branch stores in the different localities and their relationship with the local Party and government will be arranged as follows: the main branch will make the overall arrangements with regard to economic, professional, and personnel matters, but in organizational matters they [the branch stores] will answer to the district committee (*quwei* 区委) or municipal committee (*shiwei* 市委) [of the Party].”<sup>54</sup> Zhou does already hint here to a system of dual responsibility of all professional units to both government and Party organs, as was discussed in chapter four.

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<sup>52</sup> Cited in Huang Luofeng’s keynote speech at the 1949 Xinhua conference: “Chuban weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao” in *ZRGCBSL* 1.267-96, here p. 268.

<sup>53</sup> I have seen no document verifying this point. See *ibid.* p. 268.

<sup>54</sup> See Zhou’s report as contained in “Chuban weiyuanhui di yi ci huiyi jilu,” p. 24f.

The Party body that was put in charge of publishing in the North China branch was the Publishing Committee. The composition of this new body, however, gave headaches to the Party because of a lack of personnel: not all of the nine cadres on the body came from the propaganda sector and most of those that did had done news work only; those with a past in publishing were not senior enough and came from Xinhua. None of them had sufficient experience with publishing in an urban setting and could lead the takeover (*jieguan* 接管) of the large publishing industries in Beijing and Tianjin, the centres of publishing in the Northern region.<sup>55</sup>

**Chart 1: The Publishing Committee**

Name	Born	Joins CCP	Past experience	Exp. with urban publishing?	Probable function in 出版委员会
祝志澄	1906	1932	Printing worker at Shangwu, leads printing plants in Jiangxi Soviet and Yan'an, takes part in Long March		Worker activist
华应申	1911	1937	Xinzhi shudian, Zhongguo CBS, Huazhong Xinhua shudian (manager)	X	Xinhua representative
平杰三	1906	1927	Admin. career in Huabei; before 1949 vice-secretary of CC Huabei; no publishing experience		CC Huabei representative
王子野	1916	1938	Editor at <i>Jin-Cha-Ji ribao</i> ; in Huabei PD resp. for publishing		Administrator
史育才	1914	1938	Huabei <i>Xinhua ribao</i> ; Huabei Xinhua shudian (manager)		Xinhua representative
欧建新					
卢鸣谷	1917	1938	Journalist with Dongbei newspapers; Dongbei shudian vice-manager		Dongbei shudian repr.
王钊	1923	1939	Minor propaganda posts in Dongbei		?
郭敬	1908	1936	Propaganda posts in Dongbei; CCP Beijing PD secretary		Beijing CCP representative
黄洛峰	1909	1927	Dushu chubanshe (manager), Sanlian shudian (manager)	X	Head

Note: no biographical information on Ou Jianxin could be found, neither could his range of activities be identified from the meeting transcripts; while Ou was present in most early meetings, he only rarely addressed the plenum on a number of technical issues. His influence on the Committee seems to have been marginal.

Sources: *Zhongguo renming dacidian: dangdai renwu juan*. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1992; *Zhongguo chuban kexue yanjiusuo*, Hebei sheng xinwen chubanju (ed.). *Zhongguo chuban renming cidian*. Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 1989; *Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu* (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chuabanshe, 2000.

<sup>55</sup> See the analysis in Chart 1: The Publishing Committee.

The CCP therefore resorted once again to Huang Luofeng: a veteran Party member, Huang had worked with Dushu chubanshe back in Shanghai and Hong Kong and thus knew the industry from first-hand experience; furthermore, he had proved his talent as an able administrator in overcoming the difficulties in Sanlian's merger. In mid February 1949, Huang was therefore recalled from his position in Shenyang, where he had organized Sanlian's Northeastern branch and went to Beijing to lead the Publishing Committee.

The initial measures of the unification process concerned Xinhua's activities in Beijing and Tianjin. It was here that Huang and his colleagues encountered their first problems, a legacy of the cities' conquest: while the Huabei Xinhua branch had entered the urban areas from the Central Committee's base in Shijiazhuang, outlets of Dongbei shudian (the Xinhua branch in the Northeast), following Lin Biao's armies' move southwards into Northern China, had spread simultaneously into Beijing and Tianjin. Rivalry caused resentment in both organizations; the merger of these outlets took several months to complete – apparently, squabbles over petty interests were not exclusive to Sanlian.<sup>56</sup> Further problems lay down the road. From a March 15 report that Huang had written for Zhou Enlai, we can get a fairly comprehensive picture of the situation of the publishing industry six weeks after the conquest of Beijing, of the intentions of the Publishing Committee, and of the state of its work.<sup>57</sup>

Although first steps to unify the Party's publishing activities in the various areas under CCP control had already been taken, "the situation between the different areas is that as of today each still goes its own way; there is no unity or concentration, and no rational division of labour and cooperation."<sup>58</sup> In a reversal of earlier proposals, the concentration of publishing affairs in the hands of the Party now became the choice of the day. Huang provided the rationale for centralized control: "If compared to the objective demands of cultural construction, our current material and financial means fall very far behind. ... Unification and concentration is therefore inevitable to avoid waste and to fully realize our

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<sup>56</sup> See Huang Luofeng's report, p. 283-84.

<sup>57</sup> Huang Luofeng's report, "Chuban gongzuo jihua shu," is an attachment to "Lu Dingyi guanyu Chubanju gongzuo fangzhen deng wenti zhi Zhou Enlai de qingshi xin ji Zhou Enlai de pishi" in *ZRGCSL* 1.37-42. Zhou passed the report on to Dong Biwu and Hu Qiaomu and asked for their opinions.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

capacities.”<sup>59</sup> Neither Xinhua nor Sanlian had the resources and first of all the personnel to expand their network, if these resources were not used with a maximum of “rationality:” “Only if we are united and concentrated, we can bring into full play our forces and compete with the large private publishers – so as to surpass them in business and to gradually control them politically and economically.”<sup>60</sup> The rationale for the centralization of control is interesting indeed: Xinhua had come to the Beijing area as an outsider, where it faced the large and experienced publishing companies that controlled the market. Only with massive administrative support would Xinhua be able to compete with them. It comes as a surprise that the CCP thought of the relationship to other publishers in terms of competition: the Party’s foothold in the city obviously was precarious at best, and the Publishing Committee did not consider taking on the private publishers in the near future. For the time being, the Committee prepared only to take over control of those shares in companies like Zhengzhong shuju or Dadong shuju that had been owned by the GMD or by high-ranking GMD officials.

In Huang’s argumentation, we can detect the logic of the CCP media concept: the Party’s goal is to re-educate the population and to remould their thinking, formulated in this paragraph of Huang’s report as “cultural construction.” The agent of this enterprise is clearly the CCP, and it can achieve this task only through direct control of the media; it thus seeks control of the publishing industry. The way to realize this goal is the Xinhua path. Huang does also mention Sanlian as a model to be followed, on a par with Xinhua, but his stress is not the three bookstores’ tradition of independence combined with their loyalty, but rather the voluntary submission under closer Party control that is worth to be emulated: “In the GMD areas, Shenghuo shudian, Xinzhi shudian, and Dushu chubanshe have fully merged in October last year; this is a hallmark on the road of the publishing businesses led by the Party towards unification and concentration.”<sup>61</sup> Sanlian has set out on the road of Xinhua-ization that leads towards Party publishing. The Publishing Committee therefore concentrated its energies on the unification of Xinhua; its plan for the year 1949 read: “In the course of this year, the Northern China Xinhua branch must be merged first, and then Sanlian shudian and Dongbei

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

shudian must be merged [into the Publishing Committee]; the personnel, infrastructure, and financial means of the three bookstores are to be used rationally and adjusted; and the strong points of each of them must be [further] strengthened.”<sup>62</sup>

The report also proposes, for the first time, an outline for the future separation of responsibilities between Party and government: “The publishing businesses under the leadership of the Party unify and centralize step by step, and their composition must be reorganized. In [the area of] publishing the two sectors [*xitong* 系统] of Party and state must be separated, while for distribution, a centralized [*yiyuanhua* 一元化] distribution network must be set up, the responsibility for which lies entirely with the [future] publishing bureau of the government side.”<sup>63</sup> Printing and distribution were technical aspects of the publishing process and therefore less sensitive; only publishing proper would be placed under direct Party control. For a number of crucial items – translations of Marxist-Leninist classics, Party documents, the works of Party leaders, textbooks for the CCP’s internal education programs, and Party journals – Huang proposed direct management by Jiefangshe 解放社 under the PD.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the might of the industry oligarchs was gradually to be eroded: the printing of Party documents was a field of increasing significance with presumably profitable publishing jobs from which non-Party publishers were excluded. In sum, Huang’s March 15 report to Zhou Enlai reacted to the CC directive earlier that month that had called for unification and centralization of the publishing sector (see above). It seems that the Publishing Committee went ahead with the process of unification with even more determination than the CC had stipulated; the lower level cadres had adopted a vision of publishing more radical than the CC – in typical bureaucratic behaviour, lower level cadres interpreted the media concept in a way more literal than the CC.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>64</sup> Jiefangshe was the editorial department of the CC organ *Jiefang* founded in 1937. Its book publishing activities had been handed over to Xinhua shudian in the early 1940, but Xinhua customarily published a number of Marxist-Leninist classics as well as study materials for cadres under the imprint of Jiefangshe until 1950. Huang Luofeng proposed to formally “revive the organisation of Jiefangshe” in order to become the publisher for these materials. This did not happen, and the publications in question were issued under the name of Renmin chubanshe since 1950.

When the Publishing Committee set out to work, its scope and functions were still very tentative; the transcripts of the early meetings attest to the confusion and to the cadres' sometimes rather naive ideas, especially concerning the immediate capacities available to the CCP during the take-over. The early proposals of the Publishing Committee sketch a controlling agency of Orwellian dimensions: the future Publishing Office was supposed to centralize supervision over all publishers and bookstores by holding majority shares, and it would have performed inspections of all books to be published. As an initial capital, the Publishing Committee proposed one billion Yuan,<sup>65</sup> and it pledged to train one thousand cadres within three years. By early spring, institution building efforts had gained so much momentum that the desire to control directly and immediately anything and everything replaced earlier pledges of governing through indirect influence. The Publishing Committee's plans, however, were angrily rejected by Dong Biwu 董必武, head of the Finance and Economics Commission of the North China People's Government and a CCP Politburo member, as utopian.<sup>66</sup>

By slowly increasing its manpower, the Publishing Committee worked to gradually assume direct control over the publishing sector. Two decisive steps guaranteed the Party's grip on the crucial junctures of publishing in China. A key issue was the assignment of textbook publication for primary and secondary schools. In the areas controlled by the CCP, the Party made every effort to abolish textbooks issued under the auspices of the GMD as soon as possible, in order to promote new education guidelines.<sup>67</sup> This policy produced the need for an enormous number of textbooks to be published and printed in time for the fall term. While the sheer numbers to be produced were a major challenge (due to lack of capacities, printing jobs were delegated to local level printing shops), the economic consequences were equally important: the big Shanghai publishers had

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<sup>65</sup> Even under the inflationary conditions of 1949 this was an enormous sum that totalled the entire capital of the North China Trading Company, as Dong Biwu remarked.

<sup>66</sup> For the plan see "Zhongyang chubanjū zuzhi dagang (caoan)" in *ZRGCSL* 1: 1949, p. 43-45. Dong Biwu's reaction is in *ibid.*, p. 46-47.

<sup>67</sup> For this purpose, a Textbooks Inspection Committee (*Jiaokeshu bianshen weiyuanhui* 教科书编审委员会), led by the writer and educator Ye Shengtao 叶圣陶, assumed responsibility on all textbook contents. Ye was later to become vice-head of the General Publication Administration. On CCP educational policies in the takeover period see Shi Ming Hu, Eli Seifman (ed.). *Toward a New World Outlook: A Documentary History of Education in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1976*. New York: AMS Press, 1976, Part I.

earned up to 70 per cent of their revenues from text book production; their exclusion from this highly profitable market segment was a blow that on the other hand increased Xinhua's market share and promoted the influence of the Publishing Committee.<sup>68</sup>

A second measure to enhance Xinhua's standing in the publishing sector was an order of mid-September that formally guaranteed Jiefangshe (i.e. Xinhua shudian, see above) and Xinhua the exclusive right to publish and reprint Party documents, speeches and texts by Party leaders, and other official pronouncements, even if these had been published in newspapers before. Even "progressive" publishers such as Beixin were refused the right to publish collections of important policy documents and were punished for violations. The Propaganda Department explained that giving exclusive rights of these documents to Xinhua was necessary to ensure the correctness and timeliness of all editions circulating, to enable possible corrections of the texts, and "to prevent arbitrary explanatory and interpretive notes being added that distort the original meaning."<sup>69</sup> While increasing control, the effective monopoly for Xinhua was also a competitive advantage, since demand for policy documents and the works of Party leaders was rising sharply with the CCP's emerging victory and the proliferation of study and re-education classes. With Party documents and school textbooks, two profitable core segments of the publishing market had effectively been granted to the Party publishers; shortly thereafter, government documents, too, were declared to be the exclusive terrain of Xinhua and Jiefangshe.<sup>70</sup>

These measures notwithstanding, problems in the early months abounded. From the meeting notes of the Publishing Committee, we get the impression of a lack of general direction, doubts concerning the scope of control, and sometimes complete chaos. Clashes intensified between cadres coming from the base areas and those that had worked in the cities for a longer time. The Publishing

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<sup>68</sup> For the number see Hu Yuzhi's opening report to the 1949 Xinhua conference in *ZRGCBSL* 1.254-66, here p. 256. The text book issue is a recurring theme in the notes of the Publishing Committee meetings in *ibid*.

<sup>69</sup> See "Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu guanyu siying shudian bianxuan wo dang wenjian deng wenti gei Huadongju xuanchuanbu de zhishi" in *ZRGCBSL* 1.219-20. This document also contains the decision to punish Beixin.

<sup>70</sup> See *ZRGCBSL* 2.1-2. In a letter from Hu Yuzhi, dated April 27, 1950, however, a partial withdrawal from this measure was declared and private publishers were allowed to print government documents, since Xinhua reacted too slow and lacked sufficient capacities. See *ZRGCBSL* 2.159-61.



Committee had to admit: “A number of comrades who have lived in the cities for a longer time look down on the ‘country bumpkins’ (*tu baozi* 土包子) and say that they are ‘earthy’ (*tu* 土) and ‘lack any sense of time.’ The comrades coming from the countryside despise their ‘airs’ and say that they are formalistic.”<sup>71</sup> Dissatisfied customers in the stores reminded the Committee of shortcomings in its work, as it was forced to acknowledge repeatedly.<sup>72</sup> The Committee’s general approach to solving problems that emerges from the meeting notes – discussions in its meetings and the request of orders from higher organs – seems to have clashed with the requirements of effective economic management.

Once more cadres from the erstwhile Sanlian organization joined the new bodies in charge of publishing, the few Xinhua people active in the administration lost out in the distribution of posts and positions. The number of cadres with a background in the CCP’s urban publishing ventures, and especially in Sanlian shudian, was on the rise. This became first apparent in fall 1949, when the “National Xinhua Bookstore Conference on Publishing” was convened in Beijing on October 3. The 165 participants of this first major publishing conference included delegates from the regional Xinhua branches, from Sanlian, as well as members of the Publishing Committee and a number of cadres from different Party committees in the propaganda sector.<sup>73</sup> The conference gave ample room for regional work reports and provided an opportunity for cadres to link up and exchange experiences. Furthermore, the Party centre chose this opportunity to communicate policies and directions to all delegates. During the conference, the personnel setting for the post-1949 period began to emerge. Of ten keynote speakers, only five were later appointed to responsible positions in the publishing sector: Hu Yuzhi, Huang Luofeng, Xu Boxin, Shi Yucai 史育才, and Wang Yi 王益.<sup>74</sup> Hu was a member of the China Democratic League (his CCP membership

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<sup>71</sup> “Chuban weiyuanhui zonghe baogao” (dated June 30, 1949) in *ZRGCSL* 160-69, here p. 164.

<sup>72</sup> See, among others, *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> See the table in *ZRGCSL* 1.449-54. This list, however, leaves out those cadres from work units other than the publishers and the Publishing Committee. Thus the names of influential cadres in the propaganda sector, such as Hu Qiaomu, Lu Dingyi, and Chen Boda, were omitted, although they attended at least part of the conference’s proceedings and also spoke to the participants.

<sup>74</sup> Hu delivered the general report, Huang spoke on behalf of the Publishing Committee, Xu reported on the Party’s pre-1949 publishing activities in the GMD areas; Shi Yucai and Wang Yi, the general managers of the Huabei and Huadong Xinhua bookstores, reported on their respective publishers.

was secret) and served mostly in United Front functions; his actual influence in publishing affairs seems to have been small. Three of the other four had a Sanlian past.<sup>75</sup> Of the remaining, two occupied medium-level propaganda and publishing posts after 1949, the other three faded into oblivion after the conference.<sup>76</sup> Thus, the Xinhua people were the ones who lost out in process of institution building and were relegated to second- and third-tier jobs (see chart two). These developments present us with a paradox: while the Party leadership had decided to make Xinhua the model the entire publishing industry was to follow eventually, Xinhua itself had failed to train a cadre of experienced personnel. It was overwhelmingly cadres with a Sanlian background who were called in to run Xinhua and to take charge of re-engineering the publishing sector. They were better educated and had more experience in the urban publishing market, but in turn they had to accommodate the Party's prerogatives, and eventually even bring about Sanlian's demise.

Around the time of the publishing conference, the formal administrative structure for the publishing sector began to emerge. The Publishing Committee was dissolved in November 1949; both its personnel and its tasks were divided between the new Publishing Bureau, a Party body under the CC PD (the Publishing Committee had answered to the CCP North China PD), and the General Publication Administration (GPA) that was formally inaugurated on November 1. The leadership of the government body was handed over to a number of elder-generation intellectuals without formal CCP affiliation, such as Hu Yuzhi, Zhou Jianren 周建人, and Ye Shengtao. Hu and Zhou were associated with Shenghuo shudian, while Ye had a close relationship with Kaiming. Among the Administration's vice-heads, only Chen Kehan 陈克寒, the editor-in-chief of Xinhua she, was officially a CCP member. While non-Party people were awarded prominent representative posts, the crucial work in the Administration was done by

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<sup>75</sup> Wang Yi (b. 1917) had worked at Shenghuo and Xinzhi between 1935 and 1940; he later headed Shandong Xinhua and Huadong Xinhua. Shi Yucai had made his early career at Huabei Xinhua shudian and was thus the exception among the five men.

<sup>76</sup> Wang Shuntong 王顺桐, who represented Xibei Xinhua as a propaganda official of the CC Northwest Bureau, later served on local posts in the propaganda, publishing, and science fields. Shao Gongwen 邵公文, who delivered the Sanlian report, became general manager of Sanlian and later led other enterprises in the publishing sector. No information at all is available for the (non-) careers of Li Wen 李文, Hua Qinghe 华青禾, and Chen Yu 陈雨, the general managers of Dongbei Xinhua, Huazhong Xinhua, and the Xinhua branch accompanying the third field army, respectively.

**Chart 2: Keynote Speakers of the 1949 Xinhua Conference**

Name	Talk at 1949 conference	Past Experience	Later functions
胡愈之	全国出版事业概况	Shenghuo; diff. newspapers	GPA head; vice minister for Culture
黄洛峰	出版委员会工作报告	Dushu chubanshe (manager), Sanlian shudian (manager)	GPA Publishing Bureau head; Wenhua bu chuban shiye guanliju head
徐伯昕	国统区革命出版工作报告	Shenghuo (manager), Sanlian (manager)	GPA General Office head; GPA Distribution Bureau head; Xinhua zongdian (manager)
李文	东北新华书店工作报告	?	?
史育才	华北区新华书店工作报告	Huabei <i>Xinhua ribao</i> ; Huabei Xinhua shudian (manager)	Xinhua shudian (manager); Wenhua bu chuban shiye guanliju vice head
王顺桐	西北区新华书店工作报告	Prop. positions in CCP CC Northwest Bureau	medium-level prop. and science admin. positions in Northwest, Beijing
邵公文	生活读书新知三联书店工作报告	Shenghuo shudian	Sanlian gen. manager; Zhongguo tushu faxing gongsi gen. manager
王益	华东区新华书店工作报告	Shenghuo, Xinzhi; Shandong Xinhua; Huadong Xinhua	Xinhua zongdian gen. manager; since 1958 Wenhua bu chuban shiye guanliju head
陈雨	华东军区、第三野战军随军书店图书馆工作报告	?	?
华青禾	华中区新华书店工作报告	?	?

Note: grey fields in column three (past experience) = Sanlian past  
 grey fields in column four (later functions) = posts in national publishing leadership  
 No information on Li Wen, Chen Yu, and Hua Qinghe is available.

Sources: *Zhongguo renming dacidian: dangdai renwu juan*. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1992; *Zhongguo chuban kexue yanjiusuo*, Hebei sheng xinwen chubanju (ed.). *Zhongguo chuban renming cidian*. Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 1989; *Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu* (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chuabanshe, 2000.

the Publishing Bureau (Chuban zongshu chubanju 出版总署出版局). With Huang Luofeng, Zhu Zhicheng 祝志澄, Hua Yingshen, and Hu Sheng, we find four ranking CCP members in charge of the Publishing Bureau. Of these, Huang, Hua, and Hu had a Sanlian past (Hua Yingshen had recently worked for Xinhua). Zhu Zhicheng had been a printing worker employed by Shangwu, and had later overseen the Yan'an printing plant; he was apparently the worker element in the administration who had been carried over from the Publishing Committee. On the most important posts in the new national administrative structure we thus find a remarkably high

number of Sanlian people, as against only very few Xinhua cadres (see also chart 3).<sup>77</sup> The allocation of administrative jobs to former or current Sanlian people did not strengthen Sanlian's position in the PRC. To the contrary: Sanlian was not only sidelined as a Party publisher; the CCP's reliance on experienced Sanlian personnel in the new administrative organs bled it of its backbone employees. Sanlian's ability to compete in the market was shrinking.

**Chart 3: Leadership of the General Publication Administration**

Name	Born	Joins CCP	Past Experience	GPA Post
胡愈之	1896	(1933)	Shenghuo; diff. newspapers	Head
叶圣陶	1894	-	Shangwu, Kaiming	Vice head
周建人	1888	1948	Shangwu, Shenghuo, Xinzhi	Vice head
陈克寒	1917	1934	Huabei Xinhua ribao; Xinhua she head	Vice head; (conc. posts in PD)
萨空了	1907	-	Journalist	Vice head; (conc. vice-head of Gen. News Admin.)
黄洛峰	1909	1927	Dushu chubanshe (manager), Sanlian shudian (manager)	GPA Chubanju head
祝志澄	1906	1932	Printing worker at Shangwu, leads printing plants in Jiangxi Soviet and Yan'an, takes part in Long March	GPA Chubanju vice head
华应申	1911	1937	Xinzhi shudian, Zhongguo CBS, Huazhong Xinhua shudian (manager)	GPA Chubanju vice head
胡绳	1918	1938	Shenghuo	GPA medium-level pos.; head of GPA Party cell; (conc. vice-head of PD Secretariat)

Sources: *Zhongguo renming dacidian: dangdai renwu juan*. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1992; *Zhongguo chuban kexue yanjiusuo*, Hebei sheng xinwen chubanju (ed.). *Zhongguo chuban renming cidian*. Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 1989; *Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu* (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chuabanshe, 2000.

At the Xinhua conference in Beijing, a clearer understanding of the future direction of the publishing sector began to emerge. The first major issue was the national unification of publishing and the organization of an institutional framework. During the conference, the enormous difficulties of this undertaking, arising from regional disparities, were highlighted by cadres: especially personnel from regions such as the Northwest and Central China that had only recently been occupied by

<sup>77</sup> Biographic information taken from *Zhongguo renming dacidian: dangdai renwu juan*. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1992; *Zhongguo chuban kexue yanjiusuo*, Hebei sheng xinwen chubanju (ed.). *Zhongguo chuban renming cidian*. Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 1989; *Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu* (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chuabanshe, 2000.

the PLA had to deal with difficult topography and a lack of infrastructure. The key argument in favour of unification and centralization was “rationalization” – a point consistent with the arguments made in favour of the Sanlian merger. The idea of “rationalizing” a chaotic, market-driven industry had its origins in the Yan’an era.<sup>78</sup> According to this understanding, the energies consumed by free market competition can be channelled to more productive purposes, that is, “serving the people.” Unification, so the conference participants hoped, would for example help to bring down book prices through a fixed national system of price calculation. Lower book prices would lessen the burden especially of poor readers and would contribute to the state’s effort to reduce illiteracy.<sup>79</sup>

An issue that obviously gave a headache to many participants was summed up under the slogan “enterpris-ation” (*qiyehua* 企业化). Referring to the tense fiscal situation of the central government, the Party leadership called upon the publishers and book stores to pay attention to their bottom line, to introduce modern accounting, and to work towards equity break even (*shiwu baoben* 实物保本). In open defiance of this policy, delegates from poorer regions, especially from the Northwest, asked for more capital injections, but apparently did not succeed, since *qiyehua* was included in the final report.<sup>80</sup> *Qiyehua*, however, must not be mistaken for “business-ization” (*shangyehua* 商业化). The CCP had no intention of introducing market principles at Xinhua, but demanded only that its publishing outlets should avoid losses for which the state – i.e. the people – would have to pay for. This important difference also led to a redefinition of the term “profit.”

As a medium-term goal aside from *qiyehua*, specialization emerged during the conference. Specialization concerned primarily the separation of publishing, printing, and distribution of books. The integrated production chain that handled books from the editing of manuscripts to retail sales to the customer was a particular feature of the Chinese publishing industry: all major and many minor

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<sup>78</sup> Compare the April 15, 1942, Directive that mandated the restructuring of the Yan’an publishing sector, discussed in chapter two.

<sup>79</sup> Huang Luofeng explains the new pricing system in his closing report to the conference (ZRGCSL 1.425-40, here p. 433). See also Lu Dingyi’s thoughts on the book price issue in his closing address to the conference (ZRGCSL 1.441-46, here p. 445). On the CCP’s efforts to erase illiteracy see Glen Peterson. *The Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-1995*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997.

<sup>80</sup> Huang Luofeng speaks about *qiyehua* in his closing report (p. 433-34). For a rebuttal see the report of Wang Shuntong, the Northwest Xinhua representative (ZRGCSL 1.349-70).

Chinese publishers were publishing house cum printing shop and book store – thus the names of the Chinese publishers, that mostly ended in *shudian* 书店, *shuju* 书局, or *yinshuguan* 印书馆.<sup>81</sup> Chinese bookstores derived much of their identity from the integration of publishing proper, printing, and wholesale and retail sales. At the Xinhua conference, the integrated production chain was called “unscientific;” in his opening remarks, Hu Yuzhi accused the assembling of publication, printing, and distribution under the same brand as a remnant of feudal thinking.<sup>82</sup> Huang Luofeng proposed the separation of these three activities in the long run, arguing for “professionalization.”<sup>83</sup>

A theme that was only beginning to emerge was Xinhua’s future status. Until 1949, Xinhua had been a Party bookstore, answering to the local Party committees. After the founding of the PRC, the unified control of Xinhua was to be handed over not to the Party centre, but to the General Publication Administration, a government body subordinate to the State Council.<sup>84</sup> Xinhua was to undergo the transition from a Party publisher to a state bookstore, a decision made public by the Propaganda Department shortly after the conference.<sup>85</sup> With Xinhua becoming a state bookstore rather than a Party publisher, however, its relationship with other publishing houses had to be clarified. Lu Dingyi drew attention to the necessity “to cooperate honestly and frankly with the public-private joint ventures and the private publishing industry. The ‘Common Program of the Political Consultative Conference’ guarantees that the people have the freedom of publishing... The private publishing businesses must respect the state laws and orders, but within the limits permitted by these laws and orders, they have publishing freedom.”<sup>86</sup> On the sidelines of the Xinhua conference, a tea party was convened where the CCP reassured the private publishers of their position in the PRC. The key-note speech was given by Hu Yuzhi, a non-Xinhua man.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, the state-owned publishers occupied a key-position and played a leadership role within the industry:

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<sup>81</sup> Similar arrangements were common in Europe until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>82</sup> Hu Yuzhi’s report can be found in *ZRGCSL* 1.254-66, here see p. 254-57.

<sup>83</sup> See Huang’s report, p. 431-33.

<sup>84</sup> On the issue of the transition and a discussion of some related problems see Huang’s report on behalf of the Publishing Committee, p. 295-96.

<sup>85</sup> “Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu guanyu quanguo Xinhua shudian chuban gongzuo huiyi de tonggao” (dated Oct. 26, 1949) in *ZRGCSL* 1.474-75.

<sup>86</sup> Lu’s speech, p. 444.

<sup>87</sup> A summary report of this tea party is available in *ZRGCSL* 1.462-67.

“Our own forces are smaller than those of the private [publishers], but we mustn’t allow the private sector and ourselves to develop in opposition to each other, and we mustn’t force them out [of business] and let them disappear; we must unite with them, lead them, and, under the principle of taking both public and private enterprises into account [*gongsi jian gu* 公私兼顾], introduce division of labour in the production in a planned and gradual way.”<sup>88</sup> A double-track policy is emerging here: while the private industry is being reassured of their status, behind the closed doors of the publishing conference the ground was prepared for a dominant role for the state-owned Xinhua bookstore. The demand of direct Party control from the media concept was understood in an increasingly literal fashion.

At the very end of the Xinhua conference, the core principles for publishing in the PRC were summed up by none other than Lu Dingyi, the head of the CCP PD. In a crucial passage of his closing remarks, Lu made clear the difference between the Party’s publishers and the private publishing houses.<sup>89</sup>

The publishing industry that serves the people does indeed have [bright] prospects. This is a truth that already lies clearly before us. Such publishing organs like Xinhua shudian and Sanlian shudian that are serving the people, have struggled bitterly for so many years, and now indeed they face a bright future. The difference between our publishing industry and the old publishing industry is to serve the people unconditionally. The profit to the cause of the people’s liberation is the only profit that counts for us; no matter whether the publishers earn money or make losses, no matter whether individual satisfaction is high or low, all must serve the people. Under the rule of the GMD, the people’s publishing workers went so far as to be ready to sacrifice their lives for the profits of the people. From the old point of view, such a kind of publishing and such publishing workers, were simply “stupid.” But just this kind of publishing and these publishing workers are those that will have a future. Stalin has said that Communists are made from a special material. Our Communists are just this sort of special people, they unconditionally serve the people. Xinhua shudian and Sanlian shudian are models of this kind of publishing businesses; the outstanding publishing workers from all over the country will advance on this road. We must maintain and develop this glorious tradition.

As the most senior Party representative to address the conference, Lu chose blunt words to describe the prospects for the publishing sector. The most interesting point is Lu’s use of *liyi* 利益. *Liyi* should be rendered variously as “profit” and “benefits.” Lu deals here with two competing understandings of *liyi*, business profits on the one hand, and the benefits of the people – that transcend a purely monetary understanding. Lu Dingyi regards the latter as the “correct” interpretation.

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<sup>88</sup> Hu Yuzhi’s speech, p. 266.

<sup>89</sup> Lu Dingyi’s address in *ZRGCSL* 1.441-46, here p. 442.

For the private publishing houses, Lu's speech would have sounded alarming, if they were given an opportunity to hear his address, because his proposals come up to abolishing market principles for the publishing sector. Lu also goes further than Huang Luofeng when he justifies even loss-making enterprises: under certain circumstances, the demands for equity break even can be suspended. Finally, Lu Dingyi singles out Xinhua (and the Xinhua-ized Sanlian) as a model not just for state-owned publishing enterprises, but for all publishers: the introductory remark that the future (*qiantu* 前途) belongs to those publishing enterprises that "serve the people" is a clear indication of the further direction. In his speech, Lu had proposed nothing less than the blue print for the transformation of the publishing sector.

*Learning and Emulating: Soviet Publishing and the Transformation of the Chinese Book Industry*

How did the CCP put into practice its ambitions to assume comprehensive control of the publishing sector? Through what steps was the Xinhua model extended to the entire Chinese publishing industry? And, most importantly, what models did the CCP use for the implementation of the media concept in the publishing sector? As the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* became the blueprint for the construction of socialism in China, the Soviet experience played an important role in the restructuring of the Chinese publishing sector and provided a model for the transformation the industry.<sup>90</sup> It was, however, a model based on the Soviet experience of the 1930s, long after the revolution – in contrast to the more recent prescriptions of Soviet advisers who urged the CCP to respect the relatively long period of transition that

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<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately, since the 1960s Chinese sources do no longer comment on the Soviet role in the publishing sector. Information is very fragmentary and must be reconstructed from what little material is available. A recent volume affirms the important influence of the Soviet model for the Chinese publishing industry in the 1950s. See Yu Min (ed.). *Qian Sulian Eluosi chuban guanli yanjiu*. Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 2002.



had been agreed at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in September 1949.<sup>91</sup>

According to the biographers of Hu Yuzhi, a Soviet representative was present at the Xinhua conference.<sup>92</sup> The director of the Soviet Union's International Bookstore addressed the audience and instructed the Chinese, who were eager to learn from the Soviet Union, on the Soviet experiences in publishing and its administration, among other things.<sup>93</sup> He told the Chinese especially about the need to separate publishing, printing, and distribution. His address was also included in a volume collecting the key speeches of the conference that was distributed in 1950.<sup>94</sup> However, the number of Soviet advisors in the publishing sector staying permanently in China was probably very small in contrast to those in other industries in the 1950s.<sup>95</sup>

As an alternative to sending experts to China, the Soviet authorities invited Chinese administrators to visit the Soviet Union and collect experience first hand. Since none of the new leaders of the publishing sector had studied in the Soviet Union during the heyday of the Third International in the 1930s, the inspection tours of the early 1950s were an important experience for them. Most notably, Huang Luofeng went to Moscow in July 1950 for a four-month period of study.<sup>96</sup>

The most convenient way to transfer Soviet knowledge to the PRC was the translation into Chinese of Soviet books and other material that was then used as study material all over the country. During the first decade of the PRC, large numbers of Soviet literature of theoretical and applied nature was translated into

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<sup>91</sup> A parallel argument has been made, with regard to the transformation of the Chinese economy, by Li Hua-yu. See *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948-1953*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. Li's observations seem to be valid for the publishing sector as well.

<sup>92</sup> The name of this man is given as Deaomiduofu 德奧米多夫. I have been unable to track down this person.

<sup>93</sup> See Yu You. *Hu Yuzhi zhuan*. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1993, p. 328-29.

<sup>94</sup> Xinhua shudian zong guanlichu (ed.). *Quanguo Xinhua shudian chuban gongzuo huiyi zhuanji*. Beijing, 1950, p. 367. Unfortunately, I have never seen this collection. Deaomiduofu's speech is not available in other collections of publishing documents published later.

<sup>95</sup> Having no concrete figures to answer this question, I conclude from the fact that Soviet advisers are never mentioned in contemporary sources of the publishing sector that there were few (if any) advisers in the PRC's publishing sector. For a study of the impact of the Soviet model on industrial management in the PRC see Deborah A. Kaple. *Dream of a Red Factory: The Legacy of High Stalinism in China*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

<sup>96</sup> Huang went as a member of a Propaganda Work Team organized by the Propaganda Department. See the Appendix in Ma Zhongyang. *Chuban jia Huang Luofeng*, p. 262. For some reason, Huang's visit abroad is not even mentioned in the main text of this volume. The mission may have been secret, as there is no information on it available.

Chinese.<sup>97</sup> This pattern was very common and is found in the publishing sector as well.<sup>98</sup> In March 1950, Shidai chubanshe 时代出版社 (a Shanghai-based venture owned by the Soviet news agency TASS) translated a small volume entitled “Soviet Publishing” that contained five lectures by Soviet publishers.<sup>99</sup> Of special significance for the organization of the PRC publishing sector are the passages of the book introducing the structure of the Soviet publishing industry:<sup>100</sup>

In the Soviet Union, the publishing sector practices division of labour according to the different characters [of publications]. This means that every Soviet publishing organ generally publishes one sort of books: politics, art, agriculture, medicine etc. Thus, in the Soviet Union there exist: the National Publishing House for Political Books (Gospolitdat), the National Publishing House for Arts Books (Goslitedat), the National Publishing House for Agricultural Books (Sel'khoegie), the National Publishing House for Medicine Books (Medgie) etc. Many publishing houses have joined the National Association of Publishing Houses (Ogie) under the Soviet Council of Ministers. The National Association of Publishing Houses plays an important role in the Soviet publishing sector. Among its members are (as of 1947): the National Publishing House for Political Books, the National Publishing House for Literary Books, the National Publishing House for Medicine Books, the National Publishing House for Technical Books, the Soviet Encyclopedia Publishing House of the National Academy of Sciences, the Soviet Dictionary (Foreign Languages and Languages of Minorities in the Soviet Union) Publishing House, the Geography Books Publishing House, the Jewish 'Der Emes' Publishing House, and the publishing organs of the eighteen districts; these eighteen publishing organs primarily print works of local character, literary works of local authors, and books for production and agriculture. Besides the publishing houses belonging to the National Association of Publishing Houses, there is the Publishing House of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, the publishing houses of the other [local] academies of sciences, the publishing houses of many ministries (like the Textbook Publishing House of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Republic, the Medicine Books Publishing House of the Soviet Ministry of Physical Education, the Military Affairs Books Publishing House of the Soviet Ministry of Armed Forces etc.), educational institutions, mass organizations, party organizations, and the publishing organs of the institutions of higher learning and other organizations. In Moscow, there is furthermore the Foreign Languages Publishing House that is specialized in printing and translating books into foreign languages. Besides the national publishing houses, there are publishing organs in the member republics, autonomous regions, districts, and localities.

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<sup>97</sup> Compare the following bibliography: Zhongyang wenhuabu chuban shiye guanliju (ed.). *Wo guo fanyi chuban Sulian shuji mulu*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenhuabu chuban shiye guanliju, 1955. Compare also the list given in Kaple. *Dream of a Red Factory*, p. 14-18.

<sup>98</sup> Translations relevant for the publishing sector include: *Sulian de chuban* (see below); Nazhaluofu. *Sulian chuban shiye jianshi*. Beijing: Shidai chubanshe, 1955; *Sulian chuban yinshua gongzuo ren yuan huiyi wenjian*. Beijing: Shidai chubanshe, 1955; K.I. Yinlinsiji. *Shukan bianjixue jiaoxue dagang*. Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1956.

<sup>99</sup> Maerkusi. *Sulian de chuban*. Shanghai: Shidai chubanshe, 1950. Orig. *Sovetskaia pechat'*.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36f.

The above passage is just a brief description of the organization of the Soviet publishing industry, but in the Chinese context it must be read as a blueprint for the future transformation of the publishing sector. It stands in marked contrast to the organization of the Chinese publishing industry before 1949. The Soviet model first of all prescribes “division of labour” in the form of specialization: all publishing houses have narrowly defined fields of business. The distinction of responsibilities for particular kinds of publications is advocated as a measure of rationalization, yet it also serves purposes of control. If the Soviet model was to be implemented in China, the identity of the existing Chinese publishers would receive a major blow: for decades, Chinese publishing houses had produced books across functional lines. Sanlian and its predecessors, for example, published Chinese and foreign literature as well as works of philosophy, the social sciences, and occasionally even the sciences. Such a broad scope became impossible in the light of the Soviet model.

The passage quoted above contains important information concerning the administrative organization of the sector: the National Association of Publishing Houses is entrusted with the united leadership of the entire Soviet publishing industry, with the exception of publishers directly administered by the Party or by the government ministries. To set up a comprehensive structure of control and command that would correspond with the Soviet counterpart thus became a priority for the CCP. Most importantly, however, is the complete absence of private publishing houses in the long list given by the Soviets. In the long term, the entire private sector in China would thus have to be nationalized. As I will show below, the Chinese Communists set out to learn from the Soviet experience and made every effort to emulate the Soviet model. As a consequence, the Chinese publishing sector became in many ways a direct copy of the Soviet model; even details, such as the Academy of Sciences’ own publishing house, were taken over from the Soviet Union.

In its first months, the GPA was preoccupied mainly with creating a confusing bureaucratic structure with overlapping layers that struggled for competencies. Deciding the division of responsibilities apparently consumed so much energy that very little time remained for the ambitious goal of direct leadership of the state-owned Xinhua bookstore. The GPA explained malfunctions

and failures to perform usually with a lack of experienced cadres and other personnel that prevented it from setting up an even more complicated structure.<sup>101</sup> Hu Yuzhi had to admit shortcomings in the organization of book supply, the relationship with the private publishers, and in the communication between the GPA and the Party agencies. In a June 1950 report to Hu Qiaomu, Hu Yuzhi drew a pessimistic picture of the situation in the publishing sector. Hu Yuzhi's frankness is striking:<sup>102</sup>

The publishing sector of the entire country is still quite chaotic. Output is low and so is quality. The vast majority of new books are of mediocre content and are stereotyped. The biggest sales are only cadre study books and journals, with literary works coming in second; books in support of production and construction and reading materials for the great masses of workers and peasants are few and far between. We will have to spend a great amount of work to turn around the trend of publishing being detached from the real needs.

The steps taken towards unification of Xinhua bookstore are extremely slow. While objective conditions are excellent, the subjective conditions cannot keep pace. Our biggest shortcoming is that relations with the masses haven't been handled well; the distribution organs are slacking and the readers say that Xinhua is a *yamen*<sup>103</sup> that is difficult to enter.

Book prices have reached a very severe [i.e. high] level. Many schools and students cannot afford textbooks; in Beijing middle schools, three to four students share one book. High paper prices are of course the main reason for high book prices, but another reason is the mishandling of distribution and our inability to avoid waste. In most places, textbooks cannot be supplied in time. The Xinhua bookstore in Guangzhou united the private booksellers and organized a textbook supply committee; in mid-April, [the textbooks] for the spring term had not yet been supplied completely, so that the schools had to extend their deadlines for two months; [the Guangzhou store] violated regular guidelines and sold books for increased prices calculated by parity units; [this behaviour] lacks organization and discipline and does harm to the prestige of the Party and the government (they have later apologized publicly in the newspapers).

The GPA's first experiences in directly managing production and supply of books had been nothing short of a disaster. The exclusion of the commercial publishing houses such as Shangwu, from textbook publishing had led to a breakdown of

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<sup>101</sup> The GPA's three-month report from February 16, 1950, gives fair insight into the problems plaguing the body in the early days ("Chuban zongshu san ge yue gongzuo jiancha hou de ji xiang jue ding" in *ZRGCSL* 2.90-94). In one instance, a cadre admits that books imported from the Soviet Union and distributed by the new International Bookstore (Guoji shudian 国际书店), a GPA unit, were so expensive due to that book store's ineffectiveness, that even Xinhua branches refused to place their orders through Guoji, and preferred cheaper books imported by private book sellers in Northeast China.

<sup>102</sup> See Hu Yuzhi's letter to Hu Qiaomu which in its extraordinary frankness in fact amounts to a self-criticism: "Chuban zongshu gongzuo zonghe baogao: 1950 nian 2-5 yue" in *ZRGCSL* 2.300-01.

<sup>103</sup> The organs of central and local government and administration in imperial China were notorious for the arbitrariness of the officials; "entering" a *yamen*, that is, reaching the successful handling of official matters usually required either a lot of money or good personal relations, or both.

supply. Worse, Shangwu's workshops were standing idle and the publisher produced huge deficits month after month; only massive subsidies by the new government (that was in dire straits fiscally anyway) kept Shangwu from drastically reducing its workforce, a step that would have further damaged the reputation of the new government.<sup>104</sup>

Yet while Hu Yuzhi was ready to shoulder his part of the blame, he was not afraid to point out the responsibility of the Party for the present situation in the Chinese publishing industry:<sup>105</sup>

The Party's leadership relationship is weak. The Party branch's help in raising the cadres' ideological [awareness], in implementing business strategies, and in reflecting the masses' opinions, is not big, so that leadership and masses lose touch and the views of leadership and cadres are not united. Human resource management tends to a closed-door attitude. Some non-Party cadres [i.e. personnel] say that the activities of Party and [Communist Youth] League are shrouded in mystery and therefore they have apprehensions and misgivings, and that the leaders of the administration, too, sometimes make not clear the intentions of the Party. (The following is omitted).<sup>106</sup> I have to personally shoulder the responsibility for these affairs, because I have not patiently linked up with the Party and, with the exception of key questions, have not often requested advice and reported to the Party. From now on I must correct this [shortcoming]. I hope that you will give me much support and I ask the Party cell to give me much more leadership assistance and the necessary criticism.

Obviously, Hu Yuzhi counts himself to those "non-Party cadres" who feel that the CCP shrouds itself "in mystery." Formulated in a polite manner, Hu makes it abundantly clear that he feels let down by the Party; communication between the political leadership (from where the policies emanate that Hu has to implement) and the administrative organs is not functioning properly; the difficulties in the sector and the frustration for the employees are thus aggravated.

While the private sector had suffered considerably from the new restrictions and the uncertainty caused by the administrative chaos,<sup>107</sup> the worst performer in

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<sup>104</sup> "Chuban zongshu gongzuo zonghe baogao: 1950 nian 2-5 yue," p. 301. For more details see "Wei Shangwu yinshuguan wenti Chuban zongshu zhi Huadong Xinwen chubanju han" in *ZRGCSL* 2.249-52.

<sup>105</sup> "Chuban zongshu gongzuo zonghe baogao: 1950 nian 2-5 yue," p. 301.

<sup>106</sup> Omission in the original (*ZRGCSL* reprint).

<sup>107</sup> In addition to restrictions on their business scope and the loss of important sources of income, such as school textbooks, the large private publishers were dealt a further blow: in spring 1950 the GPA began to urge the large publishing houses to move their headquarters from Shanghai to Beijing. This open step to advance central government control went at the heart of the publishing sector: for decades Shanghai had been the undisputed capital of publishing in China. When publishing houses were urged to shift to Beijing – in return for massive capital injections desperately needed by the ailing publishers – they had to reorient from the commercial setting of Shanghai to the politicized environment of Beijing; the move wreaked havoc to their identities. For Kaiming see "Chuban zongshu gei Kaiming shudian fuwen" in *ZRGCSL* 2.246-47.

the industry was undoubtedly the Party-led Xinhua shudian. Not even a year after the founding of the PRC it turned out that the rigorous and often blind implementation of the media concept on a national scale had put much strain on the publishing industry. In mid-1950, the private sector did still exist and tried to carve out its niche under the new conditions. Yet these difficulties notwithstanding, the Party's propaganda leadership decided to push ahead with the media concept that the CCP had developed in Yan'an: Xinhua was the one and only choice acceptable to the Party leadership.

A consequence of the chaos in the regulatory bodies was the decision to transfer responsibility for the day-to-day affairs of Xinhua from GPA to another body, the Xinhua Main Administration (*Xinhua zong guanlichu* 新华总管理处); the GPA was henceforth to concentrate on strictly administrative affairs. The Xinhua Main Administration was established in Beijing on April 1, 1950 and was put in charge of all management affairs of the Xinhua branches in the large regions.<sup>108</sup> While retaining close ties to the GPA (Huang Luofeng, head of the GPA's Publishing Bureau was named general manager of the Xinhua Main Administration), the Main Administration took over the responsibility for all core publishing areas such as textbooks, the Marxist classics, and Party and government documents; the regional branches would receive master copies of the works compiled in Beijing and were to reprint them for local distribution. In addition, they would be allowed to publish works of local character, literary works, and, on demand of the centre, a few school textbooks. Editorial control was thus being concentrated not only in the hands of Xinhua, but in the Main Administration under direct political control of the central government. Furthermore, with the establishment of the Xinhua Main Administration, the relationship among the branches was reformed: horizontal contacts between regional bookstores were gradually reduced, with all important information flowing through the Main Administration. The vertically integrated system of administration and communication through which the CCP has controlled the flow of information and the decision-making processes in all areas of life since the 1950s was thus introduced into the publishing sector, too.

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<sup>108</sup> See "Chuban zongshu guanyu tongyi quan guo Xinhua shudian de jue ding" (March 25, 1950) in *ZRGCSL* 2.107-17.

In August and September, 1950, two important conferences were convened that introduced the next step in the process of unification and consolidation of the Chinese publishing sector. The Second National Work Conference of Xinhua Bookstores met in Beijing from August 29 to September 10, followed by the First National Publishing Conference, held from September 15 to 25, where representatives of the private publishing houses joined the Xinhua cadres. The Xinhua conference summed up the progress of work since the first such meeting a year earlier; the attending Xinhua cadres were briefed on the further direction of the structural reforms of the sector. The theme now moving onto centre stage was the breakup of the integrated production chain of publishing, printing, and distribution (*faxing* 发行),<sup>109</sup> an issue that had already been discussed the year before. The introduction of “division of labour” (*fen gong* 分工) was motivated by the Soviet model that loomed in the background of many a speech at the conference. Knowledge about Soviet publishing practices and the organization of the Soviet publishing sector seemed to be much better now; it is very likely that Huang Luofeng, who was still in the Soviet Union at the time of the conferences, provided the attendants with detailed information on what he was seeing in Moscow.

The new organizational pattern was discussed at the two conferences, and the decisions reached there were approved by the Central Committee and then communicated within the Party.<sup>110</sup> On October 28, 1950, the government issued a “Directive of the Government Administration Council of the Central People’s Government Concerning Improving and Developing the Publishing Business in the Whole Country,”<sup>111</sup> thus formally pronouncing the division of labour:<sup>112</sup>

Publishing, distribution, and printing of books and journals are three kinds of work with different characteristics; principally they shall gradually practice scientific division of labour. To raise the quality of the publications, the professional publishing houses, in the first place the public sector publishing houses, shall gradually practice a rough

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<sup>109</sup> Before 1949, no clear distinction between retail and wholesale existed in the Chinese publishing industry; most bookstores engaged in both kinds of activities. Since wholesale purchases by lower level Xinhua stores were initially treated as normal sales, many local stores complained about inflated prices, because the prices had to accommodate both the costs of the end seller and the intermediary, whereas books in larger cities were cheaper due to a shorter distribution chain.

<sup>110</sup> See “Zhongyang zhuanfa quan guo chuban huiyi guanyu ge xiang gongzuo fangzhen de jueding” (dated October 13, 1950) in XGWX 3.128-130.

<sup>111</sup> “Zhongyang renmin zhengfu Zhengwuyuan guanyu gaijin he fazhan quan guo chuban shiye de zhishi” in ZRGCSL 2.642-45.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 642-43.

division of labour according to the nature of the publications. The General Publication Administration shall also, as far as possible, help the larger ones of the private publishing houses to outline a professional publishing direction; it shall assist the smaller private publishing houses, under the principle of respecting their free will, to [join in] cooperative business operations, so as to overcome the phenomena of unbridled competition, duplications and waste in publishing work.<sup>113</sup>

In practice, this decision proposed both a division of labour along organizational lines and a specialization according to subject matter, as practiced in the Soviet Union. It thus required the separation of Xinhua's publishing, printing, and distribution activities. The internally distributed final document of the publishing conference then proposed the establishment of a number of state publishing houses, formed around Xinhua's editorial committees, each with a specified task: the People's Publishing House (*Renmin chubanshe* 人民出版社) was to specialize on publications of political nature and policy-related reading materials, the task of the Education Press (*Jiaoyu chubanshe* 教育出版社), to be formed in junction with the education ministry, was to publish school textbooks, etc. Likewise, the conference decided that the larger private publishing houses should concentrate their publishing activities on one special field; their retail and wholesale activities were to be transferred gradually to Xinhua.<sup>114</sup>

The GPA reacted quickly and the reorganization of the Chinese publishing sector took effect on December 1, 1950, when Renmin chubanshe was established. Hu Sheng, a Sanlian man, was made head of the first new publishing house, to be assisted by Hua Yingshen and Wang Ziye 王子野, two Xinhua cadres.<sup>115</sup> Shortly thereafter, the printing plants in Beijing and elsewhere were reorganized: in 1949, the administration of the printing facilities that Xinhua had taken over from Zhengzhong and other GMD publishers had been handed over to the Publishing Committee and was then transferred to the Xinhua Main Administration. Under the new system of division of labour, these plants, as well as those that had been built in the months since the CCP's assumption of power,

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<sup>113</sup> Note that the directive does not differentiate properly between "division of labour," i.e. the separation of publishing, printing, and distribution, and "specialization," which means that publishing houses must concentrate on a single kind of publications. Both are referred to as *fen gong* 分工 here.

<sup>114</sup> See "Zhongyang zhuanfa... de jue ding", p. 129-30.

<sup>115</sup> See Bi Dezhen. "Renmin chubanshe 40 nian" in Song Yingli. *Zhongguo dangdai chuban shiliao* 4.371-77, and Renmin chubanshe zongbianshi, Renmin chubanshe shewu bangongshi (comp.). "Renmin chubanshe dashiji" in *Chuban Shiliao* 9-10. Both accounts are highly stratified mainstream histories.



retained their name, but were placed under direct supervision of the GPA as independent work units.<sup>116</sup> On January 1, 1951, the Xinhua Main Administration was renamed Xinhua Main Branch (*Xinhua zongdian*) and set up shop as the state-owned agency to concentrate exclusively on book distribution. The main branch in Beijing was to “manage in a unified way the national Xinhua book stores’ distribution of monopolized books and journals.”<sup>117</sup>

In the provinces, the same organizational pattern was followed when the vertical administrative organization of the PRC gradually evolved: the editorial boards of the local Xinhua branches (*zong fendian*) formed the core of the provincial people’s publishing houses (such as Hebei renmin chubanshe 河北人民出版社, Shandong renmin chubanshe 山东人民出版社, Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社 etc.),<sup>118</sup> while responsibility for printing was transferred to the local publishing authorities (usually a *chubanju* or *xinwen chubanju*). On both central and provincial levels, the tripartite “division of labour” was implemented administratively through three independent work units under joint supervision of the publishing authorities and the propaganda committees.

With the second restructuring in late 1950 and early 1951, the transformation of Xinhua came to a preliminary conclusion. The national administrative structure was completed in the early 1950s with the establishment of the last provincial governments. While administrative responsibilities shifted over the next decades, with stress alternating between Party and government authorities, the overall arrangement of “division of labour” and double, i.e. Party and state, responsibility has remained remarkably stable until today: as the country’s most important retail and wholesale chain<sup>119</sup> Xinhua has refrained from entering the publishing sector again. Renmin chubanshe and its local pendants

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<sup>116</sup> See “Chuban zongshu guanyu Xinhua shudian zong guanlichu gaizu ji chengli Renmin chubanshe deng san qiye danwei de tongbao” (dated January 17, 1951) in *ZRGCBSL* 3.17-18. The exact date when Xinhua Printing Plant Main Administration became independent is unclear.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17. The term “monopolized” (*zhuanying*) refers to those market segments other book stores were excluded from, such as political publications and school textbooks.

<sup>118</sup> The three provincial publishers were founded in Nov. 1950, Jan. 1951, and Mar. 1951, respectively.

<sup>119</sup> In 1996, Xinhua had a market share of 90% of national book sales value; in the countryside, Xinhua accounted for 98% of sales. Numbers from Shu Chen. “Xinhua shudian jianku chuanye 60 nian” in Song Yingli. *Zhongguo dangdai chuban shiliao* 4.102-07, here p. 104. For the urban areas, the figures may be taken with a grain of salt, but Xinhua’s dominance in the countryside is beyond doubt.

have lost much of their significance due to the depoliticization of Chinese society in the 1980s and 1990s but still have a monopoly on government documents and the collected works of the most important Party leaders (albeit by far not as lucrative a business as it was in the early 1950s).

Over the short time of just 15 years, Xinhua shudian had thus evolved from a cave bookstore in Yan'an to a powerful national player with monopolies in the three core areas. Xinhua had paved the way for the restructuring of the publishing sector along lines that the Party regarded as "rational" and "scientific," and had thus moved, with political and material support of the Party-state, from a peripheral position to the centre-stage of the Chinese publishing sector. By late 1950, Xinhua had even become the pace-setter for the private publishing sector, indicating to them a direction of development that soon became mandatory for the remaining private publishing enterprises.

The restructuring the Chinese publishing sector had taken little more than two years, from early 1949 to early 1951. The process had been far from linear; it had been riddled by protracted debates, misunderstandings, and breakdowns of communication. Overall, trial and error accompanied the experiments that in the end led to the emergence of a permanent structure for the Chinese publishing sector – not without, however, leading to significant disruptions of the industry's functioning. The Party's determination to accept these disruptions – even where they threatened other priority projects, such as reforming the school sector – as a transitory phenomenon attests to the conviction of the CCP leadership to follow the ideas outlined in the Party's media concept: direct control over the media, their enlightening mission, their orientation towards the masses as defined by the Party, and their ambiguous nature in class struggle. To establish full and unequivocal control over all segments of the media sector was an issue of key concern for the CCP in the takeover years.

The extent to which the Party's movements were driven by the prescriptions of the media concept becomes clear in view of the fate of Sanlian shudian, the other pre-1949 model of CCP-led publishing. As indicated above, Sanlian could look back on two decades of experience in which it had been a highly effective operation that had produced with a well-trained, sophisticated cadre – none of this could be said of Xinhua. Nonetheless, the dismantling of Sanlian began only

months after the merger in late 1948. Since early 1949, a continuous stream of Sanlian's best and brightest – Huang Luofeng, Xu Boxin, and Shen Jingzhi, to name but a few – were transferred to positions in the new administrative organs and to Xinhua, or to publishers in the private sector that were gradually turned into public ownership. Only the Sanlian cadres had a pool of experience with the urban private sector publishing that that was crucial for the CCP's takeover of the industry. Shen Jingzhi, for example, was sent to the business council, the new leading organ of Kaiming shudian, where he served as the CCP's contact man.<sup>120</sup> The hopes of Kaiming, the most “progressive” among the six large publishing conglomerates of Republican China, to earn the favour of the new rulers and to play an increased role in the new setting, did not materialize. In 1953, Kaiming was merged with Qingnian chubanshe 青年出版社<sup>121</sup> into what became Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe 中国青年出版社, a fully state-owned venture.

As early as July 1949, a CCP CC directive indicated the future path for Sanlian when it clarified the relationship of Xinhua and Sanlian:<sup>122</sup>

Both Sanlian shudian and Xinhua shudian are publishers under the leadership of the Party, but Xinhua is entirely public owned, and after the establishment of a future central government, it will become a state publisher. Sanlian [in contrast] is a progressive publishing house of joint public-private ownership and will retain this form [of ownership] in the future. In the national new-democratic publishing sector... Xinhua must therefore shoulder the main responsibility, and Sanlian should become Xinhua's close aide and colleague.

Sanlian was to play a privileged role in the PRC, albeit in a position second to Xinhua. This position of subordination became more pronounced in 1950, as Sanlian was perceived more and more as a private sector company (rather than a Party publisher, the way Xinhua was treated). The private publishing houses were placed under considerable pressure to proceed towards diverse forms of joint private-public ownership, and finally nationalization, a course that Sanlian, too, was now to go.<sup>123</sup> The former Sanlian cadres that had moved to the government's

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<sup>120</sup> See Tang Xiguang. “Kaiming de licheng” in Zhongguo chuban gongzuozhe xiehui. *Wo yu Kaiming*, p. 289-314, here p. 312-13.

<sup>121</sup> Qingnian chubanshe was attached to the Central Committee of the Chinese New Democratic Youth League (Zhongguo xin minzhuzhuyi qingniantuan 中国新民主主义青年团), that became the Communist Youth League (Gongqingtuan 共青团) in May 1957.

<sup>122</sup> “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu Sanlian shudian jinhou gongzuo fangzhen de zhishi” (dated July 18, 1949) in *ZRGCSL* 1.190-91, here p. 190.

<sup>123</sup> This process that came significantly earlier in the publishing sector than in most other industries, cannot be discussed in detail here. Resentment and resistance against the GPA's bullying was

publishing authorities could not prevent Sanlian from being marginalized. Upon pressure from the CCP, Sanlian had to pass its retailing activities to Zhongguo tushu faxing gongsi 中国图书发行公司 in late 1950, just as all other private publishing houses had to.<sup>124</sup> Bled of its most able staff – second-tier personnel such as Shao Gongwen 邵公文 were now in charge – Sanlian’s situation deteriorated further. The end of the road was reached in August 1951, when Sanlian ceased to exist as an independent publishing enterprise and was merged with Renmin chubanshe.<sup>125</sup> Books were still published under Sanlian’s name, but its organization was incorporated into that of Renmin chubanshe and Sanlian’s editorial department – its strongest asset – moved into the building housing Renmin chubanshe in an arrangement called “one unit with two brand names” (*yi ge danwei, liang kuai mingpai* 一个单位，两块名牌).

The demise of Sanlian was accelerated by external factors. Rising tensions on the Korean peninsula and the PRC’s entry into the war (the Chinese army crossed the Yalu 鸭绿 river on Oct. 16, 1950) placed the Chinese economy under severe stress. In close conjunction with the war, the CCP started the “campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries” (*sufan yundong* 肃反运动); the radicalization of the domestic situation speeded up the trend towards uniformity.<sup>126</sup> Probably even more important was Mao Zedong’s impatience with the speed of economic construction in the PRC. As early as 1950, Mao began to think about accelerating the PRC’s march towards a socialist economy and thus to cut short the period of New Democracy that in 1949 had been defined as lasting ten to fifteen years. Under these circumstances, the need for a model enterprise of the United Front

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strong among the large publishing companies. Shangwu resorted to all legal means to fight off the GPA’s efforts to make inroads into its organization. This struggle is documented in “Shangwu yinshuguan wenti li ci huitan zhiyao” in *ZRGCSL* 2.250-52, a very interesting document that provides rare insights into organized resistance against the new state in the early years after the takeover.

<sup>124</sup> Zhongguo tushu faxing gongsi was a pure bookseller founded by Shangwu, Zhonghua, Kaiming, and Sanlian on Jan. 1, 1951. Three years later, Zhongguo tushu faxing gongsi was merged with Xinhua.

<sup>125</sup> Sources on the merger are not available, it is mentioned in passing in a few publications, such as the entry “Shenghuo-Dushu-Xinzhi Sanlian shudian” in *ZDBQ*, *Xinwen chuban juan*, p. 261f. Additional information was provided by interviewee 109.

<sup>126</sup> On the *sufan* campaign and its consequences see Julia C. Strauss. “Paternalist Terror: The Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries and Regime Consolidation in the People’s Republic of China” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44.1 (2002), p. 80-105. The campaign was announced in the “double ten” directive, issued on Oct. 10, 1950.

approach, such as Sanlian shudian, quickly evaporated. The crucial propaganda sector underwent transformation towards full state control and even state ownership several years before the other industries.

With the passing of Sanlian from the scene, only Xinhua remained as the embodiment of Party-led and state-owned publishing in the PRC, a model that did not change significantly for the next thirty years. Only the Xinhua path allowed the direct translation of the CCP's media concept into this field of the propaganda sector – publishing was no longer an industry in an economic setting, but a tool of persuasion and education in the hands of the CCP. It was the demand for direct and exclusive control over the media that prevented the Party from ever seriously considering Sanlian as a model for the organization of the publishing sector. Its apparent strengths notwithstanding, and in face of obvious difficulties in the transition process, the Party decided to stick to the Xinhua path: direct and all-encompassing bureaucratic control of the publishing sector under a network of new administrative agencies, with Xinhua at the core, even when such control came at a price in terms of efficiency and market performance.

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In this chapter I have argued that within the short span of three years, the CCP transformed the Chinese publishing sector from a highly competitive cultural industry into a segment of the propaganda and education *xitong*. The transition to forms of public ownership and direct state control occurred much faster than in most other industries – a clear sign that the CCP did not think of publishing in economic terms.

In 1949, the CCP could draw on two sets of first-hand experience in the publishing sector. For more than a decade, the Party had relied on indirect means of control – mainly through Party membership of key personnel and the loyalty of cadres – to use enterprises such as Shenghuo shudian as outlets to spread the CCP's message. This approach had proven its effectiveness in the areas under GMD control and under the Japanese occupation, where Shenghuo, Dushu, and Xinzhi helped the Party to reach out to intellectuals under the umbrella of the CCP's United Front policy, and at the same time to coordinate communication with

Party members. The Sanlian cadres had learned their craft in the cosmopolitan setting of Shanghai, the centre of China's publishing industry. Due to their expertise, many of them moved into the new positions of authority in the sector. Sanlian had become the CCP's leadership academy for the publishing sector.

Yet under the impression of the Soviet model, the CCP decided to implement the Party's media concept much more literally than the Sanlian model would have permitted. Only Xinhua shudian, the CCP's publishing arm of the Yan'an period, provided the Party with direct and exclusive control over the entire publishing sector, as the media concept formulated in the early 1940s had mandated. Nothing short of a fully-owned propaganda institution, integrated into the Party's framework of bureaucratic control, could be tolerated in the propaganda *xitong* – a crucial pillar of the CCP's rule, and also a field where the Party expected counterattacks of its enemies. The Party thus arrived early on at a very literal interpretation of the media concept.

In the course of the institution building process, the CCP was ready to face repeated setbacks and even resistance, but proceeded with the implementation of the Xinhua mode of publishing on a national scale: a network of administrative agencies was put in charge of the sector to put into effect the Party's claim of control. In the cities recently captured, notably Beijing and Shanghai, Xinhua took over first the GMD-owned publishing facilities and then expanded its market share at the expense of the private sector. The identity of the large private publishing houses was broken by the forced move of their headquarters from the capitalist setting of Shanghai to the political environment of Beijing, by the decision to break up the integrated production chain of publishing, printing, and distribution, and by the enforcement of "specialization" that made publishers chose a single market segment. Not even Sanlian was spared its fate and, bled of its leading core, it was merged into the state-owned publishing sector. By late 1951, three monopolists were born with the retail and wholesale chain Xinhua shudian, the Xinhua printing plants, and Renmin chubanshe. The remaining publishers of the formerly private sectors did only nominally continue to exist, and the last pockets of resistance were disappearing over the next two years.<sup>127</sup> The Xinhua model had been

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<sup>127</sup> A notoriously difficult segment of the publishing industry was the highly fragmented and specialized cottage industry producing comics, concentrated mainly in Shanghai. Reports such as

implemented across the board on a national scale, and the Chinese media concept had become the guiding logic of the publishing industry in an almost unmediated way.

The CCP's decision to enforce the media concept in a literal manner despite a series of setbacks and obvious failures shows the power of the CCP's belief in the correctness of the principles it had developed for the media sector. The transformation of the publishing sector had proven the strengths of the media concept, but had also exposed its weaknesses and its inherent tensions. These weaknesses did not disappear after the initial takeover years, but rather tended to pile up as the new regime consolidated. It was eight years after the creation of the PRC, in 1957, that these tensions broke through the surface and the problems in the media sector became visible in a short but violent explosion of arguments.

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"Shanghai lianhuan tuhua de gaizao qianhou" (dated Oct. 1950) in *Shanghai dang'an* 1999.4, p. 19-22, "Shanghai jiefang yilai liang nian ban lianhuan tuhua gaizao yundong chubu zongjie" (dated Jan. 1952), in *ibid.*, p. 22-27, document the Party's difficulties to turn around these last pockets of the capitalist, market-driven publishing industry of the Republican era.





## **Chapter Six**

### **The Paper, the Party, and the People: Wenhuibao, Spring 1957**

*“The stage of hurricane-like class struggle has already passed in our country... this is no longer storm and downpour, not even medium rain, but rather a little rain, a drizzle, a continuous light drizzle.”*  
(Mao Zedong, Feb. 27, 1957, as remembered by Xu Zhucheng)

*“As long as class differences exist in the world, the newspapers are always a tool of class struggle”*  
(Mao Zedong, June 14, 1957)

The implementation of the media concept across the entire media sector of the PRC had provided the CCP with an unprecedented degree of control: neither the Qing rulers nor the GMD had succeeded in establishing a grip on the media, based on ideological convictions, even remotely as thorough as that of the CCP. By the early 1950s, the Party found itself in a position of almost total control of the publishing industry, the press, and the other elements that were now united in the newly constituted propaganda sector. The CCP was ready to embark on the project of remoulding the thinking of the Chinese people.

A number of successes across the political board seemed to prove right the new government's approach to governance: after years of war the economy was restored in record time, the country gained international recognition in the Socialist camp, and the population was united ideologically through the Korean War. In all these processes, the media played a decisive role. These general achievements notwithstanding, however, day-to-day reality in the media sector looked not all that rosy, and more than five years after the founding of the PRC, the entire sector was struggling with a number of difficulties. While some problems of the takeover period had been solved relatively soon, others turned out to be of more than a transitory nature and were there to stay.

When problems in the superstructure were found to stand in the way of further rapid progress in the project of economic construction, the leadership started to consider corrections in the ideological arena. The second major challenge to the Party's media concept (after the extension of the Yan'an vision to the entire country after 1949, see chapter five) was thus initiated originally from within the Party itself. It was only after the Party leadership had stepped into action and after repeated calls on Party members in 1956 and spring 1957 that the rank-

and-file of the media personnel reacted to the call of “letting hundred flowers blossom:” the CCP’s number one newspaper, RMRB, announced a change in policy as early as July 1956, but it was not until nine months later that journalists from all over the country started publicly debating solutions to the structural problems that were by then well-known to both the Party leadership and the journalists below.

Yet during the open debates that were spreading across the nation in May 1957, some of the fundamental assumptions underlying the media concept were identified as the root of the structural problems in the media sector. When the CCP leadership came to the conclusion that courageous journalists were calling into question the pillars of the Party’s media concept, it intervened violently and brought the debate to an end. The ensuing anti-Rightist campaign targeted those newspapers and journalists that were found to be at the forefront of the critics. The campaign led to the reinstatement of controls and cemented a literal interpretation of the media concept.

In this chapter, I will concentrate on the Shanghai daily *Wenhuibao* 文汇报 (hereafter WHB) to illustrate the debates surrounding the function of newspapers, their responsibility towards the state and the people, and the role of journalists. The Beijing-based *Guangming ribao* 光明日报 (GMRB) and WHB were the two papers most severely criticized during the anti-Rightist campaign. Observers have tended to pay more attention to the Beijing paper, because its leadership was made up of well-known intellectuals, notably Chu Anping 储安平.<sup>1</sup> Yet it was WHB that ran the more outspoken articles and, once the anti-Rightist movement began, Mao’s public wrath was directed primarily against WHB and its leadership of professional journalists, rather than against GMRB.

I will start my discussion with an attempt to outline the problems that beleaguered the Chinese newspaper landscape, first from the perspective of the Party leadership, and then from that of the journalists. While much information on the problems as perceived by the men and women in the newspapers surfaced during the high-tide of criticism, the most comprehensive account comes from a

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<sup>1</sup> On the essayist and journalist Chu Anping see Dai Qing. *Liang Shuming, Wang Shiwei, Chu Anping*. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1989. Xie Yong (ed.). *Chu Anping: yi tiao heliu bande youyu*. Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1999. Zhang Yihe. *Zui hou de guizu*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2004, ch. 2.

fictional source, Liu Binyan's 刘宾雁 *Ben bao neibu xiaoxi* 本报内部消息, on which I will draw here.<sup>2</sup> I will then address the reform measures in the newspaper sector that were initiated by the Party. The main part of this chapter focuses on the discussions of May 1957. I have selected a seemingly minor debate, the Zuo Ye affair (*Zuo Ye shijian* 佐叶事件), which however contains practically all arguments and proposals brought forward in the newspaper sector. When Mao ordered the Party to fight back in June, it reacted quickly: an especially malicious piece of criticism came from Yao Wenyuan 姚文元, at that time a figure still on the fringes of the news sector. Finally, the public criticism and self-criticism of WHB reveals not only many of the arguments made for reforms of the press, but also the Party's retrospective interpretation of these proposals; in this light we can also reassess the role of the CCP's media concept.

I will argue that the Party had intended to relax controls and allow for a more liberal interpretation of the media concept – but not for its abolition. The debate in the newspapers also remained within the limits of the concept. It was only after the journalists were encouraged repeatedly to address the structural problems of their sector that some elements of the media concept were questioned. The concept itself, however, was never called into question, not even in May 1957. Nonetheless, when the crackdown came, the Party argued that it had met with an attack of the class enemy in the ideological realm: the tensions between the different elements within the media concept finally broke through the surface, and the concept's concluding Stalinist clause became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Consequently, all energy was channelled into resurrecting the *status quo ante*; yet what prevailed in the end was an even more radical and literal interpretation of the media concept.

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<sup>2</sup> As Rudolf Wagner has proposed, in political settings as tightly controlled as the PRC, important political debates are often shifted to the realm of literature, where they can be discussed more openly and comprehensively. The analysis of fictional sources therefore reveals many important arguments that otherwise do not appear openly. See "Introduction" in Rudolf G. Wagner. *Inside a Service Trade: Studies in Contemporary Chinese Prose*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1992. See also Merle Goldman. "Mao's Obsession with the Political Role of Literature and the Intellectuals" in Roderick MacFarquhar, Timothy Cheek, Eugene Wu (eds.). *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao: From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward*. Cambridge, Ma.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1989, p. 39-58. The importance of the story discussed here is underlined by Mao Zedong, who referred to it in his famous "Things are about to change" from mid May, 1957, that signalled the impending change in the political climate.

### *The Setting: One Hundred Flowers*

When Mao Zedong called for a “high tide in socialism” in December 1955,<sup>3</sup> he signalled his dissatisfaction with the slow progress of the country towards socialism: the rapid economic reconstruction after the Anti-Japanese and Civil wars, and the completion of institution building in 1954, led the Chairman to view more optimistically the Chinese people’s ability to achieve socialism in a relatively short time. In the production drive beginning in late December 1955, whole industries of the urban economy were converted to socialist forms of ownership within a matter of days, while in the countryside collectivization was speeded up. The production drive was accompanied by a liberalization in the ideological realm, designed to set free more forces for the construction of socialism. A relaxed attitude towards intellectuals could be justified on the grounds that the coalition government was basically consolidated.<sup>4</sup> The relaxation in the ideological realm was soon affected by events beyond China’s borders: the ‘Thaw’ in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe after the XX<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress and Khrushchev’s secret speech made their impression on the liberalizing experiments in spring 1956 in China.<sup>5</sup>

Two major policy interventions by Mao Zedong created a distinctly different atmosphere in the ideological realm. The first was Mao’s (then secret) “Ten Great Relationships” speech, delivered on April 25, where Mao felt the need to redefine the relationship between the Party and the people.<sup>6</sup> In his point seven, “The relationship between Party and non-Party,” he came to the conclusion that “it’s probably better to have several parties. Not only has it been that way in the past, but it may well be so in the future.” Non-CCP intellectuals could indeed play a positive role in the country and were free to voice their opinions: “Let them rail us;

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<sup>3</sup> See his foreword (*xu*) to the three volume-edition *Zhongguo nongcun de shehuizhuyi gaochao*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1956, 3 vols.

<sup>4</sup> The first major sign of a changing intellectual climate was Zhou Enlai’s speech “Guanyu zhishifenzi wenti de baogao,” held on Jan. 14, 1956, on the occasion of a CCP CC conference on intellectuals. The speech was published in RMRB, Jan. 30, 1956.

<sup>5</sup> This argumentation follows Roderick MacFarquhar who summarizes “that China’s thaw originated in the victories for socialism of late 1955 and early 1956, albeit liberalization was certainly later spurred on by events in Eastern Europe.” See *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution 1: Contradictions Among the People, 1956-1957*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1974, p.81.

<sup>6</sup> “Lun shi da guanxi.” The relationships speech was published only after the Cultural Revolution in RMRB, Dec. 26, 1976. For his analysis (*Origins*, p. 48-51), MacFarquhar had to use versions of this speech published in unofficial Red Guard tabloids in the Cultural Revolution. The following quotes are taken from RMRB.

if they are unreasonable, we rebuke them, if they are reasonable, we accept it. This is quite beneficial to the Party, to the people, and to socialism.” Mao even went so far as to proclaim that bourgeois intellectuals of the likes of Long Yun 龙云, Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, and Peng Yihu 彭一湖,<sup>7</sup> who had been critical of the Party, should also be given an opportunity to voice their opinions (“We also have to nurse them”), and advised the CCP: “I hope that you will grasp United Front work so as to improve our relations with them and make every possible effort to mobilize their activism to serve socialism.” Non-party intellectuals were thus encouraged to contribute actively to the CCP’s policies and were assured that their criticisms would be dealt with on a factual basis; they would not have to fear reprisals. This seemed to be a remarkable reversal of policies from the Hu Feng 胡风 and Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries (*Sufan* 肃反) campaigns a just year earlier.<sup>8</sup>

Mao’s “Hundred Flowers” speech, which he delivered just a week after the Relationships speech, was the second signal that the atmosphere in the superstructure was about to change.<sup>9</sup> In literature and art, Mao proposed more

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<sup>7</sup> Long Yun had been a GMD army commander who had declared his support for the CCP in 1948 and consequently occupied military and civil positions in the PRC. The philosopher Liang Shuming had been involved in both politics and newspaper work and was a prominent member of the Democratic League, one of the democratic coalition parties. The outspoken intellectual frequently ran into trouble with the CCP. Chow Ching-wen reports one particularly severe clash with Mao Zedong in *Ten Years of Storm. The True Story of the Communist Regime in China*. Westport, Con.: Greenwood Press, 1960, p. 252-57. See also Theodore H.E. Chen. *Thought Reform of the Chinese Intellectuals*. Westport, Con.: Hyperion Press, 1960, p. 46-49, 91-93. Peng Yihu was member of the Standing Committee of the China Democratic National Construction Association, another coalition party.

<sup>8</sup> On the Hu Feng campaign see Merle Goldman. *Literary Dissent in Communist China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967, ch. 7. On the *Sufan* campaign see Julia C. Strauss. “Paternalist Terror: The Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries and Regime Consolidation in the People’s Republic of China” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44.1 (2002), p. 80-105. Technically speaking, the *Sufan* campaign was continuing all through the Hundred Flowers movement.

<sup>9</sup> Excerpts from Mao’s speech at the Supreme State Conference (May 2) are reproduced under the title “Zai yishu fangmian de bai hua qi fang de fangzhen, xueshu fangmian de bai jia zheng ming de fangzhen, shi you biyao de” in Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, Zhongyang dang’anguan ‘Dang de wenxian’ bianjibu (ed.). *Gongheguo zougou de lu. Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian zhuanji xuanji 2: 1953-56*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1991, p. 249-50. The entire speech was never published, but sources say that Mao lectured on the ‘Ten Great Relationships,’ “the content being roughly the same as the speech on Apr. 25 [i.e., the original Ten Great Relationships]” (see Zhongyang dang’anguan ‘dang de wenxian’ bianjibu (ed.). *Gongheguo zougou de lu. Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian zhuanji xuanji 2: 1953-56*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1991, vol. 6, p. 105, n. 1). Since it is unlikely that Mao held two talks to the same audience on one day, I suggest that the famous “Hundred Flowers” speech was in fact another version of the ‘Ten Great Relationships,’ containing the remarks quoted above. This would also explain why the speech was never published. For a similar argumentation see MacFarquhar et al (eds.). *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao*, p. 140, note 8. The remarks on the “Hundred

diversity, while with respect to the science community he explained: “Within the limits set by the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, all academic ideas, correct or incorrect, should be voiced, without us interfering. Lysenko or not-Lysenko, how can we understand that fully; there are so many theories, so many schools in science. And in the social sciences, there’s also this school and that school, so let them talk. In the journals and in the newspapers, all sorts of opinions can be voiced.” The Party would withdraw to a certain extent from interference into intellectual discourse. It was the task of Lu Dingyi, head of the CCP Propaganda Department, to elaborate on Mao’s ideas in a prominent June 13 article in RMRB.<sup>10</sup> Lu explained: “Our policy of ‘Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend’ means free [speech] among the people (*renmin neibu* 人民内部). We advocate increasing this kind of freedom as the people’s political power consolidates.” Referring to the decisive victory in the transition to socialism, Lu Dingyi proposes that the scope for discussion in arts and sciences can be widened, in order to speed up development: “If we want to make our country rich and strong, in addition to consolidating the people’s political power, to developing the economy, developing the realm of education, and strengthening national defence, we must also bring literature and arts, and the sciences to a flourishing development; not a single of these conditions is dispensable.” Free debate, so Lu hoped, would set free productive forces that were able to propel the country forward on a path faster than that possible under the previous conditions. Open discussion and a competition of ideas were necessary factors for this goal. Yet while the new policy opened up a new scope of debate, Lu also outlined the limits

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Flowers” were not included when the final version of the Relationships speech was prepared for publication in 1975. At that time, Mao personally approved of the final text that was produced by merging the two drafts of April 25 and May 2 (i.e., the “Hundred Flowers” speech), while in late 1965 he had objected against internal circulation of the speech (in its earlier form). *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wen’gao* 6.105-06, n.1; see also *ibid.* 13.444-45, n.1. As Mao mentioned in another speech on Apr. 28, the concept had been around for several months. It was sometimes attributed to Zhou Yang (see an injection by “somebody in the audience” in an excerpt from this speech, reproduced under the title “‘Bai hua qi fang, bai jia zheng ming’ yinggai cheng wei women de fangzhen” in *Gongheguo zougou de lu*, p. 248-49. The origins of the concept are also discussed in MacFarquhar, *Origins*, p. 51-56.

<sup>10</sup> The article is based on a speech by Lu held on May 26 to an audience of academics, writers, and professionals in the CCP leadership compound at Zhongnanhai 中南海. The manuscript went through several drafts, and the Propaganda Department and later Zhou Enlai made revisions. After the speech, it was revised again and sent to Mao for comments on June 8. The revised text was finally published in RMRB on June 13. On the revision process and Mao’s endorsement (“very good, can be published”) of the text see *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wen’gao* 6.120, n. 1.

that discussion was not to cross: “In brief, while we advocate to draw a clear line between the enemy and us in politics, we also advocate that among the people, there definitely must be freedom. ‘Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend’ is an expression of the freedom among the people in the realm of literature and art and scientific work.” Within the limits indicated by the Party, however, discussion was allowed, and this included the medium of criticism and self-criticism. Lu indicated that even the Party might become an object of criticism: “Openly admitting errors, exposing the reasons of these errors, analyzing the environment that has produced these errors, and discussing in detail methods to correct these errors, is, for a Party, the hallmark of a respectful Party, and for an individual, the attribute of a matter-of-fact style.” Lu Dingyi’s declaration that neither individuals (the Party members) nor the Party itself were immune to committing mistakes and consequently were legitimate targets of (well-intentioned, i.e. ‘among the people’) criticism was ultimately responsible for the outpouring of criticism in the following months and in spring 1957.

In the background of the efforts to liberalize the political atmosphere and to encourage the intellectuals to voice their criticisms was the debate on bureaucratism. Mao Zedong became increasingly convinced that bureaucratism had become the main obstacle for the development of Socialism. This view was argued, on Mao’s behalf, by Deng Xiaoping in his speech at the Eighth Party Congress in September 1956. Liu Shaoqi, however, contended that subjectivism was the main obstacle, and the debate remained inconclusive for the time being. Only in spring 1957 Mao was able to persuade his still reluctant colleagues of the need of a rectification campaign that would address the issue of bureaucratism – what became the high tide of the Hundred Flowers campaign in May 1957.<sup>11</sup>

The adoption of a new line in the treatment of intellectuals and in the realm of the superstructure had profound implications for the newspaper sector. As Mao had indicated in his Hundred Flowers speech, the press was the main channel of articulation for the intellectuals and thus a major avenue of debate. A shake-up of the Chinese press was thus a crucial part of the liberalization drive.

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<sup>11</sup> See MacFarquhar. *Origins of the Cultural Revolution* 1, p. 112-16.

*The Problem (I): The View from the Top*

It was Liu Shaoqi who came forward to carry the Hundred Flowers policy into the media sector and to jump-start the opening-up of the CCP's press infrastructure. On May 28 and June 13, he called two meetings with senior representatives of Xinhua she and discussed with them some problems of the current Chinese press.<sup>12</sup> The points addressed by Liu were of far-reaching importance and concerned not only the basic outlook of Xinhua, the core-piece of the Party's press apparatus; they were of relevance for the entire press sector.

Liu first of all discussed the basic character (*xingzhi* 性质) of Xinhua she: he proposed that Xinhua should claim more freedom to speak for itself, while toning down its role of being the official government spokesman:<sup>13</sup>

You should thoroughly discuss: is it better if Xinhua she is the state news agency or should it belong to the people (*laobaixing* 老百姓)? I think it is better if it is not a state news agency but belongs to the people... Xinhua's editorials and the editorials by Xinhua journalists should not speak in the name of the state... If Xinhua belongs to the people and doesn't play the role of a state news agency, the State Council could establish a news office that would assume the task of publicly distributing news and statements, and refuting rumours.

Such a proposal did not mean that Xinhua was to be privatized or freed from Party control; what Liu had in mind was that Xinhua claim more independence as a source of news, rather than just act as the mouthpiece of the government. Nowhere in his speech did he mention any real changes to Xinhua's ownership structure nor to its place within the administrative structure. However, it was a critique of Xinhua's general outlook: all too proudly Xinhua had presented itself as the government spokesperson, only to find that its reliance on this position had also produced negative results. Liu Shaoqi's proposal that Xinhua view itself as "the people's" news agency was a slap in the face of the Xinhua leadership because it attested to them that they had lost touch with the people they were supposed to serve. Xinhua personnel thus should look to the Party leadership for direct advice less often and instead rely on their own instincts when reporting the

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<sup>12</sup> See "Dui Xinhua she de di yi ci zhishi" in XGWH 3.358-69; "Dui Xinhua she gongzuo de di er ci zhishi" in *ibid.*, p. 377-82. For a summary of Liu's main points and criticism thereof see Renmin ribao wuchanjieji geming pai, Shoudu xinwen pipan lianluozhan (ed.). *Xinwen zhanxian liang tiao luxian douzheng dashiji, 1948-1966*. N.p., n.d., p. 9-10.

<sup>13</sup> "Dui Xinhua she de di yi ci zhishi," p. 367f.



news; at the same time, however, the journalists were supposed to stay loyal to the Party, as Liu had made unmistakably clear.

Liu's second proposal carried the argument of his outline of Xinhua's basic character further, addressing the work of Xinhua's reporters: he called on the news workers to pay attention to being "objective, truthful, impartial, and not one-sided" – the basic credo of the liberal press.<sup>14</sup> The Chinese newspapers should not be afraid to report negative aspects in their news stories: "we must talk about the good things, and about the bad things, too,"<sup>15</sup> and the journalists should even report shortcomings in the CCP's work if this can help the Party to overcome these shortcomings: "When an error just raises its head over the horizon, it would be harmful to the people if we do not uncover and stop it; we must raise [this problem] without delay in our news reports and make the people pay attention to it."<sup>16</sup> Yet Liu carefully balanced his statement and defined the class framework of reporting:<sup>17</sup>

Our news reports cannot transcend classes and cannot be objectivistic; we must adopt a firm standpoint of the people and a class standpoint; [the reports] must use a Marxist-Leninist point of view and method. While news reporting should be objective, truthful, and impartial, it must also give consideration to the benefit and harm it does, it must see whether it is beneficial to the cause of the people and the proletariat. Stalin, for example, has committed many errors, in the struggle to eliminate counterrevolutionaries (*sufan douzheng* 肃反斗争) he had some people killed by mistake, this is true. But if we report this, it would be very harmful to the struggle currently going on, this is a question of standpoint. He has committed mistakes, but we must think about when it will be beneficial for us to talk about it.

When Liu thus proposed that newspapers pay more attention to truthfulness and the troublesome aspects of Chinese society and the Party's work, he obviously did not advocate an all-out adoption of the principles of the liberal press. He spoke of a "false impression," implying that creating an impression, a preconfigured picture of the situation, would be permissible and even be the task of the newspapers; Liu just wanted this impression to be nearer to what he defined as the "truth," thus strengthening rather than weakening the position of the Chinese press by making it become more objective.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 360-61.

When he urged reporters to pursue a more truthful style in news reporting, Liu did in fact give a remarkably frank assessment of Chinese newspaper practice in the years leading up to 1956. In general, newspapers had become too dull and boring. This was, first of all, a result of overcompliance with what the reporters suspected were the leadership's intentions, and the fear to commit political mistakes. Liu was especially concerned with what had become a common practice: to report only the positive aspects in the newspapers. There was no need to do so, Liu explained:<sup>18</sup>

When carrying international news, some papers only print positive stories about us; whenever somebody condemns us or says something positive about America it is being deleted; this method is not good. If, for example, the head of the American government condemns us, can we print this in our newspapers? In my opinion, we can do so. If he condemns us, then this is a real fact and is the objective reality, how can he condemn us! If we print such things in our newspapers from time to time, we let the people know that somebody is condemning us, that imperialism is spreading rumours, and so we raise the indignation of the people.

In this respect, so Liu, Xinhua could even learn from the capitalists news agencies' credo of objectivity. Chinese newspapers, by reporting almost exclusively the positive in order to create a favourable public opinion for the Party, had lost credibility with the masses who could see many problems on a daily basis; at the same time, this practice carried the risk that the leadership might not be informed immediately of emerging problems.

Liu furthermore requested the newspapers to pay more attention to their readers' needs. He proposed that the content carried by the papers be diversified and that they should struggle to attract more readers through more lively reporting, implying that news reporting was too monotonous, with lengthy and dull articles dominating the newspapers' pages. He agreed with a proposal raised by his audience that news should generally be short, "three to five hundred words for normal news."<sup>19</sup> Liu thus admitted that many stories in the newspapers were too long-winded and boring. Rather, newspaper articles should be short and to the point, so that they "are of general interest, and at the same time are of interest to a small number of specialists."<sup>20</sup> In this context, Liu also circulated the idea that Xinhua she may start its own newspaper and begin to compete with RMRB with a

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 360.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

focus on publishing news. Rather than complementing each other, the newspapers' relationship should be characterized by competition. This idea was probably motivated by Mao's call for the Hundred Flowers: different opinions were supposed to compete, and newspapers consequently would have to find ways to attract a following among the readers, who would thus have an opportunity to vote in a competitive market.

Finally, competition should be carried into the newspaper boardroom itself, and journalists encouraged to speak out and write more openly and in a fresher, livelier style. Liu told the Xinhua leadership that more newspaper articles should be signed by their authors: Xinhua reports were required to be truthful, lively, interesting, and should be written in good style. A journalist doing so should be allowed to make a name for himself. Reporters shoulder the laborious task of researching news stories, and they have to take the risk of being criticized in case they are found wrong; thus, they should be given the opportunity to show off their talents. This, Liu felt, was but an adequate compensation.<sup>21</sup>

In his two talks at Xinhua she, Liu Shaoqi proposed a change in existing media policy and suggested remedies for a number of shortcomings that had accumulated over the years since 1949. A careful reading of the text of Liu's speeches reveals a number of problems that weighed on the effectiveness of the newspapers, the "Party's mouthpiece." Liu's intention was to overcome these problems and to make the press a more efficient tool of propaganda. In the Cultural Revolution, excerpts from these very speeches were listed as Liu Shaoqi's "crimes" that were said to be proofs for the ulterior intentions of Liu to lead the press down a bourgeois path.<sup>22</sup> Quite the opposite seems to be true: while Liu addressed the shortcomings of the papers in a remarkably frank tone, he did so only behind closed doors; his audience, a reported eleven cadres, were all experienced and trusted leading personalities in the media sector. The remedies he proposed were clearly designed to raise the efficiency of the newspapers – without altering their basic character. Liu did not call into question the Party's media concept. That said, however, it seems that his analysis of the problems affecting the Chinese newspaper sector in the mid-1950s remains rather shallow;

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 363f.

<sup>22</sup> For example, in *Xinwen zhanxian liang tiao luxian*.

the points addresses by Liu almost exclusively concern surface phenomena, and his remedies, too, deal only with the most visible of the newspaper's structural problems. A much more thoroughgoing reflection on the deeper reasons for the problems of the Chinese press came almost simultaneously from a very different direction.

### *The Problem (II): The View from the Bottom*

How did the journalists perceive of their situation? The Hundred Flowers campaign provided them with a unique opportunity to voice their grievances. Even under the new political atmosphere of “thaw,” however, many news personnel were reluctant to address the roots of the problem openly: too much was at stake. The news sector was and is a field much more sensitive than the publishing sector; consequently, there is much less detailed first-hand information available on the press for the period under consideration here, the Hundred Flowers campaign. Inside accounts are still treated confidentially and even memoirs are occasionally censored.<sup>23</sup> Just as in other sensitive fields, fictional or semi-fictional accounts often provide more original and unfiltered insight into the problems under debate, information that cannot be discussed in other strictly factual accounts.<sup>24</sup> In the following section, I will rely on such an account to reconstruct the journalists' analysis of the structural problems of the Chinese newspaper sector.

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<sup>23</sup> Very precious information on WHB, for example, could certainly be found in *Wenhui kuaibao*, an internal bulletin of the paper, that is – unfortunately – not available to the researcher. The most important source on WHB for the period under consideration here are therefore the memoirs of WHB's editor-in-chief, *Xu Zhucheng huiyilu*, which were published in 1998 by Sanlian shudian. The book's prefaces, however, are dated from 1985 and 1987, and in the epilogue Xu's son explains that the book could be only published after lengthy negotiations, and several years after Xu's death. Even then, many passages from the manuscripts were obviously deleted. Some of the passages in question can be reconstructed as they appear in *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi* (ed.). *Wenhuibao shilüe, 1949.6-1966.5*. Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1997; this volume quotes from the manuscript of *Xu Zhucheng huiyilu*. Fortunately, two crucial fragments of the manuscript are available in two articles: “‘Yangmou’ – 1957” in *Xinhua wenzhai* 1989.2, p. 143-49, and “Yangmou qinliji” in *Zhongguo zhi chun* 55 (1987), p. 19-30. Both articles are almost identical, yet the latter, published outside the PRC, contains several paragraphs that were deleted in the *Xinhua wenzhai* article. As a rule, I have given preference to quoting from this source, which I regard to be the most authentic.

<sup>24</sup> See the argument in Wagner. *Inside a Service Trade*, “Preface” and “Introduction,” esp. p. 1.

The June 1956 issue of *Renmin wenxue* 人民文学, the country's flagship literary journal, carried a story by a young and until then almost unknown writer, Liu Binyan, entitled *Ben bao neibu xiaoxi* (*Inside News from our Paper*, hereafter *Ben bao*).<sup>25</sup> Although a fictional account, *Ben bao* is solidly rooted in reality: it is generally seen as belonging to the genre of "reportage literature" (*baogao wenxue* 报告文学), or rather, "textie" 特写, as which it was classified by the original publisher. A "Textie" is a piece of fiction, closely tied to and reflecting real events and situations, invested with deep social commitment; for this sake, problems looming below the surface of society are explored. "Textie" is a counter-genre to the longer, more normative novel.<sup>26</sup> The genre "textie" was a Soviet invention; it was a product of the "Thaw literature" that proliferated in the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin. Influential works of this genre, notably those of Valentin Ovechkin, were introduced to China since 1955, and Liu Binyan, as translator of several of Ovechkin's articles, contributed to its introduction in China.<sup>27</sup> When Lu Dingyi publicly endorsed the Hundred Flowers policy, Chinese writers such as Wang Meng 王蒙 and Liu Binyan took this as a signal to emulate the Soviet literary thaw with in their own writings. One of these products is *Ben bao*.

A classic example of the *textie* genre, Liu's story is a piece of fiction, yet the problems addressed by the author are very real. Liu Binyan was a journalist with *Zhongguo qingnianbao* 中国青年报, the organ of the Communist Youth League's Central Committee; in this position, he had gained first-hand insights into the

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<sup>25</sup> Liu Binyan. "Ben bao neibu xiaoxi" in *Renmin wenxue* 1956.6, p. 6-21; a sequel (*xubian*, see below) was published in *Renmin wenxue* 1956.10, p. 48-59. A translation by Bennett Lee can be found in William J. F. Jenner. *Fragrant Weeds. Chinese Short Stories Once Labelled as 'Poisonous Weeds'*. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1983. This translation, however, is unsatisfactory in several respects: first, the original story and the sequel were lumped together into a single piece, the strikingly different character of both parts notwithstanding. Secondly, the translator has not marked the changes made by *Renmin wenxue's* editor-in-chief, Qin Zhaoyang 秦兆阳. While these changes were not visible in *Renmin wenxue* (and all later publications), they reflect the different conceptions of the problem itself and of the political landscape by the writer Liu on the one hand, and Qin, an administrator in the cultural sector, on the other. Some fragments of the original text have been recovered by Rudolf Wagner and are investigated in Wagner. *Inside a Service Trade*, p. 179-192 and 213-26.

<sup>26</sup> For a thorough investigation of this genre that was very influential everywhere in the socialist world, see Wagner, *Inside a Service Trade*, p. 243-376.

<sup>27</sup> Ovechkin's "Days in the rayon" (*Raionnye budni*) appeared in Chinese as "Quli de richang shenghuo" in *Yiwen* 1954.5, p. 1-38; others, such as Galina Nikolaeva's *The Newcomer: The Manager of an MTS and the Chief Agronomist (Povest' o direktore MTS i glavnom agronome)*, followed in 1955 (*Tuolaji zhan zhanzhang he zong nongye shi*, published by Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe). For an analysis see Wagner. *Inside a Service Trade*, p. 311-24.

problems of newspaper-making in Beijing and in the debates going on among newspaper personnel. Liu (b. 1925) had joined the CCP at the age of nineteen and had worked for *Zhongguo qingnianbao* since 1951. Being responsible for the paper's department of industry and trade, Liu had extensive contacts with workers and knew about the troubles caused by the CCP's policies. Like the protagonist in his story, Liu unsuccessfully tried to bring these problems to the attention of the public, but his articles were rejected.<sup>28</sup> He thus experienced the frustrations that activist reporters had accumulated since 1949, and which form the focus of *Ben bao*. In March 1956, Liu accompanied Deng Tuo 邓拓, the editor-in-chief of RMRB, to Warsaw to attend a meeting of the International Organization of Journalists.<sup>29</sup> In Poland, he not only had an opportunity to read the Soviet press (Liu was fluent in Russian) and see the results of the emerging "thaw" with his own eyes; he also heard of Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin at the CPSU's XX<sup>th</sup> Congress. He thus felt even more encouraged to deliver in his story an authentic reflection of the concerns of Chinese newspaper makers in 1956.

While Liu Shaoqi's critique of the press was little more than a phenomenological description of the shortcomings in the newspapers, Liu Binyan went much further when he tried to reconstruct the underlying social and political conditions that were responsible for the problems identified by Liu Shaoqi. He was encouraged to do so by Qin Zhaoyang, *Renmin wenxue*'s editor-in-chief, who made every effort to draw the readers' attention to the story: it was printed in bold face in the journal's table of contents, and in an editor's note Qin commented that the story's aim was to carry the "opposition to rightist conservative thinking" to a new level of reflection.<sup>30</sup>

The story's plot is set in the offices of a Party newspaper of an unidentified provincial capital (in criticism of the story later revealed to be *Harbin ribao* 哈尔滨日报, the Heilongjiang provincial committee's mouthpiece, which had a reputation to be particularly conservative).<sup>31</sup> The story's protagonist, a young female reporter, is a type rather than an individual character: Huang Jiaying 黄佳英 embodies one of several groups of "organization (wo)men" that supposedly make up the board of

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<sup>28</sup> See Liu Binyan. *Liu Binyan zizhuan*. Hong Kong: Xinguang chubanshe, 1990, p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65f.

<sup>30</sup> "Bianzhe de hua" in *Renmin wenxue* 1956.6, p. 125.

<sup>31</sup> See Wagner. *Inside a Service Trade*, p. 182f.

a typical newspaper. She is an activist, filled with enthusiasm towards her work and towards the Party's cause. Her enthusiasm, however, gets her nowhere, because "the activism and the creativity of the newspaper employees are being frustrated for the reason that the editor-in-chief doesn't trust the editors and reporters; he underestimates their political consciousness and abilities, interferes too much and does not care enough about the editors' opinions."<sup>32</sup> The heroine's youthful activism is bogged down by a dilemma: she learns about many urgent problems but is neither allowed to report them in the paper, nor to get actively involved in solving these problems. To the contrary, her outbursts of activity get her into difficulties with her superiors and her behaviour is criticized as individualistic; she is reproached for having "her own opinion on each and every matter."<sup>33</sup> For the same reasons, her application to join the Party has been delayed time and again.

She finds herself surrounded by another type of "organization men" on the same level of the paper's hierarchy – people, however, who get along much better in the system than she does: they have resigned their activism and instead carry out orders passively while trying to anticipate what they are expected to do and say. Some simply hope to swim with the tide without causing trouble for themselves; others, including the protagonist's fiancée, have become opportunists and careerists who use the system for their own advantage to get ahead within the bureaucratic structure. When asked to come up with a proposal for the coverage of the "National Congress of Advanced Producers," the young man triumphantly declares: "I have called two newspapers in Beijing, they use the same way of reporting it."<sup>34</sup> Emulating the Beijing newspapers is a convenient way to be on the safe side – even if the coverage is found to be almost identical with that of the preceding year. The rigid control of the newspapers, caused by a literal understanding of the media concept, is stifling the activism and the creativity of the journalists.

Above the level of the newspaper reporters, we find two layers of leadership: the vice editor-in-chief finds himself squeezed between his subordinates and the editor-in-chief. He has resorted to passivity and, instead of making decisions,

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<sup>32</sup> *Renmin wenxue* 1956.6, p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> *Renmin wenxue* 1956.10, p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> *Renmin wenxue* 1956.6, p. 12.

passes up any problems he is confronted with, and delegates downwards whatever he is asked to do, thus “relaying the directives of the department head as his own and making the editorial board members’ reports into his own reports.”<sup>35</sup> He refuses to shoulder any responsibility; instead, he has studied closely the ‘rules’ along which the bureaucracy functions and that must be respected if he is to reduce resistance to a minimum: “He had already mastered a couple of concepts and formulas he had come to call ‘rules’ and to which he reduced all complicated matters or which he would put atop everything, so that he could be satisfied with them fitting everywhere.”<sup>36</sup> Originally an activist himself who had come to the newspaper several years ago full of anticipation of his job and of the contributions he would make to the Party’s goals, he has become bogged down by the same system that strangulates the journalists’ activism. In a grotesque fit of excitement he sighs: “What a wonderful thing to have one’s own opinions!”<sup>37</sup>

The editor-in-chief is characterized primarily by his absence: he does not appear even a single time in the entire story. Locked up in his office, he rejects whatever initiative reaches him from below and frustrates his subordinates by his bursts of anger over the telephone. He wants to decide everything by himself; his work style is characterized by looking to his superiors in the municipal Party committee and its PD for advice – and not to the editors and their reports. The heroine characterizes the day-to-day policy of the newspaper: “we always have to wait until the provincial Party Committee has defined an issue as a key task, and only then is an amount of space dedicated to this problem and we report about it.”<sup>38</sup> When a new problem arises, an editor who has become used to this form of management reacts with disbelief on a proposal to report it in the paper: “How could we do that! The Party Centre has not yet considered this issue and has not reached a decision, how could a newspaper possibly start a discussion?”<sup>39</sup> In the desire for control, the political centre in Beijing has claimed the exclusive authority to define the issue areas that the newspapers will deal with. Liu Shaoqi had addressed the same point in his talks with the Xinhua journalists. The results of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 20.



blind obedience and overcompliance are likely to be counterproductive: if the journalist's initiative is curbed, crucial problems may go unreported.

The editor-in-chief looks to his superiors not just for advice on what to write about, but also for judging the success of his paper: "reactions" (*fanying* 反应) are of prime importance to him in his search for guidance; the readers, in contrast, do not figure in his calculations. Thus, his newspaper has turned into nothing short of a newspaper's caricature: even the employees poke fun at the paper's section of economic and industrial news, saying it has become "virtually a propaganda office of the provincial committee's industry department."<sup>40</sup> This, so the story's underlying message, is the most appropriate characterization of the Party newspapers in the 1950s.

Through the four "types" of characters that populate the typical Chinese newspaper boardroom of 1956, Liu Binyan draws the picture of an ossified bureaucratic apparatus: layers of authority and rigid lines of communication have hamstrung the entire newspaper. The problems Liu Shaoqi had discussed with the Xinhua staff were rooted in the very structure of the media apparatus that the CCP had created after 1949, they were structural problems. Even worse: in his story Liu Binyan shows that they were not problems peculiar to the newspaper sector; rather, they were a mirror image of other sectors of Chinese society. The female protagonist has uncovered in the industrial work units she is supposed to write about exactly the same structures that hamper her own actions. The system stifles activism and instead supports all sorts of careerists and opportunists who are interested not in contributing to the Party's cause, but only in their personal advancement.

Upon publication *Ben bao* was greeted by the readers,<sup>41</sup> and the reaction the story had caused, as well as the evolving political situation, encouraged the editor-in-chief of *Renmin wenxue*, Qin Zhaoyang, to urge Liu to write a sequel (*xubian* 续编). This sequel was published in the October issue of the same journal,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> A particularly noteworthy piece among the numerous reactions on the story appearing in newspapers all over the country is a short *Xiangsheng* 相声 dialogue by Jian Yu 鉴余, published under the title "Richang tanhualu" 日常谈话录 in the October issue of *Renmin wenxue* that also carried the sequel. In this ironic piece, an old cadre confesses that if he were in the position of the editor-in-chief, he would not "just criticize [the heroine]? I would punish her!!" (p. 23-24) because she dares to criticize the Party's policies. Liu Binyan's picture of the situation was thus thought to be rather too moderate in the face of the real situation. See Wagner. *Inside a Service Trade*, p. 224.

carrying the conflict of the story's protagonists to a new level. Most importantly, the sequel centres around the character of Chen Lidong 陈立栋, the editor-in-chief who finally appears before the readers. While in the first part, he had been but an angry voice over the telephone, Liu treats him now with much more openness than would have been possible four months earlier; he explained the reasons behind Chen's behaviour: the editor-in-chief is portrayed as the loyal Party soldier who lives true to the principle "obediently and loyally following Party leadership" (*laolao shishi fucong dang de lingdao* 老老实实服从党的领导).<sup>42</sup> He is a veteran Party member who has always worked hard, but has lost touch with reality and with the people. Yet he is not an opportunist and events do finally shake him out of his complacency.

When the Party orders a change in subscription policies (such a change had indeed occurred, taking effect on July 1, 1956, see below), the number of copies sold plunges dramatically, revealing to Chen that his cherished newspaper is in fact so dull and boring that even the workers – the paper's target group – refuse to read it. Other newspapers have reacted immediately and have adopted a more accommodating style, but not so Chen's paper. Liu drives home this point through a comparison of the visual appearance of a progressive and a backward paper:<sup>43</sup>

Today's paper – how alluring a thing! In all the different corners of our mother country, many thousands of readers every morning greet this harbinger of time full of excitement, eager anticipation, and a fresh mind! Packed with the voices, colours and the smell of the whole world, it bursts into the door opened towards the sun, rouses people with a shout, whispers to them, stirs them, and draws them into reflection... But there is also another kind of paper: the first impression it gives the reader is that of rows and rows of unfriendly lead letters. You cannot really find out what day's paper you hold in hands and need to spend great effort to dig patiently through all four pages, yet what you receive from it will be little nonetheless.

There is no doubt that Chen's paper belongs to the latter category. Confronted with the bare fact that nobody actually needs the paper he has dedicated all his energy to, Chen goes on a soul-searching journey and comes to the conclusion that he himself is to blame, his good intentions notwithstanding. Chen's sudden transformation into a human being increases the power of the argument: the fault lies within the system. A young editor pronounces the momentous truth: "What I

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<sup>42</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>43</sup> *Renmin wenxue* 1956.10, p. 50.

think, what we need is a thorough change in the system, in the way of doing things.”<sup>44</sup> The media concept, and in particular the CCP’s strict interpretation of the first three clauses that stress the functional character of the media, have imposed upon the Chinese newspaper sector a comprehensive system of control that is on the brink of strangulating the press. Thus, it turns out to run counter to its initial purpose, and doubts arise about the newspapers’ very function: in the two-direction flow of information, the bottom-to-top channel has become clogged. The concerns of the masses can no longer reach the leadership but end up in internally circulated reference material (such is the story’s title, *Benbao neibu xiaoxi*): “It was indeed odd how things turned out. The reports written by the journalists that contained new and interesting problems, were not printed, but turned into ‘inside news,’ while the long-winded and boring internal document, originally written for a small circle of people, had to be printed in a newspaper with tens of thousands of subscribers.”<sup>45</sup> In a world stood on its head, the internal has become public and the urgent matter of public concern is sealed up in the Party’s internal communication. When the leadership has lost touch with the masses, the masses refuse to accept what is being transmitted downwards to them. Instead of guarding the Party’s rule, the media concept and its strict interpretation endanger it.

In Liu Binyan’s eyes, one of the most important functions of the newspapers no longer works properly: the newspapers are supposed to be the ears and eyes of the Party, informing the leadership of what is going on in the society.<sup>46</sup> Yet when the bottom-to-top stream of information no longer functions, the newspapers also cannot carry out their second main function: being the throat and the tongue of the Party (*dangde houshe* 党的喉舌). With opportunists, careerists, and formalistic conservatives in command, who follow the Party line only in form but not in substance, the newspaper can no longer speak for the Party but has become the tool of a self-serving bureaucracy.

What had happened that encouraged Liu Binyan to adopt an even sharper tone in the sequel to his *Ben bao*? Two events had convinced Liu that he was right with his criticism, which he perceived as an enthusiastic echo of Mao’s call for

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<sup>44</sup> *Renmin wenxue* 1956.6, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> “However, now we all know, each Party member should be the ears and eyes of the Party, the brain of the Party” (*Xubian*, p. 58). See also Wagner. *Inside a Service Trade*, p. 222f.

hundred flowers to bloom: on July 1, 1956, RMRB had announced a major reshuffle of its editorial policy, an issue I turn to shortly. Secondly, in September 1956 the CCP had held its Eighth Party Congress, where Mao had argued again in favour of rectification (although as yet with little success). Both the Party Congress and the makeover of RMRB seemed to confirm Liu's positions.<sup>47</sup>

Liu Binyan's analysis of the situation in China's newspaper sector, especially in the sequel, is alarming indeed. Yet not enough: while the author had focused on the ossified bureaucratic structure as the obstacle to effective news work, Qin Zhaoyang, the story's editor, decided to add another element and thus make the conflict even more acute. Without Liu's knowledge, he carried out a series of major amendments in the sequel, so that Chen, the newspaper's editor-in-chief, makes his self-criticism not out of insight, but rather to save his position and carry on as before. The bureaucratic structure, Qin implies, gives even people with sinister motives an opportunity to pursue their plots.<sup>48</sup> *Ben bao* thus was made dangerously close of implying what the CCP feared most: the class enemy's subversion of the mass media.

With or without Qin's amendments to the original story, *Ben bao* contains a thorough analysis of the major problems that characterized Chinese newspaper work around the time Mao had called for one hundred flowers to flourish and for criticism to be voiced. While it was Liu's merit to bring these deficiencies to the public's attention, he was not the only one to see the structural problems of the news sector. Behind closed doors, discussions had taken place and the Party leadership had decided to take action in the newspaper sector. Changes became visible for everyone on July 1, the CCP's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

### *The Thaw (I): Reform of RMRB*

By convention, the most prominent location of RMRB's pages is the upper left hand corner of the first page. It is here where usually important editorials, major policy announcements, or the key articles of the day's edition are to be

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<sup>47</sup> The Party Congress is analyzed in MacFarquhar. *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution 1*, ch. 8-11.

<sup>48</sup> See Wagner. *Inside a Service Trade*, p. 213-26, for the changes to the original text wrought by Qin.

found.<sup>49</sup> On July 1, 1956, RMRB's readers found in this corner an editorial entitled "To the Readers" (*Zhi duzhe* 致读者) that told them: "Beginning from today, RMRB will publish eight pages daily. Moreover, there will be some changes in editorial work. We want to use this opportunity to talk about these changes. RMRB is the Party's paper, and it is also the paper of the people; from its initial issue until today, it has always served the interests of the Party and the people." The very fact that the organ of the CCP Central Committee addressed its readers directly and in such explicit terms is remarkable. The paper indicated a change in direction right from the title of its editorial. The unusual volume of the paper – eight pages instead of six hitherto – was another sign telling the readers that they were to expect something new.<sup>50</sup>

The editorial explained that even after eight years of publication (RMRB was founded on June 15, 1948), many shortcomings remained that were to be addressed by the current change in format. RMRB listed three major areas for improvements: the scope of reporting was to be enlarged, free debates should be promoted, and the paper's style would be given a lift. In a world full of change, the paper explained (obviously referring to the production drive and the transition to socialism), "different categories of readers demand to understand this changing world from different points of view. Doing our best to satisfy the various demands of our readers is our bounden duty." The rather narrow scope that had characterized RMRB (and, as readers knew, most papers in the country) to that date, was no longer appropriate in the current situation. The paper therefore pledged to diversify and to increase reporting to a broader range of issues. To serve its readers' needs, even topics that until then had not found their way into the paper's pages were to be covered, such as news about the capitalist countries, poor villages in the countryside, and negative aspects ("things not pleasant"). While the amount of news was to be increased, much more coverage should be given to features. This announcement contained, of course, an implicit critical assessment of Chinese newspaper work: a reporting policy all too narrowly

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<sup>49</sup> See Renmin ribao bianjibu. *Renmin ribao banmian beiyao*. Beijing: Renmin ribao chubanshe, 1997. Comp. for example the explanations on p. 1-4 and the following examples.

<sup>50</sup> Another indication of the significance was the editorial's title: it is certainly no coincidence that "To the readers" had also been the title of the seminal editorial that announced the reform of JFRB in April 1942.

focused on political events and appeals for economic construction had hurt the paper's attractiveness for the readers; a dull and boring paper was not an effective medium for propaganda and had failed to bring about a lively and enthusiastic atmosphere. "Life" – *shenghuo* 生活 – is a key word in the editorial.<sup>51</sup>

The changes introduced in July 1956 were clearly inspired by Liu Shaoqi's directions to the press a month earlier.<sup>52</sup> The July 1 editorial was preceded by several weeks of discussions and an evaluation of RMRB's work. The team in charge of the reform was led by Hu Qiaomu, Mao's personal secretary, together with Deng Tuo, the paper's editor-in-chief, and vice-editor Hu Jiwei 胡绩伟.<sup>53</sup> On June 20, the group sent a report to the CC that outlined their assessment and plans, and shortly thereafter they received approval from the Centre.<sup>54</sup> July 1, the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP was chosen as the launching date of the "new" RMRB. The July 1 editorial was written by none other than Hu Qiaomu.<sup>55</sup>

The editorial promised the readers that to produce a lively and attractive paper, two sections of RMRB in particular were to be expanded: the economic section would devote one page each to industry and agriculture daily; and the international news section was doubled to two pages. Both measures reflect the desire to give scope to formerly underreported subjects. RMRB further introduced regular features, such as a daily page with "academic and cultural issues;" the upper half of the last page was to be reserved for a literary supplement, while the lower half would carry advertisements. Both page seven, with the cultural features, and the last page were instrumental in producing a newspaper boasting more variety and colours – as Liu Binyan had shown, it was these kinds of features that had been most likely to fall victim to the printing of lengthy Party documents.

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<sup>51</sup> *Shenghuo* and *shengqi* 生气 appear at several times in the editorial, in an effort to transmit an impression of vigor and energy. "Life" was one of the key themes of the "thaw" literature, both in China and in the Soviet Union; frequent references to the youth, and to a vigorous, rebellious type of personality in particular, symbolize the departure from dogmatist old modes of thinking. Comp. Wagner. *Inside a Service Trade*, ch 6, on the redefinition of the "socialist personality."

<sup>52</sup> On the RMRB reforms see also Timothy Cheek. *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, p. 145-48.

<sup>53</sup> See Li Zhuang. *Renmin ribao fengyu sishi nian*. Beijing: Renmin ribao chubanshe, 1993, p. 191-97. Li himself belonged to the seven-member team in charge of reform.

<sup>54</sup> "Renmin ribao bianji weiyuanhui xiang Zhongyang de baogao." See Li Zhuang. "Sishi nian jian san da shi" in Renmin ribao baoshi bianjizu (ed.). *Renmin ribao huiyilu*. Beijing: Renmin ribao chubanshe, 1988, p. 50-61, here p. 56. The document was never published.

<sup>55</sup> It was included in *Hu Qiaomu wenji*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1992, vol. 1, p. 480-83.

With the square statement that “newspapers are a society’s institution for the expression of opinion” (*baozhi shi shehui de yanlun jiguan* 报纸是社会的言论机关), the editorial set out to explain the second of its reform proposals, the promotion of free debates (*kaizhan ziyou taolun* 开展自由讨论). “In the past, our newspaper has handled the promotion of debates not well at all, and this has reduced the vitality of the paper.” This public self-criticism was followed by a pledge to open up space for freer and livelier discussions: the paper would withdraw from selecting the topics that could be discussed. The course of debates would not be predetermined, and if a discussion did not come to a conclusive solution of a problem immediately, or if dissenting opinions remained, this was not bad, but rather a sign of normality. Yet RMRB did not only redefine the rules of public discussion, but also reminded its readers: “although the articles published in our newspaper have been selected by the editorial department, they may not necessarily represent the view of the department.” Retreating from the power to speak in a uniform voice on behalf of the Party on all issues was a major step for RMRB: to acknowledge the legitimacy of different opinions within the population, within the Party, and on its own pages did affect the very role of the PRC’s number one newspaper as the authoritative voice of the Party. No longer could the editor in Liu Binyan’s story call the Beijing papers in search of the “correct” line of reporting. Each newspaper would still have to shoulder the responsibility to “lead society’s understanding towards a correct path,” but it was now acknowledged that “in no society, all members can possibly have one and the same understanding towards each and every concrete problem.” RMRB was to make allowances for the diversity of opinions within society and give them ample room to “bloom and contend.”

The third area where RMRB pledged to reform was its style: improving the paper’s style was a key requirement to make it more attractive and readable. Again, RMRB had to make a self-criticism: “Although our newspaper has carried many good articles in the past and the language in the paper has gradually improved somewhat, all in all there are still many works that are stiff, dry, and long-winded; empty and dogmatic ‘eight-legged essays’ and grammatically inconsistent writings are far from being stamped out.” RMRB now urged all writers to pay attention to producing carefully structured and beautifully written articles

and “to refrain at all costs from making the reader feel lulled to sleep while reading.” The new rules the editorial proposed were that “newspapers must be substantial, reasonable, and well-structured” (*yan zhi you wu, yan zhi cheng li, yan zhi cheng zhang* 言之有物，言之成理，言之成章) – issues discussed by Mao in his 1942 speech condemning *dang bagu*.<sup>56</sup>

With an improvement in format, content, and style, RMRB pledged to carry out an ambitious overhaul of the entire newspaper that was intended to bring the paper closer to the reader. Reducing the distance between the readers and the newspaper staff (and the Party leadership who occupied the other end of the communication channel) was crucial if the paper was to be made more effective. A surprising step was the editorial’s announcement to scrap the page that had been reserved for reader’s correspondence. Instead, letters would from now on appear on all pages. Thus, readers were allowed a say in all sections and on all topics; they were no longer confined to a cage-like special section that was easily overlooked by readers interested only in instructions from above, but not in the people’s voices – people such as Chen, the editor-in-chief in Liu Binyan’s story. This bold move thus was clearly an effort of RMRB to redefine its relationship with its readers. The paper argued “the name of our paper is *People’s Daily*, which means that it is the people’s common weapon, and also their common property. The people’s masses are its master. Only by relying on the people’s masses can we make a good job in running our paper.” The last sentence is a reference to Mao’s famous dictum “Revolutionary war is the masses’ war; only by mobilizing the masses can we fight the war, only by relying on the masses can we fight the war.”<sup>57</sup> In his text, Mao made reliance on the people’s masses a prerequisite for success in the revolutionary war. The argumentation in the editorial parallels that of Mao: only relying on the readers and serving their interests unselfishly can lead to success in the socialist revolution currently under way.

The changes that RMRB announced in the July 1 editorial were of immense importance not just for the paper itself, but also for the theoretical premises of newspaper making in the PRC. The considerations of RMRB were clearly initiated from above; they reflected the broader issues raised by Mao in the Relationships

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<sup>56</sup> “Fandui dang bagu,” discussed in chapter two.

<sup>57</sup> From “Guanxin qunzhong shenghuo, zhuyi gongzuo fangfa” (dated Jan. 27, 1934), included in *Mao Zedong xuanji*, vol. 1, p. 136.



and Hundred Flowers speeches. Under these circumstances, can the RMRB reform be seen as an attempt to leave behind the straightjacket of the Chinese media concept? Apparently not: neither did the CCP renounce its claim of direct control of the paper – after all the reforms were of the top-down kind – nor did the Party walk away from claiming the right to use the media as a tool in the normative project of educating the people and remoulding their thinking. To the contrary: the intention of the RMRB reforms was to improve the paper’s performance and to make it an even more effective tool of Party propaganda. While the paper promised to give more room to discussions and to tolerate dissenting opinions, such steps were explained with the hope to increase the speed of economic construction and transition to socialism in a more competitive social climate that would encourage wider strata of society to become engaged in the Party’s projects. Thus, the CCP was ready to make amendments to the interpretation of the media concept and to the way of its implementation. Alterations of the concept itself, however, were not on the agenda. It was not until spring 1957 that the journalists themselves started to challenge essential aspects of the media concept.

Due to RMRB’s vanguard function in the Chinese newspaper sector, a decisive policy change such as that announced on July 1 could not go without response from other newspapers in the nation. The various central and regional newspapers had to take seriously the problems raised by RMRB: its self-criticism was not so much a self-criticism *per se* but a reproach of the entire newspaper sector. To drive home this point, the CC sent RMRB’s June 20 report to the local PD’s and newspapers with a note that encouraged them explicitly to follow RMRB’s lead.<sup>58</sup> Within the framework of the Hundred Flowers policy, newspapers were now called upon to open up their pages and to produce more lively and readable articles, to carry the debates that one hundred flowers and one hundred schools were to produce. Other strong signals of changes in policy emerged from Beijing, such as the decision to increase significantly the circulation of *Cankao xiaoxi* 参考消息, the premier *neibu* newspaper.<sup>59</sup> Following the lead of RMRB,

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<sup>58</sup> The note is reprinted in Zhongyang xuanchuanbu bangongting (ed.). *Dang de xuanchuan gongzuo wenjian xuanbian*. Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1994, vol. 1, p. 311-12.

<sup>59</sup> “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu kuoda *Cankao xiaoxi* dingyue fanwei de tongzhi” (dated Dec. 18, 1956) in XGWX 3.1197-1200. See also Mao’s remark “Kan *Cankao xiaoxi* jiu shi ‘zhong niudou’”

newspapers across China soon began to emulate its new line.<sup>60</sup> A special case was that of the Shanghai daily WHB.

### *The Thaw (II): WHB Reborn*

WHB could not react immediately to the changing atmosphere for a simple reason: it no longer existed. Only two months prior to the RMRB reform, on April 28, WHB had published its last issue and thus completed a protracted transition process from a general newspaper to a specialized paper aimed at middle school teachers, now called *Jiaoshibao* 教师报 and published twice weekly in Beijing. Yet WHB had shown resilience before, and the rapidly changing political environment helped it to make a comeback that had seemed all but impossible a few months earlier: on October 1, 1956, WHB was reborn in what was the third relaunch in its turbulent history.

WHB looked back on a tradition as a newspaper with a primarily intellectual target group. Founded in 1938 by a group of intellectuals around Xu Zhucheng 徐铸成, it had addressed an urban, educated readership with high-quality features and lively discussions.<sup>61</sup> Closed down twice by the Japanese and GMD authorities for its leftist agenda in 1939 and 1947, WHB resumed publication in 1948 for the second time. Xu Zhucheng, then a seasoned and respected journalist known for his sharp editorials, was called back to lead the paper. Xu was chief-writer (*zhubi* 主笔), an arrangement under which he would write and sign most of the paper's key articles and editorials.<sup>62</sup>

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(dated Jan. 27, 1957) in *Mao Zedong xinwen gongzuo wenxuan*. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1983, p. 185. On *Cankao xiaoxi* see chapter four.

<sup>60</sup> On the effects on other newspapers see Fang Hanqi, Zhang Zhihua (ed.). *Zhongguo xinwen shiye jianshi (di er ban)*. Beijing: Zhongyang renmin daxue chubanshe, 1995, p. 424.

<sup>61</sup> The best source on WHB is the Xu Zhucheng's autobiography, *Xu Zhucheng huiyilu*. The rest of this chapter draws heavily on this – even after heavy editing, see above – uniquely frank and rich source. Other literature includes *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi* (ed.). *Wenhuibao dashiji (1938.1-1939.5, 1945.8-1947.5)*. Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1986; *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi* (ed.). *Wenhuibao shilüe (1938.1-1939.5, 1945.8-1947.5)*. Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1988; and *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi* (ed.). *Wenhuibao shilüe (1949.6-1966.5)*. Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1997. *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi* (ed.). *Cong fengyu zhong zou lai*. Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1993. *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi* (ed.). *Zai quzhe zhong qianjin*. Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1995.

<sup>62</sup> Such a position existed in most Chinese newspapers before 1949; it was much more attractive than that of an editor-in-chief who cannot normally publish articles or editorials under his own name.

Thanks to its leftist credentials, WHB was allowed to continue publication after 1949, but since 1951 it came under the pressure of the CCP's "rationalization and division of labour" policy that worked analogous to that in the publishing sector. Since in the eyes of the planners in Beijing there was no room for two papers with the same target audience, intellectuals, WHB lost out against GMRB. Its role was redefined: "WHB must make further efforts to explicitly take middle and primary school teachers, high school students and some university students as its main target group."<sup>63</sup> This audience, while officially still defined as "educated" or "intellectuals" (*zhishifenzi* 知识分子) was a setback for the ambitions of Xu and his newspaper, that had counted influential intellectuals such as the historian Jian Bozan 翦伯赞, the writer Mao Dun, and Peking opera star Mei Lanfang 梅兰芳 among its regular contributors and had spearheaded many an important intellectual discussion. With the paper being forced to succumb to pressure from both Beijing and Shanghai, its content became more focused and WHB was turned into a professional paper; as a consequence, its print run surged to 200,000,<sup>64</sup> but WHB had lost much of its intellectual audiences.<sup>65</sup>

In April 1955, the Ministry of Education convened a conference in Beijing to discuss the creation of a new paper, *Jiaoshibao*. The idea for a paper specialized in education, organized after a Soviet model, had been launched in spring 1954 by the head of the CCP PD, Lu Dingyi, and in March 1955 the PD formally approved of the plans prepared by the Ministry. At the conference, Xu Zhucheng had to agree to participate in the preparations for *Jiaoshibao* that was to be formed "on the basis" of WHB and several minor, education-related publications.<sup>66</sup> On October 1, 1955, an "Important message of our paper" announced that WHB from that date on was to be published only twice weekly: "To gather experience for running

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The CCP did away with the position of chief writer after 1949, and people like Xu became editor-in-chief.

<sup>63</sup> "[Zhonggong Shanghai] shiwei guanyu Shanghai xinwenjie sixiang gaizao hou jiaqiang lingdao wenti de tongzhi," dated Jan. 1953. Cited after *Wenhuibao shilüe, 1949-1966*, p. 39.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50. The surge in circulation was probably the result of institutional subscriptions by schools.

<sup>65</sup> Besides "specialization" other forces were at work that increased the pressure on WHB and eventually brought about its closure: Ke Qingshi 柯庆施, the Party secretary of Shanghai, hated the paper and sent a vice editor-in-chief to WHB with the explicit task to force its closure. See Xu Zhucheng, "'Yangmou' – 1957," p. 143.

<sup>66</sup> *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi. Wenhuibao shilüe*, p. 49-53. As the authors note, it took unusually long for the State Council to agree. Zhou Enlai hesitated to scrap a newspaper of the reputation of WHB and asked the Shanghai authorities about their assessment before he approved of the plans.

*Jiaoshibao*, our paper has decided to publish, beginning from October 1, four pages twice a week (Wednesday and Saturday) in the format of [the future] *Jiaoshibao* as a trial so as to facilitate the transition to *Jiaoshibao*... According to the directives of the PRC Ministry of Education, we will continue to use the name *Wenhuibao* in the transition period.”<sup>67</sup> In the following months, the WHB staff had no choice but to wind up their paper’s operations: WHB had to close its Shanghai offices; most of the staff were transferred to other work units while a small number of key staff moved to Beijing, where *Jiaoshibao* was published under the name of the Ministry of Education.<sup>68</sup> On April 28, 1956, WHB published its last edition and informed its readers: “It has been decided that *Jiaoshibao* will start publication on May 1; WHB will therefore be discontinued. Dear readers! From now on, we will meet at *Jiaoshibao*!”<sup>69</sup> For all practical purposes, the fate of WHB thus seemed to be sealed: under the logic of the “specialization” policy, a Soviet import, there was no room for WHB.

Yet events were overtaking the developments in the newspaper sector: only weeks after WHB had closed its doors Mao proclaimed the Hundred Flowers. When intellectuals were called upon to engage in debates and Liu Shaoqi proposed that even RMRB should prove its worth in competition, the need for more than one newspaper carrying intellectual discourse suddenly became acute. In the new political situation, the old WHB seemed to represent just the model of what a newspaper for the intelligentsia was supposed to look like. Advancing on a fast track, decision makers in Beijing apparently came to reconsider the WHB issue; the PD and UFWD joined hands working to restore WHB. On the one hand, Li Weihai, the UFWD head called Zhang Bojun, Luo Longji, and Wang Yunsheng, three prominent non-CCP figures, to come up with proposals for newspaper work, including WHB. Luo Longji thereupon contacted Xu Zhucheng and Pu Xixiu 浦熙修, WHB’s former Beijing bureau chief, encouraging them to take a proactive stance,

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<sup>67</sup> “Ben bao zhongyao qishi.”

<sup>68</sup> Contrary to the jubilant words that accompanied the last edition, WHB staff were probably all but happy about the closure of their paper. All preparations for *Jiaoshibao* are conspicuously absent in Xu Zhucheng’s memoirs, a sure sign for Xu’s disapproval (he uses the same technique in other places of his autobiography). Xu was named editor-in-chief of *Jiaoshibao* but was in fact side-lined by a CCP cadre and vice editor-in-chief, Liu Songtao 刘松涛. He had not much to do in Beijing and described these months as the “most leisurely time in my life.” *Xu Zhucheng huiyilu*, p. 253-54.

<sup>69</sup> “Zhong kan ci,” WHB 1956.4.28.

since the Ministry of Education might drag its feet on the WHB issue.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, Deng Tuo, the editor-in-chief of RMRB, played a crucial role. In late June, Deng hinted to Xu Zhucheng that the question was being discussed.<sup>71</sup> Xu consequently rejected an offer to go to GMRB as editor-in-chief on the grounds that his closest associates were all with *Jiaoshibao* (in his stead, Chu Anping took over GMRB).<sup>72</sup> In late June and early July Beijing began to brim with rumours and from Lu Dingyi, the head of the PD, Zhu and Pu Xixiu heard that WHB's relaunch was a sealed fact. A few days later, Xu and Pu were summoned to Zhongnanhai where Zhang Jichun 张际春, a vice-head of the PD, told them officially of the CC's decision to revive WHB. Shortly thereafter, Deng Tuo explained the Party's intentions to them. Xu remembers this meeting:<sup>73</sup>

[Pu] Xixiu and I went ahead to the appointment. First I talked about my personal views. Deng Tuo immediately started to talk just like an old friend and said: "Here are some immature ideas for you two as a reference: first, the Centre hopes that WHB will resume publication as soon as possible; naturally they hope that it will vigorously propagate the 'Double Hundred' policy and encourage the intellectual circles to contend and bloom courageously, because WHB has always been particularly influential among the intellectuals. Secondly, [WHB] should vigorously present new achievements and trends in culture, science, and technology from both abroad and at home to the readers, so as to broaden the perspective of the intellectuals. Thirdly, [WHB] should also be concerned with the intellectuals' material and spiritual life; there is no harm in setting up a column that broadly discusses [things like] how to decorate one's house, how to plant flowers, breed fish, or furnish one's study etc. Fourth, after the socialist transformation is completed, a culture high tide will certainly appear in the vast countryside, and you should start early to pay attention to culture and education in the countryside. The experience of the old *Dagongbao* 大公报 with traveller's letters is worth emulating, so you can send journalists to travel the villages all over the country. They do not necessarily need to take letters of introduction from all [bureaucratic] layers with them, the material they get in this way is always "reporting the good but not the bad." [Journalists] can directly go to the cooperatives and understand the real situation at the grass-roots and then write their reports. Finally [the Centre] hopes that you will put emphasis on reflecting [our] situation in Western Europe, America, Japan, and Southeast Asia, and exert influence [there]. Currently, the influence of RMRB and Xinhua she is still mainly limited to Eastern Europe, their influence in the other areas falls even short of that of *Dagongbao* and WHB. You must pay attention to stress this aspect."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Zhang Yihe. *Zui hou de guizu*, p. 36-38.

<sup>71</sup> *Xu Zhucheng huiyilu*, p. 255f. Xu does not give a date but remembers that this happened during the third meeting of the first National People's Congress, which convened from June 15-30, 1956.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258. For a slightly more elaborate account see Xu Zhucheng. *Baohai jiuwen*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1981, p. 312-16.

<sup>74</sup> The last passage ("Finally, ...") is grammatically ambivalent and could be misunderstood as a call on WHB to increase reporting on the capitalist areas and to introduce ideas from there to China, as Liu Shaoqi had demanded from the Xinhua personnel. The meaning is clearer in the uncensored version of this chapter. See "'Yangmou' – 1957," p. 144. It is interesting to see that the Party

Deng Tuo, on behalf of the Party Centre, presented to Xu a complete program for the revived WHB: after the relaunch WHB was to target intellectuals and concentrate on the spheres of culture, the sciences, and literature and art – due to its reputation with China’s intellectuals, WHB was suited for this task like no other paper in China.

Feverish preparations for the relaunch began immediately after the Zhongnanhai meeting. Xu could ensure the return of many of WHB’s former staff; additionally, Qin Benli 钦本立, who headed the America group at RMRB’s international news section, would join the paper and head WHB’s Party group.<sup>75</sup> The writer Ke Ling 柯灵, a man of the first hour of WHB, would also return; together with Xu, Qin, and Pu Xixiu, who was to carry on as Beijing bureau chief, he would form the paper’s core staff. A skilled negotiator, Xu initially opposed to return to Shanghai to run his paper; he agreed only after securing a guarantee that the Shanghai authorities would not interfere with WHB’s operations. Ke Qingshi 柯庆施, the Shanghai Party secretary, was notorious for his intolerant approach to any form of intellectual debate, which had earned him the nickname “one-voice-hall” (*yiyan tang* 一言堂).<sup>76</sup> At a dinner with Yao Zhen 姚溱, a PD vice-head, Xu was reassured by Shi Ximin 石西民, head of the Shanghai Party Committee’s PD, that WHB would be classified as a central-level newspaper (*zhongyangji* 中央级)

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Centre regarded WHB as a tool for external propaganda, an often neglected aspect of the Chinese media.

<sup>75</sup> This position made Qin Benli (1918-1991) *de facto* the most powerful man at WHB. Qin only reluctantly gave up his job as head of the America section at RMRB’s international news department; he was initially only “borrowed” by WHB. Qin Benli. “Liu zai jiyi li de pianduan” in *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi. Cong fengyu zhong zou lai*, p. 135-40, here p. 136. See also Xu Zhucheng. “‘Yangmou’ – 1957,” p. 144. At WHB, Qin was given an opportunity to establish himself as an independent thinker and liberal minded journalist. More than thirty years later, in May 1989, his courage and his stubbornness brought him into conflict with the Shanghai authorities once again, when he was purged as editor-in-chief of the famous *Shijie jingji daobao* 世界经济导报 that consequently was closed down.

<sup>76</sup> Xu had a strained relationship with Ke, and also with Zhang Chunqiao, head of the CCP Shanghai PD’s Office for Literature and Art. Ke had reportedly said that “there are too many newspapers in Shanghai, which makes it inconvenient to control them; *Wenhuibao* should be closed down.” *Wenhuibao shilüe, 1949-1966*, p. 62f. Ke is identified as the notorious “one-voice-hall” in Xu Zhucheng. “Yangmou qinli ji,” p. 21 (Ke’s name does not appear in the two versions of this account published in the PRC). The nickname of Ke, “one-voice-hall,” where only one speaks and all other listen, is also reported in Chen Huangmei. “Zhou Enlai dui dianying yishu de qinqie guanhuai,” in *Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe* (ed.). *Bu jin de sinian*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987.

and would not be cut off from crucial Beijing news sources, such as the internal circulation *Da Cankao*, as had happened earlier.<sup>77</sup>

With the help of Deng Tuo, Xu Zhucheng drew up the official plan for WHB's relaunch and handed it to Zhang Jichun, who told Xu to go ahead with his preparations immediately. When the plan's official confirmation by the CC arrived, it carried, next to the usual notice "approved" (*zhaozhun* 照准), a sentence reading "comrade Xu Zhucheng must be given full powers of office" (*yao rang Xu Zhucheng tongzhi you zhi you quan* 要让徐铸成同志有职有权). Xu could thus start his enterprise with a maximum of support.

A person who had been instrumental in securing this amount of support was Deng Tuo, the editor-in-chief of RMRB. The degree of Deng's commitment to WHB is indeed amazing: his name appears time and again in the memoirs of WHB people, and he helped WHB at several critical junctures throughout 1956 and 1957. Only speculation is possible regarding the reasons for Deng's engagement, going far beyond the loyalty requested by friendship. Apparently Deng was dissatisfied with his position at RMRB: he was under high pressure, with little leeway to pursue his own ideas. Time and again, Deng was not even his own master at RMRB, but had to succumb to the power of the grey eminence, Hu Qiaomu. Yet it seems that Deng also was dissatisfied with the very direction that RMRB had taken: His ongoing support for WHB suggests that he himself was in favour of a livelier, more open newspaper, an ideal he saw realized by Xu Zhucheng's paper.<sup>78</sup>

Xu and his staff formulated the editorial policies of WHB: it was to become a lively, fact-based, and intellectually stimulating paper. Xu went so far as to lay down as a rule: "what others don't touch, we print; whatever others print we don't touch" (*ren qi wo qu, ren qu wo qi* 人弃我取, 人取我弃).<sup>79</sup> Taking the RMRB reforms as a point of departure, WHB planned its comeback as a paper boasting of diversity and pledged to "break with established rules" (*dapo kuangkuang* 打破框框) – a far cry from its last days as an independent paper, when WHB had to

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<sup>77</sup> *Xu Zhucheng huiyilu*, p. 259. It was probably WHB's access to *Neibu cankao* that was at stake; no newspaper would be likely to have access to *Da cankao*, whose small print run served exclusively the top leadership.

<sup>78</sup> The memoirs of Xu Zhucheng as well as his remarks in *Baohai jiuwen*, p. 314f, seem to support this reading. Timothy Cheek, too, details Deng Tuo's dissatisfaction with his work. See *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China*, p. 132; 172-77.

<sup>79</sup> *Xu Zhucheng huiyilu*, p. 260.

concentrate on topics of relevance for middle school teachers. Xu Zhucheng activated his old relationships and could thus secure strong support from leading Chinese intellectuals.

After just two months of preparations, the reborn WHB was launched on October 1, 1956 – the third relaunch in its eventful history. From the first day on, the editorial department tried to produce a lively and inspiring newspaper. The first issue boasted with contributions by prominent writers and intellectuals: poetry from Ai Qing 艾青 and Guo Moruo, (then head of the Federation of Literary and Art Circles as well as president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences), appeared on pages one and two; Guo had written another piece on literature and society; the veteran journalist Song Yunbin 宋云彬 contributed an article on the Tang dynasty writer Han Yu 韩愈. Other articles included the first part of cartoonist Feng Zikai's 丰子恺 “Lushan youji” 庐山游记, and an essay by the writer Shu Wu 舒芜.

The core piece in WHB's relaunch issue was its editorial. Framed and placed in the upper left hand corner, it drew the attention of the readers just as RMRB's July 1 editorial had done. It is insightful to read WHB's relaunch editorial against the background in RMRB's reform announcement. Most conspicuous is the strikingly different tone of the two editorials that starts right from the title: WHB contrasted RMRB's short and matter-of fact “To our readers” (*Zhi duzhe* 致读者) with the its own “Respectful announcement to our readers” (*Jinggao duzhe* 敬告读者). By using the expression *jinggao*, the authors of WHB chose a more polite formulation that at the same time implies some sort of personal relationship between the speaker and the addressee that is absent in the rather factual *zhi*, which may even indicate a top-down direction of communication. In this way, WHB tried to reduce the distance between the newspaper and its audience. The editorial continues in the same tone: while RMRB flatly announced that it had changed its editorial policy and then explained the paper's future direction, WHB linked its editorial line with the demands of the readers: it had received over 70,000 letters of support since the earliest rumours of a relaunch, containing numerous proposals that WHB had consulted while drawing up its relaunch plans. The most important point was an explicit rejection of the policy of specialization that had been forced on them before; WHB assured its readers that it would be a general



interest paper: “We have already made some concrete arrangements so that WHB can fully and accurately report on major domestic and international news, with a focus on reporting news in the areas of culture, science and education.” WHB would not specialize on one particular target audience, as *Jiaoshibao* had done.

The July 1 editorial had declared: “RMRB is the Party’s paper, and it is also the paper of the people.” WHB contrasted this with its own statement of intent: “WHB has always been a newspaper of the people, a newspaper of the intellectuals.” While the formulation is a quotation from RMRB, the emphasis chosen could not be more different. Most conspicuous is the absence of the paper’s Party character. Only in the editorial’s last paragraph is the CCP mentioned for the first time: “The wise leadership of the Party and the Party’s concern and care for the intellectuals have already opened up unheard of future prospects for us. Let us advance even more courageously, advance towards science, advance towards socialism!” The formulation remains ambiguous: the Party’s leadership is mentioned, but it remains unclear what that means for the newspaper; in fact, the editorial says nowhere that WHB is led by the Party. The paper thus moved to the fringes of the CCP’s media concept. It would serve socialism but left it open if that meant toeing the Party line or allowing for interpretations by the paper’s editors.

Such rhetoric could, of course, be justified by the Party’s current policy, the Hundred Flowers. The editorial defined the paper’s own understanding of its mission: “WHB will provide a fair amount of space to become a forum for ‘hundred schools of thought to contend.’ We will solicit articles, reflect the questions [raised] in debates of all different kinds and promote ‘the contending of hundred schools of thought.’” This was a repudiation of the earlier policy to “learn from the Soviet Union.” “In the last few years, we have studied the experience of the news work of the Soviet Union and other fraternal countries and have reaped certain gains. In the future WHB will continue to study the strong points of all sides, preserve its own style, and strive for rich and colourful contents and a lively and liberal appearance.” In this short passage, the Soviet experience is negated three times: the qualification “certain gains” amounts to a rejection of the Soviet model; the pledge to study the “strong points of all sides” means studying also the methods of newspaper-making in the capitalist countries, a proposal of Liu Shaoqi in his talks

with news workers that had been used by RMRB's "reform group;"<sup>80</sup> and the paper's announcement to "preserve its own style" meant that no outside models would be allowed to dictate WHB's style and editorial policy. WHB promised to "strive for rich and colourful contents, and a lively and liberal appearance."

Encouraged by support from the CC committee (as Deng Tuo had stressed), by Liu Shaoqi's demand for improvements in the Chinese newspaper sector, and by Mao's calls for one hundred flowers to bloom and one hundred schools of thought to contend, WHB thus outlined an editorial policy that would challenge the ways of newspaper making established in the PRC after 1949. In doing so, WHB went beyond RMRB's reform pledges when it declared: "A people's newspaper (*renmin de baozhi* 人民的报纸) should first of all speak through facts, reflect reality through the news happening every day, and proclaim the truth." *Renmin de baozhi* sounds like *Renmin ribao* – the reader arrives at the impression that WHB tried to be the better RMRB, fulfilling the promise of RMRB's name. Going so far, however, WHB was careful not to leave the framework of the media concept. The editorial refutes any dogmatic interpretation of the concept, but this line had been proposed by Liu Shaoqi and thus came from the highest Party leadership. Yet the editorial comes nowhere near the point of questioning or even rejecting Party leadership *per se*, not even in its refusal to spell out the CCP's direct leadership of the paper. Even more conspicuously, the deeper motivation of the Party's media concept is fully present in the Oct. 1 editorial: WHB hopes to "advance towards socialism" by way of education and enlightenment of the people; the ultimate goal of the paper's new outlook is to increase its effectiveness in the pursuit of the CCP's normative projects. All that WHB did was to apply a liberal interpretation of the media concept and to stress the clauses (1) to (5) in relation to clause (6), which defined the media's role in class struggle. We see at work here the latent tension between the different elements of the concept. Yet at the beginning of the Hundred Flowers campaign, this tension was still manageable and did not automatically lead to conflict.

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<sup>80</sup> "Dui Xinhua she gongzuo de di er ci zhishi," p. 359.

The readers all over the country greeted WHB's relaunch enthusiastically. The paper's first issue sold over 100,000 copies and the print run reached 300,000 in May 1957.<sup>81</sup> WHB picked up many controversial issues and topics that did not make it into other newspapers. For instance, WHB joined a major debate that critically assessed Chinese film production since 1949. Two articles in particular, written by Zhong Dianfei 钟惦棐, a cadre of the CCP PD, caused a stir, and later drew Mao's wrath; they were among the accusations levelled against WHB after June 1957.<sup>82</sup> WHB also translated excerpts from Anna Louise Strong's new book *The Stalin Era*.<sup>83</sup> On a more local notice, WHB came to the defence of students who cheated because they were so bored by their dull examinations – this matter, too, became a hotly debated issue. While WHB quickly earned itself a reputation for unusual and contentious issues, it also boasted high quality literary and academic contributions. It was proud to publish on its pages poetry by the two marshals Zhu De 朱德 and Ye Jianying 叶剑英, as well as pieces by historians Jian Bozan and Hou Wailu 侯外庐. Within a short time, WHB had moved back onto the centre stage of the Chinese newspaper scene. When blooming and contending reached new heights in spring 1957, WHB was again on the forefront. The degree to which the paper had succeeded in establishing itself as an independent-minded and intellectually stimulating newspaper became visible only after the launch of the anti-Rightist campaign: it was WHB that received the disputable honour of being torn to pieces and criticized by name for its editorial policy in two articles written by Mao Zedong personally.

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<sup>81</sup> First figure taken from Xie Weiming. "Fanyou fengbao zhong de 'Beiban,'" in *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi. Zai quzhe zhong qianjin*, p. 289-300, here p. 294. In mid May 1957, Deng Tuo informed Xu, who had just returned from the Soviet Union, that WHB's print run had reached 300,000. See Xu Zhucheng. "'Yangmou' – 1957," p. 147.

<sup>82</sup> "Dianying de luogu" (signed 'Wenyibao pinglunyuanyuan') in WHB, Dec. 21, 1956, and *Wenyibao* 文艺报, Dec. 15, 1956. "Weile qianjin," in WHB, Jan. 4, 1957. See also *Wenhuibao shilüe*, p. 171-74.

<sup>83</sup> The veteran newspaper man Fan Changjiang 范长江 had recommended the volume to Qin Benli. See Qin Benli. "Liu zai jiyi li de pianduan," p. 137. WHB started serializing several chapters of the volume on Feb. 24, 1957. Because of the book's critical judgement of Stalin, it was published in China only as a *neibu* edition. WHB was later criticized for publishing the excerpts.

### *May 1957: The Debate on Journalism*

General response to the Hundred Flowers policy was lukewarm through most of 1956: with the exception of a number of young writers like Liu Binyan, many intellectuals who had seen the effects of previous campaigns hesitated to come forward with criticism. Mao was particularly dissatisfied with the response of the press. In order to jump-start blooming and contending in the crucial propaganda *xitong*, the CCP convened on short notice a national propaganda conference, to be followed by provincial propaganda conferences, from March 6 through 13, 1957. Over 800 participants (including 160 non-CCP personnel) from all over the country came to Beijing.<sup>84</sup> The Shanghai delegation included representatives of the press, the literary and art circles, and the education sector, as well as a young secretary (*ganshi* 干事) from the Shanghai PD with the name of Yao Wen Yuan 姚文元. It was very unusual for a junior cadre in his twenties to attend an important meeting like the propaganda conference. Only in Beijing the other delegates learned that Mao had read Yao's articles and wanted to meet him.<sup>85</sup> For the Shanghai WHB, Xu Zhucheng was invited.

Immediately after arriving in Beijing, the conference participants were made to hear recordings of Mao's Contradictions speech ("Guanyu zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodun de wenti" 关于正确处理人民内部矛盾的问题). On February 27, Mao had elaborated on "contradictions among the people:" with the transition to socialism, class struggle was basically completed, and the majority of problems would henceforth be treated as "contradictions among the people" that would not require class struggle. He told delegates that the atmosphere henceforth would no longer be that of "thunderstorms" (*jifeng baoyu* 疾风暴雨, i.e. class struggle) but rather "slight breeze and light rain" (*he feng xi yu* 和风细雨) or even a "slight drizzle" (*maomaoyu* 毛毛雨).<sup>86</sup> If it was Mao's intention to create a relaxed climate

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<sup>84</sup> Numbers taken from Zhu Zheng. *1957 nian de xiaji: cong bai jia zhengming dao liang jia zhengming*. Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1998, p. 23. This volume is the best account of the Hundred Flowers period written to date. For the documents of the propaganda conference see Zhongyang xuanchuanbu bangongting (ed.). *Dangde xuanchuan gongzuo huiyi gaikuang he wenxian*. Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1994, p. 164-81.

<sup>85</sup> See Xu Zhucheng. "Yangmou' – 1957," here p. 146.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. Mao's Contradictions speech was published only several months later with significant changes. For the original version see *Mao Zhuxi wenxian sanshi pian*. Beijing: Beijing teshu gangchang xuanchuan qinwuzu, n.d., cited in Michael Schoenhals. "Original Contradictions: On the Unrevised Text of Mao Zedong's 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People'" in

for the Hundred Flowers, he succeeded in doing so, at least with the non-Party personnel among the propaganda cadres, who heard the recording of his speech with excitement.

Shortly before the end of the propaganda conference, on March 12, Mao Zedong addressed the meeting.<sup>87</sup> In this speech, Mao elaborated on the key themes of his Contradictions speech. Referring to the general principles of propaganda, Mao defined the scope of work for the attending cadres: “Our comrades doing propaganda work have the task to propagate Marxism. This propaganda is a gradual one; it must be done well so that people are willing to accept it. We cannot force the people to accept Marxism, we can only persuade them to accept it.”<sup>88</sup> The Hundred Flowers policy did not refute the general ideological framework, but rather changed the methods used to elaborate this ideology. As for the new approach, Mao proposed: “we must [practice] slight breeze and light rain, learn lessons from the past to avoid future mistakes, and cure the sickness to save the patient; we must oppose using the method ‘killing people with a single strike.’”<sup>89</sup> The formulations used were close to those of the Contradictions speech. In more concrete terms, Mao told the conference not to be afraid of voicing opinions or of one-sidedness: “Can we demand from people to overcome their one-sidedness step by step, and to look at problems in a comprehensive manner? I think we must demand this from them.”<sup>90</sup> The stage was now set for the Hundred Flowers policy to be implemented with new vigour all across the propaganda sector. In an important addition, Mao explicitly extended the scope of the ‘Double Hundred’ significantly: “The policies of letting hundred

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*Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 16 (1986), p. 99-112. Zhu Zheng has reconstructed parts of the original speech from a series of RMRB editorials in *1957 nian de xiaji*, p. 23-32. When the speech was published in RMRB on June 19, the “slight breeze and light rain” formulation was modified and the following section was inserted: “But the remnants of the landlord and comprador classes we have overthrown do still exist, the bourgeoisie does still exist, and the petty bourgeoisie has only begun to reform. Class struggle is by no means over. The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the class struggle between the various political forces, and the class struggle of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the ideological realm, are still protracted and tortuous, and sometimes even very sharp.” See *Mao Zedong wenji*, vol. 7, p. 230.

<sup>87</sup> His speech, “Zai Zhongguo gongchandang quanguo xuanchuan gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua,” was released in 1964 and is reprinted in *Mao Zedong wenji*, vol. 7., p. 267-83. As the editors of this edition comment (p. 282), the speech was heavily edited before publication; in particular, the need for class struggle was stressed, and a less lenient attitude towards intellectuals in general was introduced.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276-77.

flowers bloom and hundred schools of thought contend are not only good ways to develop science and literature and art, but applied broadly, they are also good ways for all our work.”<sup>91</sup> For the period ahead, the Hundred Flowers would dominate all sectors of public life. The task of the newspaper people now was to put into action this policy in the Chinese press and thus to become a public forum of debate.

On the fringes of the conference, Xu Zhucheng and a select number of other participants were given an opportunity to get an even more thorough understanding of Mao's view of the Hundred Flowers. On the afternoon of March 10, they were invited to Zhongnanhai to a reception with Mao.<sup>92</sup> In a very frank discussion, Mao asked the delegates about their opinion on the Hundred Flowers. Xu asked: “I have no clear ideas of how to propagate the ‘double hundred policy’ in the newspapers and I feel it difficult to pin down. I’m afraid of committing dogmatist errors if we grasp it too tightly, and of committing revisionist errors if we let it too loose. Could the Chairman instruct us on how to grasp it?”<sup>93</sup> Mao evaded a direct answer on this question and told Xu “to learn fighting in the course of fighting.” However, he encouraged the journalists “not to fear one-sidedness” (*pianmianxing* 片面性). Without giving detailed advice, Mao thus opened up the newspapers for criticism and debate – criticism not only from CCP members, but also from people outside the Party, people like Xu. Xu received even more explicit support from Mao for his editorial policy. The Chairman confessed to him: “Your WHB is very good, from music and chess to calligraphy and painting, plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemums, flowers and birds, insect and fish – everything’s there that one could wish for, really fine. When I get up in the afternoon, the first thing I do is reading your paper, then I read RMRB, and if there’s time I take a look at the other papers.”<sup>94</sup> Mao enjoyed exactly those aspects of WHB that made it the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>92</sup> The notes of that meeting were published in *Mao Zedong xinwen gongzuo wenxuan*, p. 186-95. For the following discussion I have relied on the account given in *Xu Zhucheng huiyilu*, and especially on his “‘Yangmou’ – 1957,” the franker, unedited version. The quotes in the next two paragraphs are taken from this latter source. A translation, based on another version of the conversation from a Cultural Revolution source can be found in MacFarquhar et al (eds.). *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao*, p. 249-72.

<sup>93</sup> Xu Zhucheng. “‘Yangmou’ – 1957,” p. 146.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

intellectuals' favourite paper. Mao's statement was a humiliation for Deng Tuo, the editor-in-chief of RMRB, who sat directly opposite of Xu at the meeting.

Still trying to figure out the amount of support Mao was prepared to give a non-Party paper like WHB, Xu tested the Hundred Flowers principle with a concrete issue and complained to Mao about the interference of the Shanghai authorities:<sup>95</sup>

“To my understanding, the ‘double hundred policy’ means for politics and ideology to emphasize inviting criticism, to let the people speak their minds freely. If [some opinions] are incorrect, we should explain them patiently, and should not suppress them immediately; this is what appreciating criticism means.” The Chairman said: “This understanding is absolutely correct, good, speak on.” I said “When our WHB started the debate on film, we received many letters, some of them containing very sharp criticism, and also some that raised objections. We let [the debate] loose quite intentionally, so that everybody might have his say, and we planned to discuss the issue later. But in Shanghai we came under attack from all sides [*weigong* 围攻]. Thus I ask the Chairman, how shall we react?”

Complaining openly about Ke Qingshi and Zhang Chunqiao to Mao was a very bold move for a non-Party intellectual like Xu Zhucheng, but again he received the Chairman's support: “I will ask comrade Zhou Yang to write a small summary for your debate, this is called thesis, antithesis, synthesis, this is dialectics!”<sup>96</sup> Xu could thus go back to Shanghai and tell his colleagues about the support he had secured from the paramount leader in Beijing. Mao, in turn, had encouraged WHB to widen the discussions and to get intellectuals from all spheres of life involved into the impending rectification movement.

After the national propaganda conference, the propaganda apparatus began to move into higher gears. The speed adopted at different newspapers, however, was unequal. On April 1, the leadership of GMRB was reshuffled: long-time editor-in-chief Chang Zhiqing 常芝青 retired in favour of Chu Anping. Chang's departure was motivated by the status of his paper: GMRB officially belonged to the democratic parties. To convince the non-CCP personnel of their independence from the CCP, Chang, a longstanding CCP member, had to go and was replaced by Chu, an non-CCP intellectual (as noted above, personnel changes at GMRB had been in the making since mid-1956).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 146-47.

<sup>97</sup> See Mu Xin. *Ban Guangming ribao shi nian zishu, 1957-1967*. Beijing: Zhongyang dangshi chubanshe, 1994, p. 9-10.

Not all papers reacted as fast. The most notorious feet-dragger was RMRB. The CCP CC mouthpiece's reluctance to join in the chorus of the Hundred Flowers caused an angry outburst by Mao on April 10.<sup>98</sup> Mao met with Deng Tuo, Hu Jiwei, and other RMRB personnel and accused them of deliberately ignoring both his Contradictions speech and the national propaganda conference. Deng Tuo's argument that the Party Centre had not officially released notice of the two meetings was brushed aside by Mao: even non-CCP papers had started reporting on the propaganda conference, why was the Party's mouthpiece slower than the "democratic" newspapers? Mao was prepared to suspend fixed rules on reporting, such as Xinhua's power to release news reports about key meetings like those of February and March, if doing so would be in the spirit of the current Party policy, the Hundred Flowers. Behind RMRB's reluctance, Mao sensed opposition against his own policies: "I think you are deliberately singing a different tune, deliberately singing in praise is people like Chen Qitong 陈其通.<sup>99</sup> You are not a Party paper, you are a faction paper. In the past I said you were bookish pedants making a newspaper, but that's not right, in fact you are like dead people making a paper."<sup>100</sup> Mao's often quoted outburst may have been not too far off the mark. Roderick MacFarquhar has pointed out that opposition to Mao's policies was widespread within the Party, especially from Liu Shaoqi and Lu Dingyi.<sup>101</sup> Such an argument seems plausible in the light of Deng Tuo's complaints that he had tried to organize a number of articles on the issue that had been held back by Hu Qiaomu, as Hu admitted at the meeting.<sup>102</sup> However, it is not entirely clear where the resistance Mao believed to exist did actually come from: Deng Tuo had complained repeatedly of having no real power at RMRB, and even offered to

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<sup>98</sup> Timothy Cheek comments on the unwillingness of Deng Tuo and others at RMRB to get involved with the high tide of the Hundred Flowers. See *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China*, p. 174-76. A word-by-word transcript of the infamous "bedroom meeting" where Mao voiced his anger can be found in the memoirs of Wang Ruoshui: *Zhihui de tongku*. Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1989, p. 320-25.

<sup>99</sup> A group of cadres from the PLA's General Political Department, including Chen Qitong had published several articles highly critical of the stories of Wang Meng and Liu Binyan and saw the official literary doctrine, Socialist Realism, under threat. The earliest article, "Women dui muqian wenyijie gongzuo de ji dian yijian" appeared in RMRB on Jan. 7. The promoters of the Hundred Flowers policy, notably Mao, saw this as an attempt to oppose the Party's new policy. Mao was angered in particular by RMRB's slow response to this issue.

<sup>100</sup> From Wang Ruoshui. *Zhihui de tongku*, p. 321.

<sup>101</sup> See *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution 1*, ch. 14, esp. p. 191-96.

<sup>102</sup> See Wang Ruoshui. *Zhihui de tongku*, p. 322.



retire at the meeting with Mao. The strong man in the shadows at RMRB was Hu Qiaomu, but it seems unlikely that opposition to a policy as important as the Hundred Flowers would come from Mao's close aide. Neither did Lu Dingyi have enough influence in the PD, at least not against Hu. It may thus very well be that RMRB was prevented from bolder and more rapid moves by a combination of factors: the bureaucratic structures of the paper on the one hand, and a common sense of insecurity among newspaper personnel confronted with the rapidly evolving situation on the other. These were the very structural problems that Liu Binyan had made responsible for his newspaper's state of freeze.

In his speech at the propaganda conference and in his discussions with journalists, Mao had given hints as to the direction that the changes should take: he proposed a loosening of established rules that would mean in fact a less strict interpretation of the media concept. When he tried to develop the Hundred Flowers into a full-blown "rectification campaign," the intellectuals (including non-Party people) were invited to come forward with their complaints; they were expected to help the CCP to reform its ways and to become more effective in its mode of governance. Doing so was crucial to overcome bureaucratism and to prepare for the new tasks ahead, now that the transition to socialism was basically completed. In this context, the newspapers were called upon to become a platform for criticism and self-criticism. The important point behind this move is that the rectification movement has been initiated by the CCP itself, and its objective is to improve the Party's way of rule. Only in this narrow framework, blooming and contending was considered legitimate – and thus the media concept remained intact, since it was not allowed to question the Party's leadership role *per se*.

WHB had reacted faster than RMRB to the changing atmosphere. Xu Zhucheng had relayed the spirit of Mao's Contradictions speech back to Shanghai; other WHB staff had heard recordings of the speech there. On March 25, WHB started to study Mao's speeches, and the paper's column "Shehui daxue" 社会学 began to elaborate on the Contradictions speech. Xu himself could not return to Shanghai, as he was unexpectedly asked to lead a delegation of Chinese news personnel on an inspection tour through the Soviet Union. Xu left on March 27 and returned to Shanghai only on May 13, when the period of blooming and contending had already culminated. To be named the head of an important

delegation to the socialist brother nation was an unusual honour for a non-Party man like Xu Zhucheng and stresses the amount of trust the highest Party leadership placed in him.<sup>103</sup> In Moscow, Xu even shook hands with Khrushchev; the photographs taken at this opportunity were used against Xu during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>104</sup> Another obvious sign of support for WHB was a much-publicized visit by Lu Dingyi to the paper on April 11. Originally, Mao had been scheduled to visit WHB.<sup>105</sup> WHB thus seemed to have support for its editorial policies from the highest echelons of the Party leadership when the Hundred Flowers moved into high gear. On May 1, 1957, RMRB officially announced the start of a rectification movement, the Party's second after the Yan'an movement of 1942, and called on the intellectuals to come forward with criticism.<sup>106</sup>

The role and function of the press was one of the most hotly debated issues during the Hundred Flowers period. The crystallization point of these debates was a seemingly minor issue: the Zuo Ye affair.<sup>107</sup> Initially, the affair seemed more than unlikely to provoke the kind of reaction across Chinese newspapers it eventually did. The events are quickly reconstructed: in April 1957, a high-ranking delegation from the Soviet Union, led by K. Voroshilov, the Chairman of the Highest Soviet of the USSR, visited China. Interest in the visit was intense, and the delegation received ample coverage in the Chinese press wherever it went. Such was the case on April 17, when Voroshilov, accompanied by Liu Shaoqi, visited an agricultural exposition in Beijing. An aide (*zhuli* 助理) to the Chinese minister of agriculture was in charge of organizing the visit and leading the delegation through the exposition. If it weren't for the later affair, nobody would remember the name of this minor official: Zuo Ye. When Voroshilov and Liu ceremonially shook hands on the crowded space outside the exhibition building's entrance, pushing and shoving started among the sixty accredited Chinese reporters and journalists. Making matters worse, Zuo Ye blocked the reporters' view. When a cameraman from the

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<sup>103</sup> The decision to make Xu the head of the delegation was reportedly made by Mao Zedong. See "Yangmou qinliji," p. 25. This was the second delegation, after the one led by Deng Tuo and Zhang Chungqiao that had visited the Soviet Union to learn from *Pravda* a year earlier.

<sup>104</sup> *Xu Zhucheng huiyilu* contains excerpts from Xu's diaries of his trip to the Soviet Union (p. 267-94).

<sup>105</sup> See Qin Benli. "Liu zai jiyi li de pianduan," p. 138. It is unclear why Mao did not come.

<sup>106</sup> "Quan dang chongxin jinxing yi ci fan guanliaozhuyi, fan zongpaizhuyi, fan zhuguanzhuyi de zhengfeng yundong – yundong de zhuti: zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodun."

<sup>107</sup> For a short account see Gao Liang. "Zuo Ye shijian yingxiang suo ji" in *Renmin ribao baoshi bianjizu. Renmin ribao huiyilu*, p. 121-23.

Chinese Central Documentary Film Agency tried to pull the official aside, Zuo Ye exploded: “What?! Are you important or am I? If you push again I will make you scram!” (*Zenme?! Ni zhongyao haishi wo zhongyao? Zai ji jiu jiao nimen gunchuqu!* 怎么?! 你重要还是我重要? 再挤就叫你们滚出去!). The reporters were aghast at the official’s rudeness, but under normal circumstances, the incident would probably soon be forgotten.

However, when blooming and contending started in May, a short article appeared in *Zhongguo qingnianbao* with the title “The minister’s aide and the cameramen” (*Buzhang zhuli he sheyingshi* 部长助理和摄影师).<sup>108</sup> After a short factual account, in which the author Hong Ke 洪克 even admitted that “there was quite some chaos” among reporters and by-standers, he addressed the crucial question: “This comrade [Zuo Ye] was clearly abusing people – he was abusing all of us reporters at the scene, because he said ‘you’ (*nimen* 你们).” The official’s misbehaviour could not be excused as a conflict between him and a single cameraman, but concerned the entire news corps. And it did not stop here:

And then, this rude attitude even became an order that was communicated to us: a comrade of the Foreign Ministry’s News Bureau came and told me and a cameraman from *Beijing ribao*: “Stop shoving, if you shove again we will make you scram.” No longer able to bear such arrogant airs, I told him: “Comrade, no matter what you say, but you shouldn’t abuse people.” “That’s not me abusing,” he said, “I’m just communicating what others have said.”

The scale of the April 17 incident was now growing. Zuo Ye’s outburst was no longer seen as the rash reaction of an individual official given a task too large for him to cope with, but rather as the manifestation of a contemptuous attitude that many cadres held towards journalists and reporters.

The article analyzes the problem in more general terms: “The minister’s aide and we live in the same big socialist family, why doesn’t he comprehend that people are on equal relationships, their ranks and positions notwithstanding? Why doesn’t he understand that impertinent remarks and deliberate abuse are most impolite?” What is at stake are the ranks within Chinese society.<sup>109</sup> As a cadre, the official of the Ministry of Agriculture believed to be in his right simply because of

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<sup>108</sup> *Zhongguo qingnianbao*, May 7, 1957. The article appeared on page three.

<sup>109</sup> A cartoon on the bottom of the same page addressed the same issue: five chairs in a row, from a pompous armchair to a rickety stool, wait for cadres at five levels, from the bureau chief (*juzhang* 局长) to the assistant (*ganshi* 干事).

his status. Yet what is the status of reporters within Chinese society? “This ministerial aide probably has not considered: behind the reporters, there stands a million-strong audience that hopes to see interesting pictures and films of everything that Voroshilov does in our country. If all the cameramen just ‘scram,’ then the minister’s aide cannot satisfy the audiences’ needs, no matter how ‘important’ he may be.” The article’s author derived legitimacy for the journalists’ job from their social function: they were speaking to the masses, informing them – and were thus representing the masses’ interests. The official’s “importance” (“Are you important or am I?”) is relative to the journalists’ importance. The last sentence of the quote obviously mocks the official’s feeling important, but the implication of the argument reaches further: the journalists are connecting the officials, including the Party leadership (like Liu Shaoqi in this case) with the broad masses. Just like the masses, however, they feel the invisible wall between the officials and themselves. The issue of the “wall” (*qiang* 墙) or “ditch” (*gou* 沟) that separated the Party and the people, and that runs as a rift through the entire Chinese society was an issue that received much attention in the discussion of non-Party intellectuals in the second half of May.

The article ends with two crucial sentences: “It must be said that recently, ... reporters have met with more than just a few unreasonable restrictions and impediments during their assignments; this has become a headache for the Beijing news circles. The behaviour of this ministerial aide is just an especially outstanding example among many.” The article explicitly stresses that the Zuo Ye affair is not an isolated phenomenon, but an illustration of a general practice. The concrete example is only the pretext for the discussion of the grievances of Chinese journalists in a segregated society, dominated by hierarchies in all spheres of life. The journalists felt mistreated by the officialdom: instead of earning recognition for their attempts to serve the readers, and thus the people, in the – from their perspective (here very literally from the cameraman’s perspective) – correct way, they had to bear abuse from officials who had in mind only their own status. It was this accusation that made sure that the Zuo Ye affair would not be limited to a single article.

Other newspapers reacted quickly. The next day, on May 8, WHB came forward with its own article on the affair. From the outset, WHB lifted the incident to a higher plane than *Zhongguo qingnianbao* had done. Firstly, WHB chose to run its article on page one. While being not much longer than the short piece from *Zhongguo qingnianbao*, its position identified it as an important issue. Secondly, the title of WHB's article went directly to the main problem: the article in *Zhongguo qingnianbao* had proceeded from the incident itself; the WHB article was entitled straightforwardly "News reporters' woes" (*Xinwen jizhe de kumen* 新闻记者的苦闷).

The account of the original incident makes up only a third of the WHB article. The account's most significant difference to the *Zhongguo qingnianbao* article is that WHB mentions Zuo Ye by name – *Zhongguo qingnianbao* had identified the official only by his position. Criticizing by name is not usual in Chinese newspapers; by doing so WHB added sharpness to the accusations against the official.<sup>110</sup> WHB then moves on to list other areas where journalists feel unnecessary hardships placed upon them by the officialdom: "The example of comrade Zuo Ye's treatment of the reporters is certainly a singular and outstanding case, but journalists performing the tasks they have been assigned to do frequently encounter a number of impediments." The first of these is the elusiveness of many higher officials: reporters often must surmount numerous "passes" (*guan* 关) to see or interview even medium-level officials.<sup>111</sup> The "pass" here is another formulation for the "wall" or "ditch" between Party and people. Another problem is the Party's tendency toward secretiveness: even trivial matters were made into secrets, thus impeding the journalists' work. Finally, there were many instances where newspaper people were simply treated with contempt: journalists in Guilin received the order to report from a gala meeting but were refused entry to the ballroom, so that the reporters had to watch from outside the window.

WHB started where *Zhongguo qingnianbao* had ended its article: the Zuo Ye affair was only one manifestation of a generally problematic relationship

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<sup>110</sup> On the problem of criticizing by name see Michael Schoenhals. *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1992, p. 34ff.

<sup>111</sup> Although this is not made explicit, the article seems to be directed primarily at local-level cadres – first of all in Shanghai, where WHB had a long-standing conflict with the authorities.

between the newspaper people and the officialdom. The paper justified its criticism with the current political campaign:

Now that the Party has proposed the policy of “letting hundred flowers bloom and letting hundred schools of thought contend,” we have witnessed how the Chinese academic and intellectual circles have started to buzz with action. News work is also one [of these] flowers; if we want to make this flower blossom in the brightest colours, we must clear out of the way all the bricks and stones that weigh down on this flower, and thus create the conditions for the people’s news work.

Referring indirectly to Mao’s call at the propaganda conference to make the ‘Double Hundred’ policy the method for “all our work,” WHB claimed the right to speak out on behalf of the press people. Improving their situation would be instrumental to make “the people’s news work” function better. WHB places its own criticism under this broader goal.

In its structure, the WHB article on page one does not follow the strictly logical argumentation of the *Zhongguo qingnianbao* article; it reads rather as a collection of illustrations. This is indeed the article’s intention, as the reader discovers who turns to the same issue’s second page, where he finds a carefully written editorial on the topic, carrying the programmatic title: “Respect news reporters” (*Zunzhong xinwen jizhe* 尊重新闻记者). This thoughtful and provocative essay addresses the problem of the news workers’ status and the treatment they receive in a sublime and sometimes satirical manner. While the editorial’s agenda is less obvious, its implications reach far beyond that of both the WHB and *Zhongguo qingnianbao* articles.

The article starts with an appeal to the officially declared equality of all professions: “the revolutionary education of many years has all along told us: people’s professions are not divided into honourable and low; there is only the revolutionary division of labour.” Consequently, “news work is just one part of the revolutionary enterprise, it is the propagator and organizer of the Party’s and government’s cause.” The allusion to Lenin adds weight to the news worker’s claim of being an integral part of the revolution. As such, they deserve treatment equal to that other revolutionaries receive. The particular merit of the Chinese newspaper sector lies in the paper’s educative function: “for everyone able to read, the daily and indispensable spiritual nourishment is – the newspaper.” The journalists thus deserve respect and fair treatment because of their contribution to

the revolution and to the construction of socialism, a contribution that is not more and not less important than the contribution of others.

For the authors of the editorial, the really troubling question is: why is the first thing that comes to the mind of the minister's aide the question of who is more important? Inserting a little dialectics – “conscience is the reflection of being” – the editorial concludes that in the PRC, the thinking of many officials lags behind the reality of their social existence. This, so the editorialist, is exactly the problem that the Party's rectification campaign is bound to address. For Zuo Ye, he has the advice:

Dear ministerial aide, please take some time and read the RMRB editorial “Why do we need rectification?”<sup>112</sup> There it says: “The people's state protects the people. Only in the people's state, the people can use, on a national scale and universal scope, the means of democracy to educate and reform themselves, and escape from the influence of the internal and external reactionaries, ... and transform their bad habits and bad thinking brought along from the old society.”

The quotation from the RMRB editorial comes in fact from Mao's “On the People's Democratic Dictatorship.”<sup>113</sup> The editorialist asks Zuo Ye to grasp the opportunity of the current rectification campaign and reform his ways as well as his thinking.

The editorial now moves onto very dangerous terrain: Zuo Ye is a Party member, while WHB is run by non-Party intellectuals. In the course of the Hundred Flowers, people outside of the Party were explicitly called upon to help the CCP in its rectification, but the prospect of Party members (and cadres, for that!) being more backward than the journalists is disturbing indeed – because the backward thinking that Zuo Ye has put on display is a remnant of the “old society.” The editorial is not afraid to compare the situation of journalists before and after 1949:

In the Chongqing and Nanjing years [i.e. 1927-1949], the GMD frequently blocked news and set up organs of news censorship, and even went so far as beating, arresting, and putting to death journalists. We remember that journalists reporting on the “National Political Assembly” (Guomin canzhenghui 国民参政会)<sup>114</sup> were searched and there were such humiliating violations of human rights as conference delegates using the main door and journalists going through the side doors...

The people's political power we enjoy now respects journalists. But seeing journalists as a nuisance, keeping them at arm's length and denying cooperation, looking at them in despise and without respect – all these old ways do still exist. This confirms that people's thinking and their conscience is lagging behind the changes in the economic

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<sup>112</sup> “Wei shenme yao zhengfeng?” in RMRB, May 2, 1957.

<sup>113</sup> “Lun renmin minzhu zhuanzheng,” in RMRB, July 1, 1949. Repr. in *Mao Zedong xuanji*, vol. 4, p. 1468-82. The quote appears on p. 1476.

<sup>114</sup> A consultative organ established in 1938; since 1945, the Assembly became increasingly ineffective due to the CCP's boycott. It was abolished in 1948.

system, which means that changes in the superstructure have not kept pace with changes at the economic base.

The incidents of bureaucratism, sectarianism, and subjectivism that the journalists were confronted with in the past eight years are extremely large in number because of the special character of this trade: [the journalists] get in contact with a great many issues. Now the time has come for the journalists to voice their grievances.

The contrast presented in these paragraphs is not really a contrast. All too obvious are the similarities between the journalist's treatment under the old and the new regime. Easily can the reader get the impression that the CCP – or at least large numbers of its cadres – betray the very principles they are preaching.

The editorial comes to the bold conclusion: “We can establish the following law: a regime that stands in opposition to its own people repels and distrusts its journalists (*dang yi ge zhengquan fandui renmin de shihou, ta shi paichi jizhe, huaiyi jizhe de* 当一个政权反对人民的时候，它是排斥记者、怀疑记者的).” The editorial leaves it up to its reader to make their own judgement about the CCP's treatment of the journalists. The editorial operates on slippery terrain, because the “law” can be read in the reverse way: a regime that mistreats its journalists stands in opposition to the people. It is probably not in the intention of the editorialist to suggest such a conclusion, but from the examples cited in the editorial and the article on page one, such a reading does make sense.

Does WHB stand in opposition to the CCP? The tone of the article and its end, where the editorialist greets the timely arrival of the Hundred Flowers campaign suggest that it is not. WHB is committed to the leadership of the CCP, but it demands fair treatment for journalists. WHB accepts the Party's guidance of the press sector, but it wants to see guarantees for its own role in the Party-led project of socialism. And it is committed especially to the vision of the press as a means of enlightenment, as “spiritual nourishment” (*jingshen liangshi* 精神粮食) for the people. The open and critical attitude of the editorial is in line with the spirit of the Hundred Flowers period and the rectification campaign; this attitude notwithstanding, WHB remains loyal to the core substance of the media concept. As it turned out, it was no longer sufficient to just adherence to the key principles once the anti-Rightist campaign began.



WHB was not the only newspaper to join in the discussion of the Zuo Ye affair. Two days later, on May 10, RMRB published its statement on this issue. It refrained from editorializing on the affair and chose a more satirical approach that was published on page eight – the last page, not the first, where WHB’s article appeared; nonetheless RMRB had devoted considerable space on its page to the issue. RMRB’s coverage consisted of three parts: a satirical poem, a cartoon, and a short article. The article carries the title “We must learn to respect people” (*Yao xuehui zunzhong ren* 要学会尊重人). This title obviously is a reference to the WHB editorial “Respect news reporters,” but just as obviously it emphasizes a different point: mutual respect is the ethical bottom-line; only on this base can reporters demand respect for themselves. As the title indicates, the RMRB article takes a more balanced view than the WHB editorial.

The article, written by Yuan Ying,<sup>115</sup> the vice-head of RMRB’s literature and art department, refrains from summing up the Zuo Ye affair and refers the reader to *Zhongguo qingnianbao* and WHB. It follows WHB in the identification of the main problem: the official’s question “Are you important or am I?” He stresses that in fact all people at the scene were of equal importance and thus deserve equal treatment. The segregation of ranks (*jibie* 级别) itself is an incorrect form of behaviour in a socialist society. Only towards the end of the article the author leaves his conciliatory position and sides with the journalists: “Dear comrade [Zuo Ye], you’ve been wrong; on such occasions, the work of the reporters should be much more important than [that of] a ministerial aide. Without them [the reporters], millions of people wouldn’t get to see the pictures they long for. Isn’t this a very plain truth?” He ends the article, however, on a balanced note, rejecting any kind of “rankings” – mutual respect is the need of the day.

Both the poem and the cartoon take up the same issue, yet in a decidedly more polemical way. The poem by Yuan Shuipai 袁水拍, the head of RMRB’s department of literature and art (he was later put in charge of the department of literature and art of the CCP PD), is entitled “Bureaucratic airs, scram!” (*Guanliao*

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<sup>115</sup> The article is signed Liang Ruhuai. On Yuan’s pen names see Yuan Ying. *Fengyun ceji: Wo zai Renmin ribao de suiyue*. Beijing: Zhongguo dang’an chubanshe, 2006, ch. 22. For Yuan’s view of the Zuo Ye affair see *ibid.* ch. 11.

*jiazi gunkai!* 官僚架子滚开! ) and takes up the Zuo Ye affair to reflect on status thinking in the old and new Chinese societies:

Whatever our forefathers did, they had to consult the imperial almanac;  
whatever we do today, we must consider the rankings.

The old attitudes of discrimination are still present in modern society and may break through the surface at various opportunities – such as the scene at the agricultural exposition:

You should be behind me, how come you're in front of me?  
Don't you know about high and low, honourable and base?  
So what is a journalist worth?  
My position exceeds yours by half a heaven's height!

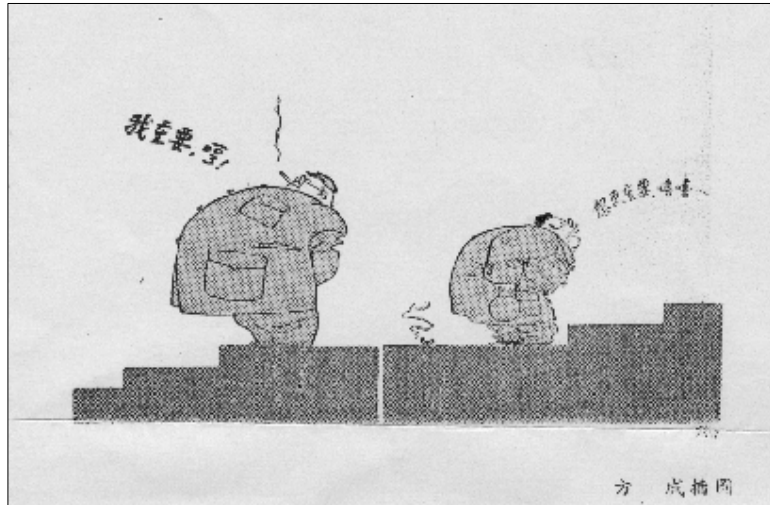
The line of argument followed in this poem is in fact closer to the WHB editorial than to the RMRB article that appears below it; the author had certainly read the WHB piece, and his short poem is more an illustration of the former than of RMRB's own article. The poem's tone is sharper than that of the article, but this is justifiable for a satirical piece. It ends with the lines:

Scram, yes, they should scramble!  
Let all these bureaucratic airs and tunes,  
these rotten attitudes and arrogant manners,  
this snobbishness, kicking those below and flattering those above...  
let them scramble, the whole lot altogether,  
don't let them again do harm to our comrades!

Here we are back in the argumentation of the RMRB article: the “comrades,” including the journalists are harmed by the arrogant behaviour of bureaucrats, a form of behaviour that actually is a remnant of the old order. News reporters, just like the other members of society have the right to claim fair treatment.

The cartoon, drawn by the well-known cartoonist Fang Cheng 方成, illustrates both the poem and the article on the lower half of the page. Mocking the habit to think in terms of ranks, we see a man in a Mao suit, obviously a cadre. He has his arms folded behind his back and sticks out an immense round belly – sign of his overbearing self-consciousness and his arrogance. His posture is topped by the cigar he smokes. He stands at the highest of three steps and speaks loudly “I am important, hmm!” The next picture shows the same cadre who has now shrunk considerably: the posture is still the same, but what had been front is now his back, the immense belly has turned into a hump. Hands on his sides, he arches his back, bowing in front of an invisible superior. The cigar, still smoking, lies on the floor

behind his back. No longer on top, he now stands on the lowest of three steps, speaking in much lower voice to his superior: “You are even more important, hihi...” Status thinking, that had always been present in Chinese society and had been reinforced by the Communist hierarchies, is not only incompatible with socialist ethics, or dangerous for the Party’s prestige, as the WHB editorial had argued, but is also silly and ridiculous.



Ill. 1: “I am important!” (RMRB, May 10, 1957)

With RMRB, China’s most prominent newspaper had picked up the Zuo Ye issue. In the course of the debate, other arguments had appeared and the discussion had gradually widened. On May 15, a week after the WHB, GMRB joined the debate with a long article.<sup>116</sup>

Instead of having its own staff commenting on the issue, GMRB had asked a scholar for his opinion: Jiang Yin’en 蒋荫恩, a professor of journalism at Beijing University, later to become vice-head of Zhongguo renmin daxue’s journalism department, must be considered an authority in the newspaper sector. Jiang indicates that he wrote his article on May 12; that it took three days to appear in the paper shows that GMRB attached much importance to the topic and to the article and had it inspected closely before publication.

Jiang’s article is a well-balanced piece that argues for a better understanding of the difficult job of journalists and calls upon everyone to support reporters doing their work. He proceeds from the Zuo Ye affair but admits that this is only one of many instances of mistreatment of journalists in China: in general, people lack an understanding of the difficulties journalists face who enthusiastically do the tasks assigned to them; additionally, journalists stand in a bad reputation. This kind of thinking is a remnant of the “old” society. None of

<sup>116</sup> “Xinwen jizhe de zhiwu yinggai dedao zhongshi.”

these arguments is new; Jiang is confirming the logic of the WHB editorial and the RMRB article. However, he goes further than the previous articles in addressing two concrete problems in the news sector. The first is the lack of direct and active reporting: “Since liberation, most newspapers have not placed enough emphasis on gathering information; the papers rely on the Xinhua news agency, and Xinhua relies on ready-made material. At major news events we only seldom see any traces of journalists; society has gotten used to this and even treats it as normal.” Live reporting should be an integral part of newspaper making, yet Chinese newspapers find it convenient to rely on Xinhua dispatches. Of course, nobody knows better than Jiang that in most cases newspapers have no choice but to do so; the Party does not allow them to write their own reports. Thus, his reproach is directed not really at the newspapers, but rather at the CCP PD.

The second problem concerns the reluctance of many leading cadres and work units to speak with journalists. Here, Jiang’s criticism is targeted directly at those responsible:

Some leaders don’t like to meet journalists; some organs, factories and mining enterprises practice a closed-door policy towards journalists or impose unreasonable restrictions on their movements; some organs see the journalists as a nuisance when they receive foreign guests, fearing that the reporters may upset a prearranged scene and disturb their own work; and some personnel responsible for security have no understanding of the journalist’s work and interfere even where it is unnecessary, so that the work of the reporters is affected.

In the case of foreign guests visiting China, Jiang argues, it might not be the presence of a crowd of reporters that creates a bad impression; to the contrary, the absence of journalists on the scene may suggest a lack of interest in the guest’s visit. The reluctance of not “some,” but in fact all Chinese leaders to speak to the press is a problem that weighs even stronger. Both local politicians and the highest leadership are notoriously hard to reach for comment, a situation that has not changed even half a century later. Public interviews, such as that with Zhou Yang, the vice-head of the PD, that WHB had published on April 9, 1957, were a rare exception to the rule and caused a sensation in China.<sup>117</sup> Jiang, an alumni of the Missouri School of Journalism and well-versed in American journalism, did see clearly this anomaly and the problems it caused and called for changes.

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<sup>117</sup> “Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu fu buzhang Zhou Yang tongzhi da ben bao jizhe wen.” The interview was an event that deserved the prime position on the top of the first page of that day’s paper.

Both points addressed by Jiang would mean a departure from established newspaper practices in the PRC. They are concrete steps based on constructive considerations: the idea to reduce the reliance on Xinhua reports would make the papers livelier and thus serve the readers' interests. Doing so, however, would require the CCP to give up a crucial instrument of control; compliance would be based on the journalists' voluntary cooperation. It is doubtful whether the Party would accept such an arrangement. No particular reasons exist for the leadership's reluctance to communicate with the press. The obsession with secrecy is not justified in view of the fact that the press is closely supervised by the Party anyway – and especially at lower levels Jiang is probably right to suspect a combination of distrust and indolence to be at work. More openness towards the public would not affect either the Party's prestige or the effectiveness of the control of the press.

In the course of a few days, the Zuo Ye affair set in motion an ever-widening debate on the function of the Chinese press and on its particular problems. After newspapers across the nation had exploded with discussions on the situation of journalists and on the role of the press, the debate soon left behind the affair that had triggered it originally. The journalist's demands initially met with success: meetings were convened in Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and other places to discuss the Zuo Ye affair and allow journalists to voice their grievances.<sup>118</sup> In Shanghai, the Municipal Party Committee responded to the journalists' complaints and sent a circular to all work units demanding better cooperation with reporters. Yet the affair backfired once the anti-Rightist movement started. On July 10, the PD convened a meeting in Beijing with all sides concerned. Zuo Ye delivered a written self-criticism, but denied to have abused the journalists. The newspaper people in turn, including Deng Tuo and Yuan Shuipai, were criticized on this and a second meeting a few days later. Wu Yikeng 吴一铿, the head of *Zhongguo qingnianbao's* literature and arts department was named a Rightist because of the Zuo Ye affair.<sup>119</sup> The brunt of the criticism, however, was reserved for WHB.

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<sup>118</sup> See *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi. Wenhuibao shilüe*, p. 179-81.

<sup>119</sup> Gao Liang. "Zuo Ye shijian yingxiang suo ji," p. 122f. See also *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi. Wenhuibao shilüe*, p. 180f.

Before turning to the accusations levelled against WHB, I will take a closer look at the debate that unfolded on WHB's pages in the weeks after the May 8 article and editorial. To broaden the discussion under way, WHB decided to invite opinions from outside its boardroom. On May 21, the paper ran an article by Xu Junyuan 许君远, a former editor of *Dagongbao* 大公报, entitled "Should newspapers go on like this?"<sup>120</sup> Xu's long and balanced essay addresses the issue from an academic perspective. The author assesses critically the appearance of Chinese newspapers since 1949: "Since liberation, the newspapers have been able to stick closely to the government's policies, and to carry out in a serious manner their propaganda tasks. They showed much scrutiny in the selection of news and with every word and every sentence held themselves responsible for the people. This aspect must be appreciated. But there are also less satisfying things." These latter phenomena are closely related to the papers' Party character. According to Xu, the newspapers have gone too far in their desire to educate the people: "All today's papers act as the reader's teacher – unlike before, when newspapers and readers were intimate friends. There is no doubt that we need teachers, but friends can also study and learn by mutual discussion." "The only thing newspapers have done since liberation is teaching and preaching; they have neglected attracting and delighting [the readers], but exactly this is a fine tradition of the Chinese newspapers." As a result, "there is a high wall between the newspaper and the readers." The "wall" is a direct consequence of the party-ization of the Chinese newspapers. The papers have one-sidedly emphasized their educational function, any entertaining elements have disappeared from their pages. Xu takes up here an issue raised by Liu Binyan that touches a core element of the CCP media concept: the newspapers are part of a normative project; with regard to the ideological backwardness of the masses the papers cannot but have an enlightening function. The author's ostensible nostalgia leads him onto dangerous terrain. He tries to modify his criticism by acknowledging the need for education. All he hopes for, is to see a more reasonable combination of the two elements: "Most Party papers still put on a 'Party face' and refuse to smile;

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<sup>120</sup> "Baozhi yingdang zheyang ganxiaqu ma?" After his paper, *Dagongbao's* Shanghai edition was closed in 1952, Xu worked in the publishing industry. See Cai Bosheng. "Bu xunchang de jjsao: jinian *Dagongbao* lao baoren Xu Junyuan bai nian danchen" at <http://www.takungpao.com/news/2002-12-4/TK-82491.htm> (downloaded Aug. 8, 2003).

is this really the style a Party paper must adopt?" The current practice, Xu warns, is counterproductive: the grey and drab papers that look all the same are in danger of losing their effectiveness as propaganda tools; their mass character – another key concern of the media concept – is on the brink of getting lost.

What are the reasons for these developments? "As I, an outsider, see the situation, since liberation the newspapers have been organ-ized [*jiguanhua* 机关化], there are no longer any differences between the news personnel and the cadres of other bureaucracies." The transition of the newspaper sector from a competitive industry to a component of the propaganda machine has led to difficulties similar to those in the publishing industry: slowness to respond to demand, bloated administrative bureaucracies, and the declining enthusiasm on the side of the journalists to improve their paper and compete for recent and interesting news. Xu Junyuan concludes his article with a bold suggestion: "These days, loud voices have called for schools and magazines run by independent but like-minded people [*tongren ban* 同人办] – so cannot we also consider newspapers of this kind?" In 1949, the CCP had opted against the idea of intellectuals running publishing houses and newspapers on behalf of the CCP, bound to the Party's line through their loyalty to the principles represented by the Party and its policies. In 1957, parts of the intelligentsia, including Xu, hoped for this question to be reconsidered.

As Xu himself admits, he was an outsider, speaking from the position of an academic and referring to his expertise as both a newspaper reader and as a former journalist. Concerns similar to that of Xu Junyuan were also expressed from active newspaper personnel. The sharpest commentary on the newspaper issue was a signed article by the WHB editor-in-chief, Xu Zhucheng. Due to his mission to Moscow, Xu had missed most of the Hundred Flowers movement. The delegation had returned to Beijing on May 10, where Xu saw the recent WHB issues and expressed concern about the sharp tone of the articles but was calmed down by Deng Tuo; Deng complained that his own paper was still controlled all too closely.<sup>121</sup> Xu returned to Shanghai only on May 14. During the absence of the editor-in-chief, Qin Benli had been in charge of WHB's editorial department; it was

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<sup>121</sup> Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi. *Wenhuibao shilüe*, p. 162f.

Qin who was responsible for WHB's direction in the Hundred Flowers period. A veteran Party member, Qin had been in constant contact with the Shanghai propaganda authorities, and from Ke Qingshi he received instructions to "continuously increase the temperature" (*jia wen zai jia wen* 加温再加温).<sup>122</sup> Upon his return, Xu did not immediately assume his work at the newspaper's offices, but started to sum up his experiences in the Soviet Union (reports of this kind were a routine affair). In the meantime, a municipal propaganda conference had been convened in Shanghai, as had been mandated by the PD at the national conference in March. Over 2700 people participated in the conference, almost half of them non-Party personnel. On May 18, Xu was asked to address the conference, and wrote a short speech with the title: "The 'wall' can be brought down" ("Qiang' shi nenggou chaidiao de" 墙是能够拆掉的). It was this speech that was published the following day in WHB.<sup>123</sup>

"The 'wall' can be brought down" is a fascinating document due to the frankness with which the author talks about the problems that had plagued WHB and that were common problems of the entire sector. Xu understands his paper as a positive example of how the "wall" between Party and people, between Party and non-Party cadres, could be removed. He speaks from concrete experience and tells his audience more about the origins of this "wall" that had eventually led to the closure of WHB the year before:

Shortly after liberation I was in Beijing and learned that the [Party] Center thought highly of some of the newspapers and hoped that we would play an active role. However, a few comrades in charge of news work adopted a derogatory and discriminating attitude towards newspapers like ours; they believed that since newspapers of this kind didn't exist in some other socialist countries, we shouldn't have them either. All along, they therefore took measures against our papers like remoulding or gradually extinguishing them. Especially during Peng Boshan's 彭柏山 tenure as head of the [CCP Shanghai Municipal] PD, our WHB and the *Xinminbao* 新民报 were

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<sup>122</sup> Xu Zhucheng. "'Yangmou' – 1957," p. 147. The reasons for these instructions are unclear. What were Ke's intentions? Was he trying to express his support for the Chairman's policies, or did he feel that the wind was about to change and deliberately tried to "lure the snake from its hole," only to take revenge later? The latter option sounds most plausible, given Ke Qingshi's strained relationship with WHB, but then Xu Zhucheng must have mixed up the dates in his memoirs – Ke could not have known about an imminent policy change in early May, when the rectification campaign had only begun. An alternative explanation might be Ke's well-known zeal to follow Mao's instructions, in this case the Chairman's call for rectification. In any case, it is clear that Qin Benli received signals from the Shanghai Party leadership to intensify WHB's engagement in the rectification campaign.

<sup>123</sup> On the propaganda conference and Xu's speech see *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi. Wenhuibao shilue*, p. 148, 163f.



pressured to the brink of suffocation. Under the high pressure of dogmatism and sectarianism, WHB almost breathed its last. Fortunately the Centre came to know [WHB's situation] in good time and arranged for its relaunch. It is rumoured that the plan to scrap WHB and turn it into *Jiaoshibao* was devised by Peng Boshan.

Xu denounces the policy of specialization and division of labour, a result of the CCP's "Learn from the Soviet Union" policy, as dogmatism and sectarianism. Xu openly criticizes the propaganda leadership and even mentions by name Peng Boshan, the former head of the Shanghai PD (in 1955 Peng was named a member of the Hu Feng "anti-Party clique" and was removed from his job; for this reason, Xu Zhucheng considered it safe enough to mention Peng by name).<sup>124</sup> With the insistence on an imported model, the Party had strangled the enthusiasm of the non-Party newspaper people from Shanghai – not WHB alone was affected, but many more papers in Shanghai and elsewhere; in short, all newspapers that did not fit into the Party paper model.

In the early 1950s, WHB was forced to accommodate to the new policies:

Nominally I was chief of office [*shezhang* 社长] and editor-in-chief and comrade Yan Baoli 严宝礼 was vice chief and head of the administrative department [*guanlibu zhuren* 管理部主任], but *de facto* we were – speaking politely – not more than consultants that may or may not be needed. To be honest, for a long time I didn't read my own newspaper – not because I wouldn't care: but with my thirty years of experience in newspaper work and my conscience, I couldn't bear to read a paper so full of dogmatic and stereotyped articles. In fact, a vice editor-in-chief and Party member was in charge of editorial work; he had never done news work before, and his education seemed to be not too good either, but he had one sort of talent, and that was to turn readable articles into something unreadable, to make all manuscripts into dogmatic and stereotyped articles. Instructions from above he handled as secrets from the leadership; he didn't talk them over with the non-Party people and also didn't discuss them consciously in the editorial committee, so that more often than not we had to listen to him like guessing a riddle – was he speaking his own opinion, or were it the [CCP] Municipal Committee's intentions? Another comrade who nominally was secretary but in fact exercised powers over administrative and personnel matters was overweeningly arrogant, too; he was good at stirring up contradictions and making use of contradictions to cement his own authority. For a long time thus, there were contradictions at WHB not only between Party and non-Party people, but also within the Party, there was a wall within the wall, and a ditch outside it. Rank-and-file cadres had no confidence in the future of our paper and whiled away their days. Some cadres even were in constant fear of harassment and were afraid to offend these "wild beasts" [*mengren* 猛人], as we say in Cantonese.

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<sup>124</sup> On Peng Boshan see Peng Xiaolian. "Wo de fuqin Peng Boshan" at [http://www.gmdaily.com.cn/1\\_sz/2000/20000810/gb/2000^96^0^000809.htm](http://www.gmdaily.com.cn/1_sz/2000/20000810/gb/2000^96^0^000809.htm) (downloaded Aug. 8, 2003).

The vice editor-in-chief whom Xu accused so bitterly was Zhang Shuren 张树人.<sup>125</sup> When the relaunch was prepared, Xu secured that Zhang stayed with *Jiaoshibao* and did not return to WHB; furthermore, Xu felt it necessary to secure guarantees of non-interference from the Shanghai authorities.<sup>126</sup> While Xu only thinly veils his bitterness, what he describes was actually a common practice in the early 1950s: the CCP sent loyal Party people into newspapers it did not own directly; nominally in positions of the second line, such as vice editor-in-chief, they would exercise the real power within the paper through their contacts with the Party's propaganda apparatus. It did not matter that many of them had no prior experience in newspaper making – the CCP had to deal with a serious shortage of qualified personnel. The Party's personnel situation in the newspaper sector was not much better than in the publishing sector discussed in the previous chapter.

The situation had greatly improved since WHB's relaunch seven months earlier. Interestingly, Xu Zhucheng ascribes these improvements not to less Party supervision, but rather to more of it: "The leadership of the Party has strengthened and the relations between the Party and the non-Party people have become closer; less than a month after the reorganization of the Party group, the number of comrades requesting to join the Party rose to fifty or sixty. From our concrete work, everyone could deeply feel the Party's concern and kindness." Xu thus relativizes his earlier argument: the policy of specialization *per se* had been wrong, but not the Party's leadership of the press. The damage had been done by overzealous local officials who had constrained the paper's leeway to an inappropriate degree; now that Party had returned to a more collegial form of cooperation with the leadership of WHB, the situation had improved immensely. What Xu calls for is more room for the newspapers to choose the forms of this cooperation; he demands trust and promises loyalty.

In order to stabilize the improvements that have been achieved and to avoid further clashes, Xu spells out a number of proposals he has drawn from his own experience of "bringing down the wall:"

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<sup>125</sup> See Xu's self-criticism "Wode fan dang zuixing," WHB, Aug. 22, 1957. The other cadre attacked by Xu was Sun Kuijun 孙葵君.

<sup>126</sup> Zhang took revenge for Xu's attacks when the anti-Rightist campaign started and in turn denounced Xu. See Zhu Zheng. *1957 nian de xiaji*, p. 324.

First of all, when Party cadres are sent [to a work unit], [the Party] should be careful [to see if these people] are really appropriate [for their jobs]; it would be best if they had brought with them affection and attachment towards their new business, yet as a minimum they should have some understanding of the business; otherwise they cannot do their work properly, not to speak of directing that of others. People of low qualifications who do not meet the above conditions, and who do not study eagerly either, will certainly be outsiders on an insider's job; they will use the Party's prestige to bully and suppress others.

It is evident that this is a reasonable demand, but Xu overlooks the Party's general dilemma in the takeover years: the CCP would have been more than willing to place better educated cadres into positions of responsibility, if only it had enough people of this kind. Xu was lucky enough to convince an able and liberal-minded Party member like Qin Benli to come to WHB; even in 1957, the CCP had all too few such cadres.

Xu goes on to express a wide-spread attitude of the Chinese intelligentsia towards their relationship with the CCP:

For non-Party people in responsible positions, support for the Party finds expression not in abject obedience to some individual Party members, but rather in their loyalty to the cause of the people. ... We must proceed from the cause of the people and not from individual interests. When we are confronted with difficulties we cannot solve, we must reflect them [to our superiors]; if our superiors cannot solve them, we must reflect them to the Municipal Committee, and those that the Municipal Committee cannot solve we must reflect to the Centre; in the end [these difficulties] can be solved.

The intellectuals are willing to follow the Party, because of the projects they see represented by the CCP. Conflicts such as those of WHB in the past are attributed not to the Party itself, but to individual Party personnel, particularly the lower-level cadres who are often ill-prepared for their jobs. Eventual problems can be solved as long as the "roads of communication" to the top leadership are open (Xu does not see or refuses to accept that the strict hierarchies of communication and command are a means of Party control themselves). This principle of mutual trust and cooperation appears again in the third point Xu makes:

Last year I myself had doubts whether a non-Party man [like me] would be able to take charge of the leadership job. How would the leadership of the Party committee and my individual responsibility be arranged in practice? By now, I have basically come to grips with this problem. No undertaking could ever go without the leadership of the Party, everyone should have the full authorities of his post for his work; the concrete fashion in which leadership of the Party and individual responsibility are combined should depend on the concrete circumstances of the work unit in question. WHB now has not just a Party Committee, but has even set up a Party group a short while ago; yet I and comrade Yan Baoli think that we have full authority, we [members of the] democratic parties can display our capabilities in the way we should. The crucial point is whether

we can mutually support each other and respect each other, whether we can frankly discuss and frankly criticize each other.

On balance, Xu dresses his sharp criticism of the circumstances prevailing in many newspapers (and at WHB until the 1956 relaunch) into a generally loyal attitude. He is willing to accept the Party's claim for leadership in all areas of life, and is careful not to leave what he sees as the framework of the Hundred Flowers policy: frank but loyal criticism. The amount of independence he demands is contrasted by his willingness to cooperate even closer with the Party's authorities:

To constantly strengthen the internal unity of the different newspapers, to give free rein to the enthusiasm of the comrades working at the different newspapers, I hope that comrade Wei Wenbo 魏文伯, comrade Shi Ximin, and comrade Bai Yan 白彦<sup>127</sup> will not only stay in touch with us responsible comrades, but will also manage to find time and visit our newspaper offices, talk to our editors, journalists, proof readers, and workers; this would help us to detect and solve eventual contradictions at an early time.

Future conflict can be avoided only if the Party and the newspaper personnel unite to improve the media. With this proposal for closer cooperation and mutual trust Xu Zhucheng tried to demonstrate his willingness to stay within the bounds of the Hundred Flowers framework. He could not know that his efforts had already been overtaken by events in Beijing.

Not all participants of the Shanghai propaganda conference and of a simultaneous conference of the Federation of Newspaper Workers in Beijing had shown the amount of restraint that speaks from Xu Zhucheng's article, its openness notwithstanding. Other people from the propaganda sector had voiced opinions that far exceeded those of Xu. As was customary during the Hundred Flowers period, the newspapers, including WHB, sent reporters to the conferences who summed up the talks of the various speakers and noted their main points. A WHB report of May 17 gives an impression of at least some of the issues discussed in Beijing.<sup>128</sup>

At the conference of the Federation of Newspaper Workers, a Xinhua reporter remarked: "News freedom has been snatched by bureaucratism, sectarianism, and subjectivism.' He said: Today, many work units of the news sector have been turned into organs [*jiguanhua* 机关化]; layers [of authority] are

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<sup>127</sup> Wen Weibo was a secretary of the CCP Shanghai Municipal Committee; Shi Ximin was head of the Municipal Committee's PD; and Bai Yan the Shanghai PD vice-head in charge of newspapers. See Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu. *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*, vol. 9, p. 421, 429.

<sup>128</sup> "Baozhi yinggai dui shei fuze?"

numerous and their structure is bloated. Those editors and reporters who are skilled in writing and editing have all assumed 'offices' [*guan* 官]. Work efficiency is absolutely absent." The bureaucratization of the press had also been noted by Xu Junyuan, and the decline of the effectiveness was a theme constantly addressed by propaganda personnel. Yet the claim that "News freedom has been snatched by bureaucratism, sectarianism, and subjectivism" – lock, stock, and barrel, was a bold denunciation of the CCP's policy towards the press. Similar condemnations came from Zhang Liqun 张黎群, the editor-in-chief of *Zhongguo qingnianbao*: "Today, the newspapers have taken over the job of being notice board, gramophone, reprint copy, and 'trouble maker' [*re shi sheng-fei* 惹事生非]. As a consequence, the newspaper people have become hanger-ons, they can no longer think themselves." Zhang's observations were certainly correct. However, it was the Party's aim from the outset to make the newspapers into nothing less than the "throat and tongue." The CCP did not find a fault with this. By turning around the perspective, Zhang touched one of the core principles of the CCP's media concept.

Another speaker addressed the nature of news and the right of reporters to investigate current affairs for their articles: "Viewing for news is nothing peculiarly bourgeois. Any news, with the exception of military and diplomatic secrets, is open for grabbing. Right now, many important affairs are published only after several days, so that readers are more and more benumbed." The speaker touched on a very sensitive subject, that is, the Party's authority to regulate information flows and information access. If reporters were allowed to investigate freely into any subject except the narrowly defined state secrets, the Party's control of the media would definitely be at stake – would high-level mismanagement or corruption be open to journalistic investigation and reporting? Could secret meeting transcripts appear in the press? Another delegate formulated this issue into the simple words: "News happen objectively, not every single event is related to classes." This statement is clearly at variance with the CCP's conception of news, based on the principles of Leninism. The questions discussed at the conference were on the border line of what the CCP could accept. Provocative enough was the title of the WHB article: "To whom should newspapers be responsible?"

In the course of the debate in the newspaper circles, opinions were voiced that were standing outside the CCP's media concept. The discussions of the Hundred Flowers period developed a momentum that was no longer under the Party's control. Since mid-May, the Chinese leadership and Mao Zedong became increasingly alarmed by the dynamics of the movement. Most disturbing were reports of unrest at universities in several Chinese cities, and even among workers,<sup>129</sup> but the course of the debate in the crucial propaganda sector was alarming, too. Since mid-May, Mao Zedong became convinced that his decision to "open up" (*fang* 放) had triggered an attack from class enemies who had been lying hidden in Chinese society. He began to prepare for the counterattack that started on June 8, once again in the form of a newspaper editorial.

During the high tide of the Hundred Flowers campaign in spring 1957, Chinese news workers started the most comprehensive debate on their own role and the function and character of the press since the establishment of the PRC in 1949. The Zuo Ye affair was a window of opportunity for journalists to articulate their frustrations and the anger caused by the treatment of journalists that had built up in the course of several years since liberation. They called for more respect for their particular group and asked for adjustments in the system that would result in more freedom for journalists to manoeuvre and give them the opportunity to display their professional pride. While most of those who joined the debate were careful not to overstep the limits, the opinions they voiced became more diverse in the second half of May and finally threatened to question the CCP's media concept. In all these debates, WHB played a crucial role; when the crackdown started, WHB therefore was among the first and most prominent victims of the anti-Rightist campaign.

#### *Counterattack. "Recorded for Reference"*

Different theories have been used to explain the reason for the sudden turn of the tide in mid-May 1957. Xu Zhucheng believes in a conspiracy, and in a not so secret conspiracy for this; thus the title of his two essays – *Yangmou* 阳谋, a "plot

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<sup>129</sup> See the pioneering study of Elizabeth Perry. "Shanghai's Strike Wave of 1957" in CQ 137 (1994), p. 1-27.

in broad daylight.”<sup>130</sup> Xu is convinced that Mao Zedong’s intention in 1956-57 was nothing else than “drawing the snakes out of their holes” (*yin she chu dong* 引蛇出洞). The title of Zhu Zheng’s book (*1957 nian de xiaji: cong bai jia zhengming dao liang jia zhengming* 1957 年的夏季：从百家争鸣到两家争鸣) implies a different reading: Zhu proposes a progression from a genuine position of one-hundred flowers to one of only two flowers in the course of summer 1957. In particular his elaborate discussions of the different versions of Mao’s Contradictions speech and the motives driving the revision process serve to support this thesis.<sup>131</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar comes to a conclusion similar to Zhu’s.<sup>132</sup>

While final judgement on Mao’s motives remains elusive, the date of his change of mind can be established with relative certainty. Since May 15, Mao started drafting an essay that was originally planned to become a newspaper article but that eventually was circulated only as an internal document among a very small group of top CCP leaders in the second half of May. After June 8, it was sent to a slightly larger number of cadres in the CC and the provinces.<sup>133</sup> Originally entitled “Turning into the opposite” (*Zou xiang fanmian* 走向反面), Mao settled for the final title “Things are about to change” (*Shiqing zheng zai qi bianhua* 事情正在起变化).

In his article, Mao presents a new assessment of the situation in China: “Over the past months, people have all criticized dogmatism, but have let off revisionism.”<sup>134</sup> Dogmatism needs to be criticized; if we do not criticize dogmatism, many mistakes cannot be corrected. Now we need to begin paying attention to criticizing revisionism. Once dogmatism has turned into its opposite, it becomes either Marxism or revisionism.”<sup>135</sup> The Hundred Flowers movement was conceived as a rectification movement targeted primarily at the mistakes of the CCP. These

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<sup>130</sup> It was Mao Zedong who had compared the Hundred Flowers to a “plot in broad daylight” in the July 1 RMRB editorial. See below.

<sup>131</sup> See *1957 nian de xiaji*, ch. two and six.

<sup>132</sup> *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution 1*, p. 311-17.

<sup>133</sup> On the drafting process see *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wen’gao* 6.475f. See also Zhu Zheng. *1957 nian de xiaji*, p. 82-87.

<sup>134</sup> Dogmatism (*jiaotiaozhuyi* 教条主义) was associated with Stalin and the denunciation of dogmatism referred to the Chinese reaction to the CPSU’s XX<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Now feeling that the pendulum had swung too far into the other direction, Mao warned of revisionism (*xiuzhengzhuyi* 修正主义), the epithet later attached to Khrushchev and his policies. Comp. MacFarquhar. *Origins*, p. 53-56.

<sup>135</sup> Quoted after *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wen’gao* 6.469-75, here p. 469.

mistakes were a result of a dogmatist approach to the Soviet Union that had led to mechanical copying of Stalinist policies. Closely following the recent policy reversals in the Soviet Union, the Party was now to cleanse itself from years of dogmatism. Non-Party people were invited to help the Party reform itself, to criticize the tendencies and positions Mao identified as bureaucratism. Now, however, this criticism had crossed the invisible line and revisionism was lurking on the horizon: according to Mao, voices calling for the restoration of the capitalist system had emerged among the tides of criticism.

The first concrete issue Mao mentions in his article is the problem of the news sector. It is here that Mao sees the most disturbing instances of revisionism. In the course of his article, he addresses the news sector several times, and it ranks first whenever he enumerates the areas he feels concerned about. The problems in the news sector must be attributed primarily to the large percentage of intellectuals in charge of the Chinese newspapers:<sup>136</sup>

Our Party has large numbers of recently admitted members from among the intelligentsia (and even more in the CYL), a part of whom is indeed caught up in quite serious revisionist thinking. They deny the Party character and class nature of newspapers; they confuse the distinction in principle between proletarian news work and bourgeois news work; they confuse the news work that reflects the collective economy of Socialist countries and the news work that reflects the anarchic and competitive economy of capitalist countries. They praise bourgeois liberalism and oppose the leadership of the Party. They approve of democracy but oppose centralism. They oppose the leadership, planning, and control – necessary but not overconcentrated – of the enterprise in culture and education (which includes the news sector) that is a precondition for the creation of a planned economy.

Mao levels at least three grave charges at the intellectuals and journalists who had spoken out in the debates in the news sector; at the same time, he calls back to everyone's attention the bottom line for the Chinese media, as stipulated by the Chinese media concept. The first criterion violated in the debates is the newspaper's class character and their Party character, clause one of the media concept and an unquestioned credo ever since Lenin. All news are based on the social life and the economic system of a nation; they thus reflect the class relations on the economic base. According to this logic, news invariably have a class character. Since the CCP claims to represent the working classes, adherence to the Party is a *conditio sine qua non* for the news sector; a remark such as "News

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 470.



happen objectively, not every single event is related to classes,” voiced at the Beijing conference and reported in WHB, was thus considered a violation of the media concept. Mao further rebukes the calls for more freedom that some journalists, including moderate voices such as Xu Junyuan, had voiced. The idea of intellectuals following the Party on a voluntary basis, without the bonds of Party control, was unacceptable to Mao. Finally, Mao sees at stake the normative function of the media, their enlightening mission. News and education are inseparable; newspapers and readers being just “friends,” rather than teacher and disciple, as Xu Junyuan had proposed, was anathema to Mao Zedong. Xu Junyuan’s article was written after Mao’s, who thus couldn’t have meant Xu in particular. Obviously, ideas like his were quite common in the debates of May 1957. Mao now showed – internally, for the time being – the limits of the debate.

The reasons for Mao’s distrust lie deeper, and only they can explain the vehemence with which the Chairman answered to the challenges. In the article, he explains his perceptions in the following way: the Rightists [*youpai* 右派] “first struggle for the overall control of the news, education, literature and art, and science sectors. They know that the CCP is no match for them in these areas, and this assessment is correct indeed.”<sup>137</sup> The rightists who have come out of their hiding plan for nothing else but the takeover of political power in the superstructure. Just as last clause of the media concept predicted, the superstructure was becoming the battle field for sharpened class struggle after the preliminary victory of the Communist Party. Once in control of the commanding heights of the superstructure, they would fight openly for restoration of the bourgeois order: “Among the Rightists in the news sector, there are even signs that they [try to] instigate the worker and peasant masses to oppose the government.”<sup>138</sup> Although he provides no concrete examples, Mao indicates that the country is on the brink of counterrevolution; probably the newspapers’ coverage of student unrest and of workers demanding improvements of their situation were enough to convince Mao that action was needed. The media concept was intended to serve as a bulwark

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 471.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 471f. This seems to be an open reference to Liu Binyan and his story “Inside News.” Massive labour unrest had indeed engulfed Shanghai throughout spring 1957, as documented by Elizabeth Perry in “Shanghai’s Strike Wave of 1957.”

against any attempts at restoration; in the present situation, a further weakening of control in the media sector was to be prevented.

The most open calls for restoration had come from people such as Xu Junyuan, who had drawn a rather rosy picture of the pre-liberation press and had argued for a return to a more varied conception of newspapers: “The bourgeoisie and large numbers of the intellectuals who have formerly served the old society always stubbornly try to express themselves, always recall with nostalgia the old world, and cannot quite get accustomed to the new world.”<sup>139</sup> It is such people that attempt to bring down the new Chinese government, and it is among their own kind that they hope to find support for their ulterior intentions. Thus, Mao had laid out the danger that had surfaced in the Hundred Flowers movement. While the CCP would have to take swift and decisive action, the appropriate point of time had not yet come. Mao hoped for more Rightists to show their true faces. In the meantime, Mao laid out the two basic criteria used to separate Rightists from innocent people in the news sector. These were “chiefly to see if people truly want socialism and if they truly accept the leadership of the Communist Party.”<sup>140</sup>

The time for action had come on June 8, 1957. It was RMRB’s famous editorial “What is this for?” (*Zhe shi wei shenme* 这是为什么) that formally started the anti-Rightist campaign. The authorship of this article has never been revealed, but it seems sure that both Mao and Hu Qiaomu were involved.<sup>141</sup> Like the editorials of the previous days, that of June 8 speaks about the rectification movement still under way, but a closer look reveals a decisively different tone. Towards the end of the text the editorial declares: “Under the pretext of ‘helping the Communist Party to rectify its work styles,’ a small number of Rightists are challenging the leadership of the CCP and the working class, and they even publicly cry that the CCP should ‘step down.’ They plan to seize this opportunity to overthrow the CCP and the working class, and the great cause of socialism, to

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 472.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 474.

<sup>141</sup> The most reliable hint comes from the memoirs of Wu Lengxi: *Yi Mao zhuxi: wo qin shen jingli de ruogan zhongda lishi shijian pianduan*. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1995, p. 39-40. Wu remembers that he was called to meet Mao on June 7 and was asked to take over RMRB from Deng Tuo. On this occasion, Mao told him about the editorial that would appear the next day. Besides Mao and Wu, Hu Qiaomu attended the meeting, who was probably also involved in writing the editorial. Zhu Zheng calls incorrect Li Weihai’s assertion (in his *Huiyu yu yanjiu*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, 1986, p. 835) that Mao was the author of the editorial. See *1957 nian de xiaji*, p. 150f.

turn back history, and to return to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.” This interpretation of the period of blooming and contending did in fact mean the end of the Hundred Flowers. It was also a reversal of Mao’s February estimate of the situation in China in the Contradictions speech, where he had declared that a time of “slight breeze and light rain” had begun. Now his assessment read: “Although large-scale class struggle in our country has already ended, class struggle itself is by no means over, especially on the ideological front.” The ideological front includes, of course, the news sector. After weeks of discussion on the issue of newspapers, the storm was impending. Things had reached the turning point, and shortly before the end of the editorial the dialectics was revealed to the public: “things which have reached their extremes will necessarily turn into the opposite direction” (*wu ji bi fan* 物极必反).

In his essay “Things are about to change” Mao had expressed his anger especially with the news sector. Not before long, Mao would openly attack what he saw as the disloyalty of the media people, and in particular that of WHB. The first shot against the paper, however, came not from the Chairman’s own pen, but from a rather unlikely direction.

On the bottom of the third page of its June 10 issue, WHB carried an essay entitled “Recorded for Reference: Random Notes While Reading Newspapers” (*Lu yi bei kao – du bao ougan* 录以备考——读报偶感). The author was Yao Wenyuan. The political change of course had taken WHB not entirely by surprise. Xu Zhucheng seems to have felt that the situation was precarious. While he got reassurances from Ke Qingshi as late as May 25, 1957, he urged the WHB editorial board to practice restraint when he relayed the “spirit” of Ke’s instructions to them; however, “under no circumstances let the readers feel from our headlines or news articles that WHB is closing [the debates] (*shou* 收).”<sup>142</sup> Yet the publication of “What is this for?” on June 8 met WHB unprepared. Feeling pressured to

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<sup>142</sup> Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi. *Wenhuibao shilüe*, p. 164. Why would Ke Qingshi encourage WHB to continue “blooming and contending?” He was a high-ranking CC member (Ke was elevated to the PB in 1958) and thus might have seen Mao’s “Things are about to change.” Given his earlier hate for the paper, we cannot but suspect that he was trying to “lure the snake from its hole” – with or without knowledge of Mao’s position paper.

respond to the RMRB editorial, WHB decided (possibly on instructions from Ke Qingshi)<sup>143</sup> to print as a form of self-criticism Yao Wenyuan's article.

Why Yao Wenyuan? Yao seemed to be an unlikely candidate for an attack as fierce as that against WHB. A mere 26 years young, Yao had written as a literary critic for several newspapers and journals in Shanghai and beyond.<sup>144</sup> In a very short time, his talent had come to the attention of his superiors in Shanghai: Yao was well-read, extremely sharp-witted, and had an elegant style; he had shown his abilities in the campaign against Hu Feng. His eloquence had not even escaped the attention of Mao Zedong, on who's initiative Yao had travelled to Beijing to attend the national propaganda conference.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, Yao was an opportunist and had no scruples to follow any turn of the tide: he would adhere to whatever line the Party put forward. As Ye Yonglie has convincingly argued, his articles from the Hundred Flowers promoted the same ideas voiced by many intellectuals who were named 'Rightists' later.<sup>146</sup> Yao was thus in a precarious situation himself, as he could easily be held accountable for these earlier articles. He was thus deeply indebted to Ke Qingshi and Zhang Chunqiao and reacted immediately when Zhang called him on June 6 and told him that the anti-Rightist campaign was about to begin and that WHB would be the first target.<sup>147</sup> He took an afternoon thumbing through the WHB issues of the past month and spent a night writing "Recorded for Reference," an essayistic masterpiece, a seminal article in contemporary Chinese newspaper history that deserves our full attention. In Yao Wenyuan, Ke and Zhang had found what they needed: a brilliant young man with the worst of intentions.

"Recorded for Reference" picks up an especially delicate issue: the political character of editing. The question at stake was: does the work of presenting news

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<sup>143</sup> There are no indications that WHB was forced to run Yao's article, yet I consider it highly unlikely that the paper would voluntarily publish a malicious diatribe such as Yao's. The fact that it was Zhang Chunqiao who asked Yao to write the article seems to confirm this interpretation.

<sup>144</sup> On Yao's early career see Lars Ragvald. *Yao Wenyuan as a Literary Critic: The Emergence of Chinese Zhdanovism*. Stockholm: Department of Oriental Languages, 1978. Ragvald mentions the seminal June 10 article only in passing (p. 38) and provides no background information.

<sup>145</sup> In Beijing, Mao expressed his satisfaction with Yao to Xu Zhucheng, who in turn told Yao about the Chairman's words. See Xu Zhucheng. "Yangmou – 1957," p. 146f.

<sup>146</sup> For this interpretation of Yao's personality see Ye Yonglie. *Yao Wenyuan zhuan*. Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 1993, ch. 6. An analysis of Yao's Hundred Flowers articles is on p. 146-49. For a more conservative interpretation of Yao's Hundred Flower articles see Ragvald. *Yao Wenyuan as a Literary Critic*, ch. 2.

<sup>147</sup> Ye Yonglie. *Yao Wenyuan zhuan*, p. 155.

to readers have political implications, and thus, is that of the editor in a newspaper's boardroom a political one? With the argument that political relevance is not only inherent in the news story itself, but also in the way it is brought to the reader, WHB was later accused of "reactionary editing" (*fandong bianpai* 反动编排). The innocently looking article reveals much of the subtleties of newspaper making in a closed political system such as the PRC, and in a high pressure environment such as during political campaigns. I will therefore devote the rest of this section to a close reading of Yao's article.

With a mere 950 words, Yao's essay is not very long. What follows is a full translation:

**Recorded for Reference: Random Notes While Reading Newspapers  
Yao Wenyuan**

One and the same news item, handled by different comrade editors, can make a difference like night and day – this marvellous secret I have learned recently from the newspapers.

A few days ago, Chairman Mao made a speech at a reception of delegates from the Communist Youth League.<sup>148</sup> Although very short, this talk has a very profound meaning. *JFRB* published it as the prime news story with an eye-catching headline in especially large lead letters. *RMRB* printed it somewhere in the middle [of the page], with a headline somewhat smaller than that of *JFRB*; it highlighted [the sentence] "unite and fight resolutely and bravely for the great cause of socialism; any words or acts deviating from socialism are entirely wrong." But *WHB*, however, has shrunk [this message] to a degree where a somewhat sloppy and careless reader simply will not find it, or, even if he sees it, may think this a news story of little or no importance. The total space it occupies is probably just as big as that of: two of the lead characters used for the headline in *JFRB*.

Now what might be the reason that the editorial departments of three newspapers assess one and the same news story so very differently? Was it that *JFRB* considered this story to be especially important, or was it that the comrade editor at *WHB* felt that this talk was just some chatter about socialism, leadership of the Party, ... old phrases everybody has long since known by heart, nothing new, and therefore of little or no importance? Or might it have been that the editor thought that *WHB*'s readers are intellectuals and have nothing to do with the young people [to whom Mao was speaking]? Or could it be possible that the editor thought that giving prominence to this story would have a negative impact on "contending," because during "contending" it might be inappropriate to talk much about stuff like leadership of the Party and socialism, and if I do bring up one or two sentences [of this kind], I will very probably meet with resistance from some people...

I do not want to judge between right and wrong, maybe each has his own reasons, "this is one criterion, and that's another" – because after all, different methods of newspaper making are a kind of "contending," too; Chairman Mao has said that newspapers could be made this way or that, there are in fact two schools. I do not want

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<sup>148</sup> This reception took place on May 25. Mao talked to delegates of third national congress of the CYL.

to analyze their [methods being] good or bad either, because now everybody still runs his affairs according to his own methods; take, for example, the speech of Li Weihan: *RMRB* stressed “Socialism is the political foundation of long-term coexistence” and used this as its headline; and it used as subheading the passage “...all in all, among the criticisms and the opinions raised from all different sides there are many correct ones that we must conscientiously accept and resolve; [yet] a considerable number are mistaken, and we must make further efforts to study and analyze them.”<sup>149</sup> *WHB*, in contrast, titled “The Communist Party earnestly welcomes supervision, [criticism,] and help,” and [its subheading was]<sup>150</sup> “I think that many criticisms and opinions are helpful to overcome the three big –isms,<sup>151</sup> and to further strengthen and consolidate the Communist Party’s core leadership function.” Clear-sighted people will see at once that the focus of attention here and there is not the same. But I think that this kind of difference is a good phenomenon, much better than “a thousand pieces of the same tune.” And even less do I want to pursue the different people’s different state of mind that speaks from this focus, because I do not claim for me the ability “to know the answer before asking the oracle.” Thus, right and wrong, good or bad, and the reasons therefore, they all await further research into the matter.

Someone might ask: so don’t you have an opinion of your own? Answer: I do. But I don’t want to tell. And the reason I won’t tell? I won’t tell either. This is not for “wanting to speak out but still waiting” (*yu shuo hai xiu* 欲说还休), in comrade Tang Tao’s 唐弢 words,<sup>152</sup> but for another reason. But at the very least, all this overthrows one kind of theory: “The editing and type-setting of news has no political character;” editing and type-setting, too, has a political [character], and that is called “each according to his needs.”

I like to read *WHB* very much, for it is fresh and substantial, and the coverage is so wide. Now today I feel very sorry to implicate *WHB*. Fortunately this article does not contain any “-ism,” and it does not hand out hats either, it does not even “adjudicate” right and wrong, so it probably will not be regarded by some people as a “stick” [*gunzi* 棍子]. If it can bring newspaper readers and newspaper editors to reflect a little bit, then my purpose has already been reached. To conclude, I hope that this short article implicating *WHB* may be published on the pages of *WHB*’s supplement.

(June 6)

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<sup>149</sup> Li Weihan, head of the CCP CC’s United Front Work Department, talked to a meeting of delegates from the different democratic parties on June 3. Reported in *RMRB* and *WHB*, June 4, 1957.

<sup>150</sup> The original text in *WHB* and the reprint in *RMRB* four days later differ here slightly. The four characters *wei fu biaoti* 为副标题 (“its subheading was”) were omitted in *WHB*, creating a *non sequitur*. The words “and criticism” (*he piping* 和批评) are not in the June 4 headline, they are clearly a mistake, probably of the editor and not of Yao Wenyuan whose stylistically refined article would not have contained two conjunctions in one sentence (*jiandu he piping he bangzhu* 监督和批评和帮助). Also, in the line above the inverted commas were set at the wrong place (“...*piping he bangzhu wei biaoti*” instead of “*piping he bangzhu*” *wei biaoti*). These mistakes are highly unusual for a quality paper like *WHB* and attest to the haste in which the text was prepared for publication. The reprint in *RMRB* on June 14 corrected all three mistakes and eliminated several unnecessary commas.

<sup>151</sup> Bureaucratism (*guanliaozhuyi* 官僚主义), sectarianism (*zongpaizhuyi* 宗派主义) and subjectivism (*zhuguanzhuyi* 主观主义), the three big evils to be targeted by the May rectification campaign.

<sup>152</sup> Tang Tao (1913-1992), writer and critic; Tang worked for *WHB*’s literary supplement *Bihui* before 1949 and was an influential professor in Shanghai thereafter. I have been unable to find out to what Yao Wenyuan is referring here. He might allude to one the satirical essays (*zawen*) for which Tang Tao was well known. I am grateful to Liu Dong for this hint.

“Recorded for Reference” attacks WHB on a front where the paper was particularly vulnerable: editorial decisions concerning what news should be carried and how they are to be presented are made in any newspaper under time constraints; in contrast to other media, the selection of news items cannot normally be double-checked with authorities, especially in the case of news stories just emerging. Under the conditions of the 100 Flowers, WHB even had reason to believe in its right to rely on its own instincts for editorial decisions: as Deng Tuo had encouraged the paper a year earlier, WHB was to make a difference from other papers. The editors at WHB were thus moving perfectly within the scope of the 100 Flowers context when setting their own accents in the editorial decision-making process. It was Yao Wenyuan who had left this context, knowing beforehand (he wrote his article on June 6, that is before the anti-Rightist campaign started on June 8) that the crackdown was about to begin. Only from his position, which foreshadowed the anti-Rightist movement, the context had changed and WHB was standing outside the legitimate framework of newspaper making. It was Yao rather than WHB who was not respecting “the rules of the game;” fairness, however, was not Yao’s intention.

What makes Yao’s article so malicious indeed are not so much the accusations which the author leveled against WHB – many more were to follow from all sides in the weeks ahead – but rather the tone of the article. Written in an elegant and fluid Chinese, loaded with allusions and a great amount of irony (and even self-irony), the casual tone of the article, sometimes even nearing the naive, grossly betrays the seriousness of the accusations it contained. It is this disproportion that gives the essay its pernicious rhetorical power. Neither does Yao make these accusations explicit: he pretends to stop short of giving a definite answer on how to judge WHB’s behavior; in fact, his very style has made his standpoint more than clear, leaving judgment to the reader is not more than a phrase.

Yao Wenyuan’s accusations against WHB are based on relatively small details, yet the conclusions he draws (and hopes the reader to draw) are of enormous significance and have far-reaching consequences. This makes it even more important to pay scrutiny to Yao’s arguments, because a closer inspection reveals that what initially look as lucid observations are in fact distortions,

concoctions, and one-sided interpretations with the single purpose to publicly slander WHB. They nevertheless do reveal much about the practices of Chinese newspaper editing.

Yao carefully selected two examples from WHB's pages that he knew would have a maximum devastating effect to the newspaper. The first item he addresses is a news story delivered to the paper by the Xinhua news agency. It reported a meeting of Mao with delegates to the third national congress of the Communist Youth League that convened in Beijing from May 15-25.<sup>153</sup> When receiving the delegates on May 25, Mao addressed them, but either he had not made a coherent speech, or it was decided that only excerpts should be published. Either way, the Xinhua report was extremely short, containing but a few introductory sentences, and then the following lines from Mao:<sup>154</sup>

Your conference has been very good. I hope that you unite and become the leading core of the youth of the whole nation.  
The Chinese Communist Party is the leading core of the entire Chinese people. Without such a core, the cause of socialism cannot triumph.  
This conference of yours was a conference of unity, and will have a very large effect on all Chinese youth. My congratulations!  
Comrades, unite and fight resolutely and bravely for the great cause of socialism; any words or acts deviating from socialism are entirely wrong.

Mao's May 25 remarks, their shortness notwithstanding, were crucially important, as this was Mao's first public indication of a change in the political direction – the May 15 memorandum "Things are About to Change" was still secret. A careful newspaper reader – such as Yao Wenyuan – would easily identify the key passage of the quotation: "unite and fight resolutely and bravely for the great cause of socialism; any words or acts deviating from socialism are entirely wrong." The last sentence must have been extremely disturbing to readers at a time when blooming and contending had reached a feverish pitch and, according to some

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<sup>153</sup> It was at this meeting that the organization changed its name from "New Democratic Youth League" to "Communist Youth League." In the newspaper reports of May and June there is still some confusion about the name change and the organization is sometimes addressed as "Youth League" (*Qingnian tuan* 青年团) and sometimes as "Communist Youth League" (*Gongqing tuan* 共青团)

<sup>154</sup> It is quite certain that the report was not longer since no other newspaper I have seen did contain any more information. All papers have adopted the report directly from Xinhua with the reference "Xinhua she Beijing 25 ri dian" 新华社北京 25 日电. If Xinhua would have delivered a longer report or the whole speech and the newspaper had cited but fragments of it, this would have been marked as "*Ju Xinhua she...*" 据新华社... . None of the published collections of Mao's works contains more than the above passage.



observers, was getting out of hand.<sup>155</sup> Lacking any further explanation, newspaper editors were hard put to decide how to handle this “non-message” – there was after all little to report about. Its good relations with Beijing notwithstanding, WHB probably had not heard about Mao’s earlier memorandum. The Shanghai Party paper *JFRB*, on the other hand, might have known through Ke Qingshi.

Newspaper editors were now confronted with a problem: how to treat an extremely short piece of little actual content; content, however, which might have, as Yao wrote, “a very profound meaning.” Different newspapers reacted differently, as Yao found out: *JFRB* made it the front-page lead story with a huge headline, although not much of a story followed below the headline. *RMRB* decided for an equally large format on a less prominent location. The editors at *WHB* opted for a somewhat smaller letter type and only a small headline. On *WHB*’s front page the article indeed looks a bit paltry, occupying a space “probably just as big as that of: two of the lead characters used for the headline in *JFRB*.”<sup>156</sup> Yet Yao Wenyuan’s assertion that “*WHB* ... has shrunk [this message] to a degree where a somewhat sloppy and careless reader simply will not find it, or, even if he sees it, may think



III. 2-4: Front page layout of *JFRB*, *RMRB*, *WHB*, June 26, 1957. The highlighted area marks the report on Mao’s speech.

<sup>155</sup> Such was the opinion of Liu Shaoqi, Peng Zhen, and other Politburo leaders concerned especially about blooming and contending at major universities. See MacFarquhar, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution 1*, p. 219-25.

<sup>156</sup> See illustrations 2-4 for the respective design of the three newspapers.

this a news story of little or no importance” is exaggerated because the WHB people paid attention to place the article at the very top of the page right in the middle between two more prominent articles. It was originally set in two columns but was reduced to one when placed on the newspaper side; if set in two columns, the entire page would have to be rearranged.<sup>157</sup>

Yao Wenyuan’s accusations were in fact not that far off the mark; we must read them as a malicious denunciation of a common practice in Chinese newspaper making. As discussed in chapter four, political messages are communicated to informed readers by way of minor signals in the newspapers; the techniques for reading these signals are not normally talked about publicly. What Yao does in his article is to open a lid on the kinds of “esoteric communication” of the PRC political elite. In the case of the May 26 report, there are plausible reasons for the editors at WHB to tone down the rather disturbing message that Mao delivered. A brief look at the article in the upper left-hand corner, right next to the Mao story, shows this: a report on the closing ceremony of the session of Shanghai’s Political Consultative Conference, this article was entitled “Study the methods of correctly handling internal contradictions: Ke Qingshi stresses the importance of democratic consultations.” The design for next day’s paper had already been in place when the Xinhua message with the Mao quote arrived late in the evening.<sup>158</sup> It is easily understandable that WHB wanted to avoid the embarrassing contrast between Mao’s dictum “any words or acts deviating from socialism are entirely wrong” and Ke’s message, stressing exactly the opposite, “democratic consultations” (*minzhu xieshang* 民主协商) on the same page – a contrast embarrassing to Ke, but also to WHB that gave more prominence to its own Shanghai article, while the report on Mao came from Xinhua.

Furthermore, WHB had any reason to defend the policy of blooming and contending, as it had done in the weeks before, when the paper had run an editorial policy more outspoken than RMRB, and was ready to touch more

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<sup>157</sup> Thus recalled by Qin Benli, vice editor-in-chief and responsible for the final design of WHB’s edition while Xu was busy with other work. See Qin’s self-criticism made during the anti-Rightist campaign, quoted in *Wenhui bao baoshi yanjiushi. Wenhui bao shilüe*, p. 184f.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

controversial issues.<sup>159</sup> By late May, WHB was involved into the Hundred Flowers debates all too deep to order a sudden retreat on as yet rather ambiguous signals. Finally, we must examine Yao's remarks on the size of headlines – this, too, being a common marker for the relative importance of news stories, and identified as such by CCP leaders.<sup>160</sup> WHB's headline is indeed much smaller in comparison with those in the two other papers mentioned by Yao. Seen in perspective, however, this headline shrinks even more: after resuming publication in October 1956, WHB tried to appeal to readers, among other measures, by more interesting, daring, and larger headlines. This method of attracting readers is visible all through the May issues, especially when compared with the headlines in the rather conservative RMRB, but also with JFRB. A small headline in WHB thus becomes even smaller.

Yao Wenyuan's assertions thus cannot easily be dismissed. WHB used the entire repertoire of editing techniques for its purposes: to promote a policy direction that until shortly before had been openly favoured by Mao Zedong and many members of the CCP leadership. The paper was fighting for its stakes in setting itself off against advances from other quarters in the Party who sought to restrict the rectification campaign under way. The decision to treat with only the modicum of attention necessary a short piece of news that had arrived late in the evening when the paper's design was already in place, and that contained an unwelcome message, must be read in this context.

Nevertheless, Yao's accusation was unfair. Yao's comparison of the three papers implies that JFRB and RMRB were giving the message, and especially Mao's utterings, the due attention it deserved (with all political implications that might have), while WHB did not. A short survey of other newspapers reveals, however, that WHB was not the isolated case that Yao tried to construct. As table 1 shows, a clear pattern in the selection of headlines and the prominence given to the Xinhua report is hardly discernible. The other newspaper singled out for its bourgeois tendencies in the anti-Rightist movement, GMRB, had placed the report on its front page, with Mao's quote framed and set in bold characters – hardly a

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<sup>159</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar has shown that RMRB had defied blooming and contending nearly all through May 1957, a policy he says was probably pushed through a Liu Shaoqi – Lu Dingyi – Hu Qiaomu – Deng Tuo chain of command. See *Origins of the Cultural Revolution 1*, p. 212-17.

<sup>160</sup> There is an entire chapter on how to compose headlines in Hu Qiaomu's *Tantan baozhi gongzuo*. Xinwen yanjiusuo, n.p., n.d. [1977], p. 193-204.

sign of defiance. *Anhui ribao* 安徽日报 and *Zhongguo qingnianbao* had chosen a similar design, and the former even ran the sentence “any words or acts deviating from socialism are entirely wrong” as headline. But *Dazhong ribao* 大众日报, the organ of the CCP Shandong provincial committee, and the army paper *Jiefangjun bao* 解放军报 (JFJB) had opted for a considerably less prominent format. Especially JFJB, run by army cadres and not by intellectuals like WHB, should have been interested in the signs hinting at the winding up of the rectification movement. Neither *Dazhong ribao* nor JFJB published issues on June 26, which was a Sunday; their reports ran in the June 27 and 28 editions, respectively. All the more remarkable is the tuned down format of the report, for they had considerably more time to prepare their editions.

**Table 1: Newspaper Coverage of the Xinhua May 25 Report**

Paper	Position of article	Headlines
<i>Anhui ribao</i>	page one top (头版头条)	毛主席勉励青年团结起来，为社会之以事业勇敢奋斗 他说：一切离开社会主义的言论行动是完全错误的
<i>Dazhong ribao</i> (5.27)	small article, upper right corner, small headline	毛主席接见团代会代表 希望青年团作为全国青年的领导核心
GMRB	头版头条, quote frame, in bold print	团结起来，作为青年的领导核心，为社会主义事业而奋斗 青年团第三次代表大会胜利闭幕 毛主席和中共中央领导人接见全体代表和各国青年代表
<i>Jiefangjun bao</i> (5.28)	quotation only, in ornamented frame, upper right corner	-
JFRB	头版头条, quote bold in text	青年团全国代表大会闭幕 毛主席向代表讲话 团结起来，坚决地勇敢地社会主义的伟大事业而奋斗。一切离开社会主义的言论行动是完全错误的
<i>Nanfang ribao</i>	-	-
RMRB	right middle, quote in text, not bold, small	毛主席勉励青年团代表大会全体代表 坚决勇敢为社会主义事业奋斗 他说：一切离开社会主义的言论行动是完全错误的
WHB	top center, very small	毛主席接见团代会代表
<i>Zhongguo qingnianbao</i>	头版头条, quote larger, italicized	青年团第三届全国代表大会胜利闭幕 毛主席向大会祝贺并作亲切指示 中共中央领导人也接见了全体代表

*Nanfang ribao* 南方日报, the organ of the Guangdong CCP provincial committee, finally, was taking the cake: the paper failed to mention Mao's talk entirely on June 26 and on the following days. While it reported extensively on page one on the closing ceremony of the CYL meeting, it did not mention Mao's talk with a single word. It remains unclear whether the editors of the paper simply oversaw the Xinhua message that arrived late that evening, or if the failure to report it was a deliberate insult to Mao from Tao Zhu 陶铸, the first secretary of the Guangdong CCP Provincial Committee. Tao reportedly had resisted several of the policy directives of the Hundred Flowers period.<sup>161</sup> Yet given his opposition to blooming and contending, he would probably have welcomed a decision to restrict blooming and contending, one more reason to give prominence to the report. A mistake by oversight, on the other hand, is hardly possible since it could have been corrected easily one or two days later. While the exact motives remain unclear, it emerges that in a high-pressure situation like that of the evening of May 25, newspapers were left on their own to decide on how to handle the Xinhua story; the papers apparently welcomed an opportunity for autonomy on this micro-level to express their particular concerns, as WHB's reaction shows. Yet Yao Wenyuan went too far when sorting out the good and the bad folks, putting the blame squarely on WHB. His next 'proof' for WHB's bad intentions is even less convincing.

The second example Yao Wenyuan used to prove his point was a news story from June 4. This message, also on the front page, reported a speech that Li Weihuan, the head of the CCP CC's United Front Work Department, had delivered to a meeting of the democratic parties on the day before. This time Yao addressed another key means frequently used by newspapers to get through their own messages: while Xinhua provides the newspapers all around the nation with news stories that are often fixed and cannot be changed at will, about the only avenue for setting individual accents, apart from the prominence attached to a report through location, size, and letter type, is the composition of headlines, by way of which different aspects of the same story might be highlighted. This is what Yao demonstrated in the case of the Li Weihuan story.

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<sup>161</sup> See MacFarquhar, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution 1*, p. 230-34, for Tao's refusal to do manual labour and related issues.

Different accents are clearly visible from the two paper's headlines: RMRB's "Socialism is the political foundation of long-term coexistence" seems to foreshadow the tightening of the public debates, while WHB's headline "The Communist Party earnestly welcomes supervision and help" implies a very different message. The contrast becomes even clearer if the subheadings are considered, as Yao had done: "...all in all, among the criticisms and the opinions raised from all different sides there are many correct ones that we must conscientiously accept and resolve; [yet] a considerable number are mistaken, and we must make further efforts to study and analyze them." RMRB carefully pointed to the two sides of blooming and contending; the second sentence hints to "mistaken" (*cuowude* 错误的) ideas – not of the Party, but among the criticisms voiced in the debates. This half-sentence opened up the eventuality that rectification may shift from the Party to the non-Party intellectuals. WHB stressed an almost contrary aspect: "I think that many criticisms and opinions are helpful to overcome the three big –isms, and to further strengthen and consolidate the Communist Party's core leadership function." While RMRB seems to urge for restraint, WHB tried to encourage further criticism.

Both subheadings quote from the same speech, but the two papers construct contrary agendas by selectively quoting those passages from Li Weihai's speech that support their own agenda. Although Xu Zhucheng had told his colleagues to reduce the temperature gradually, WHB was deeply involved in the Hundred Flowers campaign and would rather stress those aspects of Li's speech that would confirm its own editorial policy of the past weeks. If MacFarquhar's observation of RMRB's general reluctance to get involved in the Hundred Flowers campaign is correct, the paper's interest in those passages of the speech that urge restraint would be in its natural interest. Selectively quoting of authoritative texts has been an ancient means of manipulating messages in public discourse. Yao's contention that "clear-sighted people will see at once that the focus of attention here and there is not the same" is certainly correct; he decodes for the less "clear-sighted" (*mingyan* 明眼) or sophisticated reader a common practice of Chinese newspaper making and introduces him to some aspects of the esoteric political communication.

Yet Yao Wenyuan's own intentions are no less manipulative than those of the two papers. In fact, he works with exactly the same tactics he observes in the papers: selectively quoting. What Yao fails to mention is that JFRB reported Li Weihai's talk with a headline almost identical with WHB's ("Zhonggong chengken huanying jiandu bangzhu" 中共诚恳欢迎监督帮助; the WHB headline had read "...jiandu *he* bangzhu" 监督和帮助). The subheading, too ("Li Weihai speaks at the conference of democratic personages [minzhu renshi 民主人士, i.e. representatives of the "democratic parties"]; the problems raised at the conference will be studied and resolved one by one"), was rather neutral and did not point in the direction of RMRB's headline. JFRB's headline obviously would have upset the carefully constructed first argument of Yao's article. Yao had imputed ulterior motives to WHB with the help of a quotation from Mao: "Chairman Mao has said that newspapers could be made this way or that, there are in fact two schools." The quotation in Yao's text is not marked by inverted commas and could not be, because it is corrupted. There is no published text containing anything like the above quote. The most probable source of the quotation is Mao's April 1957 meeting with the RMRB editors. Mao is reported to have remarked the following: "Hundred schools, that is in fact two schools, one bourgeois and one proletarian. Seventy to eighty per cent of the intellectuals are standing in the middle of the road. Contending means these two schools competing to win over the middle-of-the-road intellectuals."<sup>162</sup> While Mao talked to the newspaper personnel, he was in fact speaking about the situation of the intellectuals in the context of the Hundred Flowers; in the sentence that follows he argues that even criticism of the basic principles (*jiben yuanli* 基本原理) of Marxism is permissible. Yao quotes Mao here out of context. What is worse, he violates a general rule of Chinese journalism: it is strictly forbidden to quote without authorization from speeches of the leadership that have not yet been officially released. That Yao feels free to do so shows that he must have had immense trust in his source – probably Zhang Chunqiao or even Ke Qingshi. Only high-level cadres might have had access to remarks such as those quoted; and only with their backing would Yao dare to use the quote. It is indeed remarkable that WHB decided to run Yao's article with an unofficial quote;

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<sup>162</sup> Quoted after Wang Ruoshui. *Zhihui de tongku*, p. 323.

this might be seen as a sign of either the haste in which the article was prepared, which left no time to verify the quote, or the pressure that was put on the paper to print the article. Whatever the exact reasons may have been, the short quote is certainly taken out of the original context and thus seems to fit perfectly with the argument that Yao was constructing, and illustrates Yao's intention: to do as much harm to WHB as possible.<sup>163</sup>

In his first argument, Yao had implied the existence of two schools or lines in the newspaper sector: a proletarian line, loyally following the Chairman, represented by JFRB and RMRB, and a capitalist line, opposing Mao, with WHB as its representative. Unfortunately, JFRB's handling of the Li Weihan speech, and especially the headline of the JFRB article would upset the delicate logic of the first argument. To avoid any contradictions in his article, Yao simply leaves out JFRB in the second comparison. It is unlikely that Yao had not seen the JFRB issue of June 4, as JFRB was Shanghai's premier paper; Yao's article is in fact too carefully researched to allow for a mistake like this. The only explanation is that Yao omitted JFRB to further his own agenda and deliberately accepted a distortion of the truth as long as his argument sounds plausible. This technique is even less fair than the rather subtle manipulations through which the newspapers worked when composing their headlines, but it is in fact just another common way through which arguments of public discourse are made in the difficult and politically charged environment of China.

Yao ends his article with a mockery of the 'blooming and contending' policy. He had made his intentions more than clear in the course of his argumentation; his refusal to spell out his accusation is no more than coquetry. During the Hundred Flowers period, the public voicing of dissenting opinions had been the rule of the day; it is against this rule that Yao turns here. Poking fun at all those who had dared to follow the Party's call to speak out, Yao writes with the knowledge of the reversal of the political line. He is absolutely conscious of what he is doing: his youth notwithstanding, he had earned himself a name through his interventions in various issues, notably the Hu Feng campaign – thus his self-ironic reference to

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<sup>163</sup> On quoting and misquoting see Mittler. *A Newspaper for China?* MS, p. 112f. Rudolf Wagner. "Der vergessene Hinweis: Wang Pi über den Lao-tzu" in Jan Assmann, Burkhard Gladikow (eds.). *Text und Kommentar: Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation IV*. München: Wilhelm Fink, 1995, p. 257-78, esp. p. 264ff.



the “stick” (*gunzi* 棍子) and the hats (*maozi* 帽子) he had become famous for. The article is, of course, just another example of what Yao Wenyuan was best in: polemical attacks against his opponents in the realm of literary criticism.

With his article “Recorded for Reference” Yao Wenyuan announces nothing less than the anti-Rightist campaign. In minute detail he has “recorded” WHB’s conduct during the Hundred Flowers period; he delivers ammunition to those who will carry out the campaign. This is why he stops short of answering the three questions: “Thus, right and wrong, good or bad, and the reasons therefore, they all await further research into the matter.” Given Yao’s careful investigation, further research is certainly not what is needed; rather, the final verdict needs to be spoken over WHB’s behaviour: had the paper operated within the limits that the Party had set for good and bad, right and wrong – had WHB kept with the spirit of the media concept? It was not up to Yao to make this final judgement. Rather, Mao Zedong himself would emerge to judge on the three questions that Yao had refused to answer, and especially on the last one, the reasons: what were the motivations that had driven WHB in its editorial policy?. And when the Chairman did make up his mind, he used Yao Wenyuan’s article as public reference material for his own accusations.

The reversal of the political line came as a shock to those who had thrown themselves into the Hundred Flowers debates. The turning point, however, came not all that sudden: Mao Zedong had become suspicious in mid-May, and in his May 25 speech he had given the first public sign of the impending change in politics. This decision was made public with the June 8 editorial “What is this for?” When Yao Wenyuan’s article appeared two days later, the lines of argument for the upcoming anti-Rightist campaign began to emerge: Yao had concentrated on what became known as “political editing,” or in this case, “reactionary editing” (*fandong bianpai* 反动编排). As Yao Wenyuan had summed up the merits of his article: “But at the very least, all this overthrows one kind of theory: ‘The editing and type-setting of news has no political character;’ editing and type-setting, too, has a political [character], and that is called ‘each according to his needs.’” “Political editing,” that is, the communication of political messages through the subtle means of layout composition, was but one of the accusations levelled against WHB. It is, however, very well-suited to illustrate how narrowly the media

concept could be interpreted. The charges brought against WHB and its leadership did concentrate on the last sentence of the media concept: the media “are a weapon as well as a battleground of class struggle and must fight against any attempt of the enemy to gain ground in the superstructure.” The Stalinist dictum of the sharpening of class struggle after the revolution now moved into the centre of the debate and clashed with the liberal interpretation based especially on the clauses (3) to (5). The inherent tension of the media concept finally broke open, with disastrous consequences.

Through implication Yao Wenyuan had accused WHB’s leadership of nothing less than abusing the newspaper as a platform for reactionary forces who called for the overthrow of the CCP’s rule. This was in fact a worst case scenario: when the rules had been loosened (*fang* 放) to overcome the difficulties in the media sector, and to make the newspapers more effective tools for the Party, the opposite had happened: in Yao’s reading, the class enemy had used the opportunity to launch an attack against the foundations of the CCP’s power. Mao endorsed this assessment a few days later.

### *The Aftermath: Criticism and Self-Criticism*

On June 14, Yao Wenyuan’s article was reprinted in RMRB, where it appeared with an introduction almost as long as the original article: “The Bourgeois Tendencies of WHB During a Certain Time” (*Wenhuibao zai yi ge shijian nei de zichanjieji fangxiang* 文汇报在一个时间内的资产阶级方向). The introduction was signed “editorial board” (*ben bao bianjibu* 本报编辑部). Neither the headline nor the article itself leaves any doubt about the author’s reading of Yao Wenyuan’s article. The author was none other than Mao Zedong.

In the article, Mao comes straight to the point: “In the past, the Shanghai WHB and the Beijing GMRB have printed large numbers of good reports and articles. However, within a short period of time, the basic political orientation of these two newspapers has changed into the orientation of the bourgeois press.” While Mao defines the scope rather narrowly as a “short period,” the accusation itself is grave: “For some time, these two papers have used the slogan of ‘letting hundred schools of thought contend’ and the CCP’s rectification movement to

publish large amounts of articles that express bourgeois viewpoints and do not engage in [constructive] criticism at all, and have carried seditious reports; they may be found in the papers in question. Some people in these newspapers have committed great mistakes with regard to the standpoint of newspapers.” It is not just individual reports and articles that are found at variance with the correct Party line, but the point of view of the leadership of the two papers: “They have mixed up the difference in principle between the newspapers of the capitalist countries and those of a socialist nation.<sup>164</sup> In this respect, some editors and reporters at some other newspapers are also in fault, as are some professors of the news departments of some universities – [this problem] concerns not only WHB and GMRB, it is only especially prominent with these two papers.” Mao obviously refers to the debates that had taken place across the newspaper sector concerning the role and the function of the newspapers. An avid reader of WHB, Mao possibly even had in mind Xu Junyuan’s May 21 article. From the lines above a hierarchy emerges: no Chinese newspaper could be sure to have behaved entirely correct during the Hundred Flowers period, all papers were invited to inspect their reporting during the April and May period. A little later in the article, RMRB admits that it has committed errors, too (that is, Mao accuses RMRB of committing errors). Yet two papers in particular stand out from the rest for their particularly serious mistakes, WHB and GMRB. Among these two, the former clearly is the major culprit, as the headlines mentions only WHB, and not GMRB.

Why WHB and GMRB? They are the only non-Party newspapers in the PRC’s first league papers. Yet this status does not mean that the Party’s media concept doesn’t apply to them: “Non-Party papers naturally need not be run exactly like Party papers, they should have their own characteristic features. However, their basic orientation must be in line with that of the other papers...” The reason for this demand is to be found in the politicization of Chinese society and the international environment, where class struggle still exists: “... because in a socialist country, the newspapers – through the means of the news – are the reflection of the socialist economy, that is, the planned economy based on public ownership; they are different from the newspapers of the capitalist countries that

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<sup>164</sup> This sentence is an almost verbatim quote from Mao’s “Things are about to change.” See *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wen’gao* 6.470.

are – through the means of the news – the reflection of an economy [characterized by] a state of anarchy and the competition of interests groups.<sup>165</sup> As long as class differences exist in the world, the newspapers are always a tool of class struggle.” The basic character of newspapers could not be spelled out any clearer: Mao calls the last clause of the media concept back into the minds of Chinese newspaper personnel. The Hundred Flowers policy had been intended as an experiment to improve the efficiency of the papers; stress on other elements of the concept had therefore been tolerated, but in general the validity of the media concept – in its entirety – had not changed. With the argument of class struggle and the definition of newspapers as “tools” (*gongju* 工具), Mao now bluntly rebuked not just any proposals that had left the framework of the media concept, but also brushed away all other interpretations of the concept that would have shifted the balance towards different elements – no matter how modest the proposed changes might have been.

Mao calls on the papers to inspect their behaviour and practice self-criticism: “We are waiting in anticipation.” This is the reason for the reprint of Yao Wenyan’s article on RMRB’s pages: “Yao Wenyan’s article only implicitly addresses WHB’s bourgeois orientation and has observed that some people at WHB stand on bourgeois positions and engage in class struggle against the proletariat, a trend both obvious and harmful. It is a good article, and therefore we reprint it here.” WHB is accused of nothing less than launching class struggle, a crime not far from rebellion and counterrevolution. With Yao’s article appearing in the organ of the CCP Central Committee, its status has changed entirely. It was originally presented as a self-criticism of WHB, printed at the bottom of the third page of the paper. The article’s prominence was upgraded first through the move from a Shanghai to a Beijing paper. Secondly, it appeared at the bottom of page one in RMRB, drawing considerably more attention than on its rather obscure position in WHB. Mao’s introductory article gives Yao’s essay even more stress.

Mao’s authorship of the June 14 RMRB article was not revealed publicly. The article appeared in the name of RMRB’s editorial department” and was dated

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<sup>165</sup> This sentence, too, is taken almost literally from “Things are about to change.” See *ibid*.

June 13.<sup>166</sup> Mao's involvement, however, was no secret at the time of publication: Deng Tuo had warned WHB in advance of the article.<sup>167</sup> A Xinhua dispatch had distributed the article in the night and ordered newspapers nationwide to reprint it. WHB had to react immediately and published Mao's article in its June 14 issue on page one. A headline in bold type face reading "RMRB Editorial Department Publishes Article: 'The Bourgeois Tendencies of WHB During a Certain Time'" called attention to it. The article was accompanied by a short Xinhua report below listing complaints of newspaper readers of WHB's editorial policy. On the top of the page, WHB published a hastily written self-criticism.<sup>168</sup> In this editorial, WHB admitted its errors – it had no other choice after the RMRB article. WHB's self-criticism remained vague and confirmed mainly that the paper had had an incorrect understanding of the Hundred Flowers policy; Xu Zhucheng, the editorial's author, apparently still hoped to justify himself in the terms of the 'blooming and contending' policy, which had after all been an initiative of Mao.

In the days immediately after the publication of Yao Wenyuan's article, the other Shanghai papers responded with more of the same: critical articles obviously signed by pseudonyms denounced WHB's editorial policy in the style of Yao.<sup>169</sup> These articles showed no longer restraint but announced their charges openly: the tide had turned and they were sure to be on the safe side. Yet Mao's condemnatory piece in RMRB lifted the WHB affair to a new level of prominence.

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<sup>166</sup> There is no doubt concerning Mao's authorship, as the article was reprinted in *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* 6.508-09.

<sup>167</sup> *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi. Wenhuibao shilüe*, p. 165. This was probably the last service Deng was able to do for WHB before he himself was sidelined. Mao had handed the editorial to Wu Lengxi, who was soon to replace Deng as editor-in-chief (Wu took formally over on June 29). However, Deng was not named a Rightist and stayed with the paper for another year before he was transferred to the CCP Beijing Municipal Committee. The order to reprint the Yao Wenyuan article had come from Mao. See *ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>168</sup> "Mingque fangxiang, jixu qianjin." The editorial misquotes a sentence of the RMRB article (writing *faxian* 发现 instead of *biaoxian* 表现, which does not make sense grammatically) and lacks a coherent logic. Both are signs of the haste in which it was prepared. This misquote is especially embarrassing, since the correct version appears in the reprint of the RMRB article immediately below the editorial and is thus visible for every reader. I rule out the possibility of the misquote being a deliberate attempt of protest or a signal to the readers of the situation – WHB still hoped to limit the damage done, and any sign of protest would have eliminated the last hopes the editors might have had.

<sup>169</sup> See for example Shui Luo 水洛. "Dui Wenhuibao jin zhongyan" in JFRB, June 12. Interestingly, this article gives a clear definition of the time when WHB committed mistakes, saying that these had emerged "since the propaganda conference in March" and especially "in the past one or two months." It is possible that the Shanghai PD which is in charge of JFRB wanted to restrict the damage done.

Even after the June 14 article, Xu Zhucheng hoped to escape the worst of the storm: for one, he had not been in Shanghai during most of the period of “blooming and contending.” Mao’s article, speaking about a “short time” seemed to indicate that it was especially the time of his absence when the gravest mistakes were made. The brunt of the blame would therefore be born by Qin Benli who had been in charge of the paper during Xu’s absence. Xu must also have read the sentence “from the last few days’ issues of these two newspapers, we already seem to have observed some change in direction” as an encouragement of his own position. Furthermore, Mao’s praise of WHB at the Zhongnanhai reception in March was still ringing in Xu’s ears. All along, he had received support from Deng Tuo and had been reassured of the Party Centre’s confidence in his paper. Xu therefore initially hoped to avoid making public self-criticisms.<sup>170</sup>

On the morning of June 14, Xu and Qin went to Ke Qingshi, who confirmed Mao’s authorship of the article to them. Ke made no secret of his anger and heaped abuse on the intellectuals: “The Chinese intellectuals can be characterized with only two words: the first is indolent; they are usually unwilling to undergo self-inspection, and often they even get arrogant. The second word is despicable: if you don’t flog them for just three days, they will swell with pride of themselves.”<sup>171</sup> Nevertheless, he promised to help WHB – apparently, Ke was concerned about his own position and influence in Beijing; he was enraged by interference into his home turf and went as far as ordering WHB not to print Xinhua releases that named Shanghai people as Rightists if he had not approved of them first.<sup>172</sup> Qin Benli recalls that Ke showed an unusual amount of support for him and Xu Zhucheng. During the early days of the anti-Rightist storm, Qin, the paper’s contact man to the Shanghai Party, was standing in close contact with Ke Qingshi, and met him almost daily. He tried to shoulder the greater part of the blame himself, and originally Ke agreed to help Xu to avoid the worst.<sup>173</sup> Yet the feared “one-voice-hall” of Shanghai did either not plan to make good on his promises, or he was forced to give in to the pressure from Beijing. After July 1, when Mao fired the second shot against WHB, Xu Zhucheng’s position became untenable.

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<sup>170</sup> Xu Zhucheng. “Yangmou qinli ji,” p. 27f.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>172</sup> Qin Benli. “Liu zai jiyi li de pianduan,” p. 138f.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

Xu Zhucheng and Qin Benli relayed Ke's message to the editorial department at a meeting that same afternoon. Immediately thereafter, WHB started to write self-incriminations in order to comply with the order from Beijing. On June 16, WHB published its first comprehensive self-criticism.<sup>174</sup> The June 16 editorial repeats and paraphrases all the core passages of Mao's RMRB article. WHB admitted to have "used an objectivistic news concept to produce our paper; as a result, this has necessarily been beneficial to the bourgeoisie's attacks on the proletariat in the class struggle." WHB stops short of an important point: it admits of having provided the bourgeoisie with conditions for reactionary activities, but it does not admit of being guilty of actively working against the Party and of consciously adopting a bourgeois point of view, as both Yao Wenyuan and Mao had implied. WHB still tried to defend itself by attributing its errors to an insufficient understanding of the Party's policy. To demonstrate its willingness to reform, the paper now subscribed to the correct interpretation of the media concept:

The newspapers of socialist countries such as ours are papers that propagate the proletarian ideology and represent the interests of the masses; our newspapers can and should have their own characteristic style, but they must all be in line with the above basic orientation. If they ignore this basic orientation, they will certainly slide into the mud pit of the bourgeois newspaper concept. Because in the struggle between the two roads [bourgeois and proletarian], whoever does not opt for the one direction, will certainly walk into the other; there is no third road.

With this confession, WHB hoped to be on the safe side.

Yet from Beijing, where the political situation was evolving ever more rapidly, WHB's initial steps were seen as slow and insufficient. The publication of the revised text of Mao's Contradictions speech in RMRB on June 19 added a new dimension to the anti-Rightist campaign. The text of the speech, on which many intellectuals like Xu Zhucheng had grounded their hopes, was now publicly available, but it did no longer support the newspaper peoples' actions, but rather the accusations levelled against them. On this basis, the wave of criticism and self-criticism could begin in earnest.

Xu Zhucheng was called to Beijing to participate in the second news workers conference in the capital, convened by the All-China Federation of

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<sup>174</sup> "Huanying ducu he bangzhu," editorial. WHB's earliest reaction to the charges levelled against them had come on June 11, only a day after the publication of Yao Wenyuan's article: the paper carried a bold black headline with a bold frame running over the entire issue: "any words or acts deviating from socialism are entirely wrong!" With the quotation from Mao's May 25 speech, WHB hoped to make good for its earlier underreporting of the issue – an answer to Yao's accusation.

Newswriters from June 24 until mid-August. In stark contrast to the March conference, the agenda of this meeting centred on criticizing the Rightists. Xu Zhucheng was made to attend struggle meetings at both the Political Consultative Conference, the league of the democratic parties, and at the Association of News Workers, the latter being much worse an experience. Deng Tuo's efforts to cover Xu were to no avail. Pu Xixiu, WHB's Beijing bureau chief, fared even worse: she had to endure more struggle sessions at the Women's Federation and also at the WHB Beijing Bureau, where the campaign had begun under the participation of a RMRB cadre. Xu Zhucheng was subjected to further struggle meetings after his return to Shanghai.<sup>175</sup>

It did not help Pu Xixiu that she had been on an inspection tour of the Northeast for nearly the entire month of May; hence she had hoped that she could not be made responsible for WHB's mistakes at the height of "blooming and contending." On June 24, GMRB published Pu Xixiu's first self-criticism.<sup>176</sup> The situation was now much worse than two weeks earlier. Pu was accused of participation in the conspiracy of Zhang Bojun 章伯钧 and Luo Longji 罗隆基, the two vice-heads of the Federation of Democratic Parties (Minmeng 民盟). Zhang and Luo had by then emerged as the two main targets at the centre of the anti-Rightist campaign; they were accused of leading an anti-Party conspiracy.<sup>177</sup> Pu was said to have been Zhang and Luo's link to the press, an allegation she publicly denied in her June 24 article. In this article, she is concerned mostly with refuting the accusations concerning her association with Luo Longji.<sup>178</sup> To "draw a clear line," she joined in the chorus denouncing Luo's crimes and delivered further details of his words and deeds for use in the struggle; in this way, Pu hoped to prove her loyalty to the CCP. Only in a short paragraph, she turns to the issue of the press and defends WHB against the charges levelled against the paper in the past two weeks:

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<sup>175</sup> See *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi. Wenhuibao shilüe*, p. 166-70. For Pu Xixiu see also Xie Weiming. "Fanyou fengbao zhong de 'Beiban,'" and Zhu Zheng. *Baoren Pu Xixiu*. Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 2005, esp. ch. 6-7.

<sup>176</sup> "Huaqing jiexian, canjia zhandou."

<sup>177</sup> On the "Zhang-Luo conspiracy" see Zhu Zheng. *1957 nian de xiaji*, ch. 7; and Zhang Yihe. *Zui hou de guizu*, ch. 2 and 6.

<sup>178</sup> Pu Xixiu is widely rumored to have had a romantic relationship with Luo. See, for example, Zhang Yaojie. "Caizi ben fengliu: Luo Longji de qinggan rensheng," in *Zhonghua dushubao*, 2 Aug. 2004, via <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/wenhua/1088/2680785.html> (downloaded 18 Apr. 2007).



Some people have said that WHB is connected to Luo Longji; that does not correspond to the truth. WHB is entirely a newspaper of the people, and has received boundless care and support from the Party. The editorial direction of the relaunch in October last year has been formulated completely with the help of the CCP PD and after asking all sides for opinions. Our newspaper is currently carrying out an in-depth internal investigation to determine why our paper has recently walked in the capitalist direction for a short period; we have already corrected [these errors].

Pu Xixiu denies the gravest accusation, WHB's supposed contact with the Zhang-Luo anti-Party conspiracy. She also admits publicly for the first time of the CCP PD's involvement in conceptualizing the paper's editorial policy after the relaunch. Pu was later censored for revealing this fact.

WHB's efforts to exculpate itself were not recognized in Beijing, where the paper was seen as too slow and reluctant to confess its mistakes. Mao Zedong in particular was not satisfied with WHB's self-criticism. On July 1, he came forward with another sharp critique of the paper, once again on the pages of RMRB. How far the situation had deteriorated for WHB is visible from the fact that Mao bluntly rejected Pu Xixiu's most important denial – her contact to Luo Longji. He angrily denounced the “Democratic League Rightist structure” (*Minmeng youpai xitong* 民盟右派系统) and its chain of command: “Luo Longji – Pu Xixiu – WHB editorial department.” Pu Xixiu was accused by name as “an able woman general” listening to the instructions of Luo Longji and actively participating in the conspiracy. Her fate was thus sealed, as was that of GMRB's Chu Anping.

Mao drew a comparison between GMRB and WHB: Chu Anping had been dismissed from his post on June 8, the very day of the RMRB editorial “What is this for?” Since then, GMRB had made a successful effort to correct its mistakes and to engage in self-criticism. WHB had also admitted errors, but Mao was far from satisfied with WHB's behaviour. To the contrary:

On June 14, WHB has made a self-criticism and has admitted some mistakes. Engaging in self-criticism is very good, and we welcome [this step]. However, we think that WHB's criticism is not enough. This being not enough is of an essential character. This means that WHB has essentially not made any self-criticism. To the contrary, in the June 14 editorial, it has defended its mistakes: “We had a one-sided and mistaken understanding of the Party's policy of ‘blooming and contending,’ thinking that we could help the Party correcting its work styles simply by unreservedly encouraging blooming and contending, and that printing too many affirmative opinions or even criticizing false opinions would affect blooming and contending negatively.” Is this correct? No! During springtime, WHB has carried out the anti-Communist, anti-people, and anti-socialist direction of the Democratic League CC, has frenziedly attacked the proletariat, and has run diametrically against the policy of the Communist Party. Its policy was to squash the Communist Party completely, to create chaos and confusion, with the intention to

replace [the CCP] – is this really “helping the Party to correct its work styles?” It is a lie, in reality it is nothing but deceit.

The fierceness of Mao’s accusations made it abundantly clear that Xu Zhucheng’s carefully worded efforts to lead his paper out of the centre of the storm had been in vain. His attempts to explain the reasons for WHB’s mistakes proved to be counterproductive. The accusation that WHB had implemented the “anti-Communist, anti-people, and anti-socialist” line of the Democratic League was only a little short of the paper being named counterrevolutionary, a capital crime punished by the legal code. It was now also becoming clear that Xu Zhucheng himself would not be able to escape responsibility. The public self-criticism was exposed by Mao as an intrigue with the intention to deceive the people. Mao reiterated this claim later in the article:

WHB has acted in accordance to the above reactionary direction, and on June 14 has cheated the people, pretending to have good intentions. WHB has said: “these mistaken ideas could arise because in our heads there still exist the remnants of the concepts of bourgeois newspaper making.” No, it should read “are still full of” [instead of remnants]. For several months they have been the throat and tongue of the reactionaries, frenziedly attacking the proletariat; the orientation of their paper has become anti-Communist, anti-people, and anti-socialist, that is, the bourgeois orientation – can this come from a few remnants of capitalist thinking? ... To the present day, WHB has refused to criticize itself for large-scale reporting reactionary news that run counter to facts, large-scale publishing of reactionary talks and speeches, and the large-scale employing reactionary editing that has been used as a tool to attack the proletariat.

WHB was now accused of actively and consciously serving the anti-Communist conspiracy. Mao Zedong argues from his interpretation of the media concept: just as the CCP organizes the media under its control to serve as its “throat and tongue” in the class struggle on the ideological front, so does the class enemy. WHB had been nothing less than the mouthpiece of the revisionists; it had helped preparing the public for the enemy’s attack. In this understanding, the fears of the CCP, as predicted by Stalin in the *Short Course*, had become true: the remnants of the bourgeoisie had launched their attack at the first opportunity that was given to them. This opportunity, as Mao confessed now, had not come by chance: it had been an intrigue carefully planned by the Party – or rather, as Mao said, an “intrigue in broad daylight” (*yangmou* 阳谋), because the original intention, to “lure the snakes from their holes” (*yin she chu dong* 引蛇出洞) had been clear from the beginning.

WHB had walked into a trap and was punished for the active support it had given to the people who were now declared Rightists. The hopes for a broader interpretation of the media concept and for more freedom for individual newspapers to choose their own ways of serving the Party and the Party's goals, had vanished. Pu Xixiu had admitted that WHB had in fact been led by the PD, but not even the paper's close contacts to the Party authorities in Beijing (through Xu Zhucheng and Deng Tuo) and Shanghai (through Qin Benli and Ke Qingshi) could prevent it from falling out of favour because of running an editorial line slightly more liberal than that, for example, of Deng Tuo's RMRB.

Xu Zhucheng and Qin Benli had learned of Mao's authorship of the July 1 article in advance from Ke Qingshi.<sup>179</sup> Having aroused the wrath of the Chairman, the fate of both men was sealed. Xu Zhucheng did not even return on his post after the criticism meetings; he was declared a Rightist in August and was sent to a "reform through labour" study class near Shanghai for half a year.<sup>180</sup> Qin Benli continued on his job as editor-in-chief until mid-July, when he was named a Rightist and replaced by Chen Yusun 陈虞孙, a senior Shanghai propaganda cadre who had worked for WHB before.

With a new leadership, WHB had to address the problems and the accusations left behind from the storm. The paper started to confess its "crimes" on July 2 with an editorial entitled "Apologizing to the people."<sup>181</sup> The editorial had been written by Jiang Wenjie 蒋文杰, a cadre of the Shanghai PD, and had been inspected by Ke Qingshi prior to publication.<sup>182</sup> The editorial proceeds from Mao's July 1 editorial and denounces Pu Xixiu and Xu Zhucheng; both are made responsible for the implementation of what was now called the "Zhang [Bojun]-Luo [Longji] line" at WHB. Xu Zhucheng was accused of blocking the efforts of "a Party member vice editor-in-chief," obviously Qin Benli, to reign in on the paper's excesses.<sup>183</sup> Yet the accusations could no longer be limited to Xu and Pu alone,

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<sup>179</sup> Qin Benli. "Liu zai jiyi li de pianduan," p. 139. Xie Weiming. "Fanyou fengbao zhong de 'Beiban,'" p. 294.

<sup>180</sup> See "Yangmou qinliji," p. 29f. Other WHB staff fared much worse. Xie Weiming of the Beijing office, for example, spent years in the notorious Beiyuan 北苑 and Qinghe 清河 prison farms near Beijing and Tianjin. See Xie's "Fanyou fengbao zhong de 'Beiban,'" p. 298-300.

<sup>181</sup> "Xiang renmin qing zui."

<sup>182</sup> *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi. Wenhuibao shilüe*, p. 155f.

<sup>183</sup> I have found no evidence of disagreements between Xu and Qin, as the editorial suggests. The only exception is the two men's relationship with Ke Qingshi: while Xu obviously hated the "one-

the entire editorial board had to admit errors: “Naturally, the majority of people in our editorial department had held bourgeois news concepts themselves and were accustomed to life in the old ways; when they were hoodwinked by the flowery words and clever rhetoric of Xu Zhucheng and Pu Xixiu, they were infected by the political disease.” The paper admitted (or rather, it was made to admit by the Shanghai PD) in principle to a bourgeois reactionary line in newspaper making.

This aberration from the correct political line was indeed the paper’s gravest mistake: from the perspective of the anti-Rightist movement, class struggle was continuing even after the founding of the PRC – and it was nowhere as acute as in the superstructure. WHB had not guarded itself sufficiently against these dangers: “In the editorial department of a socialist newspaper, we must be constantly on alert to fight against bourgeois news concepts and standpoints – how can a stranger be allowed to sleep beside our bed? If we are not determined to wipe out bourgeois newspaper concepts, they are certain to be the source of endless trouble, and will bring about calamity upon calamity.” WHB had disregarded these warnings, and, according to the editorial’s interpretation, had become a victim of the bourgeoisie’s attempted take-over. The blame was to be found nowhere else, but at the paper itself. The last sentence of the media concept, the one emphasizing the media’s role as a weapon and site of class struggle, had become the single aspect dominating the discussion on the press.

A second editorial appearing on the following day addressed the question of the newspaper’s loyalty to the Party and the people: “What does the tradition of WHB stand for? True, in those dark past years of reactionary rule [before 1949] we had the courage to speak the words that the people wanted to speak, to launch a brave and merciless struggle against the reactionary regime. But the sources of this glorious tradition were: the Party, and the people. Without the leadership and the help of the Party this glorious tradition could not even be imagined.”<sup>184</sup> The leadership through the CCP is the precondition for all newspapers, no matter if

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voice-hall,” Qin seems to have been in close contact with Ke. This point notwithstanding, I would suggest that the editorial’s argument here was a last-minute (unsuccessful) effort of the Shanghai propaganda authorities to protect an able newspaper man like Qin Benli. With regard to Xu Zhucheng’s long absence from Shanghai, the argument of Xu promoting a more aggressive editorial policy than Qin does not sound convincing.

<sup>184</sup> “Tongqie gaizao ziji,” WHB, July 3, 1957.

they are Party or non-Party papers. It is the Party that represents the people, WHB's source of legitimacy.

Together with the two editorials confessing its mistakes, WHB published a lengthy two-part self-criticism, entitled "Our first steps of investigation" and signed "editorial board of our paper."<sup>185</sup> In this comprehensive examination of the mistakes WHB was said to have committed, the paper admitted numerous faults and confirmed the basic political line that had emerged in Beijing over the past weeks, when the anti-Rightist campaign gathered steam. First of all, the article affirms all the basic aspects of the media concept: "Socialist newspapers have different functions because of the division of labour. But, to stand firmly on the standpoint of the working class, to propagate and implement the Party policies, and to defend the interests of the working class and the entire nation – this is the common characteristic that all newspapers in a socialist country must display." The fundamental lines of the media concept, and especially their generally propagandistic nature, apply to both Party and non-Party papers. For WHB this means: "As a newspaper targeting the intellectuals we must ..., under the leadership of the Party, stand firmly on the standpoint of the working class, influence and help the intellectuals, make them step by step grasp Marxism-Leninism, and gradually establish the worldview of the working class, the Communist worldview. This is the basic task of our paper." The "basic task" has two aspects. The first concerns the paper's position and is an affirmation of the first sentence of the media concept: "The media must represent the unified, single voice of the party." Its special status as a paper targeting the intelligentsia notwithstanding, WHB must argue always from the perspective of the Party and the working class. Yet it is just this status that brings with it a burden even more onerous: it must help to educate and to enlighten the most backward portion of the population ("to assist the party, the avant-garde of the working class, to raise the consciousness of the people," as the third clause of the media concept says). After the founding of the PRC, in a reversal of the original situation, the ideologically most backward group of society is no longer the semi-literate peasants masses, but rather – the bourgeoisie.

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<sup>185</sup> "Women de chubu jiancha," WHB July 2-3, 1957.

But it is the last element of the media concept that was highlighted during the anti-Rightist campaign. The control over the media is so important because they might be used in class struggle – by both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. WHB now admitted to have “become the mouthpiece... of the Rightists.” Just as the CCP uses the media as a tool in its own struggle, the bourgeoisie had tried to usurp the newspapers: “Day after day, the newspapers meet with their numerous readers, they are a powerful ideological weapon. To realize their anti-Party, anti-people, anti-socialist goals, the Rightists begin their plottist activities exactly with usurping the leadership power of the newspapers.” This interpretation of WHB’s behaviour during the Hundred Flowers period explains the vehemence of the attacks now hurled against the paper. Its error was nothing short of a “line error” (*luxian cuowu* 路线错误), that is, WHB had embarked on the capitalist road.

This line error had manifested itself in numerous ways on WHB’s pages. The largest part of the article discusses in minute detail many of the debates, articles, and editorials of the past months, and that were now found to contain grave political mistakes. Among these is, for example, Xu Zhucheng’s article “The ‘wall’ can be brought down.” His frank description of WHB’s experience in overcoming the difficulties caused by the Party’s “division of labour” policy were now held against Xu; especially his effort to get rid of the former vice editor-in-chief Zhang Shuren was denounced. Similarly, Xu Junyuan’s article was said to “completely deny the achievements of our newspaper work since liberation.” Finally, the Zuo Ye affair was brought up against WHB. While the authors of the self-criticism admitted that Zuo’s behaviour had been incorrect, WHB was said to have played up the incident and instigated a major debate that resulted in some authors calling for “bourgeois ‘press freedom.’” While the interpretation of this process proceeds from the perspective of the anti-Rightist campaign, the description of the process itself – a minor incident being employed to raise a ever widening scope of problems – was not too far off the mark, as I have shown above.

Mao’s July 1 editorial had made it clear that the Party leadership wanted to more introspection from the paper; the charges were not limited to Pu Xixiu and Xu Zhucheng, who were made to bear the brunt of the attacks. Consequently, WHB pledged guilty of mistaken thinking and bourgeois influences across the board. “Quite a few comrades in the editorial department had serious bourgeois ideas

and serious bourgeois news concepts.” These ideas were a left-over from the journalists’ past experience:

In the editorial department of our newspaper, there are many so-called “old hands” coming from the old society. In the course of the thought reform movement, they made some initial criticism of their bourgeois ideas and their bourgeois news concepts, but they have not completed their transformation and they have not tried hard enough to study Marxism, to reform their thinking, and to grasp the communist worldview. The thoughts and feelings of many people have not yet shifted to the side of the working class.

WHB was still a far way from its basic task, as outlined at the beginning of the article: in order to remould the intellectuals’ thinking and to instil them with a Marxist worldview, the paper first of all had to grasp firmly this worldview itself. WHB’s earlier practice had shown its failure to do so, and in the future it would have to live up to its pledges – it would have to implement the media concept in the way the Party regarded as proper.

With the extensive self-criticism published on July 2 and 3, the anti-Rightist campaign was far from over for WHB. Many more condemnations of the paper’s behaviour during spring 1957 and the preceding period followed, but the arguments are mostly repetitive. WHB was forced to confess its “anti-Party, anti-people, and anti-socialist” crimes; many of these articles obviously distorted the truth, but WHB was given little room to manoeuvre. On August 22, the paper published a self-criticism of Xu Zhucheng that filled almost the entire page.<sup>186</sup> In a more or less mechanical way, Xu admitted to all the charges levelled against him and pledged to submit to the Party’s re-education, as was expected of him. His self-criticism centres around the accusation of “singing a different tune” (*chang duitaixi* 唱对台戏). The editorial line he had proposed for WHB “completely negated the public character of the people’s newspapers, was aimed to make WHB into a paper with a content totally different from the people’s newspapers, and to sing a different tune from the Party papers.” In doing so, he had violated the most important rule of the media concept, the leadership of the Party. Xu admits to opposing the CCP’s leadership and addresses in particular his squeezing out of Zhang Shuren and Sun Kuijun, the Party’s representatives at WHB whom Xu had prevented from returning to the paper after its 1956 relaunch. Xu mentioned in

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<sup>186</sup> “Wode fan dang zuixing.” The editor’s note to the article for the first time openly declared Xu Zhucheng a Rightist.

particular his May 19 article “The ‘wall’ can be brought down,” where he had presented his actions against Zhang and Sun as his own experience in “bringing down the wall” and recommended it for emulation. His insight now was that “in this way I ignored my own conscience, opposed them and squeezed them out, and thus in fact opposed the leadership of the Party.” Xu explained his deviation from the correct path by his mistaken adherence to bourgeois conceptions of newspaper making – ideas that long since been abolished.

Xu’s confession was the result of numerous criticism sessions in both Beijing and Shanghai. WHB underwent a protracted process of self-inspection and reform. A total of 21 people were denounced as Rightists, eleven of whom were criticized publicly. Seven out of ten journalists of WHB’s Beijing bureau were branded as Rightists.<sup>187</sup> The new leadership was publicly announced not before Spring 1958: Jin Zhonghua 金仲华, a vice-mayor of Shanghai, was transferred from *Xinwen ribao* 新闻日报 to become chief of office (*shezhang* 社长), while Chen Yusun, a WHB veteran, took over as editor-in-chief. With Liang Keping 梁柯平, a trusted Party member was placed in charge of the Beijing bureau.<sup>188</sup> Yet even the personnel changes could not wipe out WHB’s image as a rightist newspaper, and its print run declined to about 20-30,000.<sup>189</sup> From the political leadership WHB earned late recognition for the efforts to mend its ways. In a talk on October 13, 1957, Mao Zedong finally expressed satisfaction with the paper’s reaction to the July 1 editorial.<sup>190</sup>

### Conclusion

WHB was but one casualty of the anti-Rightist campaign – many other newspapers and many more journalists were equally affected, to varying degrees. In the weeks and months after the end of “blooming and contending,” the Party

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<sup>187</sup> For the numbers see *Wenhuibao baoshi yanjiushi. Wenhuibao shilüe*, p. 161.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>190</sup> “Jianding de xiangxin qunzhong de daduoshu” in *Mao Zedong xuanji* 5.480-95, here p. 486. The ordeal for WHB’s former crew, however, was far from over, and in particular during the Cultural Revolution, the old charges were brought back against them. See, for example, “Ba xinwen zhanxian de da geming jinxing daodi: pipan Zhongguo Heluxiaofu fangeming xiuzhengzhuyi de xinwen luxian.” The article, signed by “editorial department” (*bianjibu*) of the “two papers and one journal,” i.e. RMRB, Jiefangjun bao, and *Hongqi*, was published on Sept. 1, 1968.



worked to restore full control over the press; the literal interpretation of the CCP's media concept, with special stress on the concept's last element, or class struggle, was applied to all aspects of media life in the PRC.

Under the impression of the 'thaw' that followed Stalin's death and especially the CPSU's XX<sup>th</sup> Party congress, the Chinese Party leaders initially had hoped to address a number of problems that had accumulated since 1949 and by 1956 seemed to obstruct the CCP's ambitious project of the transition to socialist forms of economic management. The rigid forms of organization in particular were found to tie down the enthusiasm of many cadres and nurtured bureaucratic structures, thus hampering development. In the media sector, a lack of competition and a mechanical mode of studying the Soviet Union's (pre-1956, i.e. before the "Thaw") experience had made the press look monotonous and drab. The disappearing of competition had led to the journalists toeing the Party line and protecting their careers; the effectiveness of the newspapers as instruments of political propaganda and education had suffered enormously.

In the course of the Hundred Flowers movement, journalists – together with many other groups of intellectuals – were given an opportunity to talk openly about the structural problems that plagued the Chinese newspaper sector and to submit proposals on how to redress the situation. To jump-start reforms in the media sector, the CCP launched a reshuffle of its primary mouthpiece, RMRB. Other papers followed, and when WHB was relaunched in October 1956, it became a platform for experiments that the Party leaders hoped would shake up the media sector and provide new stimuli for its news work.

Only after Mao's Contradictions speech and further interventions of the Chairman, who even encouraged individual journalists such as Xu Zhucheng, did the intellectuals embrace the Hundred Flowers policy and 'blooming and contending' moved into high gears. Yet during May 1957, the movement gained a momentum of its own that was hard to control by the Party, who was surprised by the outpouring of criticism and the scope of the suggestions voiced in the debates. Journalists criticized the narrow interpretation of the media concept which in their eyes had become all but a straightjacket.

Probably the most contentious issue was the relationship between journalists and the Party; between the professional newspaper personnel and the

administrative bureaucracies. The Zuo Ye affair set in motion a discussion on the role of journalists in a cadre society such as the PRC: many newspaper people felt mistreated by the Party; they were looked upon with contempt by people whom they felt were outsiders with little understanding of the complexities of professional press work – people who drew their prestige from their political credentials. The divide between ‘red’ and ‘expert’ people inside the newspapers was characterized by Xu Zhucheng as a wall that had to be brought down if the newspapers were to unfold their full efficiency.

The newspaper people who dared to speak out did touch several central aspects of the media concept. At stake was, among other things, the understanding of the principle of Party leadership. In the course of the discussion, the need for direct overall control was questioned: journalists such as Xu Zhucheng hoped to demonstrate their loyalty to the CCP and its policies by way of their performance; the forms of loyalty proposed included loyal criticism – such as the Party had invited for its rectification campaign. Other issues concerned the variety of news: journalists wanted to present their readers with a greater diversity of themes and of news sources, and they hoped to present a more objective picture of Chinese society, instead of delivering a constant stream of positive reporting that in the long run would endanger the newspapers’ credibility with their audiences.

So was the CCP’s media concept challenged in the course of the Hundred Flowers movement? For all practical purposes, it was not. With the media concept, the CCP had imposed a comprehensive normative framework on the entire Chinese media sector, with the Party in a position of ultimate power. What happened during the debates of May 1957 was that intellectuals and journalists reacted to the Party’s initiative and called for a redefinition of the relationship between the Party and the journalists in the form of a liberal interpretation of the media concept. But – with a few exceptions, such as some of the opinions voiced at the Beijing and Shanghai meetings reported in WHB on May 17 – the Party’s leadership itself was not called into question. To the contrary, by “blooming and contending,” the newspaper people tried once more to show their loyalty to the Party by responding to the CCP’s latest policy shift: the Hundred Flowers campaign. They made use of the campaign on their own account to ask for better

working conditions and to demand more influence for themselves in the political process. But they did not oppose the CCP itself: even under the conditions of the Hundred Flowers it would have been unthinkable to deny the Party's leadership authority publicly. The mechanics of control, which I have discussed in chapter four, proved to be too deeply entrenched and thus prevented the journalists from more far-reaching proposals. To oppose the Party openly in writing could not be imagined – and even less to publish such opinions. Neither did the journalists give up the normative mission ascribed to their work. To bring enlightenment to the people's masses was the ultimate goal of both the CCP and the journalists throughout the campaign. What was at stake was the best way to do so: would the stress on political issues and ideology deliver quicker and more sustainable results, or could more diversity and openness have a mobilizing effect? Even Xu Junyuan's idea of "friends" learning from each other, that he used to illustrate the relationship of newspapers and readers, did emphasize the idea of learning.

Yet when the campaign went on and the discussion heated up, it did not help that the absolute majority of the press people stayed within the framework of the media concept. The Party, and especially Mao Zedong, decided to interpret the journalists' opinions as a betrayal of the Party and the Party's principles. The explanation for this turnaround ultimately lies in the media concept itself: its inherent tensions, a consequence of different influences that reached China in the late 1930s and early 1940s, led to the clash of summer 1957. With the concept's last aspect, the media's being both a weapon and a site of increased class struggle, the argument for the anti-Rightist campaign was created and clause (6) proved to be a fatal self-fulfilling prophecy: since the media were to be used as a weapon in this class struggle, any opinion seemingly at variance with a given viewpoint of the CCP could be interpreted as the first signs of an attack of the class enemy. This is what Yao Wenyuan did when he read the subtle details of WHB's page layout in a way that would fit the class struggle argument. As soon as the Party leadership, and in this case Mao Zedong, were convinced that opposition to the Party existed, a new, narrow interpretation of the media concept triumphed.

The onslaught of the anti-Rightist campaign wreaked havoc among the newspaper people. Entire editorial boards were denounced as Rightists, for the press had played a key role in the Hundred Flowers campaign. As a result, the

Party discarded its original goal of making the Chinese newspapers a more effective instrument of socialist construction in the PRC, a goal that both Party leaders like Liu Shaoqi and a young writer like Liu Binyan had discovered as immediately desirable. The direct consequences of the narrow interpretation of the media concept that emerged from the anti-Rightist campaign became visible during the Great Leap Forward, when the press failed to intervene and prevent, through loyal criticism, the worst of excesses.<sup>191</sup> Yet the freeze in the press sector was there to stay and prevailed until the end of the Cultural Revolution. The function of the newspapers and their status in relation to the Party could not be discussed for the next twenty years.

The question that remains is: why was WHB not closed down, given its blatant failures? There would certainly have been enough arguments for a quick dismantling of the paper, and doing so would probably have been easier than finding a new leadership – after all, practically all high posts had to be redistributed after the departure of Xu Zhucheng, Pu Xixiu, Qin Benli, and many others. Yet the Party decided not to scrap the newspaper. The reasons must probably be sought once again with Mao Zedong: over the past year, Mao had invested too much prestige in the paper; to close it down would amount to a loss of face for the Party leader. WHB's relaunch had been initiated and decided by the highest CCP authorities, if not by Mao himself. He had time and again come out publicly in support of WHB, especially when he felt betrayed by the Party's main mouthpiece, RMRB. Closing WHB or merging it with another Shanghai paper would have been an embarrassment for the Chairman. His personal involvement was responsible also for his disappointment with the paper's performance and finally for the wrath that speaks from the two editorials Mao wrote to denounce WHB. What was at stake was the prestige of the CCP, both domestically and internationally, as Mao indicated several months later, when he finally expressed satisfaction with WHB's efforts of self-criticism and reform: "We don't need to shut down papers as they did in Poland, all we need is to do is publish one or two editorials in the Party paper. In the case of WHB, we have written two editorials and criticized it; when the first

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<sup>191</sup> Compare the argument of Amartya Sen that a democratic system and a free press in India had been instrumental in preventing any major famine after the country's independence in 1947, whereas the Chinese political and ideological system – and the restrictions placed on the press – were directly responsible for the monumental dimensions of the 1958-60 famine. See Jean Drèze, Amartya Sen. *Hunger and Public Action*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 210ff.

proved not sufficient and did not solve the problem thoroughly, we wrote another one, and [the paper] changed itself... shutting down a paper only creates trouble.”<sup>192</sup> The CCP had avoided a Hungarian or Polish “solution.” The anti-Rightist campaign left the CCP with more power in the media sector than ever before.

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<sup>192</sup> “Jianding de xiangxin qunzhong de daduoshu” (dated Oct. 13, 1957) in *Mao Zedong xuanji* 5.480-95, here p. 486. On Oct. 2, little more than a week earlier, *Po prostu*, the most outspoken paper in Poland during the 1956-57 period had been closed on orders of Wladyslaw Gomulka, the First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party. See Tomasz Goban-Klas. *The Orchestration of the Media: The Politics of Mass Communications in Communist Poland and the Aftermath*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, p. 116.



## **Chapter Seven**

### **Bombard the Headquarters: The Red Guard Press of the Cultural Revolution**

*To overthrow a political power, it is always necessary, first of all, to create public opinion, to do work in the ideological sphere. This is true for the revolutionary class as well as for the counterrevolutionary class.  
(Mao Zedong, 8 August 1966)*

*The Red Guard newspapers have made a tremendously useful and valuable contribution to the experience of the proletarian press, a contribution that deserves to be seriously studied and explored by every revolutionary news worker. Let us loudly and with revolutionary enthusiasm praise this great new thing of historical significance, let us loudly and with revolutionary enthusiasm praise this great innovation in the history of the proletarian press!  
(Chen Chen. "In Praise of the Red Guard Newspapers," Sept. 1967)*

The Cultural Revolution remains one of the most contested events in modern Chinese history, a fundamental makeover of the basic social relations, a reformulation of the ideological framework and of many major intellectual categories, and a turning point for the institutional history of the PRC. The earliest programmatic attempt to define the Cultural Revolution declared: "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution now unfolding is a great revolution that touches people to their very souls and constitutes a new stage in the development of the socialist revolution in our country, a deeper and more extensive stage."<sup>1</sup> The Chinese nation's proceeding to this new stage could not leave the media unaffected. To the contrary, the Cultural Revolution had a profound impact on the media in the three aspects listed above: the media's role in society, the ideological underpinnings of the media's work, and the institutional framework under which the media operated. In fact, the media found themselves at the very centre of events. The "August 8 Decision" continues:<sup>2</sup>

At the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Party, Comrade Mao Tse-tung said: To overthrow a political power, it is always necessary, first of all, to create public opinion, to do work in the ideological sphere. This is true for the revolutionary class as well as for the counterrevolutionary class. This thesis of Comrade Mao Tse-tung has been proved entirely correct in practice.

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<sup>1</sup> "Zhongguo gongchangdang zhongyang weiyuanhui guanyu wuchanjieji wenhua dageming de jueding" (8 Aug., 1966). Quoted after Union Research Institute (ed.). *CCP Documents of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, 1966-1967*. Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1968, p. 42-54, here p. 42. Chinese text in *ibid.*, p. 33-41, here p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* The Mao quotation is this paragraph, which was soon elevated to programmatic status, will be discussed in detail below.

As an essential part of the superstructure – which is generally codeterminous with the propaganda-education *xitong* – the media are one of the focal points of the movement. The Cultural Revolution is a “cultural” revolution in the very sense of the word, aimed not at the economic basis of the socialist state, that had been thoroughly transformed in the 1950s, but rather at the superstructure, where newly emerging elements of the bourgeoisie are to be found. It is not surprising at all that the Cultural Revolution was launched with a newspaper article in November 1965, that the first institution to come tumbling down under the barrage of attacks in spring and summer 1966 was the Party’s Propaganda Department, and that the first work unit where “revolutionary rebels” (*geming zaofanpai*) seized power on 4 Jan. 1967, was the Shanghai daily *Wenhuibao*. What is the impact of the Cultural Revolution on the media? And how was the Party’s media concept affected, or what role did it play under the new circumstances?

During most of the decade preceding the Cultural Revolution, the media closely followed the trajectory of the Chinese polity. With the anti-Rightist Campaign, the CCP had reasserted full control over the media sector, closing those niches of public debate that had been opened up during the Hundred Flowers Movement. The logic of the anti-Rightist campaign emphasized the sixth element of the media concept, the idea that the media were both the Party’s tool in class struggle, and a major arena of class struggle. Stress on upholding the correct class standpoint and close association with the Party’s political line has been made responsible for the media’s willingness to accept at face value the overblown statistics during the Great Leap Forward, and the failure of the country’s newspapers to report on the excesses of the Great Leap and the ensuing large-scale famine.<sup>3</sup> Once the Party decided on a course of retrenchment to revive the agricultural and industrial sectors in 1961 and 1962, the intellectual sphere experienced a loosening of controls that led to a limited ‘thaw,’ a return to more pluralism of ideas, at the expense of politics.<sup>4</sup> Liu Shaoqi famously ordered to media to place more emphasis of entertainment, captured in the slogan

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<sup>3</sup> The argument relating to the press and responses to famine is developed, among others, in Jean Drèze and Amartya K. Sen. *Hunger and Public Action*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 210-15.

<sup>4</sup> Comp. Merle Goldman. *China’s Intellectuals: Advise and Dissent*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981, ch. 1-4.



*quweixing*.<sup>5</sup> Still under the impression of the anti-Rightist campaign, however, intellectuals and media personnel mostly decided not to question of the Party's policies openly, instead, they reverted to indirect means of allusions, mockery, and satire.<sup>6</sup> The genre of *zawen*, or satiric essays, surged in popularity; yet it did so less in literary journals than on the pages of the nation's pre-eminent newspapers.<sup>7</sup> Yet with Mao's call to "never forget class struggle" at the Tenth Plenum in September 1962 – the speech from which the "August 16 Decision" quotes – the ideological climate went into a downward spiral until Yao Wenyuan declared three years later: "The objective existence of class struggle will necessarily be reflected in this or that form in the ideological sphere, or through the pen of this or that writer. Regardless of whether this writer is conscious of it or not, this is an objective law which is independent of one's will."<sup>8</sup> Yao's attack on Beijing's vice-mayor Wu Han, one of the "Three Family Village" authors, the Cultural Revolution started, assaulting first the Party authorities in charge of the cultural sphere, and then the newspapers and journals that had printed in the early 1960s those plays and essays that were now interpreted as a conspiracy against the Communist Party and the socialist state.<sup>9</sup>

How did the Cultural Revolution affect the media? What did the upheaval in the ideological sphere mean for the definition of what the media are and what they are supposed to be? How did the Party's media concept fare once the very

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<sup>5</sup> Liu promoted the concept of *quweixing* for the first time in his conversation with journalists from Xinhua she in 1956. I discuss *quweixing* and its implications in more detail later in this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf G. Wagner. *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama: Four Studies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. Jonathan Unger (ed.). *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Deng Tuo's *Evening Chats in Beijing* (*Yanshan yehua*) were published on the pages of *Beijing wanbao* from March 1961 until Sept. 1962, while the famous column "Notes from the Three-Family Village" (*Sanjiacun zhaji*) appeared in *Qianxian*, the theoretical journal of the CCP Beijing Municipal Committee, from September 1961 to July 1964. "Notes" was co-authored by Deng Tuo, Beijing vice-mayor Wu Han, and Liao Mosha, who headed the UFWD of the Beijing Municipal Committee.

<sup>8</sup> Yao Wenyuan. "Ping xinbian lishiju Hai Rui ba guan," in *Wenhuibao*, 10 Nov. 1965. Translation taken from Harold C. Hinton (ed.). *The People's Republic of China, 1949-1979: A Documentary Survey*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1980, vol. 3, p. 1472..

<sup>9</sup> The primary target at RMRB was Deng Tuo. Deng had been replaced as the paper's editor-in-chief by Wu Lengxi in June 1957, but he remained deputy editor-in-chief until he was transferred to the CCP Beijing Municipal Committee a year later, where he was in charge of culture and education affairs. At the start of the Cultural Revolution, Deng's *Evening Chats in Beijing* and his other *zawen* ventures were singled out as his main offence. Once the hunt for the capitalist conspiracy grew, Lu Dingyi, the head of the Propaganda Department was identified as the black hand behind Deng Tuo. See Timothy Cheek. *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, ch. 4 (on Deng's purge), ch. 5 (on his *Evening Chats* and *Notes*), and ch. 6 (on the CR).

institutions crumbled away that had been so closely associated with it? A paradox emerges with view to the CCP's control of the press during the Cultural Revolution: the institutional structure that had been built over decades to make the media concept work, was rendered all but dysfunctional in the earliest months of the Cultural Revolution; the Propaganda Department was not rebuilt until 1977. At the same time, however, the Party never lost control of the press. Once freed from their institutional shackles, the newspapers did not become platforms of competing opinions or revoke their duty of speaking with a single voice for the Party, or the Party's highest representative, Mao Zedong. It is amazing to see that throughout the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, the media concept continued to dominate the agenda and the behaviour of the Chinese press. As I will show in this chapter, the Party's media concept became the defining ideology even for an entirely new type of paper that had never been under institutional control, the Red Guard papers. How is the continuing power of the media concept to be explained? In this chapter I argue that the flexibility inherent in the concept and the indirect means through which it had been implemented since 1949 made it adaptable even in a radically different polity; due to the indirect means of control introduced by the CCP in accordance with the media concept, the ideas themselves were tied so loosely to the institutions supporting them that they continued to persist even when the institutional apparatus collapsed. Consequently, while the cultural revolutionaries singled out class struggle as the single defining characteristic of their approach to the media, it is possible to show that each element of the media concept remained relevant in Cultural Revolution discourses on the media and their role.

This chapter starts with a general discussion of the press and its role in the early years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1969). With the emergence of wall posters and leaflets composed by Red Guards and rebel factions, soon to be followed by serial publications, including journals and newspapers, the structure of the Chinese public sphere underwent a significant shift. At the centre of these changes lies the issue of *xiaobao*, or Red Guard tabloids, and their position and functions within the press structure. In the second part of this chapter, I will turn to self-referential texts from the Red Guard press in a way similar to that of the previous chapter. Through a case study of one *xiaobao*, I will attempt to the

delineate the arguments used both denounce the pre-Cultural Revolution Chinese newspapers, and to define the role of the press, and in particular the Red Guard papers, in the new setting of the Cultural Revolution, in order to understand the reasons for the continued relevance of the Party's media concept even in the absence of a formal institutional structure of control in the propaganda sector.

### *Revolutionizing the Chinese Press*

The myth that during the Cultural Revolution all but a tiny handful of newspapers were shut down and the number of papers published reached the lowest level since 1949 is widespread in Chinese mainstream sources, and has been accepted at face value by a number of Western observers.<sup>10</sup> The idea of a 'dearth of newspapers,' however, is utterly wrong; nothing could be further from the truth. Early in the Cultural Revolution, and especially since January 1967, thousands of new papers appeared across the nation, not to speak of leaflets, handbills, and other collections of study materials. This explosion of publishing activity saw the amount of material published and circulating skyrocketing, to the point where even major newspapers such as WHB faced supply shortages of newsprint.<sup>11</sup> If estimates of more than 10,000 newspaper and periodical publications nationwide are correct, then the Cultural Revolution was the period not with the smallest, but arguably that with the largest number of publications by far, in all of twentieth-century China.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See for example Dai Bang. "Jianguo yilai baozhi gongzuo de huigu," in *Zhongguo xinwen nianjian 1983*. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, 1983, p. 16-19, here p. 18. Compare also the general assessment in Fang Hanqi (ed.). *Zhongguo xinwen shiye tongshi*. Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1999, vol. 3, p. 319. Zhao Yuezhi speaks of the Cultural Revolution as "the dark age of Chinese journalism." *Media, Market, and Democracy: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998, p. 32. For an especially farcical depiction of the Cultural Revolution see Hugo de Burgh. *The Chinese Journalist: Mediating Information in the World's Most Populous Country*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, p. 65-62.

<sup>11</sup> In Shanghai, consumption of newsprint soared 70 per cent in a single month, from December 1966 to January 1967, rising from 162 tons to 272 tons, a rate that alarmed the Shanghai authorities. See Jin Dalu. "Shanghai wenge yundong zhong de qunzhong baokan," in *Shilin* 2005.6, p. 101-12, here p. 101.

<sup>12</sup> The National Library in Beijing holds over 2,600 different *xiaobao*; this collection, however, is probably incomplete, especially with regard to smaller papers published in the provinces. The 10,000 estimate comes from Chen Donglin. "'Wenge zuzhi baokan dang'an yu dangdai Beijing shi yanjiu,'" in Beijing shi dang'anguan (ed.). *Dang'an yu Beijing shi: Guoji xueshu taolunhui lunwen ji*. Beijing: Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe, 2003, vol. 1, p. 386-400, here p. 386.

The ‘dearth of newspapers’ myth hinges on the question of how *bona fide* newspapers or periodicals are defined. The number of 43 newspapers in print 1967 nationwide, given by official statistics, is a retroactive application of the reform era view that only papers properly registered and approved for publication by the provincial and national Party and government authorities count as publications.<sup>13</sup> This view, however, was not shared during the most crucial phase of the Cultural Revolution, neither were there any functioning organs that could have administered the registration of new papers: the Propaganda Department had been rendered dysfunctional after the ouster of its head, Lu Dingyi, and the denunciation of the Department as the ‘Demon’s Den’ (Yanwang dian 阎王殿), an appellation coined by Mao.<sup>14</sup> The Ministry of Culture, which had exercised oversight over publishing affairs until 1966, had ceased to function, too. With the discrediting of the CCP’s formal institutional apparatus, aspiring new publications were seeking and receiving alternative sources of legitimacy: repeated affirmations from the Cultural Revolution Small Group (CRSG) and its members (mostly Jiang Qing, Chen Boda, and Kang Sheng), from the Central Committee, and from Mao Zedong provided the “mass organization publications” (*qunzhong zuzhi baokan* 群众组织报刊) with sufficient legitimacy to function as officially approved players in the public sphere.

The origins of the Red Guard papers, or, as they were commonly called, *xiaobao* 小报, can be traced back to the wall posters (*dazibao* 大字报) that had been the most important means of public communication at the grass roots level in the early months of the Cultural Revolution. On August 5, Mao wrote “Bombard the Headquarters – My Big-Character Poster,” praising the wall posters of the past weeks.<sup>15</sup> Mao’s public endorsement not only lent the medium itself an unprecedented degree of legitimacy, but also symbolized the coming down of the barrier between official and unofficial publications: not only can newspaper content

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<sup>13</sup> The number of newspapers is officially now given as 343 in 1965, dropping to 49 in 1966, 43 in 1967, and 42 in 1968 and 1969. Guojia tongjiju guomin jingji zonghe tongji si (ed.). *Xin Zhongguo wushi nian tongji ziliao huibian*. Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1999, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> In March 1966, Mao complained to Kang Sheng, Jiang Qing, and Zhang Chunqiu about disobedience from the Propaganda Department; in this context he called for a “smashing of the Demon’s Den and releasing the small devils.” See Renmin ribao wuchuanjieji gemingpai, Shoudou xinwen pian lianluozhan (ed.). *Xinwen zhanxian liang tiao luxian douzheng dashiji, 1948-1966*. N.p., n.d., p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> “Paoda silingbu: Wo de yi zhang dazibao,” in RMRB 5 Aug. 1967..

appear in wall posters, but wall posters themselves can enter the official press. From wall posters and leaflets, now endowed with public power, it was a small step to the first Red Guards publications. The borders here are fluid again: while the first new papers appeared in early September 1966,<sup>16</sup> Red Guards in a number of schools and universities had appropriated the editorial power of school organs and had made them their mouthpieces.<sup>17</sup> Since October 1966, Red Guard papers began to mushroom across the nation.

The retroactive collective dismissal of the Red Guard press suggests that the unofficial Cultural Revolution publications were short-lived, irregular, and poorly edited pamphlets that had little in common with what the Party regarded as proper newspapers before 1966 and after 1978. This characterization is true for a fair amount of Red Guard papers, but by no means for all. The term *xiaobao* is in itself misleading: it refers in most cases to the tabloid format in which most Red Guard papers were printed (for lack of printing facilities and broadsheet newsprint), and not to the actual content or social status of the papers. One quite common characteristic of the Red Guard press is their irregular publication. While most of them apparently aspired to a more regular – biweekly, weekly, or three-day – publication schedule, the actual publication dates were often dictated by access to printing facilities and supplies of newsprint, and to the general volatility of the political situation, especially in the course of 1967. It should be remembered, however, that the same conditions also affected some of the most prominent ‘official’ publications, such as the Central Committee organ *Hongqi*.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The two earliest papers are said to be *Hongweibing bao* (ed. Shoudu da-zhuan yuanxiao hongweibing silingbu) and *Hongweibing* (ed. Beijing liu zhong hongweibing). Both papers published their first editions on 1 Sept. See Chen Donglin. “‘Wenge’ zushi baokan dang’an,” p. 387.

<sup>17</sup> The most celebrated case is that of Beida. On August 22, Red Guards had taken over the school publication of Beida and renamed it *Xin Beida*. Mao Zedong personally wrote the three characters for the masthead, providing the new publication with maximum legitimacy. On 24 August, RMRB published an editorial hailing the birth of this new publication as a major victory: ‘Huanhu *Xin Beida* zai douzheng zhong dansheng.’”

<sup>18</sup> Actual publication schedule for *Hongqi* and *Xinwen zhanbao*, 1967:

HQ	XWZB	HQ	XWZB	HQ	XWZB	HQ	XWZB
1: 01/01			3: 05/14	11: 07/09	8: 07/09		16: 09/14
2: 01/16		7: 05/20			9: 07/17	14: 09/17	17: 09/15
3: 02/03		8: 05/23	4: 05/23	12: 08/01	10: 07/30		18: 09.21
4: 03/01		9: 05/27	5: 06/01	13: 08/17	11: 08/12		19: 09/28
5: 03/30			6: 06/14		12/13:08/23	15: 10/06	
	1: 04/28	10: 06/21			14: 09/01		20: 10/18
6: 05/08	2: 05/06		7: 06/30		15: 09/03	16: 11/23	

The majority of the Red Guard papers were indeed short-lived: many ceased publication after a few or even a single issue, often due to shifts in the composition of factional alliances, and later to the efforts of provincial and national authorities to rein in the proliferation of publishing by mass organizations. A number of Red Guard papers, however, proved relatively long-lived: well-respected Red Guard publications that were often closely associated with the CRSG, such as *Xin Beida* or the two papers named *Jinggangshan* (published by Red Guards at Tsinghua University and Beijing Normal University), lasted well into 1968 and sometimes even longer.<sup>19</sup> The most resilient *xiaobao*, the Shanghai-based *Gongren zaofan bao* 工人造反报, was established in December 1966 and closed its doors on 15 April, 1971 (more on this paper below).<sup>20</sup>

The quality of printing and editing, too, varies significantly among the heterodox body of the Red Guard press. Small papers, especially those published by individual factions at the work unit level had to resort to mimeograph equipment to print their publications, often on very poor, locally produced paper. The larger rebel organizations, however, forced the erstwhile Party authorities in their respective jurisdictions to approve them access to financial support, a practice that was tearing gaps into local budgets and that worried the leadership.<sup>21</sup> With these funds, the Red Guards could secure access to high quality newsprint and to printing facilities – after the closing of many pre-1966 publications, many presses stood idle and could accept printing jobs from various rebel organizations. Even where Red Guards did receive no funding for their publications, most papers were profitable, since they were sold on the streets and incurred no personnel costs, as writing and editing was performed by the publishers themselves, usually on a voluntary basis.<sup>22</sup> Most of the larger Red Guard papers were printed with lead letters, which allowed for a clear print face; some of the largest even used

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The comparison between *Hongqi* and *Xinwen zhanbao*, a *xiaobao*, shows that the latter in fact observed a more regular publication schedule than the CC's theoretical organ.

<sup>19</sup> *Xin Beida* was founded on 22 Aug. 1966 and ceased publication on 17 Aug. 1968; in the two years of its existence, it published 200 issues. The Qinghua *Jinggangshan* was established on 1 Dec. 1966 and closed down on 19 Aug. 1968, after 157 issues. The Beishida *Jinggangshan* published a total of 120 issues between 9 Dec. 1966 and 21 June 1968.

<sup>20</sup> Dates taken from Zhao Feng. *Wenhua dageming cidian*. Taipei: Taiwan donghua shuju, 1993, p. 371f. See further Jin Dalu. "Shanghai wenge yundung zhong de qunzhong baokan," p. 104.

<sup>21</sup> Chen Donglin. "'Wenge' zuzhi baokan dang'an," p. 393.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 394.

industrial rotating presses that could produce print runs of over 10,000 copies.<sup>23</sup> The largest circulation paper, *Shoudu hongweibing*, published seven local editions besides its main edition in Beijing, and in its heyday printed a staggering 500,000 copies.<sup>24</sup> Chen Donglin has observed the exceptionally high quality of editing in most Red Guard publications: at a time when even small cases of inattention, such as a wrong or missing character, could bring about charges of intentional manipulation and secret opposition to the Party line, the editors of the Red Guard papers invested a disproportional amount of time into the proofreading process.<sup>25</sup>

A striking characteristic of many Red Guard papers is how similar their visual appearance is to that of the ‘official’ papers: in many cases, only the tabloid format differentiates the layout of the Red Guard publications from newspapers like RMRB, as the illustrations below show:



III. 1a: *Jinggangshan* (Beishida) III. 1b: *Renmin ribao*

III. 1c: *Xinwen zhanbao*

The *xiaobao* were closely modelled after the *dabao*, the large papers. The calligraphy of the papers’ masthead is almost without exception borrowed from Mao Zedong, who had also written the masthead for RMRB and other PRC

<sup>23</sup> On printing processes see *ibid.* In May 1967, print runs for the large Red Guard papers in Shanghai varied between 70,000 and 150,000. See Jin Dalu. “Shanghai wenge yundong zhong dequnzhong baokan,” p. 103.

<sup>24</sup> *Shoudu hongweibing* was founded on 13 Sept. 1966; in spring 1967, however, its publisher, a consortium of Red Guard organization, split into two factions that resulted in a split of the paper as well. The last issue was published on 6 Sept. 1967. On *Shoudu hongweibing* see Chen Donglin. “Wenge’ zuzhi baokan dang’an,” p. 395f.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 393.

papers.<sup>26</sup> In emulation of RMRB, quotations from Chairman Mao are an indispensable element of the front pages of most Red Guard papers; quotations from the Chairman in the text are set in bold print, a practice that RMRB had started, too, in January 1967.<sup>27</sup> While the Red Guard press rarely published Xinhua despatches, it took up the practice of reprinting important editorials from the 'large papers,' especially RMRB, *Jiefangjun bao*, and *Hongqi*, the 'two papers and one journal' (*liang bao yi kan* 两报一刊) that were supposed to act as the voice of the CRSG. Articles written by the paper's own staff are usually marked as 'ben bao xun' 本报讯, another practice they learned from the main papers. Finally, all *xiaobao* paid attention to the practice of publishing founding editorials (*fakan ci* 发刊词), editorials (*shelun* 社论), and commentator articles (*ben bao pinglun yuan* 本报评论员) to draw attention to important themes and make clear the fundamental positions of their paper.

The desire of the Red Guard papers to model themselves after the 'big papers' raises the question of the relations between 'official' and 'unofficial' publications and the structure of the public sphere at the height of the Cultural Revolution. In a recently published article, Jin Dalu has introduced a segmentation of the Cultural Revolution press into four layers that offers a useful starting point for discussing the changes in the Chinese public sphere.<sup>28</sup> At the topmost level, Jin defines the remaining 'official' newspapers, such as RMRB or, in the case of Shanghai, WHB and JFRB.<sup>29</sup> These papers, originally identified as the paragons of a capitalist 'black line' (*hei xian* 黑线) in the news sector, had been reformed after the onset of the Cultural Revolution, and especially after the January power seizures, and had thus regained their authoritative status. Secondly, there are a

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<sup>26</sup> The precedent set by *Xin Beida* has been mentioned above. Papers not adopting Mao's calligraphy as a legitimizing symbol were the rare exception. The first issue of *Shoudu hongweibing* prints the name of the paper in a regular type font, but the editors immediately recognized their mistake. From the second issue on, they adopted Mao's calligraphy. The provenance of the characters can be easily identified with the help of Zhongyang dang'anguan (ed.). *Mao Zedong shufa da zidian*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993. Comp. also Richard Curt Kraus. *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991; on the Cultural Revolution see p. 96-108, the *Xin Beida* masthead is mentioned on p. 104.

<sup>27</sup> Mao quotations appeared in bold print in RMRB starting from 1 Jan. 1967. For some time in late 1966, RMRB had experimented with setting Mao quotations in italics.

<sup>28</sup> "Shanghai wenge yundong zhong de qunzhong baokan."

<sup>29</sup> The city's third major paper, *Xinmin wanbao*, had been closed on 22 Aug. 1966. Fang Hanqi (ed.). *Zhongguo xinwen shiye biannian shi*. Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2000, vol. 2, p. 1831.



significant number of large and relatively stable Red Guard papers, usually published by broad coalitions of rebels organizations, often on a city-wide level, or by the major Red Guard groups in the most prestigious universities, such as *Xin Beida* and *Jinggangshan*. The largest, third layer is composed of the numerous papers and publications put out by various factions and rebel groups, usually at the work unit level, that were in many cases less concerned with national themes, such as the denunciation of Liu Shaoqi and other top capitalist leaders, than with the struggle against former leading personnel within the work units, and with factional battles and infighting on the grassroots level. At the bottom of this hierarchy, a hard-to-define number of underground publications is to be found. These mostly very short-lived papers, often produced by anonymous sources, contained either heterodox and dissenting views, or indulged in gossip, slander, and sometimes pornography. In the ongoing chaos, especially of summer and fall 1967, and in the absence of a functioning institutional structure, motives other than revolutionizing the nation appeared, including that of profit making. The number of these publications, however, remained small throughout; only extremely few examples of this sort did ever achieve publicity.<sup>30</sup> This does not mean, however, that provincial and national authorities did not point to this fourth kind of publications during periodic attempts to rein in the grassroots publication activities.

The borders between these four layers of the Cultural Revolution public sphere, however, were fluid; the different genres of papers are characterized less by their distinction than by their interaction. First of all, the 'official' papers did regularly reprint articles from various Red Guard sources, usually those of the second kind;<sup>31</sup> these papers, in turn, from time to time invited members from

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<sup>30</sup> The best-known case of public dissent in the early Cultural Revolution is the long essay "Chushen lun" by Yu Luoke, that caused a sensation when it appeared in *Zhongxue wengebao* on 18 Jan. 1967. The ensuing debate catapulted this paper to prominence until Qi Benyu, a member of the CRSG, publicly criticized the essay and its author on 14 Apr. See Chen Donglin. "Wenge' zuzhi baokan dang'an," p. 396f. On the Yu Luoke incident see further Xu Xiao, Ding Dong, Xu Youyu (ed). *Yu Luoke: Yizuo yu huiyi*. Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 1998.

<sup>31</sup> On 1 Feb. 1967, for example, RMRB, JFJB, and *Hongqi* reprinted an editorial from *Shoudu hongweibing*: "Dadao 'si' zi, shixing geming zaofanpai da lianhe" (orig. publ. on 25 Jan.). RMRB also published articles from *Xin Beida* and the two *Jinggangshan* papers. See Chen Donglin. "Wenge' zuzhi baokan dang'an," p. 395. Comp. also Fan Hanqi (ed). *Zhongguo xinwen shiye tongshi*, vol. 3, p. 339f.

different work units to write articles for them,<sup>32</sup> thus crossing the border between the second and third kinds of papers. Gossip that had been picked up by the underground papers sometimes made it into the more respectable *xiaobao*. In the other direction, Red Guard papers on all levels reprinted articles and editorials from the top papers on their own pages, especially when doing so would bolster their own particular political positions.<sup>33</sup> In this way, the *xiaobao* entered into a symbiotic relationship with the *dabao*, functioning both as feeders and as transmitters for the 'official' press.

A particularly interesting case is that of the well-known *Gongren zaofanbao*. Founded in Shanghai on 28 Dec. 1966, it became the organ of the Shanghai Workers' Revolutionary Rebels General Headquarters (Shanghai gongren geming zaofan zong silingbu, short Gongzongsi), the largest radical mass organization in the city, led by Wang Hongwen.<sup>34</sup> After the January 1967 power seizure in Shanghai, Gongzongsi had become the de facto dominating force of Shanghai politics; *Gongren zaofanbao* was therefore sold publicly since February and in August was approved to enter the nationwide newspaper distribution system of the Chinese Post.<sup>35</sup> Many work units consequently ordered regular subscriptions of *Gongren zaofanbao*; a January 1968 report put the figure of such publicly paid (*gongfei* 公费) subscriptions at 70,000, out of a total regular print run of 165,000. The high rate of *gongfei* subscriptions signals that by that time the paper was no longer seen as a *xiaobao*; in fact, since December 1967 the Shanghai authorities

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, *Xinwen zhanbao* 8 (9 July 1967), p. 1, 2; *Xinwen zhanbao* 9 (16 July), p. 1; *Xinwen zhanbao* 10 (30 July), p. 3; *Xinwen zhanbao* 11 (12 Aug.), p. 3; *Xinwen zhanbao* 12/13 (23 Aug.), p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> The following examples are taken from the Beishida *Jinggangshan*: "Duoqu xin de shengli," editorial, *Hongqi* 1966.16, p. 14-16, repr. *Jinggangshan* 2 (19 Dec. 1966), p. 1; "Fandui jingjizhuyi, fensui zichanjieji fandong luxian de xin fanpu," joint editorial with RMRB, *Hongqi* 1967.2, p. 19-21, repr. *Jinggangshan* 5 (12 Jan. 1967), p. 1-2; "Zhua geming, cu shengchan: chedi fensui zichanjieji fandong luxian de xin fanpu – gei Shanghai quan shi renmin shu," orig. WHB 5 Jan. 1967, repr. with editor's note in RMRB, 4 Jan., 1967, repr. *Jinggangshan* 5 (12 Jan. 1967), p. 2-3; Lin Jie. "Zai wuchanjieji wenhua da geming zhong huo xue huo yong Mao zhuxu zhuzuo," *Hongqi* 1967.2, p. 42-43, repr. *Jinggangshan* 9 (28 Jan. 1967), p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> On Gongzongsi see Li Xun. *Da bengkuai: Shanghai gongren zaofanpai xingwang shi*. Taipei: Shibao wenhua, 1996, p. 73-100 and passim; id. "Gongren jieji lingdao yiqie? 'Wenge' zhong Shanghai 'Gongren zaofanpai' ji gongren jieji de diwei," in *Dangdai Zhongguo yanjiu* 2006.2, p. 44-56; Elizabeth J. Perry and Li Xun. *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1996, p. 29-70 and passim; Elizabeth J. Perry. *Patrolling the Revolution: Worker Militias, Citizenship, and the Modern Chinese State*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006, p. 212-14 and 239-40; Ye Yonglie. *Wang Hongwen zhuan*. Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 1993, p. 75-81 and passim.

<sup>35</sup> Jin Dalu. "Shanghai wenge yundong zhong de qunzhong baokan," p. 111.

were generally referring to the “three papers:” with WHB and JFRB, *Gongren zaofanbao* thus formed the troika of the radical press in Shanghai, becoming an official organ of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee.<sup>36</sup> It enjoyed this prestige until its demise by order of the CCP Shanghai Municipal Committee on 15 April, 1971.<sup>37</sup> The case of *Gongren zaofanbao* shows that even the border between the ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ press was, to a certain extent, permeable: it was possible for a *xiaobao* to become a *dabao*.

The public sphere of the Cultural Revolution (at least during the period from mid 1966 to mid 1968) must thus be regarded as a complex space with a very large number of different players, in different categories. The interaction of these players and the permeability of the border separating the different categories makes clear that the question of the legitimacy of the ‘unofficial’ papers is much more difficult than the retroactive exclusion of the *xiaobao* tries to suggest. The publishers of the *xiaobao* could boast legitimacy for their publications within the polity of the Cultural Revolution; this legitimacy was derived from the recognition extended to them by top Party leaders, including Mao Zedong. The strong reliance on personalized sources of legitimacy and the lack of an institutionalized guarantee for their existence, however, made their status vulnerable and highly volatile. The lower an ‘unofficial’ publication ranged on the scale introduced above, the more likely it was to be shifted from the ‘legal’ to the ‘illegal’ category by political events beyond their control. In such an instable setting, a major concern for the more theoretically oriented of the Red Guard papers was to explain their legitimacy to the public, a topic I will come back to in the next section of this chapter.

The official line towards the ‘unofficial papers’ was subject to great fluctuations during the crucial years of 1967 and 1968. A major turning point were the power seizures at WHB and JFRB in early January 1967, followed by the takeover of press organs across the nation. On January 19, RMRB reprinted a WHB editorial “Long Live the Rightful Revolutionary Rebellion,” and followed three days later with its own editorial “Proletarian Revolutionaries Unite, Seize the Power from the Capitalist Roaders!,” thus boosting the drive to emulate the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>37</sup> For further information on *Gongren zaofanbao* see the short entry in Zhao Feng (ed.). ‘*Wenhua dageming’ cidian*, p. 371f.; and Li Xun. “Gongren jieji lingdao yiqie?”

example of the Shanghai papers.<sup>38</sup> The takeover of editorial power by the rebel factions was a sign that mass involvement in the running of newspapers was the line of the day, while the old principle that newspapers were produced by specialists was to be reconsidered; this in turn strengthened the position of the *xiaobao*, which defined themselves as publications of the masses (qunzhong zuzhi baokan 群众组织报刊) in the first place. The chaos following the ‘January Storm,’ however, seems to have severely affected the proper functioning of the press. In the course of general retrenchment in March, the CC issued a document that tried to limit the influence of diverse rebel factions on the provincial newspapers and imposed restrictions on what could be reported.<sup>39</sup>

In May 1967, the central leadership for the first time acknowledged the Red Guard press in an official document. Issued in the name of the CC, the “Opinions Regarding Improvements in the Propaganda of Publications by the Revolutionary Mass Organizations,” were an attempt to establish rules for the rapidly proliferating *xiaobao*.<sup>40</sup> Four of the “Opinions” seven points concern bans on certain kinds of content: (1) the *xiaobao* are forbidden to publish any speeches, orders, or directives of Mao Zedong, Lin Biao, the CC, or the Central Military Commission that have not yet been officially issued; (2) any attacks against the PLA are forbidden; (3) state secrets of all kinds must be carefully guarded; (4) international issues and foreign affairs are the exclusive terrain of the Centre and are off limits for the mass organizations and their papers. Two of the remaining points try to regulate the paper’s content: article seven asks the Red Guard papers not to propagate gossip and “street talk” (*malu xinwen* 马路新闻), while article five requests that the publishers uphold the dignity of the press and to refrain from printing indecent and vulgar “yellow news;” instead, the criticism of capitalist

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<sup>38</sup> “Geming zaofan you li wansui,” in RMRB, 19 Jan., 1967; “Wuchan jieji gemingpai da lianhe, duozou zibenzhuyi daolu dangquanpai de quan!” in RMRB, 22 Jan. 1967. The 19 Jan. reprint was accompanied by RMRB’s own endorsement of the power seizures in Shanghai’s premier papers: “Rang Mao Zedong sixiang zhanling baozhi zhendi,” RMRB, 19 Jan., 1967.

<sup>39</sup> “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu ge sheng, shi, zizhi qu baozhi de ji xiang yijian” (16 Mar. 1967) [Zhongfa (67) 104], in *Zhonggong zhongyang wenjian huibian*, 1966.5-1968.5, n.p., 1968, quoted after Song Yongyi (ed.). *Zhongguo wenhua dageming wenku* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Hong Kong: Xianggang Zhongwen daxue Zhongguo yanjiu fuwu zhongxin, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gaijin geming qunzhong zuzhi de baokan xuanchuan de yijian” (14 May 1967) [Zhongfa (67) 157], in *Zhonggong zhongyang bangongting, Guowuyuan mishuting wenhua geming lianhe jiedaishi* (ed.). *Wuchan jieji wenhua dageming you guan wenjian huibian*. Beijing: 1967, vol. 3, quoted after Song Yongyi (ed.). *Zhongguo wenhua dageming wenku*.

readers should concentrate on political and ideological issues. By pointing out the correct direction of criticism, however, the document stresses the denunciation of various capitalist readers as one of the main functions of the 'unofficial' press and thus defines their task within the larger public sphere.

In this respect, article one of the "Opinions" goes the furthest, by delineating the editorial line of the Red Guard press: "The papers of the revolutionary mass organizations shall strictly follow the instructions of Chairman Mao, vice Chairman Lin, the CC, and the Central Military Commission; they shall consult the important editorials and commentaries of RMRB, *Hongqi*, and JFJB for their own propaganda."<sup>41</sup> Tying the editorial position of the 'unofficial' press closely to that of the main papers, the Party Centre hoped to provide clear instructions for the papers' editorial position. In the absence of a functioning institutional structure for the direction of the press, the papers under direct control of the CRSG assume part of this function. The interaction between *dabao* and *xiaobao* thus lends the latter legitimacy. The most explicit endorsement of the Red Guard press, however, can be found at the very beginning of the document:<sup>42</sup>

To all central departments, the Party committees at the various levels, the revolutionary committees of the provinces and cities, the military regions, the Party committees in the military subregions, and all revolutionary mass organizations:  
In the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the various papers and leaflets compiled and printed by revolutionary mass organizations are playing an important role on the propaganda front.

The "Opinions," through both its title and this introduction, do thus unequivocally acknowledge the *xiaobao* as an essential part of the country's media apparatus. The pattern of this recognition does in fact follow closely that of the official endorsement of their publishers, the Red Guards: the "8-8 Circular" from August 1966 had recognized the Red Guards as an essential instrument of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>43</sup> Although formed spontaneously and thus outside of the Party's formal organizational structure, they were declared a product of the historical circumstances and were justified in their existence through Mao's personal attention and their loyalty to the goals of the Cultural Revolution. In the same way, the propaganda instruments of the Red Guards, the *xiaobao*, had early on

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> "Zhongguo gongchangdang zhongyang weiyuanhui guanyu wuchanjieji wenhua dageming de jueding" (8 Aug., 1966), p. 43 (English) and 34 (Chinese).

received Mao's personal support, such as through his writing of *Xin Beida's* masthead. Now the Red Guard papers obtained endorsement in writing from the Party Centre. At the same time, the document shows tentative steps to incorporate the *xiaobao* into the larger media system of the PRC: the "Opinion's" four points banning certain types of content are notably similar to the kind of content regulations that have been discussed in chapter four; their appearance in the 1967 document suggests the Party's efforts to extend the mechanics of media control to the 'unofficial' press as well. With its generally positive appraisal and the concrete prescriptions, the "Opinions" are an attempt to make the *xiaobao* a permanent element of the larger structure of the state-controlled public sphere.

The "Opinions" gave Red Guard organizations across the nation and their publications a strong boost. The *xiaobao* received further impetus from the tide of criticism that began after the 'Wuhan incident' of July 1967, when the Cultural Revolution entered one of its most radical phases.<sup>44</sup> On August 14, a document was issued in the name of the CC called "Circular on the Problem of Criticising by Name in the Newspapers."<sup>45</sup> The "Circular" published an extensive list of altogether 55 senior officials that could be criticized by name in newspapers on the national and provincial level. It declared: "In order to link this revolutionary great criticism even closer with the struggle-criticism-transformation in the various districts and units, it is necessary to criticise publicly and by name in the national and local press a number of capitalist roaders in the central organs, the CC regional bureaus, and the province and city-level Party committees."<sup>46</sup> For the *xiaobao*, which all along had taken a more liberal attitude with regard to criticizing by name, the new wave of public criticism provided the opportunity step up the denunciation of various capitalist roaders, revisionists, and counterrevolutionaries in their respective jurisdictions – "revolutionary great criticism" had been their main

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<sup>44</sup> On 20 July, 1967, two members of the CRSG, Wang Li and Xie Fuzhi (the minister of public security) who had been sent to Wuhan to mediate between radical and conservative mass organizations, were detained by troops loyal to Chen Zaidao, the commander of the Wuhan military region. The insurgence was ended by Zhou Enlai, who was dispatched to Wuhan. In the wake of the incident, the city was occupied by large contingents of PLA forces and Chen Zaidao was purged; more importantly, violence across the nation flared up again, with army units in many places becoming the latest target of attacks.

<sup>45</sup> "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu zai baokan shang dianming pipan wenti de tongzhi" (14 Aug. 1967) [Zhongfa (67) 251], in Union Research Institute (ed.). *CCP Documents of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, p. 495f (English translation on p. 497-99).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495 (English trsl. p. 497).

occupation in the past, and the May 14 “Opinions” had confirmed them in this function. The renewed call from the Centre for criticism in August mentioned only the central and provincial papers, but the document’s distribution key included “all revolutionary mass organizations;” the latter euphorically greeted the news from Beijing with a tide of denunciations that swept through all kinds of *xiaobao* in late August and early September.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, protracted factional struggles, the stalemate in the process of forging new interim organs of power sharing (the Revolutionary Committees 革命委员会), and armed clashes across the nation continued to worry the leadership in Beijing. The floating population of revolutionary rebels who were participating in factional conflicts in other regions were a particular cause of concern for the moderate parts of the Party leadership. On 30 June, 1967, the Beijing Municipal Revolutionary Committee had published a set of measures calling on out-of-city Red Guards to return to their home places and to confine the activities of mass organizations to their campuses and work units, a step that, if it were followed through, would have greatly influenced the publication of *xiaobao*, which were designed to draw larger publicity to their immediate issues of concern.<sup>48</sup> The Beijing Revolutionary Committee reiterated its points in a proclamation dated September 8, in short and unequivocal language:<sup>49</sup>

(1) In accordance with directives from the Centre, people from all places who have come to Beijing (with the exception of those invited by the Centre to discuss problems) must promptly and without exception return to their home places and wage revolution there.

(2) Out-of-town people are forbidden to set up liaison stations in universities and schools, organs, and work units in Beijing, and they are not allowed to publish newspapers in Beijing. Violators will be closed down by the Revolutionary Committee.

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<sup>47</sup> To cite but one example, *Xuanchuan zhanbao* published five issues in the three weeks between August 23 and September 15, more than twice its usual average. Compare the table in note 18 above. Among those criticized by name were Liu Shaoqi and Tao Zhu, but also Mu Xin, the editor-in-chief of GMRB, and Zhao Yiya, the editor-in-chief of the PLA organ JFJB. The names of the latter two had not appeared on the list in the August 14 “Circular.”

<sup>48</sup> Beijing shi geming weiyuanhui jiedaizu. “Beijing shi geming weiyuanhui dui wen-jiao weisheng fangmian ruogan juti wenti de jieshi” (30 June 1967), quoted after Song Yongyi (ed.). *Zhongguo wenhua dageming wenku*.

<sup>49</sup> “Beijing shi geming weiyuanhui, Beijing weishuqu silingbu bugao” (8 Sept. 1967), in Zhonggong zhongyang bangongting, Guowuyuan mishuting wenhua dageming lianhe jiedaishi (ed.). *Wuchanjieji wenhua dageming youguan wenjian huibian (di si ji)*. Beijing: 1967, quoted after quoted after Song Yongyi (ed.). *Zhongguo wenhua dageming wenku*.

The document entrusted the military to enforce the regulations. In the wake of the purge of the “516 Group” and the reorganization of the CRSG,<sup>50</sup> regional authorities across the nation stepped up pressure to rein in Red Guard factionalism and moved to suppress many rebel organizations and their various activities. Under these circumstances, the climate for the publication of *xiaobao* changed significantly. In September and October 1967, the overwhelming majority of Red Guard papers, in particular those of the third kind (in Jin Dalu’s terms) ceased publication; most of those that remained were published by large city-wide or province-wide coalitions of rebel organizations that participated in the emerging power sharing structures and thus enjoyed some degree of institutional legitimacy. By mid-1968, however, when the rebuilding of the state apparatus was well underway and the Red Guards were forcefully sent to the countryside, most of the remaining *xiaobao* were shuttered. What remained were those few papers, such as *Gongren zaofanbao*, that had made the transition to *dabao*.

#### *The Media Concept Revisited: Xinwen zhanbao*

In the preceding section, I have discussed the rise and fall of the *xiaobao*, a type of press operating outside the institutional framework that had, since 1949, been one of the most important pillars of the Party’s control of the press. The Red Guard publications derived their legitimacy directly from the ideological authority of Mao Zedong and the CRSG; with encouragement from the Party Centre, the Red Guards could go ahead, overthrow the leadership at the old newspapers and revolutionize them, and set up their own press organs. The revolutionized *dabao* and the *xiaobao* were closely intertwined; yet the latter remained vulnerable to shifts in the power constellation and the political line, such as those in late 1967 and 1968 that eventually ended their existence. The discussion above has drawn chiefly on Party documents and their attitude towards the Red Guard press. However, a number of key questions remain to be answered: what happened to the Party’s media concept in the Cultural Revolution? Did the *xiaobao* accept the

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<sup>50</sup> After the escalation of violence after the Wuhan incident and several wall poster attacks on Zhou Enlai, the CRSG was reorganized and four its most radical members – Wang Li, Mu Xin, Lin Jie, and Guan Feng – were purged. Together with Qi Benyu, who was removed from power four months later, they became known as the 516 or May 16<sup>th</sup> Group. Their dismissal paved the way for the stemming of the worst violence and a gradual return to order.



demands of the media concept? Finally, how is the almost complete absence of dissenting voices in the Red Guard press to be explained?

To answer these questions, I will now turn to the perspective of the *xiaobao*, their vision of the Chinese press, and their idea of their place within the Chinese public sphere. For this purpose, I will take a closer look at self-reflexive texts on the question of news and the press, found in particular in the *xiaobao* produced by Red Guards from the news sector. Based on a case study of *Xinwen zhanbao*, the radical organ of a coalition of rebel factions from Beijing-based news units, I will reconstruct the attitude of the *xiaobao* towards each of the clauses of the media concept. I argue that the Red Guards never tried to reject the media concept; rather, they were searching for a more literal interpretation of the media concept, which now came to be closely associated with Mao Zedong himself. At the same time, the Red Guards accused their enemies, and the ‘capitalist roaders’ in the news sector – that is, the leadership of the Propaganda Department and the chief editors of most newspapers – in particular, of not or incorrectly implementing the media concept. Because the Red Guard’s own legitimacy and the legitimacy of their papers was tied so closely to the ideological authority of the Cultural Revolution leadership, and especially to Mao Zedong, deviance from the media concept was all but impossible. The discourse on the role of the press in the *xiaobao* thus stayed carefully within the parameters of the media concept, and as a consequence, the expression of heterodox ideas in the Red Guard press remained the rare exception to the rule. The media concept continued to dominate the Chinese press – *dabao* and *xiaobao* – throughout the Cultural Revolution, and was adapted even to the structural changes of the public sphere.

In late 1966 and early 1967, a number of *xiaobao* appeared in the press and publication sector, organized by Red Guards from the major work units in the media sector, such as the Xinhua News Agency, GMRB, but also provincial outlets including *Guangzhou ribao*, *Guangxi ribao*, and *Fujian ribao*.<sup>51</sup> The most important

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<sup>51</sup> All of the below repr. in Song Yongyi (ed). *A New Collection of Red Guard Publications: Part I + II*. Oakton: Center for Chinese Research Materials, 1999-2001. *Xinhua zhanbao*, publ. by Xinhua she Xinhua gongshe wei renmin fuwu hongweibing (4 issues, 12 May – 15 Sept. 1967. Repr. in Part II, vol. 34, p. 13276-91); *Xinwen zhanxian*, publ. by Xinhua she geming lianhe weiyuanhui, Xinhua she xinwen zhanxian hongweibing (19 issues known, 22 Apr. – 16 Sept. 1967. Repr. in Part II, vol. 36, p. 14026-89); *Guangming zhanbao*, publ. by Guangming ribao geming zaofan zongbu (23 issues, 16 Aug. 1967 – 5 Sept. 1968. Repr. in Part I, vol. 5, p. 2119-206); *Guangzhou ribao hongqi*, publ. by Guangzhou pi Tao lianwei Guangzhou ribao hongqi bianjibu (issue 8: 31 July,

of these was *Xinwen zhanbao*.<sup>52</sup> Founded by a coalition of rebel groups called “Capital News Criticism Liaison Station,” *Xinwen zhanbao* had, with twenty issues, one of the longest publication histories among the *xiaobao* in the news sector; it had extensive ties with other papers,<sup>53</sup> and was closely linked to the CRSG.<sup>54</sup> Importantly, in the half year of its existence, *Xinwen zhanbao* produced a significant amount of theoretical reflections on the Chinese media and is an essential source for the events of the Cultural Revolution in the news sector.

*Xinwen zhanbao* was founded in late April 1967 by the “Capital News Criticism Liaison Station” (Shoudu xinwen pipan lianluo zhan 首都新闻批判联络站), a coalition of twelve radical Red Guard groups from three major universities (the journalism departments of Zhongguo renmin daxue 中国人民大学 and Beijing University, and the Beijing Broadcasting Institute) and nine media units (including Xinhua she, GMRB, *Gongren ribao*, and *Zhongguo qingnian bao*); they were joined by a rebel group from WHB’s Beijing bureau.<sup>55</sup> The paper, founded as a response to the more conservative *Xinwen zhanxian*,<sup>56</sup> held close contact with the CRSG through its umbrella organization, the Red Guard Congress (Hongdaihui 红代会).<sup>57</sup> Thanks to the provenance of its members – the nation’s top research institutions in journalism and media studies, and the most influential media units – the Liaison Station had access to an extraordinary amount of material and had the resources to engage, beyond accusations and denunciations, in theoretical discussions of news and media as well.

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1967. Repr. in Part I, vol. 5, p. 2222-5); *Paosheng long*, publ. by Guangxi ribao she 58112 geming lianhe zongbu (issue 14: 20 June 1967; issue 17: 2 July 1967. Repr. in Part I, vol. 11, p. 4947-58); *Ying gutou bao*, publ. by Fujian ribao gezaohui gongren ying gutou zhandoudui (issue 9: 27 Nov. 1967. Repr. in Part I, vol. 17, p. 8141-44).

<sup>52</sup> I am using the reprint in Song Yongyi (ed). *A New Collection of Red Guard Publications: Part II*, vol. 36, p. 13946-14025. In the following, I will refer directly to the issues of *Xinwen zhanbao*, rather than to the reprint.

<sup>53</sup> Numbers 14 and 17 were joint issues with *Xinhua zhanbao*; numbers 15 and 16 joint issues with *Guangming zhanbao*. *Xinwen zhanbao* published articles written by Red Guard organizations from *Qianjin bao* (the former Tianjin *Dagong bao*) (issues 3, 7, 12/13, and 17), the Xinhua News Agency (issues 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 14, 17, and 18), *Zhongguo qingnianbao* (issues 4, 8, 9, and 18), *Shanxi ribao* (issue 6), *Gongren ribao* (issues 11, 15, and 20), RMRB (issue 12/13), JFJB (issue 12/13), *Zhongguo funü* (issue 12/13), and GMRB (issues 15 and 16).

<sup>54</sup> On the pages of *Xinwen zhanbao*, Speeches, directives, and conversations of members of the CRSG figure prominently, to whom the paper was linked through its umbrella organization.

<sup>55</sup> See “Shoudu xinwen pipan lianluozhan,” in *Xinwen zhanbao* 1 (28 Apr. 1967), p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Xinwen zhanxian*, which published its first issue on 22 Apr. 1967, was run by a rival Red Guard faction from Xinhua she.

<sup>57</sup> The leaders of the Red Guard Congress, notably Nie Yuanzi and Kuai Dafu, were known to be very close to the CRSG.

The founding issue of *Xinwen zhanbao*, published on 28 April 1967, gives a fair impression of the main categories of content to be found in this and other *xiaobao* from the news sector. In addition to an oversized portrait of Mao Zedong,<sup>58</sup> the front page carries a collection of quotations from Mao Zedong related to press and propaganda issues, with the programmatic title “Chairman Mao on Newspapers: The Party Papers are a Tool of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”<sup>59</sup> Page two contains an editorial entitled “Smash Liu Shaoqi’s revisionist news line,”<sup>60</sup> a report on the founding of 首都新聞批判聯絡站, and a short section called “Briefing of important news” (*Yaowen jianbao* 要聞簡報), with short messages, all relating to the news sector. Page three carries a page-long article denouncing Liu Shaoqi’s counterrevolutionary policies for the news sector. Page four, finally, must be regarded as the exact inversion of page one: under the heading “Liu Shaoqi’s black words in the press circles,”<sup>61</sup> the reader finds an extensive list of quotations from Liu on the press (a sequel was published in the next issue). With the instructions from Mao on the one hand, and the quotations of Liu on other, the discursive field for the assessment of the Chinese press and the theoretical lines guiding it has been marked out.

The dominating theme of the debates on the pages of *Xinwen zhanbao* is class struggle and the struggle between the “two lines,” i.e. the revolutionary line of Mao Zedong and the revisionist line allegedly represented by Liu Shaoqi.<sup>62</sup> The most programmatic expression of this ideological position is a quotation attributed to Mao Zedong, which comes in fact from the “8-8 Decision” from August 1966.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> On this picture from an unknown source, Mao is sitting in an armchair, smoking and reading a newspaper. The pictures seem to stem from the mid 1960s; unfortunately, it is unclear what paper Mao is reading.

<sup>59</sup> “Mao zhuxi lun baokan: dangbao shi wuchanjieji zhuanzheng de gongju,” in *Xinwen zhanbao* 1 (28 Apr. 1967), p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> “Polan Liu Shaoqi xiuzhengzhuyi xinwen luxian” in *Xinwen zhanbao* 1 (28 Apr. 1967), p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> “Liu Shaoqi zai xinwenjie de heihua,” *Xinwen zhanbao* 1 (28 Apr. 1967), p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> An extensive documentation of this struggle is a pamphlet compiled by the editors of *Xinwen zhanbao* and a rebel group at RMRB. See Renmin ribao wuchanjieji gemingpai, Shoudu xinwen pipan lianluozhan (ed.). *Xinwen zhanxian liang tiao luxian douzheng da shiji, 1948-1966* (chugao). N.p., n.d. An extract of this pamphlet, covering the years 1958-1962 was published in *Xinwen zhanbao* 12/13 (23 Aug. 1967), p. 7-8.

<sup>63</sup> “Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyang weiyuanhui guanyu wuchanjieji wenhua dageming de jueding,” p. 33 (Chinese) and p. 42 (English).

To overthrow a political power, it is always necessary, first of all, to create public opinion, to do work in the ideological sphere. This is true for the revolutionary class as well as for the counter-revolutionary class. This thesis of comrade Mao Zedong's has been proved entirely correct in practice.

The media, so Mao, are the foremost site of class struggle: the class enemy will take to the institutions of the propaganda and education *xitong* to prepare the ground for his comeback; the task of the revolutionary classes in the PRC is thus, to prevent the media from falling into the hands of the bourgeoisie, or, if this has already happened, to wrest back control of the media. For the cultural revolutionaries, this logic justified their attack against the leadership of major media units across the nation, and it legitimized the establishment of the rebel's own organs of public opinion, the *xiaobao*. "To overthrow a political power..." consequently became a ubiquitous slogan, by far the most often cited quotation by Mao Zedong on press and propaganda issues in the Red Guard publications of the news sector.<sup>64</sup> It set the dominating theme, the programmatic framework in which the discussion of all other elements of the media concept was embedded. I will run now through the first five clauses of the media concept, as outlined at the end of chapter two, before coming back to the main theme of class struggle and its relevance for the *xiaobao* and their understanding of their own role.

*Xinwen zhanbao* contains a number of long, programmatic articles that try to define the fundamental nature of the media and their function within the socialist state. These articles are obviously not essays written by middle school or university students; they must have been authored by seasoned ideologues and media insiders among the ranks of the radical factions. The authors usually proceed from an all-out critique of the theories and practice of newspaper making by their adversaries; they frame their own arguments against this negative plane. While criticism and denunciation occupies the overwhelming majority of space in most articles, efforts to come up with ideas about how newspapers shall be run in the future can be found from time to time. One such article appeared on the front page of the eighth issue of *Xinwen zhanbao*. Under the title "Don't allow Liu Shaoqi to distort the political direction of the Party papers," the article denounces

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<sup>64</sup> On the pages of *Xinwen zhanbao*, it appears in practically every article discussing the theme of news and the press, sometimes twice on a single page. See, for example, issue 1, p. 1, p. 2, p. 3; issue 2, p. 1, p. 2; issue 3, p. 2, p. 3, p. 4; issue 6, p. 3, p. 4; issue 11, p. 3 (twice); issue 12/13, p. 3, p. 6, p. 7; issue 14, p. 3; issue 16, p. 1; issue 17, p. 3; issue 18, p. 2; issue 19, p. 4.

the “three black flags” (*san mian hei qi* 三面黑旗)<sup>65</sup> of Liu Shaoqi’s newspaper theory.<sup>66</sup> These are: the bourgeois concepts of ‘truthfulness’ (*zhenshi* 真实), ‘impartiality’ (*gongzheng* 公正), and ‘objectiveness’ (*keguan* 客观); the bourgeois idea of ‘press freedom’ (*xinwen ziyou* 新闻自由); and the equally bourgeois theory of ‘entertainment’ (*quweixing* 趣味性).

The chief accusation of the authors is that Liu, in his writings on journalism, had deliberately negated the first clause of the Party’s media concept, the requirement that “the media must represent the unified, single voice of the party.” Liu Shaoqi had committed the crime of negating the newspapers’ Party character (*dangxing* or *partiinnost*). This is crucial because.<sup>67</sup>

Our great leader Chairman Mao has said: “As long as class differences still exist in the world, newspapers will be a tool of class struggle.”<sup>68</sup> The proletarian press is a tool of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Therefore it must resolutely stand on the side of the proletariat and make propagating and defending the invincible Mao Zedong Thought its most basic task. This is the most basic political direction of the proletarian press. But the largest capitalist roader inside the Party and his followers bitterly hate the brilliant Mao Zedong Thought; they do what they can to oppose the propagation of Mao Zedong Thought in the proletarian press and make every effort to push through their reactionary bourgeois news principles.

As evidence for Liu’s position, the article quotes his 1956 conversations with Xinhua staff members (see chapter six). Discussing the problems of truthfulness and objectivity, Liu had applied criteria that in itself were alien to the socialist conception of newspapers: in a class society, objectivity – that is, a position beyond or above that of any single class – does not only not exist; the very idea of its existence and desirability reflects a bourgeois state of mind. It needs to be said that the article quotes Liu Shaoqi out of context; Liu’s remarks had been carefully balanced with his insistence to take into account one’s class standpoint (*lichang* 立场). But this is not relevant to the Cultural Revolution authors, for whom the very idea of “objectivity” – and, in the same vein, “truthfulness” and “impartiality” –

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<sup>65</sup> An apparent pun on the better known “three red flags” (*san mian hongqi* 三面红旗) of radical Maoist policies since 1958 – the General Line, the Great Leap Forward, and the People’s Communes.

<sup>66</sup> Hongdaihui Zhongguo renmin daxue san hong xinwen bingtuan. “Bu xu Liu Shaoqi cuangai dangbao de zhengzhi fangxiang,” in *Xinwen zhanbao* 8 (9 July, 1967), p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> This is a quotation from Mao’s 1957 article “*Wenhuibao* zai yi ge shiqi nei de zichanjieji fangxiang.”

become evidence of Liu's attempt to negate the newspaper's party character. Once again, the article quotes Mao Zedong and then elaborates.<sup>69</sup>

Chairman Mao has said: "What Hu Feng called 'uniformity of public opinion' means that we don't allow the counterrevolutionaries to express counterrevolutionary opinions. This is correct, our system will not allow freedom of speech to any and each counterrevolutionary, but will restrict this freedom to the rows of the people."<sup>70</sup> Our country practices the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the proletarian press is an important tool of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It knows only one standpoint, and this is the standpoint of the proletariat; it can be only one kind of voice, and this is the voice of the proletariat; and it knows only one freedom, and this is the freedom of speech of the proletariat and the other labouring people! Its purpose in the dictatorship is exactly to curb the freedom of speech of the class enemies and to deny them the right to speak!

In August 1950, Hu Feng had complained of the one-sidedness of the press and the enforced "uniformity of public opinion."<sup>71</sup> Expanding on Mao's argument in his attack on Hu, that the press will allow a voice only to those people and groups agreeing with the Party line, the article gives a narrow interpretation of the way in which the press had to act as the single and unified voice of the Party. Once the press becomes "a tool of the dictatorship of the proletariat," which is commanded by the Party, "news freedom" is of course an absurd notion, because it would require the press to abolish its Party character and open its pages to the class enemy, the very subject of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Neither are truthfulness, impartiality, and objectivity meaningful concepts: they are no longer treated as neutral categories, but rather as inherently biased to start with, as implying a departure from the basic obligation of the press to represent only the voice of the Party.

This brings us back to the article's deliberate distortion of Liu Shaoqi's 1956 remarks through means such as selective quotation and decontextualization, and the relevance of this technique for the construction of a Cultural Revolution newspaper theory. Distortions such as those in the *Xinwen zhanbao* article are common in all Cultural Revolution press sources, and they abound in the *xiaobao*. The ubiquity of this argumentative technique must be seen as a direct

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<sup>69</sup> "Bu xu Liu Shaoqi cuangai dangbao de zhengzhi fangxiang."

<sup>70</sup> From an "editor's note" (*anyu*), written by Mao, that accompanied the second batch of anti Hu Feng materials: "Guanyu Hu Feng fangeming jituan de di er pi ziliao," in RMRB, 24 May 1955.

<sup>71</sup> In a letter to Zhang Zhongxiao dated 13 Aug. 1950 that is excerpted in *ibid*. In this letter, Hu Feng cites the official *Wenyibao* as one example of how public debate in the literature and arts sector had been strangled by Party fiat (according to the editors of *Hu Feng quanji* (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1999, vol. 9, here p. 651), the original letter has been lost.

consequence of the peculiar interpretation of the first clause of the media concept: once the legitimacy of objectivity and truthfulness itself is negated, there is no longer any need to also present material that might exonerate Liu, nor would there even be a justification for doing so. To the contrary, the radical interpretation of *partiinost* dictates that the papers highlight the class enemy's crimes and exclusively his crimes – only this is the true perspective of the proletarian press. This mode of thought in fact follows the logic established by Yao Wenyan a decade earlier in his essay “Recorded for Reference,”<sup>72</sup> discussed in the previous chapter. The denunciation of Liu Shaoqi's remarks is thus turned into a prescriptive formula for the producers of the Red Guard press, an essential part of theoretical premises of the Red Guard press.

The last of the three “black flags” attacked in the long *Xinwen zhanbao* article addresses the issue of entertainment, as *quweixing* might be translated. This problem directly touches upon the second clause of the media concept: the media “are indispensable tools of party propaganda and party building.” How is this mission statement to be understood? How far must the Party papers go in supporting the dual efforts of propaganda and organization? Inversely, how far are they allowed to stray from these tasks? Are entertainment, or other forms of non-political writing acceptable on the pages of the Party press? The *quweixing* issue touches upon these questions.

In his 1956 talks to Xinhua journalists, Liu Shaoqi had addressed the question of entertainment, speaking approvingly of proposals from the journalists who had raised the issue of “general interest” (*pubian xingqu* 普遍兴趣): “[Press reports] must be of general interest, and at the same time attract the interest of a small number of specialists.”<sup>73</sup> Liu explicitly contrasted this form of reporting with an exclusive focus on politics: “News must possess intellectual appeal and artfulness; they mustn't only stress politics and [class] standpoint, they must also emphasize

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<sup>72</sup> In the decade since 1957, Yao had perfected his polemic style of writing, which consequently became the basic formula of Cultural Revolution rhetoric. The master piece that served as the model for writers throughout the Cultural Revolution is, of course, his essay November 1965 essay “Ping xinbian lishiju *Hai Rui ba guan*” that had launched the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>73</sup> “Dui Xinhua she gongzuo de di yi ci zhishi” (28 May, 1956), in Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan xinwen yanjiusuo (ed.). *Zhongguo gongchandang xinwen gongzuo wenjian huibian*. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1980, vol. 3, p. 364.

intellectual appeal, artfulness, and entertainment.”<sup>74</sup> It was on these remarks that the authors of the denunciation jumped (they are quoted verbatim in the article), once again from a class struggle logic. While Liu’s stated purpose was to interest a larger number of readers, including intellectuals and specialists (who were coveted by the CCP at the time of Liu’s speaking), these intentions were interpreted as incompatible with the goals of Party propaganda and organization in the Cultural Revolution. The effort to raise the tastes and cultivate the interests of a broader audience were now seen as a complot:<sup>75</sup>

We have exposed them – in the name of spreading knowledge and entertaining, they try to usurp the battlefield of propaganda from our Party, edge all revolutionary content out of our newspapers, so as to allow the corrupt ideologies of feudalism and capitalism to spread freely, to poison out lives and corrupt our souls, and make us ‘peacefully evolve’ amidst ‘knowledge’ and ‘entertainment!’ This is like murder with an invisible knife!

Thus, the media’s exclusive task is to serve as the mouthpiece of Party propaganda and, through its focus on politics, as the Party’s organizational tool, strengthening the unity of the Party membership in the ongoing class struggle against the bourgeoisie.

Following the logic developed in the long article analyzed above, *Xinwen zhanbao* took pains to expose the misbehaviour of the Chinese press under the influence of Liu’s “three black flags.” A good example is an article that appeared a month later. Written by the “Huaihai Combat Regiment of the *Xinhua Commune* at Xinhua she,” this article denounces a 1963 dispatch from Xinhua’s foreign service. The title is programmatic: “The opium that benumbs the revolutionary masses: about a report of ‘general interest.’”<sup>76</sup> The incident related in the article concerns a visit by Liu Shaoqi and his wife, Wang Guangmei, to the beach resort of Ngapali in Burma. The original message, a little over 500 characters, is indeed written in an unusual style: praising the beautiful white beach, the coconut palms and the light evening breeze rather than friendship between the Chinese and Burmese people, the authors comment on an ad hoc football match involving, among other dignitaries, Chinese foreign minister Chen Yi and the Burmese

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>75</sup> “Bu xu Liu Shaoqi cuangai dangbao de zhengzhi fangxiang,” in *Xinwen zhanbao* 8 (9 July 1967), p. 1.

<sup>76</sup> Xinhua she “Xinhua gongshe” Huaihai zhantuan. “Mazui geming renmin de yapian: cong yi ze you ‘pubian xingqu’ de baodao tanqi,” In *Xinwen zhanbao* 11 (20 Aug. 1967), p. 4.



general Ne Win as players; they day ended with a grill party on the beach. For the Cultural Revolution rebels, the indulgent behaviour of Liu was as utterly unacceptable as the form of the report itself.<sup>77</sup>

This 'common interest,' 'general interest,' and 'entertainment,' which China's Khrushchev has been preaching, are pure nonsense. In a class society, how could there exist 'interests' that transcend class boundaries? How could there be 'common interests'? All thinking and all interests do carry the stamp of a class. China's Khrushchev fraternizing with Burma's Chiang Kai-shek does only confirm that these two are the same kind of maggots from the manure pit, the same stinking pack.

The offending article had appeared on the first page of RMRB, 25 Apr. 1963. In order to prove their charges, the authors of the denunciation reproduced the article in *Xinwen zhanbao*, where it is accompanied by an illustration produced by the "Xinhua Commune Fine



Arts Soliders." The cartoon shows Liu Shaoqi, Wang Guangmei, and Ne Win on the beach, framed by two palm trees; all three are in high spirits, with the Chinese guests toasting their uniformed host. Scattered fish bones litter the ground, while a deer is roasting over the fire. The general's hands are dripping from what might be interpreted as either grease or blood; his sabre, too, carries stains of unclear provenance. The football next to the fire is a reminder of the afternoon's games. In all, the cartoon illustrates the debasement of Liu who associates with the likes of Ne Win, the frivolity of Xinhua of reporting on this occasion in the way it did, and the grave misjudgement of RMRB for highlighting such a story under the pretext of providing a more human image of the state president and catering to 'general interest.'

Is, then, entertainment principally forbidden, in the eyes of the Cultural Revolution newspaper makers? Not at all, as the above cartoon illustrates. Entertainment is, of course, appreciated even by the Red Guards and their

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

*xiaobao*, on the condition that it serves the purposes of Party propaganda and organization. The numerous cartoons that dot the pages of many *xiaobao*, drawn with varying degrees of proficiency, attest to this practice. As long as they uphold the general theme of class struggle and the general political line, even jokes are welcome. Under the heading “Absurdities from Imperialist and Revisionist Newspapers” (Di-xiu baokan chouwen 帝修报刊丑闻) *Xinwen zhanbao* published the following joke:<sup>78</sup>

There are three famous newspapers in the Soviet Union: *The Truth* [*Pravda*], *News* [*Izvestija*], and *Russia* [*Rossija*]. A man wants to buy a paper at a news stand and gets the response: Russia is still there, but there’s no Truth, and News have been sold out as well.

While the entertainment value of this example may be debatable, jokes belong to the accepted repertoire of Culture Revolution newspaper making.

The third clause of the media principle defines the media as the tool of the Party, as the avant-garde of the working-class, to raise the consciousness of the people. The Cultural Revolution authors do wholeheartedly agree with this stipulation. On their own, the people are bound to be led astray by the sinister machinations of the class enemy; it is therefore the purpose of the Party papers to expose the harmful intentions of these hostile elements in broad daylight, and to guide the working classes on the correct revolutionary path. Exposing and guiding are two interlocking elements, only in combination can they lead to a higher level of consciousness.

The editorial in the first issue of *Xinwen zhanbao* – appropriately titled “Smash Liu Shaoqi’s revisionist news line” – explains how these two mechanisms interact on the pages of the Cultural Revolution press, in large and small papers alike.<sup>79</sup> The central task at the current moment, is to expose the “crimes” (*zuixing* 罪行) of Liu Shaoqi on the news front, “holding high the great banner of revolutionary criticism, closely rely on the great revolutionary masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers, set in motion a great mass criticism movement, and to smash thoroughly Liu Shaoqi’s revisionist news line!”<sup>80</sup> Criticism is the means through which the various misdeeds of Liu and his followers – the article mentions Lu Dingyi, Hu

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<sup>78</sup> *Xinwen zhanbao* 9 (16 July, 1967), p. 4

<sup>79</sup> “Polan Liu Shaoqi xiuzhengzhuyi xinwen luxian,” in *Xinwen zhanbao* 1 (28 Apr. 1967), p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Qiaomu, and Wu Lengxi, his trusted lackeys – will be exposed. It is important that this criticism takes the form of mass criticism, that it requires active involvement of the masses: through their participation in the process of exposing and criticising the revisionist line, the masses are supposed to educate themselves, to raise their consciousness. And the newspapers, first of all the *xiaobao*, become the premier platform of this criticism movement.

The second element in the process of raising consciousness is guidance. The press does of course play a crucial role in providing the correct kind of guidance. The editorial continues:<sup>81</sup>

Guidance through the newspaper is of utmost importance. This guidance is an ideological guidance, a political guidance, the guidance of direction [方針] and policies, in one sentence: it is the guidance through Mao Zedong Thought, it is using Mao Zedong Thought to agitate among the masses, to organize the masses, and to arm the masses.

Mao Zedong Thought is the single most important means of guidance for the masses, and the newspapers function as a relay for this guidance. The ubiquity of Mao quotations in the texts of not just the Red Guard papers, but in the Cultural Revolution press in general, is a clear sign for its assigned role, as are the Mao quotations that usually appear next to the masthead, again in both major papers and *xiaobao* (see Ill. 1a – 1c). Exposing and guidance stand in a dialectical relationship, enshrined in one of the most often-quoted Red Guard slogan “there is no construction without destruction” (*bu po bu li*) that is cited by the editorial as well. To sum up the function of Mao Thought as the “bright guiding light” (*zhi lu ming deng* 指路明灯), the editorial invokes another famous quotation from the Chairman: “The Golden Monkey wrathfully swung his massive cudgel, and the jade-like firmament was cleared of dust.”<sup>82</sup> It is of course Mao’s Thought itself that serves as the great cudgel for the Red Guards to smash the revisionist line and guide them to the correct path. The ultimate goal of the dialectical process of criticism and guidance, thus, is to raise the consciousness of the Chinese working class, and it falls upon the media to the space for both sides of the coin.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> From Mao’s 1961 poem “Qi lü – he Guo Moruo tongzhi.” Translation taken from *Mao Tsetung Poems*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1976, p. 81. This line achieved fame early in the Cultural Revolution when it appeared in a RMRB editorial “Hao de hen!” (23 Aug. 1966) that publicly endorsed the Red Guards and the notion that “to rebel is justified.”

Focussing on the concrete concerns of the masses and involving the masses in the process of newspaper making had emerged in the early 1940s as a central demand of the press, and had been incorporated into the media concept. Yet how to define “the concerns of the masses,” and to what degree they were to be involved, remained a perennial problem after 1949. The “mass factor” in the media sector is ultimately linked to the larger debate about “red” and “expert” in the late 1950s and 1960s.<sup>83</sup> This debate was revisited once the Cultural Revolution started; it is little surprising that the Red Guards associated the “expert” line with Liu Shaoqi, who had supposedly used this issue to deny the revolutionary people access to the Party’s communication channels. Inversely, the implementation of the “mass line” was tied to Chairman Mao.

The contrast was made explicit in an article by “Lu Qun” 路群 (an inversion of *qun lu* 群路, short for *qunzhong luxian* 群众路线, or mass line) that appeared in the tenth issue of *Xinwen zhanbao*. Under the title “Fiercely attack Liu Shaoqi’s ‘experts’ newspaper line,”<sup>84</sup> the author(s) denounce the principle of journalistic professionalism, in contrast to mass involvement in the press. The article starts with a quotation:<sup>85</sup>

Chairman Mao has taught us: “The people, and only the people, and the moving force creating world history.”<sup>86</sup> The mass line is the fundamental line of a proletarian political party. How they treat the masses is the benchmark for revolution, non-revolution, and counterrevolution, and it has always been the focus for the revolutionary line of the proletariat and the reactionary line of the bourgeoisie. In the same manner, there exists a fierce two-line struggle on the question of how to run newspapers.

The binary of class-line struggle is applied to the question of professionalism, too. In what follows, the author(s) prove their point with a series of quotations from Liu Shaoqi on the issue of professionalism; he is accused of having seized the power of the press, handing it over to his reactionary allies, and denying the working classes access to the press. Thus, the papers have become tools of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Liu had affirmed the authority of specialists in the

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<sup>83</sup> In his “Sixty Articles” of January 1958, Mao had proposed the formulation of ‘red,’ denoting political a correct political orientation, and ‘zhuan,’ referring to professional expertise. The relative emphasize on either of the two was subject to contestation between then and the start of the Cultural Revolution. Compare Goldman. *China’s Intellectuals*, ch. 1-4.

<sup>84</sup> Lu Qun. “Xiang Liu Shaoqi de ‘zhuanjia’ ban bao luxian menglie kaihuo,” in *Xinwen zhanbao* 10 (30 July 1967), p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> This famous quotation is taken from Mao’s “Lun lianhe zhengfu” (i.e., Mao’s political report at the seventh Party congress in 1945). See *Mao Zedong xuanji*, vol. 3, p. 1031.

editorial offices and had instructed them to carefully edit and rewrite contributions from the masses. In the Cultural Revolution context, it was no longer important that the latter requirement had in fact originated in Yan'an and had been accepted practice all along.<sup>87</sup>

Closely following the overall logic of the Cultural Revolution, the article goes on to repudiate the theory of newspaper professionalism. Only the workers, peasants, and soldiers are the true masters of history; they have assumed the role of being master in the political and economic realms, and they must do so in the cultural sphere as well. Who else than the master (*zhuren* 主人), the article asks, shall run the newspapers? To deny the masses access to the editorial rooms amounts to usurping their power and to an effort overturn the dictatorship of the proletariat. Liu Shaoqi's stress on professionalism, along with issues such as entertainment, is thus interpreted as antagonistic to mass involvement in the press – only capitalist newspapers bar the proletariat from running the newspapers. The article concludes:<sup>88</sup>

The line of “a newspaper run by the entire Party and by the masses” is of utmost importance for the development of the proletarian press. This line is the concrete application of the Party's mass line in press and propaganda work. Without this line, it is impossible to guarantee the correct political orientation of the Party papers, impossible to realize the Party's leadership of the press, impossible to accomplish the political task of the Party papers; without this line, the newspapers cannot become the eyes and ears, the tongue and throat of the Party, cannot become the bridge and the bond between the Party and the masses. And it is for this reason that Liu Shaoqi desperately tries to oppose the line of “the masses running the newspapers,” desperately tries to shut out the workers, peasants, and soldiers [from news work], and gives the leading role to the ox ghosts and snake demons.

Mass participation is thus a crucial element of Cultural Revolution media theory; it is an essential requirement for the proper functioning of the press. According to the author(s), none of the essential tasks of the newspapers – collecting information for the Party leadership, speaking in the name of the Party, mediating between Party and masses – can be achieved without mass involvement in the editorial and publishing process.

While the discussions on the press in the Red Guard papers stay generally within the confines of the media concept, a few instances can be found where

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<sup>87</sup> See chapter two on the origins of the requirement that articles written by the masses must be closely monitored and censored, in order to make sure that they conform with the Party line and current policies.

<sup>88</sup> Lu Qun. “Xiang Liu Shaoqi de ‘zhuanjia’ ban bao luxian menglie kaihuo.”

authors try to go beyond the line and explore new ideas. The article discussed above contains one such paragraph. In an indication of the discussions going on at the height of Cultural Revolution, the article pushes the problem of mass characterization one step further, entering terrain that had not yet been covered by the media concept before.<sup>89</sup>

Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought have always held that a proletarian party paper must not only rely on the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers for its making, but the judgment and criticism of the papers' correctness and quality should also be made by the worker peasant soldier masses. Only if a paper is endorsed and approved by the masses of workers peasants and soldiers, it can count as a really revolutionary newspaper.

The above formulation stands out by the absence of the Party as the arbiter of truth and correctness that is stipulated by the concept of *partiinost*; instead, the article seems to empower the masses and their reasoned judgment to a degree that earlier interpretations of the media concept had generally avoided. The author(s) cleverly packages this novel idea into the stock phrase that "Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought have always held..." but the failure to come up with an appropriate quotation from Mao, in a text that is otherwise quick to draw on the Chairman's authority, signals that authors are pushing the line here, entering new territory.

How do the masses judge on the Party press, and how can their "endorsement and approval" be institutionalized? Is the masses' "judgment" any more than an abstract notion? Could the Red Guard press play a role in this process? The article does not elaborate on this issue of letting the worker peasant soldier masses judge on the Party press, and it remains open whether or not the right to "endorse and approve" the papers is compatible with the Party's prerogative of ultimate control over the media. Yet the carefully-worded foray in this article gives at least some sense of the emancipation felt by the Red Guards and their tabloids: newspaper making during the Cultural Revolution did undoubtedly see an unprecedented degree of mass involvement at different levels of society – and not only through the Red Guard press. Perhaps the most important element in this process was the aforementioned rise of the big-character posters – or, better, big-characters papers: the Chinese name *dazibao* 大字报

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

suggests a continuum that starts at the grassroots and works through the *xiaobao* to the large papers. This continuum, and the changes it was supposed to bring to the modes of communication in the socialist Chinese society, has been thematized and even visualized in *Xinwen zhanbao*. A set of five illustrations with an accompanying text, produced by a Red Guard unit from *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, brings to life the ideal of mass involvement and the mass character clause of the media concept:



Ill. 3: "Revolutionary big criticism wall posters are great!" Source: *Xinwen zhanbao* 17 (15 Sept. 1967), p. 4.

The illustrations, which take up the upper half of the issue's last page, show with unusual liveliness all the stages of wall poster production: on the top most picture, workers, a peasant (on the left, recognizable because of his straw hat), and soldiers read a denunciation of Liu Shaoqi (whose name is crossed out, a common practice on wall posters); the second picture shows what are presumably Red

Guards in PLA uniforms pasting new posters to a wall. The third image depicts two Red Guards studying the latest instructions from Chairman Mao, copying them into notebooks, possibly for a reprint in the Red Guard papers. The image to the right shows the masses writing new posters. Finally, the grand panorama at the bottom presents the masses, who have acted as writers and producers of wall posters in the pictures above, now as readers of the same. Bridging the gap between media producers and consumers was the key point in the Red Guards' interpretation of the fourth clause of the media principle.

The fifth clause of the media principles reads "the media are essentially about education." The media emerged as tools of instruction, both for general education and for Party training, in the Yan'an period; during the Rectification Campaign in particular, newspapers became the most widely available and up-to-date textbooks for political study by cadres at all levels. Collective newspaper reading during political study sessions was a feature of daily life after 1949 and was a central element of practically every political campaign, from the land reform movement in 1950 to the "Four Clean-ups" (Si qing 四清) campaign in 1964-65. It is thus only natural to see that newspapers remained a crucial tool of political study in the Cultural Revolution as well. How individual newspapers had dealt with the task of education became a topic of contention picked up by the Red Guards.

The educational function of the media was not limited to editorials, the most authoritative source of information on the current political line. Ever since the 1940s, when Mao had recommended the model soldier Zhang Side in his article "Serving the People,"<sup>90</sup> the Party press had played the key role in the propagation of revolutionary models, figures selected for emulation by the populace. A discussion on the pages of *Xinwen zhanbao* shows how central the correct handling of issues relating to the emulation of heroes was for the press. A short article in issue 9, written by a Red Guard unit from *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, denounces an early 1966 draft document of the PD on the question of hero propaganda.<sup>91</sup> The article formulates the major accusations against the document's authors and provides the context of the drafting process; lengthy

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<sup>90</sup> "Wei renmin fuwu," in *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), vol. 3, p. 1004-06.

<sup>91</sup> Gongdahui Zhongguo qingnian bao geming zaofan bingtuan "Yuzhou chengqing" zhandou dui. "Yanwang dian fumie qianxi paozhi de fangeming xinwen gangling bixu chedi pipan," in *Xinwen zhanbao* 9 (16 July 1967), p. 3.



excerpts of the original document, with annotations from the Red Guards, follow the article – such reprints, designed to serve material as “negative material” (*fanmian jiaocai* 反面教材), are a frequent practice in the Red Guard press.

The document in question is a draft entitled “Some problems deserving attention in the current propaganda in the newspapers” (*Dangqian baozhi xuanchuan zhong zhide zhuyi de jige wenti*). On 23 February, 1966, the PD had convened a meeting of leading cadres from the Beijing newspapers, where vice-head Wu Lengxi called on the papers to implement the spirit of the February Outline, asking them to calm down the ideological atmosphere in the wake of Yao Wen Yuan’s attacks on Wu Han’s play. In accordance with Wu Lengxi’s speech, Sun Yiqing 孙轶青, a PD official who had been a former editor-in-chief of *Zhongguo qingnianbao*, drafted the document. Wu had proposed to circulate the document through an internal publication of the PD, but when the draft was finished a month later, the political climate had already changed and in a last-minute decision Wu ordered the draft to be scrapped. For the Red Guards who had gained access to the document, it was nonetheless proof of the sinister intentions of Wu Lengxi and the PD.

The document chiefly addresses the correct handling of propaganda surrounding heroism and the emulation of heroes. Recent emulation campaigns had led to tragic excesses. The document quotes the case of a ten-year old girl that had been killed in the attempt to rescue an electricity worker. An unnamed newspaper had praised her courageous and selfless spirit and her willingness to sacrifice her life for others; the paper had called on its readers to study and emulate the girl’s spirit and the local Party committee had declared her a role model for the youth. The PD questioned the wisdom of providing the populace with examples such as this; it had detected a rise of stories about self-sacrifice since the onset of the campaign propagating the model soldier Wang Jie 王杰 in November 1965.<sup>92</sup> Such stories, so the authors of the document, had led to sometimes ill-considered sacrifice of people – people who, so the argument, might

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<sup>92</sup> All essential documents on Wang Jie, including his diary and the articles in JFJB and RMRB that kicked off the campaign, can be found in Wang Jie shengqian suo zai budui (ed.). *Wang Jie*. Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1990. This volume was published in the context of a short and little successful effort to revive a number of revolutionary model heroes after the 1989 democracy movement.

have made other and more contributions to the Party's cause. The general trend to disregard the value of life was worrisome, and the propagation of heroism should therefore be managed carefully. Worse, in the case quoted above, Hong Kong papers had jumped on the news report, denouncing the sacrifice of a little girl as brutal and inhumane. For all these reasons, the emulation of heroes and their propagation in the press needed to be handled with more care and consideration.

The Red Guard commentators denounced the PD's call for restraint as "opposing Mao Zedong thought," while the girl's reaction "...is exactly the Communist spirit of selflessness and giving everything for others extolled by Chairman Mao in his 'three old articles.'"<sup>93</sup> The authors point out.<sup>94</sup>

Comrade Wang Jie is a banner planted by the General Political Department of the Military Commission, and he has been praised by comrade Lin Biao. To force the charge of propagating a so-called "reckless" spirit on the publicity campaign around on the accident of comrade Wang Jie is to direct the spearhead against Chairman Mao's close comrade-in-arms comrade Lin Biao and against the PLA. How poisonous a plan!

The authors quote other instances of what they see as PD obstructionism, such as admonitions not to do exaggerate the self-sacrifice of Jiao Yulu 焦裕禄, another model hero and subject of a major propaganda campaign. The Red Guard's logic is the same: Mao Zedong personally has singled out Jiao Yulu for praise; the PD document must thus be opposed to the Chairman and his policies. Importantly, since the newspapers are the foremost vehicles of these nation-wide campaigns, the PD's refusal to cooperate with the campaigns damages the paper's ability to function as tools of popular education in the hands of the Party. The PD is accused of failing to follow one of the crucial requirements of the media concept.

Little, then, needs to be said about the final clause of the media concept, the use of the media as a tool and site of class struggle. As has become apparent from the discussion above, class struggle is omnipresent in Cultural Revolution rhetoric, and the adherence to the principles of class struggle served as the yardstick against which the Red Guards measured the performance of the Chinese press. In fact, in the context of the Cultural Revolution, none of the other

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<sup>93</sup> Gongdaihui Zhongguo qingnian bao geming zaofan bingtuan "Yuzhou chengqing" zhandou dui. "Yanwang dian fumie qianxi paozhi de fangeming xinwen gangling bixu chedi pipan." The "three old articles" refer to Mao's "Serve the People," "In Memory of Dr. Norman Bethune," and "The Foolish Old Man who Moved the Mountain," which were the most-read and referred to writings of Mao during the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

five clauses can be thought of in isolation from the demands of class struggle. As mentioned above, Mao Zedong had defined the parameters for the press at the very onset of the Cultural Revolution by proposing: “To overthrow a political power, it is always necessary, first of all, to create public opinion, to do work in the ideological sphere. This is true for the revolutionary class as well as for the counterrevolutionary class.”<sup>95</sup> The Red Guards adopted this thesis as the guiding principle for both the denunciation of the pre-1966 performance of the Party press, and as a compass defining the general editorial line of their own papers and publications. If the large papers were denounced as the bulwark of the bourgeois forces within the Party, the *xiaobao* were conceived as the weapons with which the Red Guards hoped to prepare the ground for their own revolution against the capitalist roaders. Like a self-fulfilling prophesy, the media had become the foremost tool and a major site of class struggle within the socialist Chinese nation.

*Beyond the Media Concept? “In Praise of the Red Guard Newspapers”*

As the last section has shown, the theoretical and practical reflections in the Red Guard press on the role and function of newspapers remain almost without exception within the confines of the Party’s media concept. All six clauses of the media concept appear in the debates on the pages of *Xinwen zhanbao*, and all of them are strongly affirmed. In neither case would the Red Guards denounce the clauses of the media concept. It would have been easy to link parts or the whole of the media concept to Party leaders other than Mao, to those currently under attack, and thus to repudiate the concept itself – the media concept had emerged in the late 1930s and early 1940s as the Party’s collective project, and others than Mao had contributed to its formulation as well. Yet in the quarter century since its emergence, the media concept had become the underlying framework of thinking for all players in the media sector, and thanks to its flexibility, it had proven adaptable to the changing ideological prerogatives as a most effective mechanism to steer the press. Rather than denouncing the media concept, the Red Guards constructed their arguments from a different vantage point: they sought for instances in the Party’s seventeen year history of managing the press that could

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<sup>95</sup> See the “August 8 Decision” of the CC.

be interpreted as violating the text or the spirit of the media concept. Liu Shaoqi and his followers in the propaganda *xitong* were accused of not fulfilling the theoretical premises of the media sector.

There were, however, a few attempts to look beyond the theoretical stipulations of the media concept. The Cultural Revolution promised a radical departure from all dogmatic structures and institutions, and the sudden appearance of the Red Guards themselves showed that new organizational forms and ideas were possible. The *xiaobao* were used overwhelmingly to attack the pre-1966 propaganda line, yet a few instances can be found in *Xinwen zhanbao* showing that reflections among at least some of the Red Guards went further, that some of them were willing to explore new terrain. The above-mentioned attempt to reinterpret the clause about mass involvement, while confined to a mere two sentences, is one such instance. A much bolder effort to rethink the nature of the socialist Chinese public sphere shall be discussed here.

In issue 19, *Xinwen zhanbao* printed a page-long article called “In Praise of the Red Guard Newspapers” (“Zan hongweibing bao” 赞红卫兵报).<sup>96</sup> This article is, in another sense as well, a rare departure from the usual practice of the news sector *xiaobao*: while the Red Guard papers tend to comment in much detail on the traditional newspapers, they do only rarely reflect on their own position and on their eventual role in a post-Cultural Revolution public sphere. This article is a notable exception. Towards the end of September 1967, in the course of the nationwide crackdown on the escalating violence of the previous weeks, pressure on the Red Guards mounted and thousands of *xiaobao* were forced to cease publication. In this situation, *Xinwen zhanbao* published “In Praise of the Red Guard Newspapers” in a last minute attempt to affirm the legitimacy of the Red Guard press. Under the pseudonym Chen Chen 陈晨, the author(s) from Beijing People’s Broadcasting Station (Beijing renmin guanbao diantai 北京人民广播电台) present an elaborate and very eloquent defence of the *xiaobao*, stressing their important function within the public sphere.

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<sup>96</sup> Chen Chen. “Zan hongweibing bao,” in *Xinwen zhanbao* 19 (28 Sept. 1967), p. 4.

From the very beginning, the article tries to emphasize the significance of the Red Guard papers by presenting them in their larger historical context:<sup>97</sup>

The four seas are rising in rage, and thunder rolls over the middle kingdom. The year 1966 is of tremendous significance in the history of mankind, and it marks a great leap forward for the international Communist movement. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China has greatly enriched the treasure house of Marxism-Leninism. Like bamboo sprouts after the rain, new things and objects full of strong vitality have been springing up everywhere. Following the rise of the great Red Guard movement over the Eastern horizon, another new object has appeared: the Red Guard newspapers that cheer and shout for the Red Guards. The appearance and development of the Red Guard papers is a great innovation in the history of the proletarian press and a great victory for Chairman Mao's news line. In the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the Red Guard papers have made enormous contributions and have earned eternal merit. The Red Guard papers deserve our loud praise.

In this short paragraph, the authors(s) try to enlist as many legitimizing references as possible: the Red Guard papers are tied to their creators, the Red Guards, to Mao and his "news line" (*ban bao luxian* 办报路线), to the Cultural Revolution itself, and finally to the world Communist movement. The following paragraphs elaborate on this genealogy, presenting the reader with a short history of the Red Guard press. The appearance of the Red Guards is the logical consequence of the sharpening of class struggle in the nation, and they were endorsed in their mission by Mao who received them on Tiananmen square. The Red Guards had initially taken recourse to leaflets and big character posters, but eventually they created their own newspapers; the Red Guard papers were thus born amidst fierce class struggle, becoming weapons in the hands of the hands of their creators..

In the article, the Red Guard papers claim to be the most effective tool for the propagation of Mao Zedong Thought and the highest directives of the Party centre. Until the Cultural Revolution, the newspapers tried to suppress Mao's thoughts and his instructions; in contrast, the Red Guard papers have devoted their entire space to the propagation of Mao Zedong Thought and have thus helped it to spread into the remotest corners of the nation. The *xiaobao* have thus assumed the role originally ascribed to the large papers. This contrast, of course, is meant to threaten all those who try to shut down the *xiaobao*: suppressing the Red Guard papers, the most effective means of propagating Mao Zedong Thought, is nothing short of an attempt to curb the influence of the Chairman and this Thought!

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

The article then goes on to revisit the accomplishments of the Red Guards press over the past twelve months. Invoking Mao's ubiquitous "To overthrow a political power..." quotation, the author(s) stress the great merits of the Red Guards papers in denouncing the capitalist roaders within the Party and publishing extensive denunciations of those subjected to criticism at all levels, from "China's Khrushchev" Liu Shaoqi at the very top, to the toppled leaders of the thousands of individual work units. Finally, the Red Guard papers have given extensive coverage to the myriad struggle meetings taking place all over the nation – far too numerous to receive adequate coverage from the remaining large papers.

The most important argument in favour of the Red Guard papers, however, is the degree of mass involvement in the process of newspaper making that the *xiaobao* have allowed. The article quotes Mao Zedong: "With our newspapers, too, we must rely on everybody, on the masses of the people, on the whole party to run them, not merely on a few persons working behind closed doors."<sup>98</sup> Mao's demand for popular involvement, taken from his widely propagated 1948 conversations with journalists of *Jin-Sui ribao*, is contrasted with the idea of news professionalism attributed to Liu Shaoqi. In this light, the author(s) observe:<sup>99</sup>

The little generals of the Red Guards have never studied the 'science' of journalism, they know nothing about the 'five Ws' and the 'eight factors.'<sup>100</sup> But they are warriors in the revolutionary struggle, storm troops of the Cultural Revolution, each of their pens is a sword directed at the enemy, every single of their papers is a battleground. The little generals of the Red Guards live among the masses, they have the broadest mass base, their newspapers carry out the mass line in the most thorough way. *The major problem that remains unresolved after more than a decade – the detachment of those doing the reporting and those doing practical work – has been finally overcome in the Red Guard newspapers.*

The final proposition points in the direction of the general argument the article wants to make. In retrospect, the core problem in the Party's propaganda sector since 1949 has been the CCP's inability to find a proper solution for the "red" vs. "expert" problem; the continued existence of a journalistic corps that has remained detached from the masses has provided the bourgeoisie with an opportunity to

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<sup>98</sup> "Dui *Jin-Sui ribao* bianji renyuan de tanhua" in *Mao Zedong xuanji*, vol. 4, p. 1319. English transl. taken from *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1961), vol. 4, p. 242.

<sup>99</sup> Chen Chen. "Zan hongweibing bao" (emphasis added).

<sup>100</sup> The "five Ws" are "Who – what – when – where – why," the popular shorthand for journalistic writing that emerged in the U.S. in the late nineteenth century. It is unclear to what the 'eight factors' (*ba yaosu*) do refer here.

launch a comeback – the editorial offices of the socialist nation have become the breeding ground of the new bourgeoisie. Any return to the old system would therefore necessarily entail the same problems all over again. In contrast, the article suggests, the Red Guard papers themselves are the solution to the Party's dilemma in the propaganda sector. They are not a transitional phenomenon during the "hot" phase of the mass movement, but must become a permanent element of the structure of the socialist Chinese public sphere. The article ends on a clearly affirmative note:

With their resolute and courageous action, the Red Guard newspapers have criticized the bourgeois, revisionist news line in a most thorough way. This is a great revolution with involvement of the masses on an unprecedented scale in the history of the proletarian press; it is a new victory for Chairman Mao's news line. The Red Guard newspapers have made a tremendously useful and valuable contribution to the experience of the proletarian press, a contribution that deserves to be seriously studied and explored by every revolutionary news worker. Let us loudly and with revolutionary enthusiasm praise this great new thing of historical significance, let us loudly and with revolutionary enthusiasm praise this great innovation in the history of the proletarian press!

The article derives the legitimacy of the Red Guard press from Mao's personal endorsement as much as from the positive contributions that the *xiaobao* have made in the course of the Cultural Revolution. While both arguments are intended to isolate them from criticism, it is the latter argument that makes them independent even from Mao's personal aura. The author(s) are wise not spell out the further implications of their claim, but they are clear from the argument: whereas the large papers, the Party press, are conceived as organs of the Party bodies at the central and local levels (or at least as the organs of the provisional organs of power that had replaced the Party committees since spring 1967 – the Revolutionary Committees), the *xiaobao* do not stand in a clear hierarchical relationship with any formal institution. They are run by Red Guard organizations that proclaim their loyalty to Mao Zedong but remain otherwise autonomous. While large umbrella organizations of various Red Guard factions were formed since late 1966 and early 1967, the groups united under their roof generally retained a high degree of autonomy – including the right to publish their own newspapers, which were not subject to editorial control of the umbrella groups. Such a perspective however, outlines a decidedly different take on the structure of the public sphere: the author(s) of the article perceive of the *xiaobao* as a bulwark against newly

arising bourgeois influences in the press – as an independent watchdog. This is the logical consequence of the Red Guard's own argument about the ultimate character of the mass organizations' publications, were these to be made permanent. What is strikingly absent in "In Praise of the Red Guard Newspapers" is a clear commitment to the first clause of the media concept and the demand of *partiinnost*, or Party character.

However large the leeway given to the Red Guards and their propaganda outlets, and notwithstanding the high degree of editorial autonomy the *xiaobao* had eventually enjoyed – an independent watchdog beyond the reach of Party control was not acceptable to the CCP, and not to Mao Zedong. *Xinwen zhanbao* ceased publication shortly after "In Praise of the Red Guard Newspapers" appeared, and the last *xiaobao* were closed down over the next two years.

### *Conclusion*

With the dismantling of the Red Guard press in 1968 and 1969 and the slow reconstruction of the Party papers in the early 1970s, from the provincial level to the municipal levels and beyond, the Cultural Revolution as a revolution in the realm of the superstructure – which is by definition codeterminous with the propaganda sector – seems to have come full circle. The Party leadership, and Mao Zedong in particular, became convinced of the incompatibility of the *xiaobao* with the prerogatives of press control and Party propaganda.

The Red Guard press had emerged in the fall of 1966 in a spontaneous process, drawing on the proliferation of large character posters and wall papers on the one hand, and on the takeover of official student papers and school publications on the other. Their appearance was closely tied to the rise and fall of their creators, the Red Guards, and the revolutionary mass organizations. When the regular structures of authority were sidelined after the Red Guard power seizures in early 1967, *xiaobao* spread across the nation; their total number remains unknown until today. With the rise of the *xiaobao* came the decline in prestige of all but a handful of newspapers at the top: the "two papers and one journal" (RMRB, JFJB, *Hongqi*), which find their equivalent in the CRSG that controlled them – the Party apparatus suffered a decline similar to that of the press.



At the same time, the borders between *xiaobao* and large papers remained porous: the Red Guard papers consciously modelled themselves after the large papers, editorial content was exchanged in both directions, and a few selected *xiaobao* even made the transition into *dabao*. With the escalating violence throughout 1967, however, it became evident that the Red Guards were notoriously difficult to control by the Party leadership; battles in the streets were accompanied by verbal battles in the Red Guard press, especially in the smaller papers of the ‘third’ category at the work unit level. Once the Red Guards showed signs of asserting their autonomy in a more self-conscious and assertive manner, the time of their disbanding had come. It is little wonder that “In Praise of the Red Guard Newspapers” signalled not the beginning of permanent and institutionalized autonomy for the Red Guard press, but their imminent closure.<sup>101</sup> The Party leadership had opted to return to order from the anarchy of the past two years.

The biggest paradox about the Cultural Revolution press remains the continued functioning of the Party’s control over the media, at a time when the institutional apparatus in control of the propaganda sector came down in spring and summer of 1966. Party bodies charged with oversight over the press had existed virtually from the founding of the Party, and had always been one of the two ‘wings’ of Party work. Yet the central PD and its local equivalents crumbled under the attacks on the ‘demon king’ and his followers, and no functioning bureaucracy was put in its place for more than a decade, until 1977. As one of the Party’s core institutions, the PD was among the last to be rebuilt after the Cultural Revolution. Yet even without this or another body in overall charge of the propaganda field, the Cultural Revolution is arguably the era that saw the highest degree of published ideological conformity since the founding of the People’s Republic.

It is in view of this paradox, I suggest, that the real power of the Party’s media concept becomes visible. The media concept was developed in the early 1940s, a

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<sup>101</sup> The discussions of the Hunan-based Shengwulian group, which developed the idea of permanent (cultural) revolution into an institutionalized setting that would make the Party redundant, if not obstructive to the ultimate cause, can be read as a close parallel to the arguments made in “In Praise of the Red Guard Newspapers.” On Shengwulian see Song Yongyi, Sun Dajin (ed.). *Wenhua dageming he tade yiduan sichao*. Hong Kong: Tianyuan shuwu, 1997; Wang Shaoguang. “‘New Trends of Thought’ on the Cultural Revolution,” in *Journal of Contemporary China* 8.21 (1999), p. 197-217; and Jonathan Unger. “Whither China? Yang Xiguang, Red Capitalists, and the Social Turmoil of the Cultural Revolution,” in *Modern China* 17.1 (1991), p. 3-37.

time when the CCP was undergoing a fundamental transformation in the Rectification Campaign and the institutional structure saw significant changes. In this setting, the media concept emerged as a theoretical construct that existed by virtue of its ideological value, independent or above any particular institutional arrangement. In other words, the media concept exists not for the institutions of control, but the institutions exist for the implementation of the media concept. Powerful as they may appear (and actually be under normal political circumstances), they are but one part of what I have called the “mechanics of control.” They remain a mechanical component, but the driving force that sets these mechanics in motion is the media concept. Once the Party, or, in this case, Mao Zedong, decided to discard the mechanical institutional apparatus that was being perceived as dysfunctional, the media concept would not necessarily come tumbling down with the structures that supported it; it merely sought for alternative ways of ensuring Party control of the Chinese media.

In the heated political and ideological battles of the Cultural Revolution, the media concept once more proved its value, due largely to the flexibility of its formulations and thus its adaptability. With little difficulty, the Red Guards could dissociate the concept from the institutions and the persons they were fighting; Mao’s personal involvement in its formulation in the early 1940s made it easy to associate the concept with the Chairman himself. This move, supported by ample quotations that appear in bold print, and even by collections of quotations for this very purpose (see the first issue of *Xinwen zhanbao*) was sufficient to provide legitimacy to the media concept with a new lease of life. Applying the general logic of Cultural Revolution ideology, two-line struggle, to the media sector, the Red Guards took literal each single element of the media concept, loudly affirming its content, and attacking their enemies on charges of not fulfilling or even violating the prescriptions of the media concept. As a consequence, the Red Guards and their papers themselves moved into the role of press control; their adherence to the media concept made sure that control over the Chinese press – both *xiaobao* and large papers – was never really in question throughout the Cultural Revolution. The Red Guards were eventually disbanded, but their ideology stayed on until the arrest of the Gang of Four, ensuring that dissent, once it became more widespread

in the 1970s, was by and large kept out of the public realm and driven underground.

The dismantling of the Red Guard press, however, led to a real dearth of the press after 1969, that could only be relieved by allowing an increasing number of pre-1966 newspapers and journals to resume publication. This, of course, did not resolve what the article "In Praise of the Red Guard Newspapers" had identified as the main problem of the Party's media work since 1949: the question of mass involvement in the process of newspaper production. The article had hinted to a latent tension, or even contradiction, between two central aspects of the media concept: the first and the fourth clause, the stipulations requiring Party character and popular participation. The authors of the article were unable to provide a solution for this dilemma; it was ultimately up to the Party to search for ways to accommodate the two demands. Under the impact of the Cultural Revolution attacks, the pre-1966 publications had lost most of their legitimacy, and their resurrection in the early 1970s did little to imbue them with new life. The effectiveness of Party propaganda went into a decline that reached its deep point after the arrest of the Gang of Four in October 1976. The propaganda sector had lost nothing of its importance to the political life of the Party, so one of the most urgent tasks to be addressed by the post-Mao leadership was to rebuild the credibility and legitimacy of the press and propaganda apparatus. This involved greater leeway for the Party's publications, a fresh debate over the role of the media in a socialist society, and an adaptation of the media concept to the new circumstances. The following chapter will look into one crucial debate taking place in 1979-1980.



## **Chapter Eight**

### **No Taboos for Reading: *Dushu* and the Thought Liberation Movement**

*“The field of theory work is immensely vast; our theory workers must have courage and vision, must dare to proceed from reality and point out new problems, as well as to solve them.”*  
(Hu Yaobang, January 1979)

*“We must lift the taboos; we must liberate any books that may help us to absorb cultural nourishment and contribute to the realization of the four modernizations – no matter if they are Chinese or foreign, old or new. Let them prove their worth in practice.”*  
(Li Honglin, April 1979)

The end of the Cultural Revolution left the Chinese populace in a state of fatigue; the revolution that was supposed to remake the superstructure had in effect eroded the belief of wide segments of the people in the effectiveness of the logic of class struggle, the dominant paradigm of the past two decades. The arrest of the Gang of Four had removed from power the most unpopular figures in the top leadership, who consequently became a convenient scapegoat for all that had went wrong since 1966. Hua Guofeng’s economic programme promised at least a partial shift from ideological mobilization to economic construction, albeit under the banners of Mao Zedong Thought, Great Leap Forward slogans, and Cultural Revolution rhetoric. To regain the initiative and rebuild the legitimacy of the Party, however, a more through-going debate on the goals and the means of the Chinese revolution was needed, a debate that would re-evaluate the nation’s history since 1949 and arrive at a new definition of the PRC’s “state of affairs” on the path to socialism. Such a debate started soon after the fall of the Gang and eventually brought Deng Xiaoping into power.

Since the media had been a core tool of governance ever since 1949 (and before that a tool in the CCP’s struggle to seize power), a general debate on the credibility and effectiveness of the main pillars of the Party’s ideology did invariably affect the definition of the nature and the function of the media. In other words, the media concept itself was on the test stand. Once the Party moved from revolution to reform, from isolation and world revolution to opening and international cooperation, from class struggle to economic construction – how would the media henceforth be imagined? Could the media concept with its emphasis on Party control, enlightenment and transformation, populism, and class struggle be

adapted to the new ideological and political realities? Would it be necessary to reach a fundamentally new understanding of the media, for example, to re-classify them from administrative agencies to economic enterprises?

As I will show in this chapter, a lively debate on the nature and the functions of the Chinese media set in accompanying the larger political debates that had led up to the Party's Third Plenum in December 1978 that brought Deng Xiaoping into power and passed his policy package of reform and opening (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放).<sup>1</sup> These broader discussions culminated in the "Theory Conference" (*Lilun gongzuo wuxuhui* 理论工作务虚会), a major meeting in Beijing that was designed to communicate the new policy initiatives to intellectuals and cadres in the propaganda sector.<sup>2</sup> The conference lasted, with interruptions, from January to April 1979 and went hand in hand with the rehabilitation of victims of the political campaigns of the last twenty years – a measure to win back the trust of a crucial segment of the intelligentsia, whose input was needed to drive the reform efforts. One outcome of the Theory Conference was the founding of the journal *Dushu* 读书 or *Reading*, that led the debate on the media and was to become the most influential intellectual journal in the 1980s.

In this chapter I will first of all inspect the policy documents that resulted from the Third Plenum and the Theory Conference. These documents contained the normative framework for the entire propaganda sector for the next decade. I will then turn to the journal *Dushu* and the major debate that began to sound out, from the journal's very first issue, the legitimate limits of public discourse on the media. *Dushu* was founded in April 1979 on the credo proclaimed by a seminal article: "No Taboos for Reading" (*Dushu wu jinqu* 读书无禁区). With this

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<sup>1</sup> Chinese historiography tends to overemphasize the significance of the Third Plenum. While it was the juncture that saw the re-emergence of Deng Xiaoping, the "four modernizations" policy (*si ge xiandaihua* 四个现代化) did indeed date from the early 1970s and must be attributed to Zhou Enlai. Compare Barry Naughton. "Industrial Policy During the Cultural Revolution: Military Preparation, Decentralization, and Leaps Forward" in William A. Joseph, Christine P.W. Wong, David Zweig (eds.). *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge, Ma.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1991, p. 153-81. In 1975, the field of literature saw important initiatives of normalization that are documented in Xia Xingzhen. *1975: wentan fengbao jishi*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1995. Several of the best-known pieces of "scar literature" (*shanghen wenxue* 伤痕文学) were published before the Third Plenum. To attribute any and all political changes to the Third Plenum goes therefore too far, the momentous role of the meeting in modern Chinese history notwithstanding.

<sup>2</sup> See Merle Goldman. "Hu Yaobang's Intellectual Network and the Theory Conference of 1979," in *The China Quarterly* 126 (1991), p. 219-42.

provocative theme, the journal tried to promote open debate in all fields and to allow a competition of opinions, thus echoing policy signals of the Third Plenum and the Theory Conference. Concentrating on the taboo debate, I will establish the vision that speaks from the programmatic articles in the journal's founding issue: *Dushu* was conceived as a platform for free debates, where the authors and their readers could engage in unrestricted discourses, bound only by their personal sense of responsibility and their loyalty to the Party's cause. I will then inspect a series of related arguments that emerged in several articles in late 1979 and lifted the debate onto a new level, touching in particular on issues that had hitherto been considered as too sensitive to be discussed openly. Finally, I will examine a number of voices critical of *Dushu's* initial position – voices that appeared in the journal itself and must therefore be seen as a conscious expression of the editors' intention to live up to their initial promise and give room to diverse opinions. *Dushu* reacted on these critical voices and the political pressure exerted on it with a strong reaffirmation of its initial editorial line two years after its founding.

The “Taboo” debate discussed in this chapter relates to a much larger issue known as the “thought liberation movement” (*sixiang jiefang yundong* 思想解放运动). After the Cultural Revolution, large sections of public discourse were handed back to the media and the intellectuals running them, as the Party withdrew from micro-management of the propaganda sector. To rebuild its legitimacy, the CCP hoped to stimulate economic construction and social development by loosening the restrictions placed upon society. The media were called in to give their active support to these reform efforts; giving more leeway to journalists and editors was conceived as a strategy to convince them to throw their support once again behind the Party. Since the Party's general aim, however, was to secure its own position, it took care to keep a close eye on the “strategic heights” of the propaganda sector. The opening of the media went only so far as it did not contradict the fundamental interests of the Party. These two objectives created a tension, and the debates on *Dushu's* pages were an attempt to find out where to draw the border. As the larger political line shifted, however, the magazine found itself more and more becoming a bulwark of the thought liberation movement, resisting pressure to tighten the reins in the ideological field. Periods of increased pressure and those of relaxation alternated throughout the 1980s.

In the instable political climate of the 1980s, the media concept made the successful transition to the “new era;” its central prerogatives could be adapted to the needs of the reformist CCP. The discussions in *Dushu* show the search for a creative new interpretation of the media concept, an interpretation that grants space for innovative thinking while remaining within the central parameters of the concept. Proposals that would move beyond the media concept did emerge in the debate, but these suggestions were ultimately rejected by the CCP.

*Dushu's* efforts to mediate between these competing objectives must also be seen as a function of its very nature. The journal emerged as an outspoken platform for liberal ideas, yet while it encouraged independent thinking and innovative ideas, it was not its distance from the political authorities that allowed the journal to establish its reputation as a courageous path breaker in intellectual affairs, but rather its closeness to a reform-oriented leadership: *Dushu* rose to prominence with the strong backing of high-level establishment intellectuals-cum-cadres. It was founded and run by people highly positioned in the national propaganda apparatus who used a window of opportunity to further liberal thought in China. The same people continued to protect the journal after the CCP propaganda authorities were handed over to more conservative cadres. This peculiar construction means that the debate in *Dushu* reflects the deliberations on the nature of the media within the propaganda *xitong* at a crucial time when this *xitong* was dominated by exceptionally liberal and open-minded leaders. The debate also explains how and why the debate ended up affirming rather than rejecting the media concept. In its new interpretation, the Party's media concept continued to dominate the media sector in the reform decade that followed the Third Plenum.

#### *The Great Turn-Around: Reform Politics*

In his seminal speech at the Central Work Conference that immediately followed the Third Plenum, Deng Xiaoping gave his assessment of the current situation: the task ahead for the CCP was “the turn-around of the core of our



Party's work."<sup>3</sup> The general line of the CCP was to be redefined: Mao Zedong had set the Party on the path of "class struggle as the key link" (*yi jieji douzheng wei gang* 以阶级斗争为纲); Deng Xiaoping now made "economic construction" the key link (*yi jingji jianshe wei gang* 以经济建设为纲). The change in the general line of the CCP was the affirmation of the reform policies for which the coalition around Deng Xiaoping had fought; it illustrated Deng's rise to become the paramount leader of the Party.

The great turn-around (*da zhuanbian* 大转变) had immediate consequences not only for the economic sphere, but produced the need for a general reorientation of the policies in the "superstructure" – including the media sector. First and foremost, the media, which had served the objectives of class struggle – in particular during the Cultural Revolutions – were now to become agents supporting the Party's strategy of economic construction and to create a stable social and political environment for this purpose. Yet the four modernizations, the primary vehicle of economic construction, also required the reassessment of the role of intellectuals in the production process: knowledge and expertise were crucial factors in the modernization of the Chinese economy. The rehabilitation alone of millions of intellectuals was not enough.<sup>4</sup> Rather, their strained relationship with their former persecutors from the "worker and peasant classes" had to be mediated. As a compromise formula, the Party declared physical and mental labour to be of equal value.<sup>5</sup> The social status of intellectuals (or, more adequately, educated people in general) was confirmed in 1982 when they were officially acknowledged as part of the working class.<sup>6</sup>

The signal for the intellectuals was Deng Xiaoping's call for "thought liberation" (*sixiang jiefang* 思想解放). He placed his speech at the Central Work

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<sup>3</sup> "Jiefang sixiang, shi shi qiu shi, tuanjie yizhi xiang qian kan" (dated Dec. 13, 1978) in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1994, vol. 2, p. 140-53, here p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> The intellectuals were newly defined as members of the working class immediately after the Third Plenum. See "Wanzhengde zhunquede lijie dangde zhishifenzi zhengce" (signed "ben bao teyue pinglun yuan") in RMRB, Jan. 4, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> This issue is discussed in Rudolf Wagner. "The Concept of Work/Labour/Arbeit in the Chinese World" in Manfred Bierwisch (ed.). *Die Rolle der Arbeit in verschiedenen Epochen und Kulturen*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003, p. 103-36, esp. p. 104-12.

<sup>6</sup> See Hu Yaobang's work report at the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress "Quanmian kaichuang shehuizhuyi xiandaihua de xin jumian" in RMRB, Sept. 8, 1982.

Conference under this motto and explained the need for more freedom in the intellectual arena:<sup>7</sup>

Only if thought is liberated can we, guided by Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, find correct solutions for the problems left over from the past, as well as for newly emerging problems, and correctly reform the relations of production and the superstructure that do not correspond with the rapid development of the productive forces; [only if thought is liberated] can we determine the concrete road, the orientation, methods, and measures for the realization of the four modernizations under the actual conditions of our country.

In the Marxist understanding of China's situation in late 1978, the superstructure did no longer correspond to the productive forces of the economic base. To bring back into accord thinking and material production, the Party had to allow free thinking and to encourage the "workers" of the superstructure, i.e. the intellectuals, to engage in debates and to make their own contributions to the Party's project. Deng declared: "The more people we have in the Party and among the people's masses who are willing to use their brains and think over problems, the better for our cause. During both revolution and reform, we need a batch of path breakers who dare to think, to explore, and to make innovations."<sup>8</sup> Deng Xiaoping's motive to initiate the opening up of the intellectual sphere was the promotion of the PRC's economic development. The method he proposed was the proper implementation of the "system of democratic centralism" (*minzhu jizhong zhi* 民主集中制): "An extremely important condition for the liberation of thought and for people to use their brains is the proper carrying out of the system of democratic centralism. We need centralized and unified leadership, but only if we have a sufficient amount of democracy, we can achieve real centralism. At the present time, we must place special emphasis on democracy."<sup>9</sup> Deng could not stress the democratic element any more explicitly.

Deng Xiaoping claimed legitimacy for his policies by emphasizing the link to Mao's "Double Hundred" policy and called on the Party to implement the Hundred Flowers.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, he urged cadres "currently we must pay special attention to overcoming bureaucratism."<sup>11</sup> Doing so was in fact a reversal of the policy shift of June 8, 1957, when large numbers of intellectuals were made to suffer for their

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<sup>7</sup> "Jiefang sixiang, shi shi qiu shi, tuanjie yizhi xiang qian kan," p. 141.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

efforts to do exactly that – battling bureaucratism. At the same time, Deng tried to convince hesitating cadres that almost thirty years after the founding of the PRC, there was nothing to fear from competing opinions – to the contrary: “A revolutionary political party fears nothing more than being unable to hear the voice of the people; the most frightening thing is absolute silence.”<sup>12</sup> Deng Xiaoping was thus giving the decisive signal for the opening up of discussion in his speech at the Third Plenum.

Less than four weeks after the end of the Plenum, the Theory Conference was convened in Beijing. The aim of this meeting was to communicate the policy shift to high-level cadres of the propaganda *xitong* who were responsible for elaborating the new policies and to explain them in the terms of Marxism-Leninism. The Theory Conference must be divided into two periods, separated by the holidays of the lunar new year. Merle Goldman has commented on the distinct character of the two stages that resulted from the sudden turn in the political climate when Deng Xiaoping ordered the crackdown on the Democracy Wall Movement.<sup>13</sup> Yet the Theory Conference was conceived from the outset to be divided into two stages: the participants in the first stage, lasting from January to February, were propagandists from Beijing and from the central-level organs, while a larger number of cadres from the provinces and from lower-level organs were invited to join the second stage of the conference.<sup>14</sup>

It was the task of Hu Yaobang, head of the PD since the Third Plenum, to hold the opening speech of the conference and to prepare the attending cadres for the issues that they were to be confronted with. Hu formulated the aims of the conference: “What are the goals we have convened this theory conference for? First, to summarize the general experiences and lessons on the theory and propaganda frontlines. ... Secondly, to study the basic task of our theory and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 144f. The notion of “absolute silence” can, of course, be contested, as the last chapter has shown. Deng’s remarks are better understood as encouraging tolerance for differing and competing opinions initiated by the Party; such Party-endorsed competition had indeed been muted during most of the two decades since the Anti-Rightist Campaign.

<sup>13</sup> *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China: Political Reform in the Deng Xiaoping Era*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 47-61. On the Democracy Wall Movement see Andrew Nathan. *Chinese Democracy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, ch. 1.

<sup>14</sup> See the announcement in Hu Yaobang’s speech at the conference’s opening ceremony “Lilun gongzuo wuxuhui yinyan” in Zhongyang xuanchuanbu bangongting (ed.). *Dang de xuanchuan gongzuo huiyi gaikuang he wenxian*. Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1994, p. 247-58, here p. 249. See also Goldman. *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy*, p. 47-61.

propaganda work after the shift of the Party's general focus of work."<sup>15</sup> To do so, Hu called for "thought liberation" and echoed Deng Xiaoping's call for free discussion: "During this conference, we must carry on the spirit of the Third Plenum and the CC work conference [immediately following the Plenum]; everybody must liberate their minds, start their engines, speak as they wish to, and fully restore and promote intra-Party democracy and our Party's fine traditions of seeking truth from facts, the mass line, and criticism and self-criticism."<sup>16</sup> The tradition Hu Yaobang wanted to see continued was that of the Hundred Flowers.

In his speech, Hu identified three key tasks for theory and propaganda workers for the period ahead. The first was to "consciously read the works of Marx, Lenin, and Mao Zedong."<sup>17</sup> A new approach to Mao Zedong Thought had been the core issue of the "theory criterion" debate that had raged through summer and fall 1978: with the slogan "practice is the sole criterion of truth" (*shijian shi jianyan zhenli de weiyi biao zhun* 实践是检验真理的唯一标准) Deng's supporters had rejected Hua Guofeng's claim to be the legitimate heir of Mao, based on the "two whatevers" (*liang ge fanshi* 两个凡是: "we will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave").<sup>18</sup> Also rejected were the Cultural Revolution policies that Hua had tried to continue. Deng Xiaoping's alternative policy package and his claim to power were legitimated by a new, pragmatist interpretation of the official ideology. After Deng's triumph at the Third Plenum, the new approach had to be consolidated to prepare the ground for the next moves of the reform coalition. These new policies, too, had to be explained in the terms of Mao Zedong Thought – the theory and propaganda workers were expected to shoulder the bulk of this new task.

The second task outlined by Hu was to "face reality" (*mianxiang shiji* 面向实际), another reference to the slogan of the truth criterion debate. "Facing reality" was but another formulation for the creative application of Marxism: "Marxism-

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<sup>15</sup> "Lilun gongzuo wuxuhui yinyan," p. 248f.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>18</sup> On the truth criterion debate see Michael Schoenhals. "The 1978 Truth Criterion Controversy" in CQ 126 (1991), p. 243-68, and Schoenhals (ed. and trsl.). *The 1978 Truth Criterion Controversy*, publ. as *Chinese Studies in Philosophy* 25.2 (1994). The most comprehensive treatment is Shen Baoxiang. *Zhenli biao zhun wenti taolun shimo*. Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1997.

Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought is the theoretical foundation guiding all our work. We must firmly hold on to this foundation, and not for a single moment we can betray it. However, if theory does not face up to reality and does not solve the real problems, then this can be no longer called relying on Marx and Lenin, but means rather to lie on them sleeping.”<sup>19</sup> A flexible approach to ideology did allow the reformers to address the four modernizations and other reform-related projects within a redefined framework of Marxism that would lend legitimacy to these policies.

Hu’s last point addressed the main theme of Deng Xiaoping’s talk at the Third Plenum: thought liberation. In the spirit of Deng, Hu declared: “The field of theory work is immensely vast; our theory workers must have courage and vision, must dare to proceed from reality and point out new problems, as well as to solve them. They must adopt a scientific attitude of upholding truth for the interests of the people, and they must oppose the bad practice of selling out their principles in favour of individual profits.”<sup>20</sup> Encouraging discussions was a precondition to solve the problems the CCP faced. The aim of thought liberation, according to Hu Yaobang, was to overcome dogmatism: “We must liberate our minds from the state of paralysis and half-paralysis, liberate them from the force of habit of small production, and from the [practices] of ‘regulating, blocking, and suppressing everything’ of bureaucratism. We must smash all ‘taboos [*jinqu* 禁区],’ break into pieces all shackles of the mind, and fully promote democracy of theories.”<sup>21</sup> Thought liberation was designed, first of all, to encourage competition of opinions in the field of theory. To leave behind the “shackles” of the past two decades, Hu proposed not only a greater diversity of voices, but also more variety in the fields that were open to discussion. In the last section of his speech Hu explicitly addressed the representatives of the newspapers and the propaganda departments present at the Theory Conference and commented on two areas in particular that he hoped would be discussed more broadly in the papers: the issue of socialist democracy, and the “mass line.” Both topics were hotly debated during the “Democracy Wall Movement” that had brought to the streets and into the population the same issues discussed behind the doors of the Theory Conference.

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<sup>19</sup> “Lilun gongzuo wuxuhui yinyan,” p. 256.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

By encouraging “thought liberation,” Hu Yaobang called for nothing short of “smashing all ‘taboo areas’” (*chongpo yiqie “jinqu”* 冲破一切禁区). The same formulation appears at two more instances in Hu Yaobang’s speech, stressing the importance he attached to the “taboo” issue.<sup>22</sup> To break down the all too narrowly defined limits of public discourse became the main trend in the development of the Chinese media in the 1980s. The founders of *Dushu* magazine were quick to capitalize on Hu’s speech and made his formulation into the rallying cry for their new journal.

### *Dushu and the Taboo Debate*

*Dushu* published its first issue in April 1979, but the preparations for the journal had begun in late 1978, immediately after the Third Plenum.<sup>23</sup> Two men were involved in the process of the journal’s conceptualization from the very first hour: Chen Hanbo 陈翰伯 and Chen Yuan 陈原. Both were veterans of the publishing sector. Chen Hanbo (1914-1988) had joined the CCP at age 22, the same year he graduated from the School of Journalism at Yanjing 燕京 University. He had worked with a number of newspapers and after 1949 joined Xinhua she and held medium-level positions in the CCP PD. In the 1950s, Chen was in charge of the CC organ *Xuexi* 学习 until he was made head of Shangwu yinshuguan and later Renmin chubanshe.<sup>24</sup> The linguist Chen Yuan (b. 1918, unrelated to Chen Hanbo) had received training in the Xinzhi and Sanlian publishing houses. After 1949 he worked with Sanlian and was made vice editor-in-chief of Renmin chubanshe and later editor-in-chief of Shangwu. Both men had closely cooperated for decades and shared many common viewpoints.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 250, 251.

<sup>23</sup> On *Dushu* and its founding see Shen Changwen. “Chu yu wuneng” (dated Oct. 2000). This article has been circulating widely on the Internet, for example at <http://www.cc.org.cn/wencui/oldwencui/zhoukan/1117adaa22.htm> (downloaded May 10, 2003); it appears also in Shen Changwen. *Gelou renyu: Dushu de zhishifenzi huiyi*. Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> On Chen Hanbo see “Zi ni xiao zhuan” and “Cong xiao duzhe dao lao bianji,” both in “Chen Hanbo wenji” bianxiezu (ed.). *Chen Hanbo wenji*. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2000, p. 351f. and 424-28.

When institutional reconstruction after the onslaught of the Cultural Revolution began in 1970, both men quickly rose to high-level positions in the publishing sector: Chen Hanbo first served as director and editor-in-chief of Renmin chubanshe and in 1978 became acting head of the State Council's Administrative Bureau of Publishing Affairs. Chen Yuan was made a member of the Bureau's Party group and was concurrently director and editor-in-chief of the prestigious Shangwu yinshuguan. So by late 1978, the two Chens were high-level cadres who as a matter of fact controlled the Chinese publishing sector. It was from this position that they initiated the journal *Dushu*. As Sanlian was not an independent publisher but existed in name only, they borrowed Sanlian's name for the journal that was in fact run by Renmin chubanshe. It is thus fair to say that *Dushu* was nothing less than the unofficial organ (*jiguan* 机关) of the Bureau of Publishing Affairs.<sup>25</sup>

*Dushu* magazine was not born in a conceptual vacuum. Rather, it was modelled after a journal published by Shenghuo shudian back in the 1940s: *Dushu yu chuban* 读书与出版. This magazine had started in 1946 as a forum where Shenghuo advertised its new books; in early 1947, the publisher decided to turn it into a regular journal with a new design and a proper editorial board.<sup>26</sup> The board members were Zhou Jianren, the historian Du Guoxiang 杜国庠, Ge Baoquan 戈宝权 (a translator specializing in Soviet literature), Chen Hanbo, and Chen Yuan. A veteran Shenghuo man, Shi Mei 史枚,<sup>27</sup> was made editor-in-chief; Chen Yuan took over in this position after Shi left for Hong Kong.<sup>28</sup> *Dushu yu chuban* presented its readers a broad variety of issues, focusing on books of "progressive" content; the journal hoped to make readers sensitive to the problems China was confronted with and to introduce foreign knowledge to China. The journal thus placed itself in the May Fourth enlightenment tradition, with the leftist leaning typical for Sanlian

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<sup>25</sup> This assessment has been supported by interviewee 109.

<sup>26</sup> On the background of *Dushu yu chuban* and *Dushu's* relation to this journal see Shen Changwen. "Chu yu wuneng." *Dushu yu chuban* was closed by the GMD authorities after only 21 issues in 1948.

<sup>27</sup> Shi Mei (1914-1981) joined the CCP as early as 1931 and worked as a propaganda cadre in the Shanghai underground. He worked for a number of leftist journals and joined Shenghuo in 1939. After 1949 he was made head of Sanlian's editorial department and later joined Renmin chubanshe. The open-minded Shi was declared a Rightist in 1957 and rehabilitated only twenty years later.

<sup>28</sup> See Chen Yuan. "Shenghuo, Dushu, Xinzhi san jia chubanshe de zazhi he wo" in *Chen Yuan chuban wenji*. Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 1995, p. 461-64, here p. 464.

journals. The magazine's slogan read: "a general interest journal of intellectual reviews, focusing on books" (*yi shuji wei zhongxin de sixiang pinglun de zonghexing zazhi* 以书籍为中心的思想评论的综合性杂志).<sup>29</sup>

For the first issue after the 1947 reform, *Dushu yu chuban* had asked the well-known educator Sun Qimeng 孙起孟 for a contribution that in fact must be read as a statement of intent of the journal itself.<sup>30</sup> Under the title "Knowledge and Learning" (*Xuewen yu wen xue* 学问与问学), Sun elaborated on the relation between learning (*xue* 学), critical and independent thinking (*wen* 问), and the purpose of knowledge (*xuewen* 学问). Sun proposes that "knowledge is mankind's cognitive tool to explain and solve the problems of life,"<sup>31</sup> but cautions that this practice-related character of knowledge can develop properly only if learning is closely bound to a concrete purpose: "Learning must focus on questions! A great scholar [*xuezhe* 学者] is necessarily a great asker [*wenzhe* 问者]! If one does not dare to ask or is not good at asking, then it is not suitable to talk about knowledge [*xuewen* 学问]."<sup>32</sup> Inversely, critical thinking is a necessary condition for successful studying: "Whoever wants to learn, must first ask! He must first learn to 'ask!' Only when he has learned to 'ask,' he has [grasped] the foundation of knowledge."<sup>33</sup> Sun ends his article with a Marxist turn: "Truth is objective; knowledge is the subjective reflection of truth. ... Our learning must focus on 'questions;' first we must learn to 'ask,' and when we have learned this we might start asking questions. Only when 'asking' and 'learning' have arrived at the same level, this may be called true knowledge."<sup>34</sup> Real knowledge is a reflection of reality, but it can become "real" only through earnest study and free and critical thinking. This call became the guide for action for the young journal *Dushu yu chuban*, and it was these ideas that inspired the founding of *Dushu* thirty years later – ideas that

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<sup>29</sup> See Shen Changwen. "Chu yu wuneng."

<sup>30</sup> In *Dushu yu chuban* 1947.1, p. 1-3. My assumption that Sun's article was more than just a contribution to the journal is based on the fact that his core arguments were repeated by the journal's former editors even decades later as their own motto, even without quoting Sun. For example, Chen Hanbo. "Cong xiao duzhe dao lao bianji," p. 426.

<sup>31</sup> Sun Qimeng. "Xuewen yu wen xue," p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.



the patrons of *Dushu* had internalized a generation earlier, before the founding of the PRC.<sup>35</sup>

After the Third Plenum the conditions to start a journal in the tradition of *Dushu yu chuban* seemed ripe: the “Truth criterion” debate of 1978 had formulated the same ideas as contained in Sun Qimeng’s article, and Hu Yaobang’s talk at the Theory Conference confirmed the same line: to promote discussion and free thinking in order to generate input for China’s modernization drive. Chen Hanbo and Chen Yuan used their administrative positions and sought another man of the *Dushu yu chuban* team to serve as *Dushu*’s first editor-in-chief: Shi Mei. With the strong support of other well-known establishment intellectuals, such as the translator Feng Yidai 冯亦代,<sup>36</sup> who agreed to assume the position of a vice editor-in-chief, the two Chen’s went ahead with their venture.<sup>37</sup> Yet while the idea for *Dushu* certainly came from the two Chen’s, it is unlikely that so prominent a venture could have gone ahead without approval and support from people placed even higher in the CCP’s hierarchy. The self-confidence of *Dushu* suggests considerable trust of the editors in their backing, which may be sought in the environs of Hu Yaobang, or possibly even in Hu himself, who in 1979 was PD head.

A considerable amount of support was indeed necessary for a journal such as *Dushu*. In analogy to its predecessor, the journal declared its motto to be “a journal of intellectual reviews, focusing on books” (*yi shu wei zhongxin de sixiang pinglun kanwu* 以书为中心的思想评论刊物).<sup>38</sup> This characterization had profound implications. Reviewing of ideas had been monopolized for decades by none other than the theoretical organ of the CCP CC – *Hongqi*. As a “journal of intellectual

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<sup>35</sup> Sun Qimeng’s article was not explicitly mentioned in *Dushu*. This may be attributed in part to the journal’s editorial policy to refrain from addressing its readers directly, but to speak to them through the journal itself. The only explicit programmatic statement of *Dushu* was “Liang zhounian gao duzhe,” which is discussed below. My assumption that the 1947 article inspired the two Chens when they founded *Dushu* is based on their close association with *Dushu yu chuban* in the 1940s and the programmatic nature of the article. Finally, the name of the modern *Dushu* is a direct reference to the 1940s journal and its tradition.

<sup>36</sup> Feng Yidai (b. 1913) had been active in the publishing field since the Republican era; after 1949 he held positions in the General Press Administration. Since 1952 Feng led the Foreign Languages Press and was vice editor-in-chief of the English-language monthly *Chinese Literature*.

<sup>37</sup> On the involvement of the two Chen’s and the founding of *Dushu* compare also Chen Fong-ching, Jin Guantao. *From Youthful Manuscripts to River Elegy: the Chinese Popular Cultural Movement and Political Transformation, 1979-1989*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1997, p. 168f.

<sup>38</sup> See Shen Changwen. “Chu yu wuneng.”

reviews,” *Dushu* in fact entered into direct competition with the Party’s powerful mouthpiece.<sup>39</sup> It did so on the basis of the Hundred Flowers policy that Deng Xiaoping had called for in his speech at the work conference following the Third Plenum. The goal that the founders had set for the journal was ambitious indeed.

*Dushu*’s first issue was scheduled for April, but while the journal’s launch was still being prepared, political events were once again overtaking the efforts of the editorial board. A change in the situation became apparent in February 1979 when newspapers began to talk about people who, under the pretext of democracy, tried to do harm to China’s social and economic stability – a reference to the Democracy Wall activists. The second half of the Theory Conference was held in a markedly different atmosphere, and on March 30 Deng Xiaoping addressed the Conference. In his speech, he delivered a sobering message:<sup>40</sup>

The Centre maintains that, to carry out the four modernizations in China, we must uphold four cardinal principles in ideology and politics. This is the basic prerequisite for realizing the four modernizations. These four principles are:

1. We must keep to the socialist road;
2. we must uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat;
3. we must uphold the leadership of the Communist Party;
4. we must uphold Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.

With the four cardinal principles, Deng Xiaoping had outlined the absolute borders of free discourse. The thought liberation movement had helped to bring Deng back into power, but when he saw his newly won power endangered by the very forces he had called in, the new paramount leader closed the lid on free debates.

It was under these circumstances that the first issue of *Dushu* reached the audiences. In a bold move, *Dushu* chose to ignore the speech Deng had held only a few days earlier, and to go ahead with a format that rather answered to Hu Yaobang’s January speech and Deng’s speech at the December 1978 work conference. The change in the political climate had been in the air even before Deng’s March 30 speech, so the editors of *Dushu* would have had enough time to accommodate, or even to postpone the launch date in order to conform with the new political line. Choosing to do neither, they put their new slogan squarely in front of a nationwide readership: “no taboos for books!”

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<sup>39</sup> *Dushu* was reminded of its precarious undertaking sometime in the 1980s during a confrontation with “a leader in the discourse [i.e., propaganda] circles (*yi wei yulunjie de lingdaoren* 一位舆论界的领导人).” See *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> “Jianchi si xiang jiben yuanze” in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* 2.158-84, here p. 164f.

Such is the title of the front article in *Dushu's* first issue. Instead of a notice of publication (*fakanci* 发刊词) or another form of introduction, *Dushu* chose a format that could not be closer to Sun Qimeng's programmatic article in *Dushu yu chuban*. For this purpose, Chen Hanbo and Chen Yuan had asked the scholar Li Honglin 李洪林 for a powerful contribution. After the Cultural Revolution, Li had established himself as an open-minded intellectual with a liberal inclination.<sup>41</sup> Even more important, Li was the deputy head of the CCP PD's Theory Bureau. With him, *Dushu* had won one of the CCP's most prominent theoreticians for its first issue; due to Li's close association with Hu Yaobang (Hu had arranged Li's transfer to the PD), the journal hoped to boost its political standing.

"No Taboos for Reading" is a straightforwardly argued but highly readable article of the very kind that became known later as the "Dushu style," combining intellectual appeal (*sixiang xing* 思想性) with readability (*kedu xing* 可读性). Li Honglin laments the deplorable situation of the Chinese book market, that is still characterized by a dearth of books – even more than two years after the fall of the "Gang of Four." He likens the persecution of books during the Cultural Revolution with the search for criminals on the run: whoever was found in the possession of such "criminals," or books, was declared guilty by association. The books themselves, like common criminals, were locked up for more than a decade, if they did not fare even worse and were pulped to produce paper for the printing of new books of a more "revolutionary" nature. In Li Honglin's opinion, the cultural authorities had wreaked more havoc under the "Gang of Four" than the censorship regimes of the Qing period or Chiang Kai-shek: instead of compiling lists outlawing thousands of books, during the Cultural Revolution a single positive list of slightly less than one thousand books had existed, with anything else being banned from book stores and libraries.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The *Dushu* article was not Li Honglin's only answer to Deng Xiaoping's "four cardinal principles." In a famous series of three articles in RMRB, he offered a liberal interpretation of Deng's new policy. See "Women jianchi shenmeyang de shehuizhuyi?" in RMRB, May 9, 1979; "Women jianchi shenmeyang de wuchanjieji zhuanzheng?" in RMRB, June 22, 1979; "Women jianchi shenmeyang de dang de lingdao" in RMRB, Oct. 5. Li had written a fourth article that could not be published due to opposition from Hu Qiaomu. See Hu Jiwei. "Bing xue qi qing, jin shi qi jian: zhuisi Wang Ruoshui tongzhi" (dated Feb. 2002) at <http://www.wangruoshui.net/jinian/hujiwei.htm> (downloaded Feb. 28, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> According to Li, two issues of what was presumably a periodical, with the title *Kaifang tushu mulu* were issued at an undisclosed date, containing ca. 1000 books of the humanities (*wenke*). I have

The situation had slightly improved in 1978, when an increasing number of reprints entered bookstores across China. Yet the general situation was far from satisfactory:<sup>43</sup>

But, the taboos for books have not been lifted entirely, because a matter of principle has not yet been clarified, and the poison of the “Gang of Four’s” cultural despotism is still around and creating mischief; some of our comrades still shudder at the thought of [things past].

This matter of principle is: Do the people have the liberty to read?

With this question, Li Honglin has arrived at the crucial point in his argumentation. For him, the answer is obvious: “To seal up books in the shops and libraries, to search other people’s houses and confiscate their books, to inspect and seize books at the customs offices or the post office, and to burn or pulp books at will – all these acts apparently proceed from one legal assumption: that the people have no freedom to read books. The people themselves have no power to decide which books to read and which not, and therefore also which plays to watch, which films to see, and what music to listen to, etc.”<sup>44</sup> To restrict the circulation of books in society is, first of all, illegal. Li calls for more freedom for the Chinese people, the freedom of access to reading matter, and, by implication, also the freedom to publish many and varied books – a diversity of books to choose from is the precondition for the people to regain those rights that the “Gang of Four” is accused of denying to them.

The question that necessarily arises is, can “good” and “bad” books equally be published? Or, in Li’s words, “what policy shall we adopt towards all the different kinds of books, including fragrant flowers and poisonous weeds?”<sup>45</sup> History has shown that the power of judgment on “good” and “bad” can lead to disaster if it falls into the wrong hands. During the Cultural Revolution, all criteria of judgment, be they political or moral, had been turned upside down. As a consequence, not only the criteria themselves had lost their credibility, but what was at stake was the moral authority of the Party to legitimately make such

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been unable to locate this extremely interesting publication. Li’s observation notwithstanding, there were of course numerous lists of denounced books circulating during the Cultural Revolution in all kinds of Red Guard publications.

<sup>43</sup> Li Honglin. “Dushu wu jinqu” in *Dushu* 1979.1, p. 2-7, here p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

judgments. Like many other intellectuals, Li had lost the trust in the CCP's wisdom, or at least in the policy of banning books:<sup>46</sup>

Yet generally speaking, making a policy out of "banning books" is a product of feudal despotism. Feudalism profits from the people being stupid. The less culture the masses have, the easier they can be manipulated, and the easier they will follow the will of those in authority. For this reason all feudal rulers practice cultural despotism and compile long lists of "banned books." In fact, "banning" is often a powerful impetus to promote the circulation of books – because these so-called "banned books" for the greater part are good books loved by the masses, and the more you try to ban them, the more they will circulate. And therefore "closing the door in a winter night to read banned books" has become a great pleasure in all feudal times; if there was no "book banning policy," there would be not be such "pleasure."

This latter observation, too, must be seen as a direct consequence of the Cultural Revolution, when the puritanism of the cultural authorities had ended up being counterproductive and had rather encouraged a grey market of illegal books that were exchanged and sometimes even hand-copied.<sup>47</sup>

Li Honglin calls the negative interventions into the publishing sector a blatant failure that had served neither the people (who were denied access to "spiritual nourishment," *jingshen liangshi* 精神粮食) nor the Party, since the people were even more attracted by the forbidden matter. The excessive control measures introduced during the Cultural Revolution to tighten the grip on the media had damaged their effectiveness, and also the effectiveness of the media concept that governed media work, and that had allowed for the excesses firsthand. Li Honglin proposed an entirely different approach to the problem:<sup>48</sup>

As Marxists, we do not face the civilization of all mankind with an attitude of hate, fear, and bans, but adopt an analytical, critical, and constructive approach. At the same time we are confident that the proletarian culture, which represents the highest level of mankind, is able to defeat all hostile ideologies, to overcome the shortcomings our culture displayed in the past, and to build an even higher culture on the present basis. Therefore we do not adopt a "book banning policy," and we do not prohibit the people's masses coming into contact with negative things. Twenty-two years ago, comrade Mao Zedong criticized some Party members, saying that they knew too little about negative things. He said: "The books of Kant and Hegel, Confucius and Chiang Kai-shek, all this negative stuff must be read."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Comp. Perry Link. "Hand-Copied Entertainment Fiction from the Cultural Revolution" in Perry Link, Richard Madsen, Paul G. Pickowicz (eds.). *Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People's Republic*. Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1989, p. 17-36.

<sup>48</sup> Li Honglin. "Dushu wu jinqu," p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> "Zai sheng, shi, zizhiqu dangwei shuji huiyi shang de jianghua" (dated Jan. 27, 1957) in *Mao Zedong xuanji* 5.330-62, here p. 346. Note that this is a quotation from the Hundred Flowers period.

Drawing legitimacy from Mao Zedong, Li calls on the Party to have confidence in its own project and to place more trust into the people's ability to follow the Party line on their own account. The socialist culture of the PRC has nothing to fear from competition with other schools of thought. This far-reaching argument, of course, was possible only after the "great turn-around" decided at the Third Plenum: the shift from class struggle to economic construction also contained a re-evaluation of the last clause of the media concept. The role of the media as weapon and arena of class struggle had dominated media policy ever since 1957; under the new political climate, other aspects of the media concept became the focus of attention.

The Third Plenum thus must be seen as a major turning point in PRC media policy. Yet does this mean that the 35 year-old media concept was discarded? Li Honglin shows that the media concept does still apply in the new situation:<sup>50</sup>

Not banning is naturally not tantamount to letting things drift along. The Party's leadership of editing, translating, publishing, distribution, and reading must be strengthened, in order to strengthen the Marxist camp. All those books that tarnish human dignity, corrupt the social ways, and poison the minds of the youth, must be rigorously suppressed, because such books do not belong to culture at all. They are extremely dirty and, as Lu Xun has said, are not better than excrements and snot.<sup>51</sup>

There is still a bottom line that cannot be crossed: the leadership of the CCP. Yet after the Third Plenum it was not difficult for a liberal Marxist like Li Honglin to accept this bottom line, as many intellectuals were confident that in the new setting they would be able to promote their own ideas and to claim enough freedom for themselves. Li's understanding of the bottom line is quite clear: it is absolutely necessary to sort out those books that cause deliberate damage to the Party's cause, which is also that of loyal intellectuals. For Li, it is completely possible to tell "fragrant flowers" from "poisonous weeds;" what he rejects is the overly narrow interpretation of this process, that had ended with the large-scale – and in Li's eyes unjustified – book bans during the Cultural Revolution. Li's intention is clear: there must be a limit to what is allowed. This line is reached whenever books are found to be openly hostile to the projects of the Party. The CCP has the right and the power to determine the direction of the country, and the media, including books (or a magazine like *Dushu*) ultimately have the function to support the Party

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Such a remark of Lu Xun is widely reported, but I have been unable to find it in his writings.

in its efforts. It is not the media concept itself that has changed, but rather the strategies that are employed to guide the media in fulfilling their mission.

The official strategy of the time is thought liberation, the banner that Deng Xiaoping had declared at the Third Plenum. Deng had called on the Party to open up their minds so as to be better prepared to meet the challenges of modernization. Li Honglin echoes that call:<sup>52</sup>

The main problem in the field of books currently is a critical shortage of good books, is that the thinking of some people has not yet been sufficiently liberated, is that the masses do still lack the democratic right to read books – but that does not mean that things should be left drifting along. To meet the needs of the four modernizations, we hope sincerely to see more and better books. We must lift the taboos; we must liberate any books that may help us to absorb cultural nourishment and contribute to the realization of the four modernizations – no matter if they are Chinese or foreign, old or new. Let them prove their worth in practice.

To achieve the goals of the reform policy, there is only one way to go in the media sector: to get rid of the numerous taboos that strangle free discussion and bog down the enthusiasm of the intellectuals who are the main audience of a journal like *Dushu*. Li concludes his article:<sup>53</sup>

In the world, there is no absolute “purity.” In the air, there is always some dust, and in water there are always some microorganisms and other matter. We must have confidence in the human respiratory organs to clean the dust and in the digestive tract’s ability to deal with the microorganisms. Otherwise we would have to wear a gas mask and drink only distilled water. After lifting the taboos for our books, there will certainly (certainly, not possibly) appear some really bad books (and not just those that the false monks [i.e., the “Gang of Four” and their followers] have called “bad books”). This is something we can definitely anticipate and that we need not fear. Let the people face them, and they will know how to deal with them.

Li Honglin calls on the Party to have faith in the ability of the Chinese people to judge right from wrong and to draw the correct lessons from the books they read. The same logic, of course, applies to the intellectuals in charge of *Dushu*, and in the entire media sector: they deserve the CCP’s trust to follow their own understanding and to adhere to the Party policies.

Li Honglin’s article is a courageous piece for the boldness with which he makes his argument: he cannot accept compromises when the liberty of the people to read, and thus to enlighten themselves, is at stake. The date of publication – shortly after Deng Xiaoping had signalled his retreat from the thought liberation policy – helped to draw attention to the article. Its programmatic nature

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

was underlined further through its position on the first pages of the journal, a conscious parallel to Sun Qimeng's article in *Dushu yu chuban*. Another intervention of *Dushu's* editors made sure that Li's article would have the planned impact: the article had originally been entitled "Reading must also do away with taboos" (*Dushu ye yao pochu jinqu* 读书也要破除禁区).<sup>54</sup> Yet the editors decided to change this title into "No Taboos for Reading" (*Dushu wu jinqu* 读书无禁区) – a much more provocative slogan. They did not even bother to tell Li Honglin. It was little wonder that the article caused an uproar when it was published and triggered a major debate.

"No Taboos for Reading" was accompanied by a number of shorter articles in the same issue addressing the same topic. Four essays elaborated on the theme of Li Honglin's article and drew attention to particularly deploring aspects of China's book market. Considering the fact that all four articles are signed by pseudonyms and that they all take up Li Honglin's main theme – the authors had obviously read Li's essay – I consider it likely that the small quartet stems from the pens of *Dushu's* editors. The first article is entitled "Liberate 'neibu books'" and criticizes the practice of publishing excessive numbers of books for a restricted readership (*neibu* 内部).<sup>55</sup> Many different kinds of books were classified for limited distribution, including the works of "revisionist" authors such as Bernstein and Kautsky, but also the memoirs of Richard Nixon or seemingly innocent academic works such as *Tongjian jishi benmo* 通鉴纪事本末.<sup>56</sup> In the years 1975-1977 alone, more than 1,500 books were published for internal circulation, with some publishing houses classifying more than fifty per cent of their output as *neibu*. Even worse, the author laments the strict hierarchy of *neibu* books, that carefully limits access to different levels of the political and administrative ranks. The author calls on publishing houses to abolish these excessive forms of secrecy, that do

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<sup>54</sup> See Shen Changwen. "Chu yu wuneng." Li himself later remembered that the original title had read "Smashing the taboo for Reading" (*Dapo dushu jinqu* 打破读书禁区). See his *Lilun fengyun*. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1986, p. 20f. Yet since Shen claims that he is still in possession of the original manuscript (See "Shushang xianhua: Shen Changwen dushu luntan fangtan lu," July 3, 2003, at <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14738/25835/1949052.html>; downloaded Aug. 18, 2003), I consider the title he gives to be more reliable.

<sup>55</sup> Yu Chen. "Jiefang 'neibu shu'" in *Dushu* 1979.1, p. 8-9. The two characters making up this name, *yu* 雨 and *chen* 辰, combined become *zhen* 震 – tremor of earthquake. Nothing less than an earthquake in the book market was needed to liberate the 'neibu' publications.

<sup>56</sup> A popular work of historiography by the Song dynasty scholar Yuan Shu 袁枢 (1131-1205).



more harm than good: “I think that we should let our young people (of course only those young people that are able and willing to read these books) come into contact with this kind of negative examples; we may call this collecting experiences by braving the storms – instead of becoming ‘hothouse flowers.’ What is wrong with doing so? Even less do we need to mention researchers who need these kinds of books.”<sup>57</sup> Negative examples (*fanmian jiaocai* 反面教材) were regularly circulated as study materials during the Hu Feng campaign, the anti-Rightists campaign, the Cultural Revolution, and other mass movements. The author thus calls for trust into the readers’ ability to digest this fare even without the Party’s guidance. The argument is the same as that in Li Honglin’s article: to have more confidence in the audiences’ ability to deal with the books they read without falling prey to the corrupting influences of non-proletarian literature.<sup>58</sup>

Another article addresses a related problem: the scarcity of books is aggravated not only by an excessive number of books classified as *neibu*, but also by the habit of many work units to “swallow up” newly appearing books to provide them to their leading cadres: “And especially if it happens that Xinhua shudian has been allocated a few dozen bestselling books, typically each member of some standing committee buys a volume, no matter if they need it or not; and the propaganda and theory organs that need these books for their work do not even catch a glimpse of them.”<sup>59</sup> Books are thus channelled to unproductive purposes, to the disadvantage of the professionals on the one hand, and the general readers, the people, who only rarely get the opportunity to purchase interesting new books through the regular channels, on the other hand.

The third article laments the difficulty of importing foreign print products to China: “The customs ‘pass’” (*Haiguan zhe yi guan* 海关这一关). Too many foreign language books are stopped by the Chinese customs service and sent back; this practice, so the author, does harm to China at a time when the CCP’s modernization project required the large-scale import of foreign knowledge.

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<sup>57</sup> Yu Chen. “Jiefang ‘neibu shu,’” p. 8f.

<sup>58</sup> Besides the politically motivated arbitrary decisions on books, there are other reasons why books are labelled *neibu*, which the author does not mention. A substantial number of translations, for example, were classified as *neibu* because they were unauthorized and the Chinese publishers paid no copyright fees; this is supported by a quick glance at Zhongguo banben tushuguan (ed.). *Quanguo neibu faxing tushu zongmu, 1949-1986*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988. I am grateful to Rudolf Wagner for bringing this point to my attention.

<sup>59</sup> Xin Shan. “Zhizhi ‘qintun’” in *Dushu* 1979.1, p. 8-9, here p. 8.

Without access to foreign language literature, intellectuals and publishing houses are hard pressed to increase their output in foreign translations. The approach the author proposes corresponds to that put forward by Li Honglin: “We honestly hope that we proceed in everything we do from the four modernizations and do truly trust our people, that we liberate our thinking a little bit, and that we walk a little faster.”<sup>60</sup> Trust in the people (and especially in those in the publishing industry) is a prerequisite for modernization.

The last essay deals with China’s library system: “Borrowing books is difficult.”<sup>61</sup> The author likens Chinese libraries (*tushuguan* 图书馆) to “store houses for forbidden books” (*jinshuguan* 禁书馆): too short opening hours that conflict with most people’s regular working hours, bad and slow service, a mountain of bureaucratic regulations restricting access, and finally an excessive number of books locked up in “special collections” (*te cang shu* 特藏书) are making life difficult for those readers who have been unable to purchase the books they need in the bookstores and therefore have come to the libraries to read.

The issue of libraries was discussed in another article that appeared a month later, in *Dushu*’s second issue.<sup>62</sup> The author, Fan Yumin 范玉民 (probably a pseudonym, “against ignorance among the people,” a word play on *yumin* 愚民),<sup>63</sup> starts with an unusual idea: the Chinese word for ‘library,’ *tushuguan* 图书馆, could in fact be shortened as follows: 書. This new character shows the character *shu* 书 (book) in a square encirclement – a book in a prison. Chinese libraries, so Fan, have become nothing less than prisons where books are incarcerated (*qiu jin tushu de jianyu* 囚禁图书的监狱), sometimes for decades. Even after the Cultural Revolution, progress has been slow, and most books have remained under detention. Fan Yumin calls for the libraries to open all “four doors,” that is the four sides of the encirclement, and thus to liberate the books. The argumentation that follows is familiar from the articles of the first issue: the excessive restrictions on the access to books are unreasonable and prevent the people from informing themselves and raising their “cultural level.” Even worse, they are an impediment

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<sup>60</sup> Huang Lun. “Haiguan zhe yi guan” in *Dushu* 1979.1, p. 10-11, here p. 11.

<sup>61</sup> Huang Ke. “Jie shu nan” in *Dushu* 1979.1, p. 10-11.

<sup>62</sup> Fan Yumin. “Shu/Tu bixu si men da kai” in *Dushu* 1979.2, p. 11-16.

<sup>63</sup> I am grateful to Barbara Mittler for suggesting this reading.

on modernization and reform. Fan calls on the authorities to open up the libraries, to trust the people – and especially to have faith in their ability to deal with books considered politically incorrect. He even suggests that everyone willing to read it should be given access to Chiang Kai-shek's *Zhongguo zhi mingyun* 中国之命运: only few people would voluntarily read such reactionary writings anyway, and those who did would certainly be bored. There was nothing wrong with letting the people taste the propaganda of times long gone by. After living under socialism for thirty years, the Chinese people would no longer be corrupted by reading such works.<sup>64</sup>

This argumentation in fact characterizes the self-understanding of the journal *Dushu* that found its first expression in the “No Taboos for Reading” debate: throughout the 1980s, *Dushu* tried to touch on issues that hitherto had been untouched and to bring up new ideas, from both China and from abroad.<sup>65</sup> The journal claimed legitimacy for its editorial line from the reform and modernization policies and in particular from Deng Xiaoping's call for thought liberation. These policies made it easy for the intellectuals, and especially those in the media sector, to support the Party line. Yet *Dushu* clearly had its own agenda, as became apparent soon thereafter: it was in the self-interest of the Chinese intellectuals to create a larger space of public debate in which they could legitimately manoeuvre. After the Cultural Revolution, the intellectuals' revolutionary enthusiasm was eroded to a degree where they found it reasonable to demand their particular rights ever more consciously. Journals such as *Dushu* were a medium for the intellectuals' quest: they were in search of greater independence from the government, and at the same time searched for avenues to participate actively in politics. On the initiative from the intellectuals who were running them, the media were trying to redefine their status and their relationship with the government.

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<sup>64</sup> *Zhongguo zhi mingyun* was modelled after Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and was published in 1943. Interestingly, the leftist Shenghuo shudian published another collection of Chiang's speeches in 1939 with the argument that people should study it widely in order to understand the book's arguments and reject them. See Xu Juemin. “Shenghuo shudian wei he chuban *Jiang weiyuanzhang kang-zhan yanlun ji*” in *Chuban shiliao* 7 (1987), p. 36-37. In his *Dushu* article Fan Yumin also suggests that books such as those of the Chinese Trotskists and the members of the Hu Feng clique, in 1979 still labelled counter-revolutionary, should be open to everyone, quoting the same reasons.

<sup>65</sup> Shen Changwen summed up this approach with the slogan “Opening whatever bottle is still closed” (*na hu bu kai ti na hu* 哪壶不开提哪壶). See “Chu yu wuneng.”

### *The Debate Widens: Thought Liberation*

The debate in *Dushu* was not limited to the taboo issue. The larger question of thought liberation (*sixiang jiefang* 思想解放) featured prominently on the journal's pages from the very beginning. In the taboo debate, leading establishment intellectuals had called for more freedom in publishing and in the book trade. In general, they echoed the new Party line that had emerged at the Third Plenum, because they could identify their own demands with this line. Consequently, they remained within the limits of the media concept in a number of respects: first and foremost, the journal seemed to toe the Party line by advocating thought liberation and the four modernizations (in the light of Deng's speech on the "four cardinal principles," of course, it must be said that they opted for a selective approach). Secondly, the leadership of the Party and its right to determine the direction of the propaganda sector was questioned nowhere in the debate: the appeals to open up libraries or to ease the customs regulations on books all proceeded from the premise of the Party's power and its right to determine the proper direction. Most importantly, however, was the intellectuals' adherence to the general normative project that guided the propaganda sector: all articles of the taboo debate defined the function of books in the terms of enlightenment and education. Even where the people were allowed access to more diverse reading matter, the ultimate goal remained the "raising of standards" and the improvement of "cultural levels."

The thought liberation debate touched on more fundamental issues. From the first issue, *Dushu* made efforts to transport its message – the lifting of taboos – into other related fields, such as history. The founding issue contained an article that reviewing the state of the field of modern Chinese history (*jindaishi* 近代史) that shows how the principle of "thought liberation" is to be applied across various academic disciplines and fields of knowledge.<sup>66</sup> In line with the master narrative prevailing in the spring of 1979, the author opens with a denunciation of the "Gang of Four:"<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Bian Zhe. "Jiefang sixiang, tupo jinqi: Zhongguo jindaishi zhuzuo zhong de wenti mantan zhi yi" in *Dushu* 1979.1, p. 25-30. The author is a well-known historian (no pseudonym).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

During the long time of cultural despotism under the rule of the “Gang of Four,” research in modern Chinese history fared just like research in other social sciences: forbidden areas and taboos everywhere. The “Gang of Four” has been crushed, but people’s hearts are still shuddering in fear and they do still carry the poison in them; the taboos have not yet all been broken open. If we do not smash these shackles of the mind and break out of the taboos, the research in modern Chinese history will be unable to achieve even richer results.

Chinese historiography has been forced into a straightjacket that has strangled not only any new results emerging from historians’ research, but has even distorted historical truth. One-sided interpretations of facts were the result of political manoeuvring during the Cultural Revolution. But even during the time before 1966, political interference had led to serious problems, for example, with regard to the Taiping movement: “In the research from the seventeen years before the Cultural Revolution, a trend to exaggerate is omnipresent in the assessment of this great rural revolution.”<sup>68</sup> The Taipings had been greeted as a revolutionary peasant uprising, yet superstitious, feudal, and irrational elements in the Taiping’s ideology and their actions had long been a taboo issue. The author calls for a more diverse view of history that would allow for a more appropriate vision of China’s past. He finds similar problems with the Chinese historians’ judgement of the 1898 constitutional reforms, the Boxer uprising, and the 1911 revolution. He hopes to see these issues discussed in the media, such as in the journal *Dushu*.

Modern Chinese history was but one area where *Dushu* wanted taboos to be lifted as the debate moved on to more comprehensive themes. A test came in the summer of 1979, when anxiety rose among intellectuals: in the aftermath of Deng Xiaoping’s speech on the “four cardinal principles,” some provincial leaders had tried to reign in the debates and start “tightening” (*shou 收*). In this situation, *Dushu* came forward with a strong piece in defence of thought liberation. To avoid drawing too much attention, the article was buried at an inconspicuous place in the middle of the journal; neither was it advertised on the issue’s cover. The essay’s tone, however, makes it stand out from the usual style of the articles appearing in *Dushu*. The language of the article and its sharp rhetoric are familiar from important RMRB editorials or speeches of the leadership, but they are highly unusual for an article in a young academic journal. For these reasons, the atypical

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

character, and the sheer boldness of this intervention into the debate, this article, published in *Dushu's* August issue, deserves our attention.<sup>69</sup>

The article carries the title “Liberate thought and march towards victory.” The title of the article’s first subsection, “Three thought liberation movements” is an obvious reference to a long article by Zhou Yang that had appeared in RMRB two months before – “Three great thought liberation movements.”<sup>70</sup> This latter article was a report Zhou had given at a conference convened by the Academy of Social Sciences to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the May Fourth movement. The May Fourth movement was the first of the three movements Zhou was speaking on; the other two were the Yan’an rectification campaign, and the reforms since the Third Plenum.

Qiao Shu’s *Dushu* article borrows not only the subtitle from Zhou Yang. Rather, a full third of his article consists of literal quotes from Zhou Yang. This technique is extremely unusual, and for a liberal journal like *Dushu* in particular. However, Qiao apparently uses Zhou Yang, an authoritative liberal voice amidst a tightening political climate, only to transport an even more radical message. Qiao comes to his point right at the start of his article:<sup>71</sup>

Some people are saying that after the Third Plenum, the [Party] Center has changed the policy of thought liberation, and that now is the time of “tightening” (*shou* 收). This is entirely wrong. The policy of thought liberation is a long-term policy. Generally speaking, one needs a correct method of thinking to liberate thought; this is a materialistic and dialectical method. To liberate thought, one must uphold seeking truth from facts, proceed from reality in everything we do, and combine theory with practice; this means to get rid of superstition, to respect science, and to understand and transform the world from the original outlook of the objective world (and the principles of its development).

The unusual pitch of the article becomes apparent from these first lines, especially from the categorical “entirely wrong” that seems to belie *Dushu's* openness for different opinions. The ominous starter “some people are saying” (*you xie ren shuo* 有些人说) is the common indicator of the countertext against which the text is written; as becomes clear later in the article, in this case the addressees are an unidentified group of people in opposition to the policy of thought liberation. What

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<sup>69</sup> Qiao Shu. “Jiefang sixiang, zou xiang shengli” in *Dushu* 1979.4, p. 15-20. Qiao Shu 乔淑 is almost certainly a pseudonym, but none of the sources on the early years of *Dushu* give any information on the author or the background of the article.

<sup>70</sup> Zhou Yang. “San ci weida de sixiang jiefang yundong” in RMRB, May 7, 1979.

<sup>71</sup> Qiao Shu. “Jiefang sixiang, zou xiang shengli,” p. 15.

is missing in these first lines is an explicit reference to the “four cardinal principles.” The stress lies instead on the earlier slogan, liberation of thought.

Following closely the argument of Zhou Yang, the author then places the post-1978 reform movement into the context of the May Fourth movement that has liberated China from “feudal” thinking, and the Yan’an rectification campaign, to which he accredits the overcoming of Soviet “dogmatism” and the creative integration of Marxist theory and Chinese reality, and thus the formation of Mao Zedong Thought. It is in this tradition that Qiao (or rather, Zhou) sees the thought liberation campaign: literal interpretations of ideology must be rejected in favour of creative and innovative thinking. Yet while this is where Zhou Yang stops, it is only the point of departure for Qiao Shu.

In the following paragraphs, he accuses a not further specified group of people of trying to put an end to the public criticism of Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four.” This, so Qiao, is as dangerous as it is harmful because “the main danger is still a ‘leftist’ tendency.” He does not even hesitate to label the leftist forays a “struggle between two ideological lines” and declares straightforwardly:<sup>72</sup>

The Third Plenum has highly appraised the debate on “practice is the sole criterion of truth” and has solemnly and boldly declared to the entire Party: “If a Party, a state, or a nation proceed in everything from written dogma and if their thinking becomes ossified, they cannot advance, their vitality disappears, and Party and state are doomed.” This is entirely correct; it fits not only our present situation, but is a general law of social development. Whoever violates this law will receive his punishment.

The policies associated with the truth criterion debate and Deng’s December 1978 speech must remain the guiding principles for all public discussions, including those in the media.

Yet the declaration of the “four cardinal principles” had given rise to other interpretations as well: “Recently, the Centre has demanded that we must uphold without wavering the four cardinal principles, that is, to uphold the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the Party, and Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought. This should actually be no problem, yet some people have consciously or unconsciously taken the Centre’s renewed stress on

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 18. The first sentence and the following quotation are again taken literally from Zhou Yang. The quotation is from Deng Xiaoping’s speech at the Third Plenum. “Jiefang sixiang, shi shi qiu shi, tuanjie yiqie xiang qian kan,” p. 143. Both Zhou and Qiao omit the phrase “and superstition prevails” (*mixin shengxing* 迷信盛行) that follows after “thinking becomes ossified” in Deng’s text. The judgement following the quotation, “is absolutely correct” (*qian zhun wan que de* 千准万确的) does not appear in Zhou Yang’s speech, but is the opinion of Qiao Shu.

upholding the four cardinal principles for a correction of the ‘deviation’ of thought liberation.”<sup>73</sup> Throughout his article, Qiao Shu refuses to explain to the readers, who those people are who distort the Centre’s correct policies. The author’s less than enthusiastic support for Deng Xiaoping’s effort to tighten the grip on the debates that had mushroomed all over China, however, nourishes the suspicion that he might even have Deng Xiaoping and the “four cardinal principles” in mind.

Qiao Shu has spared the most delicate issue for the end of his article: the proper relationship between thought liberation and the “four cardinal principles.” Deng Xiaoping in his March 31 speech had declared to the Party that “we must resolutely implement the policy of thought liberation, eradicating superstition, and proceeding in everything from reality. All this has been decided by the Third Plenum and I repeat it here; we do not allow the slightest wavering in these respects.”<sup>74</sup> This confession notwithstanding, Deng had mentioned thought liberation only three times in his long speech, and the stress had been clearly on the “cardinal principles.” Both Zhou Yang and Qiao Shu tried to define, in similar words, the relationship between these two policies. The following is a comparison of their formulations; identical passages are highlighted:<sup>75</sup>

Zhou Yang

必须明确认识：

我们的思想解放运动，  
不是放弃而是坚持社会主义道路，  
不是取消而是坚持无产阶级专政，  
不是摆脱而是坚持党的领导，  
不是背离而是坚持马列主义、毛泽东思想。

也就是说，

我们党如此强调破除迷信、解放思想，  
也就是为了根据新的历史时期的新情况，

更好地坚持社会主义道路，更好地坚持无产阶级专政，更好地坚持党的领导，更好地坚持马列主义、毛泽东思想，  
以便更好地实现社会主义现代化的宏伟纲

Qiao Shu

同时必须指出，  
只有解放思想，才能真正坚持四项基本原则。

我们的思想解放运动，  
不是放弃社会主义道路，  
不是取消无产阶级专政，  
不是摆脱党的领导，  
不是背离马克思主义、毛泽东思想的科学体系，

而正是为了坚持四项基本原则。

我们强调发扬民主，解放思想，  
也就是为了根据新长征路上的新情况、新问题，

更好地坚持这些原则，

以便更好地实现社会主义现代化的伟大任

<sup>73</sup> Qiao Shu. “Jiefang sixiang, zou xiang shengli,” p. 19.

<sup>74</sup> Deng Xiaoping. “Jianchi si xiang jiben yuanze,” p. 183.

<sup>75</sup> The quote appears after about two thirds of section three in Zhou Yang’s speech, and in Qiao Shu’s article, where it is the second last paragraph, on p. 19f.



领。  
在这样的原则问题上，是绝不能有丝毫含糊和丝毫动摇的。

We must see clearly:

our thought liberation movement does not abolish the socialist road but upholds it;  
it does not remove the dictatorship of the proletariat but upholds it;  
it does not eliminate the leadership of the Party but upholds it;  
and it does not depart from Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought, but upholds it.

And this means that our Party stresses eradicating superstition and thought liberation in order to uphold even better, according to the new situation of a new historical period, the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the Party, and Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought, so as to even better realize the grand plan of socialist modernization. On such questions of principle, we cannot allow the slightest ambiguity and the slightest wavering.

务。  
那种把坚持四项基本原则，与深入地进行思想解放运动对立起来，甚至当作“纠偏”，是没有道理的。

At the same time we must point out that only with thought liberation, we can truly uphold the four cardinal principles. Our thought liberation movement does not abolish the socialist road,

does not remove the dictatorship of the proletariat, does not eliminate the leadership of the Party, and does not depart from the scientific system of Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought, but exists exactly to uphold the four cardinal principles.

We stress promoting democracy and thought liberation in order to uphold even better, according to the new situation and new problems of a new Long March, these principles,

so as to even better realize the great task of socialist modernization. To set against each other the upholding of the four cardinal principles and the deepening and implementation of the thought liberation movement, or even to “correct the deviation” [of the latter], is entirely unfounded.

What is interesting in the two text passages are, of course, the differences between them. On the purely linguistic level, there are a few deviations. Where Zhou Yang speaks of Marxism-Leninism, Qiao mentions only Marxism. It is unlikely that this is an oversight, since Qiao’s addition “scientific system” tells us otherwise: for Qiao, Marxism is more of an open ideological complex that can be interpreted; he avoids the canonization that the attribute “Leninism” implies. A similarly minute difference in tone can be observed with regard to the terms “plan” (*gangling* 纲领) and “task” (*renwu* 任务). The latter is clearly more open, since a

task is a goal, while a plan prescribes the method to reach this goal. The differences are more obvious in Qiao's statement "We stress promoting democracy and thought liberation..." "Promoting democracy" is a constructive approach to the present situation, and not a mere "getting rid of superstition" – as a method, the former goes much further. Qiao also leaves out the Party: it is the author and like-minded people who stress thought liberation, and not just the Party.

The most obvious difference concerns the opening remarks of Qiao Shu's statement: "Only with thought liberation, we can truly uphold the four cardinal principles." This means that thought liberation is a necessary precondition for the "four cardinal principles:" only on the basis of thought liberation can the "cardinal principles" be successfully implemented. Yet Zhou Yang does make no such statement. To the contrary: in his text, thought liberation is a useful, even an important medium to achieve the holding up of the "cardinal principles," but it remains clearly subordinated to them. The stress in Zhou Yang's text lies on the "cardinal principles," and in his conclusion he echoes Deng Xiaoping's words ("the slightest wavering"). Qiao Shu apparently has a different conception of this relationship; to demonstrate this, he also avoids the laborious repetition of the four principles that Zhou Yang brings in the second part of the statement.

It is clear by now that Qiao Shu wants to promote an agenda that follows that of Zhou Yang, but goes beyond it to a significant degree. Qiao is speaking on behalf of the Chinese intellectuals, and also on behalf of the journal *Dushu*: he wants to protect the journal and the journal's cause from the pressure under which it had come after Deng Xiaoping had called on the Party to reign in on free discourse by setting clear limits to public discussions. Qiao Shu's article is a rallying cry for the continuation of the thought liberation movement and for *Dushu*'s own slogan, "no taboos for reading." Within the limits of the liberal interpretation of the media concept that *Dushu* had adopted in its earliest days, the journal tried to fight off the advances of those people who, as Qiao said in the last sentence of the passage quoted above, "set against each other the upholding of the four cardinal principles and the deepening and implementation of the thought liberation movement." In the light of the policy changes that emanated from Beijing after Deng's "cardinal principles" speech, the subversive potential of *Dushu*'s slogan had grown immensely.

*Dushu* continued to live up to its “no taboos” slogan and tried to formulate this issue in more abstract terms. In its December 1979 issue, *Dushu* carried two important articles dealing with the question of freedom of speech from a much more radical standpoint. Both articles were written by prominent intellectuals associated with Hu Yaobang’s network.<sup>76</sup> This time, the journal chose to place the articles at a prominent location and advertised them on the issue’s cover. In “Freedom of Speech,” Zhang Xianyang and Wang Guixiu discuss their topic from a legal perspective,<sup>77</sup> as does Yu Haocheng in his “The Speaker Bears no Guilt.”<sup>78</sup> Zhang and Wang start their article with a bold statement:<sup>79</sup>

The constitution of our country stipulates that the citizens have freedom of speech. Freedom of speech is a basic and also a minimal democratic right of the people’s masses. Freedom of speech must penetrate the exercise of the right to vote as well as the enjoyment of the free rights of communication, publishing, assembly, association, procession, demonstration, or strike. Without freedom of speech, all these democracies and freedoms are meaningless, and even if they could be achieved in form, they would be pointless in substance. ... In reality, the so-called freedoms of publishing, assembly, and association are nothing but different forms and means to realize freedom of speech. If the people’s masses want to be the master of their own house and take charge of the state affairs, freedom of speech is an indispensable right. Without freedom of speech, the people’s masses cannot freely make public their opinions on the nation’s political, economic, cultural, and educational affairs; how could they demonstrate that they are their own masters, how could they run their country?

All PRC constitutions, from the first in 1954, to the 1978 version in place when Zhang and Wang were writing, had granted Chinese citizens freedom of speech as a basic right: “Citizens have the freedom of speech, communication, publishing, assembly, association, procession, demonstration, and strike...”<sup>80</sup> Proceeding from this legal argument, Zhang and Wang try to provide *Dushu*’s claim that reading, and even more, writing and publishing, has no taboos, with a solid theoretical foundation. Yu Haocheng complements their argument with an important point: not

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<sup>76</sup> On Hu Yaobang’s “intellectual network” see Goldman. *Sowing the Seeds For Democracy*, ch. two and *passim*.

<sup>77</sup> “Yanlun ziyou” in *Dushu* 1979.9, p. 2-8. Zhang was a lecturer of philosophy at the Chinese People’s University and was later called to join the Institute of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought. Wang was also lecturing at People’s University. In 1989, Zhang was elbowed out of his positions. See Goldman. *Sowing the Seeds For Democracy*, p. 50-51, 334.

<sup>78</sup> “Yanzhe wu zui” in *Dushu* 1979.9, p. 9-15. Yu was a veteran legal journalist and director of Qunzhong chubanshe 群众出版社 that belongs to the Ministry of Public Security. He was forced out of this job in 1985 and after the 1989 Democracy movement Yu was imprisoned for more than a year before leaving the PRC in 1994.

<sup>79</sup> Zhang Xianyang, Wang Guixiu. “Yanlun ziyou,” p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> See article 45. Compare article 87 in the 1954 constitution.

only does everybody has the right to speak; he can enjoy this right only if he is granted the right to speak with immunity.<sup>81</sup>

Whether or not the speaker truly “bears no guilt,” that is, whether citizens can become guilty by speaking – this is a major issue [to judge if] there truly is freedom of speech and whether or not the people of our country do truly enjoy democratic rights. The unjust case of comrade Zhang Zhixin 张志新, a good daughter of the Party and the people and an outstanding Party member, has been righted and redressed; yet since the appalling news of her brutal and inhuman treatment have become public, this problem has confronted the people of the entire country even more as an extremely acute and urgent question that has drawn much attention both at home and abroad.

The case of Zhang Zhixin was widely discussed in 1979: Zhang had been a lecturer at a PLA school in Shenyang and was arrested in 1968 for her opposition to Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four.” When she was executed in 1975, the “right of speech” was denied to her in the most savage and literal manner – before shooting her, the executioners cut out her vocal chords to prevent her from shouting slogans. Her brutal killing was one of the charges levelled against the “Gang.”<sup>82</sup> When Zhang was rehabilitated in March 1979 and declared a martyr, she became a symbol for the repression of freedom of speech in Cultural Revolutionary China. Yu Haocheng uses her shocking example to urge immunity for those who make use of their right to freedom of speech.

So how is freedom of speech defined? Zhang and Wang elaborate:<sup>83</sup>

There are two conditions. First, being able to speak does not mean that there is freedom of speech. [To judge] whether or not there is freedom of speech, one must see if there is the freedom to speak on state affairs [*guojia dashi* 国家大事]. ... Secondly, the freedom of speech means that one has the freedom to express his opinions according to one’s own will and one’s own views, no matter if this opinion corresponds with those of the leadership organs, the power holders, or the majority. To put it more to the point, it means the freedom to express different and even mistaken opinions.

By demanding the right to address with impunity political issues, the authors extend the potential scope of discussion significantly. Even more contentious is their claim that Chinese citizens have the right to voice opinions at variance with those of the leadership, and thus “mistaken opinions.” If this right were granted, the leadership would be left without the tools to persecute eventual opposition to

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<sup>81</sup> Yu Haocheng. “Yanzhe wu zui,” p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> See Cyril Birch. “Literature under Communism” in Roderick MacFarquhar, John K. Fairbank (ed.). *The Cambridge History of China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, vol. 15, p. 743-812, here p. 807.

<sup>83</sup> Zhang Xianyang, Wang Guixiu. “Yanlun ziyou,” p. 2f.

its policies. This is exactly what the authors have in mind, and they deliver a carefully argued Marxist explanation:<sup>84</sup>

Our freedom of speech – just as the various other democratic rights – has been attained through the struggle of the people’s masses, under the leadership of the CCP, in the brave and resolute fight of several decades, and by overthrowing the reactionary rule of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratism, and the [consequent] founding of the state institutions of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In short, [freedom of speech] has been won by the people’s masses through their own fight, and it is therefore the property of the people; it has not been granted by anyone. The view of [freedom of speech] as granted is not a Marxist view.

Freedom of speech is an undeniable right of the people, because they were the agent of the momentous struggle that brought the CCP into power. According to the authors, the idea that the Party “gives” or “returns” the right of free speech to the people is mistaken, since it is an expression of idealism. A correct dialectical Marxist understanding must proceed from the people themselves, who are the real owners of their basic rights and freedoms. To underline their argument, Zhang and Wang quote Mao Zedong: “Where has our power come from? It comes from the working class, from the poor and lower middle peasants, it comes from the broad labouring masses who make up more than ninety per cent of the population.”<sup>85</sup> The authors comment: “This is the real Marxist viewpoint.”<sup>86</sup>

Yu Haocheng confirms the argument that the right of public discussion includes criticism of the political leadership:<sup>87</sup>

Currently there are still some people who as a matter of fact still think that Party and state leaders cannot be criticized. The people possess the right to elect and recall their own leaders, so why shouldn’t they possess the right to criticize them? Appraising the merits and faults of their leaders is a form of democracy; it is indispensable if the people are to become the masters of their own house. It is not only no crime – there is no fault with it anyway.

Yu Haocheng declares criticism of the Party leadership, and by implication also the policies advocated by the leadership, to be a legitimate right. This is indeed a very far-reaching claim.

Are there any limits to debate and to freedom of speech? For Yu Haocheng, there are clear limits that all sides involved, the participants of public discourse and the Party and government, must respect.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 3f.

<sup>85</sup> This widely circulating quotation was never officially canonized. It appeared, without context, in *Hongqi*, Oct. 14, 1968, as “Zui gao zhishi.”

<sup>86</sup> Zhang Xianyang, Wang Guixiu. “Yanlun ziyou,” p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> Yu Haocheng. “Yanzhe wu zui,” p. 12.

And it must be clarified: is all speech absolutely free, with no inhibitions whatsoever? There are no absolute things, and freedom cannot be unlimited, too. The limit to one person's freedom should be that no-one else's freedom is impeded and that the interests of society as a whole are not harmed. The recently proclaimed *Penal Code of the People's Republic of China* has provisions for defamation, libel, and counterrevolution. This is absolutely correct and also absolutely necessary. ... On the one hand we must grant and protect the freedom to express all kinds of political views, ideological standpoints, and academic theories; on the other, we have to prohibit and prosecute defamation, libel, attacks on the person, and the instigation of turbulence.

The criteria that Yu sets are very high: he acknowledges limits to free speech only where the same freedom of others is impaired, and for the sake of "the interests of society as a whole." This latter point needs further interpretation. "Instigation of turbulence" has been interpreted quite broadly by consecutive Chinese governments. Yet by referring to the *Penal Code*, Yu Haocheng limits his own rather vague formulation "instigation of turbulence" to "counterrevolution." The latter now is a very narrow interpretation – that allows in turn for very relaxed limits of discourse.

So what about the "four cardinal principles?" The answer is: neither Zhang and Wang nor Yu mention them anywhere in their texts. They avoid to take an unequivocal stand on this issue by way of neglecting it. Yu Haocheng comes nearest to addressing the "cardinal principles" with the rhetorical question: "Some people might ask: if we really carry out [the principle that] "the speaker bears no guilt" – doesn't this mean that people can criticize the Communist Party, criticize the Socialist system just as they please ?!"<sup>89</sup> His answer is straightforward: why not criticize the Party and the system? China's political system and the CCP's rule have been consolidated over the past thirty years, there is in fact nothing to fear from criticism, since the absolute majority of the people supports the Party and the system; in the past, the CCP has dealt with enemies much more dangerous than a few isolated critics. This argumentation rejects the Stalinist projection of the bourgeois attacks on the socialist system in the field of the superstructure – the projection that had triggered the radicalized interpretation of the media concept in the 1950s, and that dominated Cultural Revolution discourse on the media. It is with the rejection of this principle that Yu Haocheng leaves the framework of the media principle.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 13f.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

The ideas that Zhang Xianyang, Wang Guixiu, and Yu Haocheng presented in *Dushu* in 1979 were among the most far-reaching proposals for the media sector published since the founding of the PRC. Even in the relatively relaxed atmosphere a year after the Third Plenum, however, these proposals could not be implemented across the board: the CCP was not willing to abolish its control over the Chinese media sector. All a journal with a liberal inclination (and the necessary political backing), such as *Dushu*, could do was to open its pages for proposals as radical as these, an act that in hindsight appears to be enormously courageous. Most other journals, who lacked the kind of backing that *Dushu* enjoyed, did not dare to enter such controversial discussions. For most of the periodical sector, even the relatively liberal years of the 1980s were a rough ride, and the propaganda authorities remained always on the watch-out.<sup>90</sup> And in *Dushu*, too, the majority of articles were of a more moderate nature than those of Zhang Xianyang and Yu Haocheng. Concern for the journal's main slogan, however, the taboo issue, permeated these voices, too.

### *No Taboos: In Defence of Reading*

*Dushu* gave expression to its strict adherence to a no-taboo policy by printing articles critical of its own line. In this way, the journal hoped to encourage discussions and to create a climate of uncensored debates. The first test case for this strategy was the taboo issue that was discussed controversially in fall 1979.

In the September issue, *Dushu* published two pieces sharply critical of Li Honglin's essay and the consequent elaborations on the question of taboos. With the title "Such a formulation is inappropriate," the journal printed a reader's letter.<sup>91</sup> The author of the letter acknowledges Li Honglin's intention to speak out for thought liberation, but criticizes his use of the Mao quote to support his argument of letting circulate even harmful books. The reader tries to prove his own point with another Mao quote (a technique familiar from Cultural Revolution rhetoric, see ch. seven): "All the mistaken ideologies and all poisonous weeds can under no

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<sup>90</sup> The annual compilations of the PD's neibu journal *Xuanchuan dongtai* make for a sobering reading in this respect.

<sup>91</sup> Bai Xiancai (Bai the foremost talent?). "Zheyang de tifa bu qiadang" in *Dushu* 1979.6, p. 6.

circumstances be allowed to spread freely.”<sup>92</sup> So what is it that legitimates banning books? The author explains, certainly in Mao’s sense, that “it is to consolidate the political power. We are practicing the dictatorship of the proletariat, how could we refrain from dividing books into good and bad, and instead give all of them green light, letting mistaken ideologies and poisonous weeds spread freely?”<sup>93</sup> The author of the letter apparently still adheres to a strict reading of the final element of the media concept that calls for vigilance in the face of attempts to overthrow the socialist system and the rule of the CCP. In the superstructure, he still sees the danger of the people being poisoned by heterodox thinking – an attitude notably different from that of Zhang Xianyang or Yu Haocheng, who expressed confidence in the people’s ability to deal with such “poison.” Not so the author of the letter: “Banning books is like banning opium. Despite the medical value of opium, we cannot lift the ban on it. And while bad books may be used as negative examples in teaching, we cannot let them spread among the broad people’s masses. Thus I believe that the formulation “no taboos for reading” is inappropriate.”<sup>94</sup> While he argues that the bans have gone too far under the heavy-handed rule of the “Gang of Four,” he acknowledges in principle the correctness of the policy of control and its premise, the Party’s task to lead and enlighten an ideologically backward populace.

The comparison of “bad” books with “poisonous weeds” (*ducao* 毒草) became a common metaphor in the debate, giving a new lease of life to a derogatory term that had proliferated in the Cultural Revolution ever since Yao Wenyuan’s attack on Wu Han’s play “Hai Rui Dismissed from Office.” A short article on the following page in the same *Dushu* issue used a line of argument identical to that of the letter. In “Reading cannot be ‘without taboos’” the author Zhang Shoubai (Zhang-who-protects-the-white/pure) explains: “We often say that books and journals are our spiritual nourishment. Since they are nourishment, they cannot be poisonous. So what about reactionary books and journals? Should we see them as spiritual nourishment, too? No, they are poison. We cannot take

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<sup>92</sup> From Mao’s March 12, 1957, speech at the Propaganda conference. See *Mao Zedong wenji* 7.281.

<sup>93</sup> Bai Xiancai. “Zheyang de tifa bu qiadang.”

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*



poison for nourishment.”<sup>95</sup> “Spiritual nourishment” (*jingshen liangshi* 精神粮食) is another metaphor frequently used in the taboo debate, an image that refers back to the educational function of the media, as stipulated in the media concept: just as parents raise their children by feeding them, the people must be brought up to the level of consciousness through spiritual nourishment, provided by the Party.

Zhang especially addresses the question of libraries: can books and journals published outside the control of the CCP be made openly available? He reasons:<sup>96</sup>

A part of the old books and journals from before liberation is undoubtedly relatively good, but many of them propagate reactionary things. We cannot let this stuff proliferate wantonly. For this reason we could not do without restrictions for the reading and borrowing of such stuff from the libraries, not in the past nor in the present. It is entirely correct that the libraries have [established] procedures of inspection and approval for [people who want to] borrow and read such things, and that they cannot be borrowed and read as one pleases. If there are “no taboos for reading” and these procedures are abolished, so that people can borrow and read [such stuff] just like they borrow other books – this would mean harming the people!

The idea of “harming the people” (*hai ren* 害人) reveals the paternalistic spirit of the media concept: it is the Party’s obligation to prevent the ignorant people from inflicting harm on themselves – a harm that the author further characterizes as “being poisoned” (*zhong du* 中毒). An especially delicate issue is the spiritual health of the youth: “We must know that the yellow stuff is a kind of poison, too, even if it is sugar-coated. Many young people are full of vigour but impetuous; if they are carried away by the yellow stuff and if they keep on reading it, their revolutionary will disappears, they will be led astray and they might even lose the interest to live on. Can you bear to watch these people drown and not try to rescue them? The first thing to rescue them is to ban yellow books and journals, to prevent people from getting in contact with yellow books and journals.”<sup>97</sup> Young people need even more guidance than the rest of the population to develop in a healthy manner. The panicky reaction of Zhang Shoubai towards the loosely defined “yellow stuff” (*huangse de dongxi* 黄色的东西) – a term that can mean anything from romantic scenes in literary works to explicit pornography – reflects the puritanical fervour not only of the Cultural Revolution, but of the entire CCP

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<sup>95</sup> Zhang Shoubai. “Dushu bu neng ‘wu jinqu’” in *Dushu* 1979.6, p. 7-8, here p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7f.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

tradition.<sup>98</sup> While the limits of discussion in politics and scholarship were hotly debated in 1979, the elite was still unanimous in its rejection of any degree of tolerance for “yellow stuff.” Li Honglin had declared it to be “excrements and snot,” and “not culture at all.”

Yet Zhang Shoubai went much further than Li Honglin in defining the limits for reading and warns in drastic terms of the consequences: “If there are no taboos for reading, the world will be in chaos! [*tianxia da luan* 天下大乱]”<sup>99</sup> In the face of this danger, the ultimate fear of all Chinese rulers, Zhang cannot but sharply reject Li Honglin’s argumentation and come to the conclusion: “Considering all this, the slogan ‘no taboos for reading’ cannot make sense [*bu tong zhi lun* 不通之论], but is extremely harmful. The correct method should be: reading needs guidance. We must guide people, and especially the young, in reading.”<sup>100</sup> By declaring “No taboos for reading” a harmful mistake, Zhang also attacks the journal *Dushu* itself. Yet the journal’s reaction must be seen as a rejection of the alternative slogan that Zhang Shoubai proposes: *Dushu* not only printed Zhang’s article, but published it without comment – the journal did not consider to “guide” (*zhidao* 指导) its readers, but rather left them with the choice to judge on Zhang’s article by themselves – and thus demonstrated its confidence in the judgment of its readers.

*Dushu* printed a third article in the September issue that was also critical of Li Honglin’s essay, but tried – eventually unsuccessful – to find a more balanced position, as the title shows: “Imprisoning is not good, but absolute opening up does not work either.”<sup>101</sup> When working on a historical novel, Wu, a writer, had himself experienced the difficulties caused by the book banning policy. Yet he also cannot approve of a total liberation of China’s book market. His rather moderate position reads: “Since culture is a [part of] the superstructure serving the economic base, the organs in charge of publishing and distributing books, as one battlefield on the cultural front, mustn’t publish and sell reactionary books and journals. But works

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<sup>98</sup> An attitude, admittedly, to which the GMD had subscribed, too.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>101</sup> Wu Yue. “Jingu bu hao, wanquan kaifang ye bu tong” in *Dushu* 1979.6, p. 9-12. Wu-Yue 吴越 is the area around Shanghai and Zhejiang, but might also be read Wu yue 无曰 – “he-who-says-nothing.”

that have exerted some kind of influence in history and that have been proven to be wrong long ago, should receive a different kind of treatment.”<sup>102</sup> He does not question the general architecture of the propaganda sector and confirms the role of the media on the “cultural frontlines,” yet he hopes to see a more reasonable treatment of material that already exists in published form and that had once widely circulated. This is possible and is not even harmful; in this point the author rejects the fears of Zhang Shoubai:<sup>103</sup>

Clear-minded and healthy people have nothing at all to fear from coming into contact with incorrect things or even enemy propaganda and slander. If somebody who has gone through many years or even decades of training in Marxism-Leninism, is carried away by the enemy and is drawn to their side after reading a single enemy book, then we can only blame ourselves that our level in Marxism-Leninism is too low. A real Marxist-Leninist grows up amidst the fierce confrontation and struggle with erroneous theories of every descriptions.

We find another often used argument here: the CCP came to power amid fierce struggle against hostile ideas, it has proven powerful enough to prevail, so there is nothing to fear from heterodox ideas. Wu does, of course, ignore the other side of the CCP’s experience: the Party had successfully undermined the legitimacy of the GMD regime through effective propaganda; well aware of this process, the CCP had erected barriers after 1949 in order to fare better than its predecessor – the very barriers that *Dushu* and intellectuals were fighting against now. It appears that Wu had more confidence in the regime than the Party itself had.

However, Wu cannot come up with a practical solution; his article thus illustrates the fundamental dilemma that both the CCP and the intellectuals involved in the debate were trying to address: Wu dislikes taboos, but he cannot approve of total liberalization either. The solution he proposes (“We can only chose a differentiated way of treatment: thoroughly locking up whatever must be locked up, and courageously opening whatever should be open”)<sup>104</sup> offers no criteria for a “differentiated way of treatment;” it must have sounded little convincing to *Dushu*’s readers. Yet this was exactly the problem the Party faced as well: how to balance openness with control, how to mediate between “thought liberation” and the “four cardinal principles,” how to reinterpret the media concept without discarding it. Wu Yue ends his article by returning to the nourishment /

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 10f.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

poison metaphor: “Some people have called books the spiritual nourishment of mankind; if we can say that food can be divided into food for infants, food for the sick, and food for adults, then it is just as reasonable to divide books into those for children, for the youth, and for adults. Since nobody can eat poisonous food, why can’t we forbid a number of bad books that have no proper function at all!”<sup>105</sup> While Wu’s argument lacks the theoretical depth and reflection of the other articles that either call for the abolition of taboos, or reject the “no taboos” slogan, his position seems it fact to be closest to the political realities of the 1980s. Throughout the decade, the CCP alternated between the two more radical options that had surfaced in the debate; the result was a muddling-through approach that led to ad hoc decisions based on individual cases and the political constellation at a given time. The Party found itself caught up in the internal contradictions between competing interpretations of the various elements of the media concept.

In the next issue, a month later, *Dushu* published an answer to the three articles criticizing the “no taboos” slogan as inappropriate. Written by an author using the pseudonym Zi Qi 子起 (“the philosopher stands up”), this article is entitled “Reading should have no taboos.”<sup>106</sup> Thoughtful and well-argued, it rejects a number of arguments made by the opponents of *Dushu*’s slogan and comes forward strongly in support of the journal’s founding policy.

Zi Qi starts by identifying the key question. To do so, he refers back to Li Honglin’s initial article that had triggered the debate: “From the ideological perspective, there is still this question: ‘Among books, there are flowers as well as poisonous weeds, there are gems as well as dregs. If the people just go and read them – what if they are poisoned?’ Therefore we must start from this problem when we want to speak on no taboos for reading.”<sup>107</sup> The problem at the heart of the liberalization of the CCP’s media policy and the degree of controls necessary, thus is the question of how to deal with heterodox thinking. It is the last point of the media concept, the media’s function in the struggle between classes, that is up to re-evaluation. All other questions are only related issues. The author first of all feels it necessary to treat the problem with the complexity it deserves. He rejects as inappropriate the simplifying language and the images used by proponents and

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Zi Qi. “Dushu yingdang wu jinqu” in *Dushu* 1979.7, p. 19-25.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

opponents of the “no taboos” slogan alike: “In real life, it is relatively easy to tell the difference between nourishment and poison [*duyao* 毒药], and the two cannot easily be confused. Although we sometimes may give a little poison to patients in order to cure their ills, nobody would give poison to healthy people. But when we talk about reading, we are talking about normal people, and not about abnormal people, such as ‘sick patients.’”<sup>108</sup> The “nourishment” metaphor cannot adequately describe the situation of the propaganda sector. The idea of “bad books” as “poison” in particular is useless to describe the processes in the propaganda sector, where it is just the “healthy” people who undoubtedly can be allowed to get in touch with those books labelled as “poison.” The comparison, although very common, doesn’t make much sense in the first place and reduces the complexity of the issue too much.

The author sees the need for further discussion of a second issue, namely that of “yellow stuff.” The puritanical fervour on this issue, so Zi Qi, has obscured the most important point, namely the definition of the borderline between the depiction of love and pornography. While he falls short of providing the reader with the objectively grounded definition he himself calls for, his approach to the subject of love is more liberal than that of most of his colleagues: “In brief, we must differentiate between the normal representation of love and sexuality, and unnatural and distorted, or permissive and improper [representations] of it; we cannot describe the normal representation of love and sexuality and related depictions as yellow.”<sup>109</sup> This is an important step for the rehabilitation of major works of classical fiction, such as the play *Xixiang ji* 西厢记 and the famous novel *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅. The furthest Zi Qi would go is to compile “purified editions” (*jieben* 洁本) of such works for public distribution. He entirely rejects the classification of books into *neibu* and publicly circulated categories: such a classification is not reasonable, since the categories are in fact determined by political status and not by education and become meaningless through massive abuse anyway.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19f.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>110</sup> This reading seems to contain another argument: according to the media concept, it is those people of a higher political status who are more enlightened and who can therefore be given access to a broader variety of information without being harmed. If it is really Zi Qi’s intention to

Closely related to the question of *neibu* books is Zhang Shoubai's proposal that "reading needs guidance." Zi Qi does not reject the idea of guidance, but he demands that the reader's right and ability to think and judge independently must not be impaired by guidance: "While giving guidance to reading, we must maintain independent thinking. If your guidance is correct, I will listen to you; but if you are wrong, then speak as you please, I will read what I consider correct. And for this reason, guidance of reading should try hard to use the methods of elicitation and discussion."<sup>111</sup> This is a novel interpretation of the media concept's prescription: the reader is to be enlightened not by paternalistic guidance from above, but rather through mutual help and discussion among equals. This conception comes closest to Xu Junyuan's 1957 ideal of newspapers and readers being "friends." In Zi Qi's projection, however, the general objectives of enlightenment and education remain intact as the key function of the media; in this respect, he stays clearly within the scope of the Party's media concept.

Neither does Zi Qi reject the basic assumptions on which the propaganda *xitong* is built. Propaganda is a key area of political work and an important domain of the Party. In this instance, he can agree with Li Honglin who had argued that the leadership of the Party had to be strengthened rather than loosened:<sup>112</sup>

If there are no taboos for reading, this will make the tasks of the propaganda and education workers more troublesome. Firstly, they must exert themselves to understand the current situation and keep apace with developments. Secondly, they must organize their struggle in accordance with current needs: some [books] must be refuted, others rejected, attacked, or pursued. No taboos does not mean that there is liberalization [*ziyouhua* 自由化], but rather means that we struggle on an immense battlefield, that we are engaged in a battle of persuasion! It is in this battle that Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought will develop.

Thus, the Party's propaganda workers would have to increase their vigilance and their scope of work, instead of withdrawing from the scene.

It remains debatable in how much Zi Qi's proposal was a genuine wish and not just lip service to the current CCP line. Many intellectuals and the platforms they used – journals of the like of *Dushu* – undoubtedly used the reference to Marxism as a ticket to claim more freedom for themselves; after the Cultural Revolution, belief in ideology had eroded to a significant degree. Nevertheless I

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reject this idea, he would question the validity of the political leadership's claim to be the agent educating the populace. It is impossible to tell from his article if this was what Zi Qi had in mind.

<sup>111</sup> Zi Qi. "Dushu yingdang wu jinqu," p. 24.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 24f.

would suggest that adherence to Marxist philosophy and the struggle for more freedoms and rights and less state interference were not mutually exclusive for many Chinese intellectuals. Humanist interpretations of Marxism, inspired by thinkers from Eastern Europe and Western critical Marxists received much attention throughout the 1980s. Eventually it was only the brutality of the events of June 1989 that shattered the belief in Marxism of all but the staunchest supporters of the CCP. It is important, however, not to project the post-1989 decline of official ideology backwards on the early 1980s. What Zi Qi was looking for was a new *modus vivendi* for the media, a new arrangement with the CCP. This spirit speaks from the concluding lines of his article:<sup>113</sup>

No taboos for books – old and new, Chinese and foreign – means the complete liberation of thought for all people who read, means throwing oneself into the battle free from all restraints. And specifically for the young readers it means plunging into the ocean of books, riding the waves and rolling up and down; they may swallow some water, [but in this way] they train their real skills in Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought. To lock people up in a sterile hot house and shower them with nutrient solution is a foolish method that will not bring the desired results. Reading should have no taboos – this is the only correct way!

Taking up another argument made earlier, Zi Qi pronounces his hope that the younger generation in particular will train themselves in real life rather than in a hot house. The goal of this training are “the real skills in Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought.”

Zi Qi’s article temporarily closed the lid on the “taboo” debate that had lasted for half a year; all important arguments had been made, opponents of *Dushu*’s policy had been given the opportunity to bring up their criticism, and in the light of all these opinions the journal had decided to carry on with its general line: to be “a journal of intellectual reviews, focusing on books,” a platform of debate open to all. *Dushu* claimed for itself the autonomy that Chinese intellectuals after the Cultural Revolution demanded for themselves. The journal did not, however, leave the general context of Marxism as an ideological foundation and the principle of contributing to the Party’s political project. Even the most vehement supporters of the journal and its line, such as the stubborn Chen Hanbo, were Marxists by conviction, and they hoped for the journal that was their brainchild to make its own contribution to China’s development. A glimpse of Chen Hanbo’s

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

ideals and his ideas for the journal can be obtained from a draft paper that was published years after his death. The paper, dating from circa 1980, contains proposals for articles, columns and debates, all prepared for the journal *Dushu*.<sup>114</sup> Among Chen's proposals are: "In every issue there must be something propagating the study of M-ism;" "Ask ten well-known people to write something about how they embraced M-ism, or how they read (studied) M-ism, or why we need M-ism." Chen also proposed a column called "Introduction (or ABC) to social sciences,"<sup>115</sup> including philosophy, political economy, scientific socialism, history etc. While the thought paper is too short to make for a comprehensive content description and its dating is too insecure, Chen Hanbo's concern with issues related to Marxism and Marxist philosophy is obvious. Yet the convictions of its founders notwithstanding (or just because of their particular understanding of these convictions), *Dushu* called for an open and critical approach to ideology that was prone to bring it into conflict with other, more orthodox interpretations within the CCP.

The "no taboos" slogan that the acting editors had inherited from the journal's founders caused them more than a few headaches. Not long after its founding, *Dushu* found itself in frequent clashes with the authorities, namely with the PD, where Wang Renzhong 王任重, a conservative-minded bureaucrat had taken over from Hu Yaobang in February 1980 after Hu became CC Secretary General (*zong shuji* 总书记). The journal's political capital – its close association with and support for the Party line of the Third Plenum – turned into a liability as the political situation further evolved. *Dushu's* uncompromising attitude and the boldness of many of its articles – such as those of Zhang Xianyang and Yu Haocheng (who both belonged to Hu Yaobang's intellectual network, which explains why *Dushu* got away with publishing them) – caused many a conflict with the propaganda officials. After a particularly violent confrontation in April 1981, the acting editor-in-chief Shi Mei returned from the PD only to suffer a stroke on the same evening; he died a day later.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> "Gei *Dushu* chu dian timu" in *Chen Hanbo wenji*, p. 112f.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>116</sup> See Shen Changwen. "Chu yu wuneng." Compare also Chen Fong-ching. *From Youthful Manuscripts to River Elegy*, p. 105.



*Dushu* entered a difficult period in late 1980 when the liberal voices in the political arena came under pressure. While Deng Xiaoping had tolerated a far-reaching debate on political reforms all through spring and summer 1980, since the fall of that year he began to listen to the voices of more conservative politicians who warned of the danger of “bourgeois liberalization” (*zichanjieji ziyouhua* 资产阶级自由化).<sup>117</sup> Under the impression of events in Eastern Europe and especially in Poland, where dock workers in Gdansk had been on strike and the independent labour union Solidarity had been formed, the CCP leadership began to retreat from its liberal course. The situation in the literary realm had been tense already since the criticism of the play *Jiaru wo shi zhende* 假如我是真的 by Sha Yexin 沙叶新 in February 1980. The public attacks on Sha were only harbingers of the storm that was to hit the literary sector and the entire propaganda *xitong* in spring 1981 in form of the campaign against the writer Bai Hua 白桦.<sup>118</sup>

The fact that *Dushu* was able to weather the increasingly difficult climate of fall 1980 must be credited to the journal's close association with reform-minded intellectuals of Hu Yaobang's network, and in particular to the efforts of the fiercely liberal Chen Hanbo and his colleague Chen Yuan, who had reached notoriety for their uncompromising and independent stance. Dubbed the “CC Club,”<sup>119</sup> the two Chens succeeded in sheltering *Dushu* from many attacks coming from less liberal quarters in the Party. In late 1980, Chen Hanbo came to help the journal. It was especially Li Honglin's programmatic essay that was weighing down time and again on *Dushu's* editors, so they asked Chen for help: “At that time I felt great pressure from the article ‘No taboos for reading’ published in the initial issue and asked him [Chen] to take care of [this issue]. After he had me explain in detail, he inserted along paragraph in the essay that distinctly supported that article.”<sup>120</sup> In

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<sup>117</sup> Compare Goldman. *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy*, ch.3.

<sup>118</sup> Bai Hua had written and published the screenplay *Kulian* 苦恋 in 1979. When the film was shown for internal audiences in early 1981, in particular the ending was accused of calling into question the merits of the CCP. On the Bai Hua campaign see Goldman. *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy*, ch.4.

<sup>119</sup> They were initially dubbed this way during the Cultural Revolution, when Red Guards drew a comparison to the original “CC Club” of the 1930s and 1940s, that is, to Chiang Kai-shek's close associates Chen Guofu 陈果夫 and Chen Lifu 陈立夫. See Shen Changwen. “Chu yu wuneng.”

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* Shen Changwen had joined *Dushu* in 1980. He had been the personal secretary of Chen Yuan in the 1950s at Renmin chubanshe. In 1986, Shen took over from Chen Yuan as *Dushu's* editor-in-chief and became the first director of Sanlian shudian when the publisher regained its independence in that year.

consultation with the editorial board of *Dushu*, Chen wrote an essay in commemoration of the journal's second anniversary that was, however, published already in January to bring immediate relief to *Dushu*.

Bearing the somewhat inadequate title "Telling Our Readers on Our Second Anniversary," the article was signed "editorial board of this journal" – a signature *Dushu* had not used hitherto.<sup>121</sup> Chen Hanbo speaks to the readers on a basis of equals: "Since its founding, *Dushu* has already published 22 issues, two months more and it will be two years. We want to use this opportunity to discuss with our readers how to continue improving this journal; this seems to be necessary."<sup>122</sup> Chen had chosen the word "discuss" (*shangliang* 商量) with careful consideration: he indicates that the readers have a say in the making of the journal, an idea he also respected in the process of writing the article. As Shen Changwen remembers, Chen sought him out repeatedly to understand the opinions of the journal's readers.<sup>123</sup> In the article, Chen Hanbo stresses this democratic attitude and first of all sums up a number of points that readers and contributors had made towards the journal. These points express also the hopes that readers have placed in the journal, and Chen promises that *Dushu* will do its best to live up to the expectations of its audience. In particular, Chen points out: "We appreciate our readers to criticize anything we have printed. We treat seriously all criticism of our readers and see it as them supervising us."<sup>124</sup> The term "to supervise" (*jiandu* 监督) is certainly a conscious choice: it is the readers who are supposed to supervise the journal – and not the PD. *Dushu* wants to remain a platform of discussion and unbridled criticism; this requires that the journal itself be open to opinions on its editorial policy.

The key passage of the anniversary article concerns the most contentious point, that is, the "no taboos" policy. As the journal's editors had asked him to do, Chen came forward strongly affirmative of the slogan guiding *Dushu*.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ben kan bianjibu. "Liang zhounian gao duzhe" in *Dushu* 1981.1, p. 2-5. Chen Hanbo's authorship is beyond doubt, as the article has been reprinted in *Chen Hanbo wenji*, p. 184-87.

<sup>122</sup> Ben kan bianjibu. "Liang zhounian gao duzhe," p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> Shen Changwen. "Chu yu wuneng."

<sup>124</sup> Ben kan bianjibu. "Liang zhounian gao duzhe," p. 5.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3f.

We reiterate our support for the slogan “no taboos for reading.” As everyone knows, we have witnessed in our modern history a book banning hurricane without precedent. After the downfall of the “Gang of Four” the storm has passed, but there are still many people who do not dare to lift the ban on books. When we targeted the current malpractices and shouted loudly “no taboos for reading,” we were greeted by our readers and felt very grateful [for their support]. It is common knowledge that nobody would advocate uncritically that “there is merit in every book” and propose reading randomly. And indeed, the author of the article “No taboos for reading” has already said: “The Party’s leadership of editing, translating, publishing, distribution, and reading must be strengthened, in order to strengthen the Marxist camp. All those books that tarnish human dignity, corrupt the social ways, and poison the minds of the youth, must be rigorously suppressed, because such books do not belong to culture at all. They are extremely dirty and, as Lu Xun has said, are not better than excrements and snot.” We quote this long passage to show that the very first article has already spelled out: it is absolutely unnecessary to take every bush and tree for an enemy or to entertain groundless fears. On this topic, our journal has published different opinions, and we plan to do the same with regard to some other issues of concern for our readers. To add one more sentence: the articles published in this journal do not represent the opinion of the editorial department. Our authors should take responsibility for their own texts; and everyone can express different opinions on any article.

This last point is an interesting proposal, as it is in contradiction to a long-standing CCP policy for the publishing sector, namely the system of editor responsibility and in particular the “three tier system” that has been discussed in chapter four. Understandably, the CCP would not give in on this point, and final responsibility for what was published did still rest with *Dushu*’s editorial board; just like other journals, *Dushu*, too, had to make compromises and carry out amendments to submitted manuscripts. We must therefore read Chen Hanbo’s concluding lines as a step to encourage both the readers and the journal to come as close as possible to the ideal of “no taboos for reading.” For the past two years, *Dushu* had done its best to act according to its own slogan, and it had not imposed any limits to the discussions on its pages. Letting different opinions compete in a setting open to all voices covering all areas of interest was the guiding principle of *Dushu*, a principle that was to remain in place throughout the 1980s.

*Dushu* confesses openly its support for the CCP’s ambitious project of the modernization of China and the reform and opening of the country. Readers appreciated the journal’s broad scope and its effort to introduce foreign ideas to China; *Dushu* thus became arguably the most widely read and most influential intellectual magazine in the PRC. In *Dushu*, a number of open-minded intellectuals with experiences in journalism dating from the 1940s, and who consequently moved into high positions in the Chinese propaganda sector, were finally given a

chance to realize their vision of an engaged and liberal journal loyal to the CCP and to Marxist principles. Yet doing so had become possible only when the Party itself had decided to shift its general orientation.

### *Conclusion*

The launching of the reform and opening policies in 1978 and the CCP's shift from revolution to reform, from the logic of class struggle to economic construction, became the greatest challenge for the Chinese media concept that had governed the media in the PRC ever since 1949. The rise to power of the reform coalition around Deng Xiaoping and the large-scale rehabilitation of intellectuals who had been subjected to persecution for more than two decades changed the outlook of the Chinese political landscape. The media were forced to adapt to the new situation. While other corner stones of the PRC's political architecture, such as the People's Communes (*renmin gongshe* 人民公社) were swept away in the "great turn-around," the media concept, part of the CCP's Yan'an heritage, proved flexible enough to allow for new interpretations; thus it was able to adapt to the new situation and continued to provide the Party with guiding principles for its propaganda work.

The profound changes of the Party's general line were summarized by Deng Xiaoping at the Third Plenum; Hu Yaobang outlined their implications for the media sector. The shift from class struggle to economic construction and modernization first of all required that the last phrase of the media concept had to be toned down significantly: class struggle was henceforth to play a subordinate role in the ideas guiding regarding the direction of the media. On the other end of the equation, the use of the media for enlightenment and educational purposes was stressed by both the Party leadership, that wished to make the populace internalize the new policies and to devote all energies to the economic reforms, and by the intellectuals who celebrated their regained role as the brains and teachers of the nation. The normative function of the media was strengthened rather than weakened in the course of reform.

The decline of class struggle and the emphasis on the intrinsic value of knowledge and its mediation were two crucial issues in the background of a profound debate on the function of the Chinese media that took place in 1979 – the discussion on the slogan of the newly founded monthly *Dushu*: “no taboos for reading.” The debate on the journal’s pages brought forward, within less than a year, practically all arguments that dominated Chinese media theory and practice throughout the 1980s. While conservative voices warned of the dangers that a too radical liberalization would pose to the Party and its propaganda apparatus, liberal ideologues argued that after three decades of consolidation the political system of the PRC and the rule of the Party had nothing to fear from a less aggressive approach to governance; to the contrary, only the competition of ideas in the space of public communication would be able to mobilize people’s minds to come up with the input needed to carry out the four modernizations and to accelerate China’s development. Beyond these opinions, more radical voices emerged that called for a near-total abolition of the mechanisms of control, accepting only the legal limits on personal freedom, including the rights of speech and publishing.

The last group of opinions could never reach the political mainstream. In 1989, the radical proponents of democracy finally lost out and they also lost the right to express their views legitimately in the PRC. The other two groups on the continuum (that only gradually began to crystallize into opposing factions) competed throughout the 1980s for influence in the propaganda sector. The general trend of the “cycles of relaxation and repression” in the media sector (that coincided with the political campaigns of 1981, 1983, and 1986/87)<sup>126</sup> was towards more liberalization of the media: progressive decentralization, increasing interdependence with the outside world, and the transformation of society brought about by the economic reforms all served to make impossible a permanent return to a closely controlled setting. This development in the media sector illustrates a general shift in the CCP’s approach to governance: the Party began to withdraw from micro-management of society and retreated to the “commanding heights” of the political landscape, those topics that were directly relevant for the primary

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<sup>126</sup> See He Yuhuai. *Cycles of Repression and Relaxation: Politico-Literary Events in China, 1976-1989*. Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1992.

objectives of the Party-state.<sup>127</sup> In this process, the operating space for the media increased significantly: many areas of public communication, namely in the field of entertainment, became available to the media. This trend continued and accelerated in the 1990s.

Yet more diversity in the media did not necessarily mean less control. The Party stopped to care for issues that were no longer considered as immediately relevant to core questions such as policy making and regime survival. In these core areas, however, the Party defended its claims of control with all means, as the various political campaigns showed. Exhausted from the ideological excesses of the Cultural Revolution, the media were used in a less proactive manner, but the general structures of control remained in place and could be reinforced whenever the need to do so arose. The general liberalization notwithstanding, the fundamental arrangements in the media sector, such as the ownership structure, remained unchanged: media enterprises were in their entirety exempted from marketization and commercialization until the late 1980s. Private ownership of the media remained unthinkable.

Even the one aspect of the media concept that most visibly lost in significance due to the reform policies was not discarded entirely, but continued to loom in the background. The discussions in *Dushu* had acknowledged almost unanimously the Party's right to take action against counterrevolutionary tendencies. None of the participants would declare the end of class struggle, and the end of the media's function as a tool and site of class struggle. The CCP made use of its right to intervene repeatedly during the 1980s, when Western influences were denounced as "bourgeois" and thus as reactionary tendencies. In 1989, the rebellion of media people was interpreted by the Party as an effort of class enemies to bring down the rule of the CCP and the socialist system through an attack on the "ideological frontlines;" the consequent crackdown in the media sector was particularly severe.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> For the media, these were generally formulated in terms of taboo areas that require close scrutiny of relevant publications, in contrast to most other themes. See the discussion in ch. 4.

<sup>128</sup> The collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union had a chilling effect as well: the events of 1989-91 did fit perfectly well with the assumptions that class enemies try to undermine a socialist nation through the superstructure and the media and eventually bring down the regime itself, leading to the restoration of class struggle. The Chinese democracy movement of 1989 and the consequent events abroad served to confirm the conviction of the CCP leadership for the continued need of the class struggle clause in the Party's media concept.

The other elements of the media concept, too, remained valid in reform China. The Party character (*dangxing*) of press and publishing could never be called into question openly. It was newspapers lower in the hierarchy and farther away from Beijing, the political centre, that could establish a limited degree of autonomy, but neither the Chinese press nor other sections of the Chinese media apparatus were ever able to claim the form of independence that, for example, the Polish Solidarity press enjoyed. They remained within the framework determined by a liberal interpretation of the media concept; the basic lines of this interpretation had been explored in the “taboo” debate in *Dushu* back in 1979.

The circumstances of *Dushu*'s founding and the line taken by the journal since 1979 are paradigmatic for the situation of the Chinese media in the 1980s. The journal was conceived by a number of establishment intellectuals who had in mind the model of a liberal but loyal press that predated the founding of the PRC. In 1979, when they reached high-level positions in the propaganda sector, their time had come to translate this vision into reality. The liberal journal *Dushu* that spoke out on behalf of the intellectuals was not a popular medium, but rather a government organ. It was the coincidence of the interests of establishment intellectuals and the political line of the CCP under Deng Xiaoping that had brought about the new atmosphere in the media sector, yet the initiative for these developments had come from the Party. *Dushu* was founded by officials from the PD. Thus, while the new setting provided the intellectuals (who were in charge of the media apparatus) with much more potential for manipulation and subversive activities that allowed them to advocate their own agenda, in the last consequence the intellectuals were once again following the political line which the CCP had decided on. The media concept and its inherent contradictions were responsible for the clashes between the opinions in the “taboo” debate; but the concept must also be credited with the flexibility to allow the general shift in climate while preserving the authority and the power of the Party in the media sector.





## Chapter Nine Great Walls of Soap: Chinese Television in the Era of Marketization

*“For the first time, the Chinese media of mass communication have adopted something like a middle standpoint, assuming the role of a medium of dialogue between the top-level policy makers and people’s masses.”*  
(Heshang)

*“Maybe you have all along been taking our journal to be a battle field or a bridgehead fortress or some other kind of defensive bulwark. But listen to what everybody says: aren’t you treating our broad readers like opponents who must be attacked or guarded against? This way of thinking definitively needs to be corrected.”*  
(Bianjibu de gushi)

Political liberalization and economic reforms have been the two factors shaping and transforming China in the 1980s. In the new political climate, Chinese society plunged into debates of a breadth and depth unseen since the May Fourth era. The abolition of the people’s communes in the countryside and the emergence of new forms of enterprise, including collectively owned and private companies in both urban and rural areas, set the PRC on a path of rapid economic growth; rising living standards nurtured quickly expanding markets and led to the emergence of a consumer society. For most of the 1980s, however, the media sector was exempted from the second of the two factors. In the years immediately after the 1949 take-over, the CCP had transformed the Chinese press and publishing industries from a competitive part of the national economy into a subsection of the propaganda *xitong*, an area within the political *imaginaire* entirely removed from the economic sector. So when economic reforms started in the early 1980s, the new policies did not yet apply to the media. Neither were individual entrepreneurs (*getihu* 个体户) allowed to establish publishing houses, nor did the Party approve of collectively-owned media enterprises such as newspapers.

Towards the end of the 1980s, however, and notably after 1987, structural reforms of the economic and administrative system also reached the media sector. As before, the CCP refused to grant private entrepreneurs the right to set up businesses in the sector, and it also did not allow market principles and free competition to shake up the media in the same way many industries were transformed by market forces, but the reduction of government subsidies (or at least the threat to do so) brought increasing pressure on the media – publishing

houses, newspapers and journals, as well as radio and TV stations – to pay attention to their bottom line. When the media enterprises moved to diversify their sources of income, the most likely choice was to attract advertising revenues. The resulting pressure to expand their audience forced the media to be more attentive to the demands and the tastes of their readers and viewers.

How did marketization affect the Chinese media sector? The modern Chinese media concept had defined the function of the media and made them an element of the Party's normative social project. Did the media concept lose its relevance, after almost fifty years, when market principles were introduced to the sector? The concept had survived the reorientation of the CCP's general line in the wake of the Third Plenum and had proven flexible enough to cope with the political liberalization and the opening that characterized the 1980s. Were the principles governing the media sector able to adopt to another decisive change of their overall environment?

It has been argued that the reform politics have basically altered the paradigms of media work in the PRC: the propaganda model of the press, based on command communication and dating from the Mao era, was replaced by a setting in which political demands were negotiated with an economic rationale in an increasingly consumer-oriented society.<sup>1</sup>

While I do not question this assumption, I would suggest a higher degree of continuity: rather than breaking radically with the Maoist past, the CCP has tried to modify the media concept and adapt the media sector to the new social and economic conditions. In this chapter I will show that the media concept was able to cope with the major challenge posed by the marketization (*shichanghua* 市场化) and commodification (*shangpinhua* 商品化) of the Chinese economy that reached the sector in the late 1980s and early 1990s. First of all, the predicted erosion of the Party's actual ability to control the media has not happened: even in an environment characterized by market mechanisms and monetary pressures, the CCP has retained the ability to prescribe media contents, to enforce (if necessary) the media's pedagogic function, and to punish individual deviations from current

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Chin-Chuan Lee. "Mass Media: Of China, About China" in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed.). *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1990, p. 3-29. For a similar argument see Yuezhi Zhao. *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.

policies. The furthest the Party would go was to move into the background and allow more room for obviously non-political forms of entertainment that had disappeared in the early 1950s – under the condition that they were not detrimental to the project of education and enlightenment that, since the 1980s, was referred to as the “construction of spiritual civilization” (*jingshen wenming jianshe* 精神文明建设). The CCP has tried to turn the new market mechanisms to its own advantage and to make media controls and commercialization compatible. As the analyses in this chapter show, the Party has only partly succeeded in this effort, as the forces it has set free – for example, the subversive power of laughter and comedy – have engaged the Party’s propaganda authorities in a protracted tug-of-war. At the same time, however, it is clear that the media concept continues to set the parameters of the discussion.

In this chapter, I will turn to Chinese television to examine the impact of marketization on the media and on the media concept. The first Chinese TV stations began to operate in 1958, but in contrast to broadcasting, television played just a minor role in the media sector for the next twenty years.<sup>2</sup> In 1978, only three million TV sets existed nationwide. In 1981, however, the number reached 10 million, and the 100 million benchmark was passed in 1987. While penetration in the countryside was still low at this time, TV sets could be found in practically all urban households, which had started to shift to colour TV sets since 1986.<sup>3</sup> Since about 1987, then, television had become, at least in the urban areas, the prime medium of both information and entertainment.<sup>4</sup>

I will first of all outline the political measures that pointed the way for the introduction of market principles into the media sector, and into the television industry in particular. While the CCP created a stimulus for television stations to pay attention to their bottom line, the Party refrained from radical approaches:

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<sup>2</sup> On the origins of Chinese television see Guo Zhenzhi. *Zhongguo dianshi shi*. Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1997, p. 3-18. Zuo Moye (ed.). *Dangdai Zhongguo de guangbo dianshi*. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1987, vol. 2, p. 3-22.

<sup>3</sup> Numbers taken from Guojia tongjiju (ed.). *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1981, 1982, 1987*. Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1982 (p. 410), 1983 (p. 508), and 1988 (p. 804, 808, and 833).

<sup>4</sup> On Chinese television in the period under consideration here see also Yin Hong. “Meaning, Production, Consumption: The History and Reality of Television Drama in China” in Stephanie H. Donald, Michael Keane, Yin Hong (eds.). *Media in China: Consumption, Content, and Crisis*. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 28-39; Jinglu Yu. “The Structure and Function of Chinese Television, 1979-1989” in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed.). *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1990, p. 69-87; James Lull. *China Turned On: Television, Reform, and Resistance*. London: Routledge, 1991.

subsidies were reduced or reallocated but not cut entirely, neither would financially unsuccessful stations (especially in poorer inland provinces) be allowed to go bankrupt.<sup>5</sup> I will then turn to two approaches to respond to the new demands that appear to be radically different in their effort to create revenues by attracting more audiences. In effect, however, common points become visible. The two approaches I will contrast here are the television documentary *Heshang* 河殇 aired in 1988, and the soap opera *Bianjibu de gushi* 编辑部的故事 produced in 1991. Both of them were enormously successful with the audience and can be seen as blueprints for television making in the 1990s.

While higher-charged and more controversial documentaries of the kind of *Heshang* have reappeared periodically, most media producers have preferred the lower-risk option of the soap opera approach with its soft forms of irony; the “sex appeal” of politics notwithstanding, it was soap operas that turned out to be the winning formula in the TV stations’ struggle for survival between the “Party line” and the “bottom line.” Entertainment with a popular appeal that avoids sensitive or political issues has thus become the mainstream mode of Chinese television in the 1990s. The CCP, so my conclusion in this chapter, allowed the triumph of entertainment in the media, so long as the objectives of the Party’s moral project were not questioned (for example by pornography or all too blatant glorification of violence) and political taboo issues were not touched.<sup>6</sup> The media concept was not abolished, but looms in the background, ready to be implemented with full force whenever necessary.

### *The Media and the Market*

The transformation of the Chinese economy was an incremental process that advanced in different stages, and with varying speed, throughout the 1980s. Economic reform was accompanied by debates on political reform (*zhengzhi tizhi gaige* 政治体制改革): progress in this area was even slower than in the economic

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<sup>5</sup> In most cases, indirect financing, such as almost unlimited access to bank credits, free use of property and real estate, and economic favours from local-level officials, have replaced direct subsidies. This trend has continued into the 1990s and beyond.

<sup>6</sup> For a similar argument see the articles in Wang Jing (ed.). *Chinese Popular Culture and the State*. Special Issue, *Positions* 9.1 (2001).

field and suffered more setbacks. Nevertheless, both reform projects had a significant impact on the functioning of the Chinese media. These effects became gradually more visible in the second half of the decade.

As part of the propaganda sector, the media were formally exempt from economic reform: even after 1990, newspapers, publishing houses, and broadcasting stations were classified as “institutions,” or *shiye danwei* 事业单位, rather than “enterprises,” or *qiye danwei* 企业单位.<sup>7</sup> While *qiye danwei* are part of the national economy, *shiye danwei* are public service providers; it is not by coincidence that *shiye* also means “cause,” such as in “the Party’s cause” or “the cause of cultural construction.” Literally, the media are thus units working for the public cause. This designation was rigidly applied all through the 1980s, and only in the late 1990s the Party gave green light for the enterpris-ation (*qiyehua* 企业化) of selected media units.

The rapidly expanding economy and the adjustments introduced to the administrative structure in the course of political reforms, however, deeply affected the media, their official status and designation notwithstanding. These developments became increasingly obvious by 1987. After a freeze caused by the campaign against “bourgeois liberalization” (*zichanjieji ziyouhua* 资产阶级自由化) in late 1986 and early 1987, and the ouster of CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobang, the economy was rapidly expanding by the time the Party’s 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress was held in October that year. In his report to the congress, Zhao Ziyang did stop short of using the designation “market economy” (*shichang jingji* 市场经济) for China’s economic structure<sup>8</sup> – the term “socialist market economy” (*shehuizhuyi shichang jingji* 社会主义市场经济) was coined only at the Party’s next congress five years later.<sup>9</sup> Yet while Zhao did not mention the term “market

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<sup>7</sup> On the distinction of *qiye danwei* and *shiye danwei* see also Daniel C. Lynch. *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and “Thought Work” in Reformed China*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 75-84. Lynch says that since the mid-1990s, Chinese officials have been using the slogan “institutions managed like enterprises” (*shiye danwei, qiye guanli* 事业单位, 企业管理) as the de facto compromise formula. See *ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> See Zhao’s report “Yanzhe you Zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi daolu qianjin” in RMRB, Nov. 6, 1987. On Zhao’s report see also Goldman. *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy*, p. 232-37.

<sup>9</sup> See Jiang Zemin’s report to the 14<sup>th</sup> Party Congress: “Jiakuai gaige kaifang he xiandaihua jianshe bufa, duoqu you Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi shiye de geng da shengli” (Oct. 12, 1992) in RMRB, Oct. 21, 1992. On the process of drafting this document see “Rang sixiang chongpo laolong: ‘shichang jingji’ xiejin shisi da baogao de jianxin licheng” in *Zhongguo qingnian* 1993.1, p. 4-5.

economy,” he was equally careful to avoid the term “planned economy” (*jihua jingji* 计划经济). The term linking the two conceptions of the national economy was “commodity” (*shangpin* 商品): Zhao spoke of a “planned commodity economy” (*you jihua de shangpin jingji* 有计划的商品经济), but also of “commodity markets” (*shangpin shichang* 商品市场). The message behind Zhao’s careful wording is clearly that the market is on the rise: not only appears the word “market” with a considerably higher frequency in his speech than “plan;” he also uses two substitutes for the non-word “market economy,” namely “market system” (*shichang tixi* 市场体系) and “market order” (*shichang shunxu* 市场顺序).

In his speech, Zhao Ziyang declared: “The socialist commodity economy surges forward with unstoppable vigour.” Since the Third Plenum, so Zhao, economic stagnation and mismanagement had been corrected and the Party had led China onto the path of accelerated economic growth. The result of this process was a commodity economy. The “commodification” (*shangpinhua* 商品化) of the Chinese national economy, Zhao said, was an inevitable result of the Chinese road to socialism; it was closely related to the “primary stage of socialism” (*shehuizhuyi chuji jieduan* 社会主义初级阶段). This latter theory originated from Zhao’s own pen and was his major contribution to Chinese socialist theory. He explained to his audience: “Our country currently is in the primary stage of socialism: because our socialism was born in a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, the level of the productive forces lags far behind that of the developed capitalist nations. Therefore we must go through a prolonged primary stage in which we must carry out the industrialization and commodification, socialization (*shehuihua* 社会化), and modernization of production that many other countries have achieved under the conditions of capitalism.”<sup>10</sup> With the radical redefinition of China’s stage in the process of social advancement, Zhao Ziyang in fact returned to the gradualist policies associated originally with Lenin’s New Economic Policy of the early 1920s, which Soviet advisers had recommended to the Chinese as the best path for the People’s Republic. Mao had brushed away this blueprint in 1953 in favour of a more rapid “transition to socialism,” a step that the CCP had now

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<sup>10</sup> “Yanzhe you Zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi daolu qianjin.”

decided to undo.<sup>11</sup> Zhao explained that the creation of a commodity economy was a necessary condition for China to leave behind the various forms of small-scale production and handicraft that still dominated the Chinese national economy and that were actually remnants of a feudal mode of production. Only if China reached an advanced level of industrialization, the country would be able to move on to higher forms of socialism.

As the commodification of the economy was inevitable, and even a necessary factor for development, there was nothing to fear from it:<sup>12</sup>

Taking public ownership as the mainstay, we must vigorously develop the planned commodity economy. Fully developing the commodity economy is a stage in the development of society and economy that cannot be passed by, and that is an indispensable and fundamental condition for the socialization and modernization of production. With regard to the system of ownership and the distribution [of incomes], the socialist society does not demand puritanism and equalitarianism. To the contrary, during the primary stage, we must develop – under the premise of taking public ownership as the mainstay – varied components of the economy, must carry out – under the premise of taking “each according to his work” as the mainstay – various forms of [income] distribution, and encourage some people to get rich first through honest labour and lawful business, with the goal of common prosperity.

The latter remark was a reference to Deng Xiaoping’s famous credo to “let some become rich first.”<sup>13</sup> Economic competition was thus positively recognized as an ingredient in the economic structure that would have stimulating effects on economic development and on the construction of socialism. At the same time, there was nothing to fear about the process of commodification: “The essential difference between the socialist commodity economy and the capitalist commodity economy is that the basis of their systems of ownership is different.”<sup>14</sup> The changes brought about by economic restructuring, Zhao promised, would remain within the framework of China’s socialist system.

Zhao Ziyang’s speech at the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress had a profound impact not only for *qiye danwei*, for the economic enterprises, but also for the *shiye danwei*, such as that of the media sector. This impact was felt by the media directly and indirectly. First of all, pressure to react to market mechanisms had built up

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<sup>11</sup> For an exemplary study of industrial organization in the early 1950s and the Soviet models see Deborah A. Kaple. *Dream of a Red Factory: The Legacy of High Stalinism in China*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> “Yanzhe you Zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi daolu qianjin.”

<sup>13</sup> See “Shehuizhuyi he shichang jingji bu cunzai genben maodun” (dated Oct. 25, 1985), in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993, vol. 3, p. 148-51, here p. 149.

<sup>14</sup> “Yanzhe you Zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi daolu qianjin.”

gradually over the past years. In spring 1987, for example, a set of guidelines issued by the Ministry of Finance had urged *shiye danwei* across the propaganda sector to reign in costs and to mobilize sources of incomes other than government subsidies.<sup>15</sup> The “Guidelines” declared:<sup>16</sup>

All *shiye danwei* that can do so must tap their potential and expand their paid services; they must rationally cultivate [sources of] income and must raise the level of self-sufficiency in operating expenditures. *Shiye danwei* with a relatively high fixed income must, according to the degree of their financial self-sufficiency, adopt the methods of either receiving subsidies for [income] shortfalls [only], or paying for their expenditures from their income [for those *danwei* with a better cash flow], or practicing enterprise-like management (*qiyehua guanli* 企业化管理) [for the top earners among *shiye danwei*]. *Shiye danwei* with full budget management (*quane yusuan guanli* 全额预算管理), too, must be urged to actively cultivate their [sources of] income and to use it to repay parts of their budget allocations.

The ministry tried to reduce the reliance of *shiye danwei*, such as hospitals, research laboratories, and media units, on subsidies and encouraged them to cultivate other sources of income. While support would not be withdrawn from those units unable to meet their own financial needs, there were limits to the amount of money they could hope to receive.

As for the broadcast media, the “Guidelines” singled out advertising as a potential source of revenues that the stations were to pursue: “Radio and television must receive funds according to the hours they broadcast; they must bring all revenues from advertising, except some bonuses and welfare funds subtracted according to the guidelines, into their budget and repay part of their financial allocations.”<sup>17</sup> As TV and radio were expected to have a higher potential to create revenues, they even had to cover part of their investment needs (investments are usually paid for by the state) from advertising income. Other Party and government documents also urged reforms in the news sector. The “propaganda blueprint” for the year 1988, issued shortly after the 13<sup>th</sup> Party congress, called on the state’s organs of financial administration, price regulation, and taxes, to work together with the PPA on “rational” (*helide* 合理的) tax levels

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<sup>15</sup> “Guanyu jieyue shiyefei kaizhi de ji xiang guiding” (dated May 18, 1987), in Xinwen chubanshu zhengce fagui si (ed.). *Zhongguo xinwen chuban fagui jianming shiyong shouce, 1949-1994*. Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 1994, p. 221f.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 222.



that would leave enough room for the build-up of funds in the industry, a step to encourage the self-reliance of the media units.<sup>18</sup>

Indirect pressure on the media to react to the marketization of the Chinese economy came from the economic sector: with his speech, Zhao Ziyang had not so much opened up uncharted terrain as he had acknowledged formally the result of nine years of economic reforms. This can be seen from the growth of an industry that prior to 1979 for all practical purposes had not existed, but that played an increasingly important role for the media: advertising. The first Chinese television advertisement ever was broadcast on Jan. 28, 1979 on the Shanghai TV station; in November the same year, the PD gave formal approval to the broadcasting and printing of ads in the news media. Since December 1979, advertisements became a regular feature on CCTV.<sup>19</sup> As enterprises were urged to compete, advertising expenditures grew rapidly – and with them the revenues that the media received from advertising.<sup>20</sup> Enterprises lobbied increasingly harder to place their ads in media they found promising.

Indirect pressure, coming from enterprises willing to increase their amount of advertising, and direct pressures from the government thus complemented each other. While the flow of subsidies for the media – at least for the politically most important, such as central and local Party organs – never ceased entirely, subsidies were not likely to grow at a time when the Party promoted more self-sufficiency for the economy and tried to scale back the political interventions in social micro-processes in favour of a “macro approach of management” (*hongguan guanli* 宏观管理), another catchword of Zhao Ziyang’s speech at the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Furthermore, at a time when the government became ever more unwilling to shoulder the costs, the media found themselves confronted with rising expenditures, aggravated by inflationary pressures. Finally, in an

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<sup>18</sup> “Yijubaba nian xuanchuan gongzuo yaodian” (dated Jan. 16, 1988) in Zhongyang xuanchuanbu bangongting (ed.). *Dang de xuanchuan gongzuo huiyi gaikuang he wenxian, 1951-1992*. Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1994, p. 852-63, here p. 859.

<sup>19</sup> See Ma Dawei. “Shilun wo guo dianshi guanggao de fazhan” in *Xinwen yanjiu ziliao* 60 (1993), p. 17-27, here p. 17. Compare also Randall Stross. “The Return of Advertising to China: A Survey of the Ideological Reversal” in *The China Quarterly* 123 (1990), p. 485-502. CCTV, for example, earned 27 million RMB from advertising in 1987. Advertising revenues had surged to 1.2 billion RMB in 1994, and reached 13,36 billion RMB in 1998. Numbers taken from Yin Hong. “Meaning, Production, Consumption,” p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> Although prices for ads were fixed by the state until the mid-1980s, advertising grew quickly as a source of income for the media. For numbers see the tables in Lynch. *After the Propaganda State*, p. 57 and 59.

environment where living standards were rising quickly across the full spectrum of society, the media work units were hard pressed to increase their revenues so as to create surpluses that could be distributed as bonuses to their employees.

Under this package of pressures, the media turned to advertising. In this way, economic reforms and marketization, or, in Zhao Ziyang's terms, the commodification of the Chinese national economy, reached the media sector. As competition in the economic field intensified, so did competition for advertising revenues in the media sector. The ability to attract large audiences thus became a crucial factor for the media units for the first time around 1987. In this setting, the media profited from the Party's earlier relaxation of the ideological realm that now provided them with the opportunity to jockey for popularity and to cater to public tastes. Television, with an increasingly broad reach, especially among the affluent urban strata, was well positioned to profit from the onslaught of commercialization: while in 1983 TV attracted only 15 per cent of all advertising expenditures in China, its share rose to 25 per cent in 1987 and to 40 per cent in 1994.<sup>21</sup> Yet competition among television stations for lucrative prime time advertising soon heated up and forced television stations across the nation to create ever more sophisticated programming to meet popular tastes.<sup>22</sup> TV stations all over China experimented with different approaches to popularity, concentrating on TV series. The first Chinese blockbuster TV series was broadcast in June 1988: *Heshang*.

#### *Heshang and the Popular Appeal of Politics*

The six-part TV series *Heshang* (usually translated as *River Elegy*) was first aired on Chinese Central Television (CCTV) on June 11-16, 1988, and caused an uproar that soon engulfed intellectual groups, viewers across the nation, the top Party leadership, and even overseas Chinese circles. In the large body of literature on the subject,<sup>23</sup> *Heshang* has been interpreted as the culmination of the 1980s

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<sup>21</sup> Compare Lynch. *After the Propaganda State*, p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> The first decisive effort to raise the quality of programming was the creation of inter-regional exchange networks for TV programming. See Jinglu Yu. "The Structure and Function of Chinese Television," p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> *Heshang* seems to be a subject nobody writing on the 1980s can avoid. Among the more significant discussions are: Chen Fong-ching, Jin Guantao. *From Youthful Manuscripts to River Elegy: The Chinese Popular Cultural Movement and Political Transformation, 1979-1989*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1997, p. 215-27. Wang Jing. *High Culture Fever: Politics,*

“cultural fever” (*wenhua re* 文化热) and as a powerful statement in support of China’s opening and reform. *Heshang*, it has been said, was sympathetic of Zhao Ziyang’s policies, but went significantly beyond the agenda the Party was willing and able to sustain at that moment. These interpretations are certainly correct and I will not question them here. In this section, I am interested in a different question that has received little attention as yet: what motivated the country’s premier TV station to support the production of a controversial piece like *Heshang*? I will argue that, aside from the personal political convictions of the CCTV leadership, commercial considerations played a significant role in the decision to get involved in the project.

The *Heshang* saga can be told in a few sentences. The idea for a TV series on the Yellow river, enriched by some of the topics of the feverish discussions going on among intellectuals in the 1980s, must be credited to Xia Jun 夏骏, a very young but gifted and well-connected journalist at CCTV.<sup>24</sup> Xia was only 23 years old in 1985 when he approached leading intellectuals involved in the cultural discussions and tried to warm them for the idea of carrying their debates into a television documentary. However, it was not before summer 1987 that the political climate allowed the project to be realized and CCTV and a number of reform-minded intellectuals agreed on a concept of the series. Su Xiaokang 苏晓康, a liberal-minded RMRB reporter, became the brain behind the series, while Wang Luxiang 王鲁湘 did most of the script-writing. During later stages of production, they were joined by other liberal intellectuals, including Jin Guantao 金观涛, chief

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*Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng’s China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, ch. 3. Chen Xiaomei: *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, ch.1. Marie Claire Huot. *Le Petite Révolution Culturelle*. Arles: Editions Philippe Picquier, 1994, p. 93-98. Chen Zuyan. “River Elegy as Reportage Literature: Generic Experimentation and Boundaries,” in *China Information* VII.4 (1993), p. 20-32. The text of the series can be found in Cui Wenhua (ed.). *Heshang lun*. Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1988. The entire text was translated and commented by Richard W. Bodman and Pin P. Wan in *Deathsong of the River: A Reader’s Guide to the Chinese TV Series Heshang*. Ithaca: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1991. For further discussions see Christina Neder. *Flußelegie: Chinas Identitätskrise: Die Debatte um die chinesische Fernsehserie Heshang, 1988-1994*. Dortmund, Projekt Verlag, 1996. Weng Ningna (ed.). *Heshang: Zhongguoren zui shenchen de chang tan*. Taipei: Fengyun shidai chuban gongsi, 1988. Zhong Huamin (ed.). *Chong ping Heshang*. Hangzhou: Hangzhou daxue chubanshe, 1989. Hua Yan (ed.). *Heshang pipan*. Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1989.

<sup>24</sup> The twists and turns of *Heshang*’s birth have been told masterfully in Chen Fong-ching. *From Youthful Manuscripts to River Elegy*, p. 215-21. There is nothing to add to this account, and I rely in my elaboration of *Heshang*’s background on Chen and Jin.

editor of the influential *Towards the Future* book series (*Zou xiang weilai congshu* 走向未来丛书), published by Sichuan renmin chubanshe. For the intellectuals and CCTV, the *Heshang* project was a mutually beneficial venture: the station hoped to profit from the renown of the intellectuals, and the latter saw the opportunity to bring the issues of their concern to the attention of a broader public.

*Heshang* was produced in winter 1987/88, using footage from a Sino-Japanese cooperative documentary on the Yellow River, shot in 1984-86, as well as some additional material that was later filmed exclusively for the series. Other intellectuals, university professors, and writers were invited to appear as commentators in the programme. Production expenses were covered by CCTV, while the crew also received considerable support from the PLA.<sup>25</sup> With the help of senior CCTV administrators, the series was rushed through the approval procedures obligatory for TV productions (responsibility in this case rested with the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television<sup>26</sup>) and was prepared for airing in June 1988. The title was chosen in analogy to *Guoshang* 国殇, an elegy in the collection *Jiu ge* 九歌 by the third century B.C. poet Qu Yuan 屈原.<sup>27</sup>

Upon airing in mid-June, *Heshang* caused a sensation. It was a novelty in several respects: it was the first time that one of the heated discussions of the intellectual scene was carried onto the TV screens and thus reached households across China; the appearance of well-known cultural figures as commentators was an unheard of thing, not to speak of the documentary's radical message: that China's "yellow," earth-bound, land-centred civilization had utterly failed to generate prosperity and national strength and therefore deserved to be rejected in favour of a "blue," open-minded, maritime culture that would allow China to join the world – in short, for what Wang Jing has called the "indigo myth of modernity."<sup>28</sup> Borrowing audiovisual techniques from traditional propaganda, the documentary, with its strong imagery and easily comprehensible nationalistic (but nonetheless

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<sup>25</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 220, esp. n. 12. The military had been instrumental in lending logistical support to the original filming; the PLA was, for example, the only body having helicopters needed for the numerous aerial shots. The army was also involved during later stages of production.

<sup>26</sup> The Ministry was reduced into a State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (Guangbo dianying dianshi zongju 广播电影电视总局) in 1998. The move came in the course of overall administrative reform, but it also reflected the gradual retreat of Party and government from micro-management that made the Ministry superfluous.

<sup>27</sup> Tang Bingzheng et al. (ed.). *Chu ci jin zhu*. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996, p. 75-78.

<sup>28</sup> Wang Jing. *High Culture Fever*, p. 119.

iconoclastic) message, appealed to the audiences' concern for China's destiny and the further direction of the CCP's reform project. In the 1980s context, such an approach seemed logical and the frenzy created by *Heshang* proved the producers right – they had found a way to draw the audiences' attention.

While Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaoping greeted the series, other high-ranking CCP figures, notably Wang Zhen 王震,<sup>29</sup> expressed fierce opposition to the denigration of China's glorious culture and tradition, and to what they saw as an attempt of all-out Westernization. When heated intra-Party debates at the seaside resort of Beidaihe 北戴河 in August remained inconclusive,<sup>30</sup> the series was revised along lines proposed by the PD and shown again, creating an even bigger uproar. Fierce battles over the correctness of the decision to air *Heshang* reportedly dragged on until December, but the critics were then silenced. However, the topic was brought up again immediately after the crackdown on the 1989 Democracy Movement, and a campaign was launched as the CCP struggled to reassert control of the ideological realm. The campaign against the documentary and its producers, who either fled the country or were imprisoned,<sup>31</sup> continued until 1990.

What is remarkable about the production of *Heshang* is that the initiative for the documentary came from CCTV, and not from the intellectual protagonists who were later associated with it in the first place. For one, the energetic and youthful Xia Jun saw the potential of the massive amount of material that the Chinese-Japanese co-production, sponsored primarily by the Japanese NHK station, had reaped. Xia reportedly was appalled by the poverty and backwardness of China's Northwest – those areas praised to be the cradle of the Chinese civilization. And it was he who recognized the perspective of linking the footage with the heated cultural discussions taking place among China's intellectuals.

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<sup>29</sup> Wang Zhen, b. 1908; 1982-87 President of the Central Party School and since 1988 a vice-president of the PRC,

<sup>30</sup> It was this meeting that made clear that Zhao was losing the grace of Deng Xiaoping. See Richard Baum. "The Road to Tiananmen: Chinese Politics in the 1980s" in Roderick MacFarquhar (ed.). *The Politics of China, 1949-1989*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 340-471, here p. 427-31.

<sup>31</sup> Su Xiaokang was able to flee to France and later went to the U.S. Wang Luxiang was arrested in Beijing. Xia Jun was protected by CCTV and avoided arrest. See Geremie Barmé, Linda Jaivin (ed.). *New Ghosts, Old Dreams: Chinese Rebel Voices*. New York: Times Books, 1992, p. 142.

The intellectuals, in turn, were not immediately interested in the medium of television. They were all too fixated on the media they were familiar with: books, journals, and occasionally newspaper articles were the platforms where the “cultural fever” raged. Xia Jun’s initial efforts to get prominent figures such as Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng 刘青峰 on board failed, as Jin later recalled, because they were “not yet realizing the immense potential of the mass medium [of television].”<sup>32</sup> Response from other intellectuals contacted, such as Liu Binyan and Su Xiaokang, initially was lukewarm, too.

In fact, Xia Jun found it easier to convince his mentor at CCTV of the prospects of his project: Chen Hanyuan 陈汉元 was the station’s vice-director in charge of daily affairs. Chen was an open-minded and experienced TV veteran who had worked for twenty years at CCTV and its predecessor, Beijing Television. He had handpicked Xia when the young man graduated from the Beijing Broadcasting Institute and continued to protect him even after the crackdown on the Democracy Movement and the consequent campaign against *Heshang*. For the time being, it was Chen who helped the series to get approval from the TV station for production.<sup>33</sup>

Chen Hanyuan was also instrumental in securing the approval of the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television needed before the series could be aired. Chen contacted his old colleague Wang Feng 王枫, a former CCTV director who at the time was a vice-minister. Wang Feng saw to it that *Heshang* encountered no trouble in two rounds of internal screening.<sup>34</sup> It is important to stress that neither Xia Jun nor Chen Hanyuan or Wang Feng were otherwise involved in the cultural discussions of the 1980s. They were certainly sympathetic to the debates, yet they were not intellectuals in the first place, but either journalists or senior administrators in the broadcasting sector. Their sympathy alone would not have been enough to make the project attractive for CCTV. Rather, a number of points suggest that it was the commercial potential of the popular appeal of politics, as presented in *Heshang*, that created an economic rationale for CCTV’s participation.

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<sup>32</sup> Chen Fong-ching. *From Youthful Manuscripts to River Elegy*, p. 217, n. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Chen was responsible for the decision to accept the manuscript. See Wang Luxiang. “Huiyi yu sikao” in Cui Wenhua. *Heshang lun*, p. 91-97, here p. 92.

<sup>34</sup> On Wang Feng’s role in the approval process see the inside account by Cui Wenhua. “*Heshang* dui Zhongguo dianshi de qishi he zai?” in Cui Wenhua. *Heshang lun*, p. 123-42, here p. 134f. On the support of both Chen Hanyuan and Wang Feng see also Wang Luxiang. “Huiyi yi sikao,” p. 96f.

The station did not only throw its bureaucratic weight behind the production of *Heshang*, but also entered a significant financial commitment in deciding to cover the costs of additional footage that had to be shot at the original locations. Apparently the station's leadership was convinced that their investment (in both the political and financial sense) in *Heshang* would pay off, as it pushed hard to ensure the quick viewing of the series. And even when the heated debate had started across the country, CCTV must have regarded *Heshang* as a major success. This is the only explanation for the station's proactive move to produce a sequel to *Heshang*, centring on the May Fourth movement. Basically the same team around Su Xiaokang and Xia Jun was entrusted with production, and CCTV, with the backing of Chen Hanyuan, provided a generous budget of 300,000 *yuan*. The decision for this series came in late 1988 amidst the heated debate on *Heshang*. No matter which course the debate on the series would take, with *Heshang* China's premier TV station had created a blockbuster and had caused a sensation that was encouraging both intellectually and in financial terms.<sup>35</sup> Sensing untapped sources of income, the investment into a sequel thus seemed well worth the risks. Unfortunately, the risks proved bigger than expected; as a result the sequel was never finished.<sup>36</sup>

The narrative strategies and the textual and visual language of *Heshang* confirms the argument that the series was a conscious effort of CCTV to attract a maximum number of viewers (and thus also to boost its income). *Heshang* obviously targets a non-intellectual audience: while the arguments presented in the documentary and the underlying theories are all rooted in the intellectual discussions of the preceding years, the stress is clearly on popularization. First of all, the language in which the series' message is presented to television viewers is not that of intellectual discourse. Jin Guantao, for example, had presented his

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<sup>35</sup> No information is available for advertisement revenues from the series. Advertising, however, was but one source of income related to the series; CCTV could hope to create significant extra revenues from selling screening rights to local TV stations across China, a lucrative and common practice.

<sup>36</sup> The order to stop work on this sequel came after several of those involved in the project had signed the February 26, 1989, petition to the PB and the National People's Congress, the second of three such open letters written in spring 1989. See Su Xiaokang. "Shiji mo huimou: guanyu yi bu dianshipian de liuchan" in *Wenhui yuekan*, 1989.5, p. 16-24, here p. 23f. Translated with annotations as "Glancing Back at the End of the Century: An Account of the Miscarriage of a Television Film" in *China Information* VII.3 (Winter 1992-93), p. 51-82. See also Richard W. Bodman. "New Reflections on May Fourth and Mao Zedong: Introducing Su Xiaokang's 'Glancing Back at the End of the Century'" in *China Information* VII.3 (Winter 1992-93), p. 46-50.

theory of the ultra-stability of Chinese culture (*chao wending jiegou* 超稳定结构) in numerous books and articles.<sup>37</sup> In part five of *Heshang*, “Sorrow and Worry” (*Youhuan* 忧患), the narrator gives a short outline of the major arguments of the theory; he refrains, however, from entering the depths of the discussion and limits his explanation to the broadest of terms, that are driven home by the power of the images on which the narrator’s voice is superimposed. At the end of the sequence, Jin Guantao comments directly on his theory in a studio interview. He speaks as an academic, but tries to explain his theory in popular terms:<sup>38</sup>

History is the facts of the past, but I believe even more strongly that history is a permanent dialogue between past and present. In the course of this dialogue we can develop a very deep sense of our suffering. This will be useful for us in the present. The lesson that history keeps ready for the Chinese people is: China must avoid all destructive convulsions in the evolution of its society, and rather let the progressive and the creative replace upheaval. When old things fall apart we should allow the new factors to grow that are able to replace the old things.

Jin Guantao sums up here in the most simple terms his conception of the dynamics of history. Learning from their own history, the Chinese people have developed an aversion against the disruptive and potentially destructive forces of change. Such an aversion is in itself a good thing, yet in the Chinese case this has led to the ultra-stable structures that Jin criticizes.

Jin Guantao does not only explain his rather complex theory in a way to suit the needs of the audience, but also adopts the language appropriate to the medium of television. He avoids jargon and other stylistic conventions that would be normal for articles (even in journals that stressed “readability,” such as *Dushu*) or books on the same subject. He speaks freely, and apparently the interviewers at CCTV had urged their guests to keep to a popular bottom line so as to make the series and its message comprehensible to the average urban household (in other words, to what had been called the “stupid folks,” *yumin*, in earlier times). The narrator follows the same pattern: throughout most of the documentary, his voice is slow but full of force. He explains even complex issues in a straightforward way, such as the “El Nino” climatic phenomenon at the beginning of the series’ fifth

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<sup>37</sup> Notably in *Zai lishi de biaoxiang beihou: dui Zhongguo fengjian shehui chao wending jiegou de tansuo*. Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1984. This book was part of the famous *Zou xiang weilai* series. Jin’s theory relies heavily on the “high-level equilibrium trap” proposed by Mark Elvin in *The Pattern of the Chinese Past: A Social and Economic Interpretation*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1973, ch. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Text after Cui Wenhua. *Heshang lun*, p. 65f.



installation: "Nature has suddenly become strange to the people! From blizzards in California to the great floods on the plains of Bengal, from the heat wave engulfing the shores of the Mediterranean to the unrelenting and widespread drought on the African plateau – the earth suddenly seems to shiver like a malaria patient, and in the face of all this mankind seems to be utterly helpless, as if it had slipped back ten thousand years. Like a ghost (*youling* 幽灵) does this novel word roam all over the world: 'El Nino.'"<sup>39</sup> The dialectics between man and nature are underlined by a series of short takes showing a storm-battered coastline, a volcano, snow in an American city, and animal cadavers in the Sahel zone of Northern Africa. The superimposed voice of the narrator explains the phenomenon and drives it home through the strong, metaphoric language. In this way, the audience is confronted with issues on the current agenda, debated by scientists and intellectuals alike; the appeal to the audience is a crucial part of the narrative strategy of the television series.

However, the self-understanding of *Heshang's* producers does not end at the role of a mediator or commentator. In keeping with the CCP's media concept and the tradition of the Party media, they slip into the role of educator of the people. The narrator is the viewer's guide through the series. It is only through his voice that the viewers can make a sense out of the rapid sequences of images that otherwise would appear rather disparate. Instead of merely commenting on the pictures, the narrator constructs the strong agenda that *Heshang* carries; it is the combination of images and voice-over that produces the persuasiveness of the series. The bias of the narrator-guide becomes especially obvious at the end of each of the six instalments. The second part ends:<sup>40</sup>

Today, we are much wiser!

If, as we have said, China once wasted historical choices, we will no longer reject to chose.

If, as we have said, our destiny is not simply fate, then we will no longer listen to its manipulations.

We have recognized: although the Yellow River flows eastwards for ten thousand *li*, in the end it empties into the sea.

We must no longer reject the invitation of the sea.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

The first person plural in its constant repetition serves to create an identification between the individual viewer at home, the narrator, and the Chinese nation. When reading these last lines, the narrator’s voice changes pitch; he speaks louder and faster, stressing qualifiers such as “*much* wiser,” “no longer,” and “in the end.”

The same strategy can be observed in the ending of the fifth instalment. It is, however, not only the force of language, but rather the combination of language and images that create the narrative power of *Heshang*. The following table contrasts the narrator’s explanation and the images:<sup>41</sup>

Voice-over	Image
We are relieved to see that, after embarking on the project of...	Stage and rostrum of 13 <sup>th</sup> Party Congress (1987)
...reforming the economic system, we have finally begun...	Deng Xiaoping at rostrum
...to experiment with reforms of the political system.	Zhao Ziyang at rostrum
For the first time, a delegate of the National People’s Congress courageously raised his hand to reject a vote – a step that has not come easy indeed! <sup>42</sup> Who won’t say that this is progress?	Taiwan representative speaking to reporters
No matter what obstacles and crises this reform will meet with, all we can do is to march ahead.	Delegates of National People’s Congress
Behind us, there were great floods and endless turmoil.	Refugees in water; trucks carrying Red Guards (black and white ==> historical footage)
But we must march ahead and break through these unceasing cycles of history.	Hang gliders and wind surfers
Perhaps we will encounter setbacks, but, isn’t this just like Gun, who failed on the verge of success, yet whose failure became the foundation for the success of his son, the Great Yu? <sup>43</sup>	The ice is broken: ice floes are carried away by the stream
Let our generation load the heavy burden of suffering on our shoulders!	Series of short shots: people working for reform projects
We must do this so that our children, grandchildren, and the next ten thousand generations will no longer suffer!	Playing children

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>42</sup> At the meeting of the National People’s Congress from March 25 to Apr. 13, 1988, a representative from Taiwan cast the first “no” vote in the history of the Congress. See *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, March 29, 1988. Quoted after Richard Bodman. *Deathsong of the River*, p. 201, n. 59.

<sup>43</sup> The Great Yu (Da Yu 大禹), the mythical founder of the Xia dynasty, is credited with diking the Yellow River. His father Gun 鯀 had tried in vain to stop the river from flowing and flooding the land. The stories of the Gun and his son are found in the *Shangshu*.

As in the passage from the end of the second instalment (see above), the first person plural creates a sense of identity. The explicit political message of the section is supported by several more rhetorical devices: the narrator works with rhetorical questions, the strongly affirmative “must march ahead,” and the two exclamations that conclude the passage. Other vocabulary, such as the “finally” in the first sentence, or the “no matter” in the middle, underline the authoritative attitude of the narrator, who seems to be sermoning to the audience. All these elements show the continuities of *Heshang* with traditional audiovisual propaganda techniques. The enlightening function of the media pervades *Heshang*.

Even more important than the narrator who guides the audience through the film, the pictures themselves and the images evoked and associated thereby have an enormous impact on the internalization of *Heshang*'s message. It is here where the TV people could bring all the techniques of documentary filming into full play. Especially revealing is the way in which images of old and new, of tradition and modernity, of the Chinese and the West are juxtaposed. The last minute of the fifth installation is a typical example of the way in which the most disparate images can be combined by the voice-over: it is the narrative that gives meaning to the images, and in turn the images and the associations they evoke with the viewers that render the message its full persuasive power that is further enhanced by the background music, a triumphal hymn that gets louder towards the end. With all these devices, the narrator creates a sense of urgency intended to shake up the audiences.

Such an open bias, however, the polemic emotional appeal, is absent from the intellectual discussions of the “cultural fever.” In these more academic discussions verifiable arguments are the main means of persuasion. The TV series *Heshang*, in contrast, operates with entirely different narrative strategies that are custom-made for the needs of a broad audience with diverse interests and a generally lower degree of intellectual sophistication; the documentary's purpose is to attract and convince this particular audience. While the ideas advocated by *Heshang* were not new, it was their packaging and their transformation on the platform of the relatively new medium of television that created their explosive impact. Much of the later controversy seemed to question the ideas promoted by *Heshang*, yet in fact it was not so much the ideas themselves that irritated the

series' opponents; if voiced exclusively in academic circles they would not have aroused the attention of the leadership – and of the broad television audiences. Rather, the manipulative potential opened up by the marriage of intellectual discourse and popularization that was created through the medium of television alarmed the Party elders. And it was this point where the professional TV people came in. Their decision to support *Heshang* was a courageous and unprecedented experiment in popular politics, an attempt motivated by the need to react to the pressures in a competitive market setting. Yet at the same time it is clear that *Heshang* was regarded by all sides as what it is: a propaganda piece drumming up popular support for Zhao Ziyang's reform policies. The propagandistic nature of *Heshang* places the series squarely within the tradition of political propaganda in the PRC.

The last question that interests us here is: how is the role of the media being treated in the discussion surrounding *Heshang*? A first hint concerning this issue can be found in *Heshang* itself. Towards the end of the last instalment, there is a passage saying:<sup>44</sup>

In late 1986 and early 1987, a nationwide student movement suddenly erupted, causing anxiety both above and below. Maybe it is still too early to make an assessment of this movement. But the forms of direct dialogue between the leadership and the students set up in the process of calming down the movement are in fact the fulfilment of the goal of the great majority of students who participated in the movement: transparency of politics and policy making.

And even on these formerly so rigid and ceremonious occasions of high-level politics [such as the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress], we can now finally see the emergence of an azure kind of transparency. For the first time, the Chinese media of mass communication [*dazhong chuanbo meijie* 大众传播媒介] have adopted something like a middle standpoint, assuming the role of a medium of dialogue between the top-level policy makers and people's masses.

The “middle standpoint” (*zhongli* 中立) was a bold formulation that was severely criticized when the *Heshang* debate was reopened after June 1989. An article in *Beijing ribao* heavily attacked the interpretation that *Heshang* gave of the 1986/87 events and the role of the media.<sup>45</sup> For one, so the article, the assessment of the passage runs counter to the Party line, because the CCP had explicitly declared the student movement to be mistaken and the result of the proliferation of

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<sup>44</sup> Cui Wenhua. *Heshang lun*, p. 78.

<sup>45</sup> Chen Zhiang. “*Heshang* yu xinwen ‘zhongli’” in *Beijing ribao*, Aug. 5, 1989. For another article arguing similarly see Yan Yan. “‘*Heshang* re’ shuomingle shenme” in *Zhongguo jiaoyubao*, Aug. 12, 1989, repr. in Hua Yan. *Heshang pipan*, p. 72-76.

“bourgeois liberalization.”<sup>46</sup> Even more dangerous, however, is the idea of the “middle standpoint.” “Those sentences on the media of mass communication contain at least the following two positions: 1. the ‘top-level policy-makers’ and the people’s masses are two opposing social forces; 2. the media of mass communication should take a middle position, which means that they should not stand on the side of the Party and the government and also shouldn’t stand on the side of the people, but rather stand unwaveringly between the two. These opinions are entirely absurd and hypocritical.”<sup>47</sup> The “middle standpoint” that *Heshang* is accused to advocate denies the Party character (*dangxing*) that is one of the foundations of the media concept.

Yet is this really the case with *Heshang*? The opposite seems true. While *Heshang* was accused of deviating from the Party line, such an accusation could emerge only after June 1989, when the Party’s general line had fundamentally changed. Political reform in particular had been derailed by the purge of Zhao Ziyang. Seen from the context of 1988, however, *Heshang*’s message seems to be in line with the policies advocated by Party general secretary Zhao: rather than deviating from the Party line, *Heshang* comes out strongly in support of the Party leadership. The series is in fact affirmative of the core policies of opening to the outside world and reforming the economic and political systems. In cases where *Heshang* went beyond the line of officially pronounced compromise, it could nevertheless hope to express the intentions of the reform-minded circles within the leadership: it was, after all, the Party itself that had admitted the TV cameras to the 13<sup>th</sup> Party congress and that had allowed the press coverage of the dissenting Taiwan delegate to the National People’s Congress. The goal of increasing the transparency of the political process had been set by the CCP itself.

*Heshang* thus does not negate the Party character of the media; to the contrary, it closely sticks to the demand that the media speak for the Party. The series is in effect a sophisticated piece of propaganda that tries to sell a liberal

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<sup>46</sup> See Deng Xiaoping “Guanyu dangqian xuesheng nao shi wenti de jianghua yaodian” (Dec. 30, 1986), published under the title “Qizhi xianmingde fandai zichanjieji ziyouhua” in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993, vol. 3, p. 194-97. This line was confirmed in “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu dangqian fandai zichanjieji ziyouhua ruogan wenti de tongzhi” (dated Jan. 28, 1987) in *Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi* (ed.). *Shier da yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1988, vol. 3, p. 1251-59.

<sup>47</sup> Chen Zhiang. “*Heshang* yu xinwen ‘zhongli.’”

version of the CCP's core policies to the audiences by packaging them in popularly appealing images, enriched by the arguments of the widespread current intellectual discussion. The makers of *Heshang*, and in particular CCTV, saw in the documentary a new form of persuasion that would cast aside the antiquated methods of propaganda dating back decades. Instead, they made full use of the persuasive means of the new media, here TV: the carefully formulated narrative and the sophisticated arrangements of *Heshang's* imagery combine into a powerful message. Most important, only such a radically new approach to the making of propaganda, so the people in charge of CCTV, would allow a cost-conscious medium like television to bridge the two demands of effective propaganda and financial sustainability. Yet in comparison to newspapers or journals like *Dushu*, the production process of a TV series is time-consuming; when the series was finally screened, the political climate had changed and the series had ceased to represent the Party line.

*The Politics of Entertainment: Stories from the Editorial Office*

The crackdown on the Democracy Movement had closed whatever windows of opportunity had been open in the 1980s for the voicing of political concerns. For almost three years, until Deng Xiaoping's tour of Southern China, heavy-handed controls were imposed on the media sector, ruling out any attempts of liberalization. The post-1989 depression was of political and social as well as of an economic kind. In the propaganda sector, the reaction on the Democracy Movement was particularly severe, as the Party struggled to regain control of the media: at the height of the student movement, journalists in Beijing and elsewhere had openly sympathized with the students' demands; what was worse, a long-term liberal attitude had developed in the media that now was said to have contributed to preparing the ideological ground for the movement.<sup>48</sup> So as the Party sifted

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<sup>48</sup> On the role of the media in 1989 see Linda Jakobsen. "Lies in Ink, Truth in Blood: The Role and Impact of the Chinese Media During the Beijing Spring of '89." Discussion paper D-6, August 1990, the Joan Shorenstein Center, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, at <http://www.tsquare.tv/themes/liesink.html> (downloaded Sep. 17, 2003). An analysis of the failures of "political thought work" (*zhengzhi sixiang gongzuo* 政治思想工作) that prepared the ground for the student movement can be found in section two of Li Peng's report to the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the 13<sup>th</sup> CC (June 23-24, 1989): "Guanyu Zhao Ziyang tongzhi zai fan dang fan shehuizhuyi de dongluan

through the rubble left from spring 1989, the media were put under close control of the propaganda authorities.

However, since the CCP avoided to reverse the general direction of economic reform (doing so would have further damaged the relations with the country's foreign investors and stifled prospects for domestic growth), the basic problem of the media was not resolved: they remained under pressure to prop up their budgets by expanding external revenues and to become financially self-sufficient. As CCTV's effort to capitalize on the feverish intellectual debates and the politicized climate of the late 1980s had backfired dramatically, the Chinese TV administrators had to look for other ways to attract audiences and to increase their revenues. The general social mood came to their help: in a climate of both melancholy and cynicism, many people became inward-looking, turning away from the broad social issues and instead began to pursue individual pleasures. The early 1990s thus became the golden era of TV melodramas and soap operas.<sup>49</sup>

The first to recognize this trend was a Beijing company, the Beijing Television Art Centre (Beijing dianshi yishu zhongxin 北京电视艺术中心).<sup>50</sup> Zheng Xiaolong 郑晓龙, the Centre's energetic vice-director first had the idea to produce cheap soap operas and situation comedies in early 1989, but only later that year did he start to devote his energies to the project in earnest. The basic pattern for the first Chinese-produced soap opera was summed up by celebrity writer Wang Shuo 王朔, whom Zheng had been able to win for the scriptwriting team: "Make somebody as good as is possible and then let them be done over really badly. It's easy for people to sympathize with their fate; then you have a show."<sup>51</sup> In short, a focus on family drama, emotions, and the life of the small people, so the team around Zheng Xiaolong concluded, would be a sure recipe to produce an audience hit. They calculated correctly that after the events of 1989, the production of a TV

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zhong suo fan de cuowu de baogao" in Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu (ed.). *Xuanchuan dongtai: 1989 nian xuanbianben*. Beijing: Renmin ribao chubanshe, 1991, p. 128-42.

<sup>49</sup> The most comprehensive study of this phenomenon is Jianying Zha. *China Pop: How Soap Operas, Tabloids, and Bestsellers are Transforming a Culture*. New York: The New Press, 1995. See also Michael Keane. "Television Drama in China: Engineering Souls for the Market" in Timothy J. Craig, Richard King (eds.). *Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002, p. 120-37.

<sup>50</sup> The Centre, established in 1982 as a production unit, is owned by the Beijing Broadcasting Bureau (Beijing guangbo shiye ju 北京广播事业局).

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Geremie Barmé. *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 104.

melodrama that redirects people's attention from highly charged political debates to more innocuous issues would be welcomed by the Party-state as well. The subsidies that Zheng Xiaolong could secure for his project show that the *Kewang* approach served the interests not only of TV stations in pursuit of profits, but also those of the government.

Produced hastily in late 1989 and early 1990, the fifty-part series *Kewang* 渴望 hit the airwaves in November 1990. First broadcast by a local station in Nanjing, other TV stations nationwide soon picked up the show when news about its phenomenal success spread. CCTV started to run the program in December. By January 1991, the entire country was in a "*Kewang* fever;" for months on end *Kewang* was the ubiquitous topic of conversation.<sup>52</sup> Even the political leadership's attention was drawn to the series, and on January 8, Li Ruihuan 李瑞环, the PB member in charge of ideology, met the crew in Zhongnanhai and "highly praised their creative work," declaring that "the most important thing [for a TV programme] is that the people like to watch it. Only then can we talk about education."<sup>53</sup> Despite – or just because of – its obviously apolitical content, *Kewang* had become a political issue: the Party's top priority after 1989 was reassuring the Chinese populace that the focus on economic reforms would continue and that individualism would be tolerated as long as it did not translate into calls for political freedom. *Kewang* could be seen as directly supportive of these concerns.

The *Kewang* series addressed issues that were much less controversial than those raised by *Heshang* and propagated a rather conservative view on moral values and social harmony that coincided both with the yearnings of the people after the turbulent past years (in this way the title, *Kewang*, literally "yearning," has commonly been understood), and with the anxieties of the political establishment. When Li Ruihuan spoke publicly in praise of *Kewang*, he did in fact endorse the rise of a market-driven mass cultural consumption. The Wang Shuo phenomenon of the late 1980s had already indicated the new trend of commercial

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<sup>52</sup> See Zha. *China Pop*, p. 25-28; and Lisa B. Rofel. "Yearnings: Televisual Love and Melodramatic Politics," in *American Ethnologist* 21.4 (1994), p. 700-22. Compare also Barmé. *In the Red*, p. 99-107, and Keane. "Television Drama in China," p. 124-26. See also the articles in Chao Xi, Yi Fu (ed.). *Nuan dong: "Kewang" re*. Beijing: Zhongguo guoji guangbo chubanshe, 1991. This volume also contains summaries of the series' episodes.

<sup>53</sup> "Shouxian yao rang ren xihuan kan, qi ci cai tandeshang jiaoyu: Liu Ruihuan tong *Kewang* juzu tan fanrong wenyi zhi lu" in GMRB, Jan. 9, 1991.



mass culture, but the Beijing TV Art Centre and its chief, Zheng Xiaolong, were the first to discover its potential for the production of commercially successful entertainment in the mass media. Mass culture is not an apolitical phenomenon in and by itself. It can be used for propagandistic purposes; on a minimum level, it can transport and disseminate messages that are in tune with, or directly supportive of, values and ideologies of the establishment or government. Such was the case with *Kewang*.

Following its instant success *Kewang* became the model for Chinese TV soaps and sit-coms, a model that was often emulated but never reached. With lots of emotional appeal, many tears, and a good dose of humour, it provided all the necessary ingredients for a successful television production: a story about ordinary people (*laobaixing* 老百姓) with whom the audience could identify. *Kewang* thus became the blueprint for other projects to follow. Yet the Beijing TV Art Centre did not rest on its laurels; trying to capitalize on the initial success of *Kewang*, Zheng Xiaolong did not simply create clones of *Kewang*, as other studios did, but rather experimented with new formats. Two highly successful follow-ups on *Kewang* relied on the basic building blocks of the former, but introduced new ideas: the 1992 smash hit *Bianjibu de gushi* was a sit-com containing a considerable amount of social satire that drew on the atmosphere of cynicism prevailing in the PRC in the early 1990s.<sup>54</sup> A year later, the Centre attracted audiences all over China with *Beijingren zai Niu Yue* 北京人在纽约, a series that appealed to the nationalist sentiments that were on the rise then.<sup>55</sup> As *Bianjibu de gushi* is set in the offices of a fictive journal, and some of the episodes squarely take on the issue of journalism, I see it as a reflexive text; in the remainder of this section I will therefore concentrate on this series, drawing conclusions from both the statements on the role of the media made by the characters in the series, and from the series itself.

*Bianjibu de gushi* was a cooperative project: Zheng Xiaolong had drawn up the general outline, and his Centre financed the production. A six-man team worked on the script, including the celebrity writers Wang Shuo and Feng

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<sup>54</sup> On this climate see Barmé. *In the Red*, ch. 5: "The Graying of Chinese Culture." On *Bianjibu de gushi* see Marie Huot. *La Petite Revolution Culturelle*, p. 98-107. Michael Keane. "Television Drama in China," p. 126-29.

<sup>55</sup> The novel on which the series is based was translated into English. See Glen Cao. *Beijinger in New York*. San Francisco: Cypress Book Co., 1993.

Xiaogang 冯小刚, both of whom had participated in writing *Kewang*. Wang and Feng in particular were later credited for the fast-paced and witty dialogues that became a trademark of TV dramas with Wang Shuo involvement. The idea for the series was born in November 1989, even before *Kewang* was aired, but it did not go into production until summer 1991.<sup>56</sup> Again, the Beijing TV Art Centre scored a major success; *Bianjibu de gushi* won both the official Feitian 飞天 award and the Jinying 金鹰 award sponsored by the popular magazine *Dazhong dianshi* 大众电视.<sup>57</sup>

*Bianjibu de gushi* is set in the offices of the journal *Renjian zhinan* 人间指南 (“Guide to life,” to use Barmé’s translation), a rather marginal state-owned venture in Beijing that seems to be a mixture of a lifestyle magazine and a literary journal; the producers intentionally leave the exact nature of *Renjian zhinan* unknown. The editorial offices are inhabited by a mere five staff members and their editor-in-chief. All of them are distinct personalities. Li Dongbao 李冬宝 is a photographer cum journalist in his thirties. He is a humorous, quick-witted man who doesn’t take his job all too serious but is always happy when he can help others. Li spends his time hanging around, drawing up great plans, joking with his colleagues, and last but not least, pursuing Ge Ling 戈玲, his younger female colleague. Yet it is especially in these moments that Li’s softer side surfaces: his sometimes macho-like behaviour notwithstanding, he is a thoughtful and sensitive man. Ge Ling is a coquette young woman; she finds pleasure in reading fashion journals instead of doing her work (if there is any). She has a sharp tongue that is tested time and again in furious dialogues with Li Dongbao, but after all she is a friendly and likable woman. Li Dongbao and Ge Ling are played by Ge You 葛优 and Lü Liping 吕丽萍, two well-known Chinese comic actors.

Yu Deli 于德利 is an entirely different character: as his name tells – Yu who reaps in the profits (*li* 利), since *de* 德 (virtue) is a homonym for *de* 得 (to get); to tell even the dumbest viewer, his surname is homophone with *yu* 余, “profit.” He is the businessman among the staff; his motto is: “money isn’t omnipotent, but it

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<sup>56</sup> See Feng Xiaogang. “Zan yi dao xiju” in Wang Shuo et al. *Bianjibu de gushi*. Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 1992, p. 1-8. Although this account is rather fictional itself, it gives some basic information on the beginnings of the series.

<sup>57</sup> See Michael Keane. “Television Drama in China,” p. 126.

definitely doesn't go without money either" (*qian bu shi wanneng de, ke meiyou qian shi wanwan bu neng de* 钱不是万能的, 可没有钱是万万不能的). Yu is always meticulously dressed in black Western-style suits and wears ties. His constant hope is to improve the journal to create a better cash flow. A totally different sort of character is Niu dajie 牛大姐: a woman in her fifties, she is an erstwhile political activist filled with the romantic revolutionary fervour of her past; between nostalgic recollections of the Maoist era, she finds time to lament the declining ideological standards of the youth. Liu Shuyou 刘书友, an elderly intellectual with thick glasses is of course exactly what his name promises, a book-friend who finds satisfaction in the few intellectual pleasures of his job. A soft-spoken and reserved man, he is afraid of committing mistakes and seldom sticks his head out. The team is completed by editor-in-chief Chen (Chen zhubian 陈主编) who must balance the different natures of his staff. He tries to mediate between them and must also represent the journal to the propaganda authorities above. Given the deplorable state of the journal, he cannot be a very able administrator, yet he succeeds in steering *Renjian zhinan* more or less free of harm through troubled waters.

The first two installations cover an especially interesting issue, namely, the journal's fight for survival in the face of the onslaught of commercialization. On a flourishing market with hundreds of competing journals, *Renjian zhinan* is losing out. Subscribers have run away in droves, and not even readers' letters arrive any longer. Liu Shuyou's hope that this might be a sign of their reader's satisfaction is shattered when a street vendor tells him that nobody buys the journal; before his eyes, an old woman purchases a batch of old issues for a dumping price –not to read them but as wrapping for her grandson's books. Liu Shuyou is aghast. When the post office calls the journal to tell them that unsold issues keep piling up and that it would be better if the journal closes, this is too much for the younger staff. In an embarrassing encounter, Li Dongbao, Ge Ling, and Yu Deli stumble over each other in the offices of the Labour Transfer Bureau. They all had the same idea: to ask for a transfer and quit *Renjian zhinan*. Yet they discover that other journals do not even consider to employ them upon hearing about their current employer – the reputation of *Renjian zhinan* is rock bottom indeed.

The situation changes abruptly, however, when editor-in-chief Chen declares that he plans to retire. The journal office immediately begins to brim with activity: each of the five editors hopes to be named Chen's successor and sets out to draw up plans for a revamped *Renjian zhinan*. The proposals coming forth are as diverse as the personalities of their originators. Old editor-in-in-chief Chen surprises his staff by adopting a democratic attitude and asking everyone to present their suggestions so as to convince the others. Little surprise that after the intense jockeying that has preceded this meeting, none of the five is willing to give in, and in the election process that follows the open debate, each of them votes for himself. In the end, Chen cannot but stay on his post; in turn he promises to implement all the original plans and proposals of his colleagues.

What is interesting about this meeting and the debate, is that we are presented here – through the mirror of irony – with the actual options available to the Chinese media under the pressure of marketization. In the changing economic structure and under pressure from the government, they must adopt one or more of the strategies outlined in this episode. In what follows I will therefore take a closer look at these suggestions and their arguments.

The first serious option offered is that of Yu Deli who opts, unsurprisingly, for the radical commercialization of the journal.<sup>58</sup>

- Yu: I believe that one of the main reasons why our journal has not been run well, is that funds are insufficient...
- Liu: Ay, don't you have anything new to say, whenever you open your mouth it's about money! How vulgar!
- Yu: Because of the low remunerations we pay for articles, we have lost a number authors. We pay too little travel expenses, so our authors can only look at the sky like frogs from the ground of the well, but they cannot plunge into the thick of life. Ay, the state is no different from our own parents: they must be fair to all their children. But what if the children are numerous and money short? We have to come up with ideas on our own.
- Chen: So what ideas do you propose – except turning [our journal] into an advertising company?
- Yu: It's not necessary to do so; yesterday I've been busy until deep into the night. There are already four companies willing to place advertisements in our journal. If you only trust me, I'll just let things go their way; if things are going that way, I guarantee that within no more than three months our *Guide to Life* (*Renjian zhinan*) will become...
- Li: ... a *Guide to Shopping* (*Gou wu zhinan* 购物指南)! The indispensable guide for your shopping trip!
- Yu: Not only will our sales surge, our funding problem will also be solved!

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<sup>58</sup> Transcripts are taken directly from the film. Many thanks to Cathy Yeh for helping me with the more obscure aspects of *Beijinghua*.

Yu's analysis focuses on the most pressing issue: the journal's lack of sufficient funds. The poor quality of the contributions to the journal are intimately connected to its dire financial situation. The cause for this situation is, of course, the Party's retreat from overall responsibility for the media. The key formulation "But what if the children are numerous and money short?" is an accurate description of the dilemma faced by the Chinese government in the 1980s: in view of a broad number of urgent investment needs, the state was no longer willing to pour the necessary amount of money into the media sector; rather, media enterprises were urged to look after their own needs (of course, like good parents the CCP was still willing to give the most basic provisions to at least a number of core media outlets). Yu Deli therefore wants to tap new sources of income: he sees nothing wrong with attracting advertisers, since the readers, too, would accept a stronger focus on commerce and consumption. Yu finds nothing with advertisements featuring lightly dressed girls if this would make his approach acceptable to his readers (he will later have to promise editor-in-chief Chen to have the models "dress decently"). For Yu, compromises regarding media content are no problem as long as doing so fulfils the purpose of increasing circulation figures solving cash flow problems.

Yu's approach, however, is too radical for his most of his colleagues. Even plain attempts at bribery (he promises a new camera equipment to Li Dongbao, lots of political literature to aunt Niu, and overtime benefits to Liu Shuyou) fail to get them go along the path of all-out commercialization of the media. The strongest opposition comes, understandably, from aunt Niu. She has a very different explanation for the journal's problems, and another vision of its future:

- Niu: I don't agree with what Yu Deli says. During the time of the New Democratic Revolution, many of our Party's periodicals enjoyed a very high standing among the masses and were very influential. At that time, there was nothing close to the conditions Yu Deli is talking about. Thus I believe that the key point for running a journal is not funds, but rather the guiding ideology! Currently our journal has indeed met with some difficulties, but we mustn't forget to closely embrace the general orientation and the policies of the Party...
- Li: Aunt Niu, aunt Niu, are you running a *Guide to Revolution* (*Geming zhinan* 革命指南) or a *Guide to Life* (*Renjian zhinan*)? This is a *Guide to Revolution*! I don't want to offend any of you, but: who of us here would be able to shoulder so heavy a burden?!
- Niu: Me! I can proudly say: taking into consideration political qualification, work experience, and loyalty to the Party's cause, I would make for a worthy editor-in-chief! [...] A very important reason why our journal has not been run well is that our work style has not been correct. In my view, the most pressing

- demand of the day is to rectify our work styles (*zhengfeng* 整风), is to straighten out our thinking!
- Li: I feel that what first needs to be straightened out is aunt Niu's thinking!
- Niu: My thinking?!
- Li: Of course! Maybe you have all along been taking our journal to be a battle field or a bridgehead fortress or some other kind of defensive bulwark. But listen to what everybody says: aren't you treating our broad readers like opponents who must be attacked or guarded against? This way of thinking definitely needs to be corrected. Can our *Renjian zhinan* become a good and trusted friend of the broad readers? Said politely, you are muddle-headed; put more frankly, you have deviated from the highest principle of serving the people!

Aunt Niu is a caricature. She is a stalwart who dreams of bringing back the political climate of the 1950s. The very real efforts of conservative forces within the CCP between 1989 and 1992 to return to the polity of the early 1950s, however, add a sobering note to her championing for *Renjian zhinan* to become a revolutionary fortress. Journals like *Zhongliu* 中流 or *Zhenli de zhuiqiu* 真理的追求, set up in 1990, understood themselves as nothing less than a "Guide to Revolution."<sup>59</sup> If the function of a journal is to be a "battle field" (*zhendi* 阵地) and to educate the people, then the criteria for selecting the journal's leadership are undoubtedly political credentials. Likewise, the methods of leadership within the media must be those of politics: campaigns, criticism and self-criticism, and thought rectification. These are the methods aunt Niu wants to adopt to bring *Renjian zhinan* back on course.

From the above exchange, the most prominent rhetorical feature of *Bianjibu de gushi* is clearly apparent: linguistic irony and ridicule. Copying the technique that had made Wang Shuo's fiction popular, the writing team worked with the bizarre effects of decontextualized polit jargon; implanted into an utterly alien environment, Aunt Niu's Stalinist phraseology mocks the ossified thinking of the few hardcore stalwarts left in some media units, but also those in the Party's propaganda apparatus. In the context of the early 1990s consumer culture, Aunt Niu's *Guide to Revolution* becomes an ironic inversion: not only is its proponent believed to be muddle-headed, but revolution has become the very opposite of serving the people. To serve the people, a journal in reform China must break

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<sup>59</sup> *Zhongliu*, *Zhenli de zhuiqiu*, and *Dangdai sichao* 当代思潮 were founded up in 1990 by leftist hardliners around Deng Liqun 邓力群. They existed throughout the 1990s on the left fringes of the political spectrum, repeatedly attacking the more moderate policies of Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji. *Zhongliu* and *Zhenli de zhuiqiu* were closed in August 2001 after voicing opposition to Jiang Zemin's "Three Representatives" theory. Interviewee 209, Beijing, September 2002.

away from Mao-era dogma and embrace modern values. This is of course a bold political statement, and it shows that serious questions concerning the direction of the media sector lurk closely beneath the surface of laughter in *Bianjibu de gushi*. Yet in the mouth of Li Dongbao, “serving the people” itself sounds awkward enough to raise questions about the meaning of the Party’s “highest principles” (*zongzhi* 宗旨) once these are uttered through the mouth of a figure like Li. The TV series seems to support the general Party line of reform and opening, but in reality the meaning of laughter and the relationship between the media, the Party, and the people is much complex. While the CCP did not give in to complaints within its own rows about the series, the volatility of politically motivated laughter suggests that the relationship remains an uneasy one.

Besides old-style propaganda and nihilistic ridicule, what options do the media have? Accusing her of being ideologically backward and failing to recognize the correct current path of the Party, Li Dongbao beats aunt Niu with her own weapons. In his eyes, the methods that aunt Niu proposes are those of the Cultural Revolution; they have in fact long been denounced and replaced by very different interpretations of media policy: newspapers and journals (or, a TV station!) do fulfil the “highest principle” of “serving the people” by becoming the people’s “good and trusted friend” (*zhiyin* 知音). Li is disgusted by the aggressive and arrogant attitude towards the readership. This humanist position lies at the bottom of Li’s own ideas on how to improve *Renjian zhinan*. When asked by editor-in-chief Chen to explain his ideas, Li answers:

Li: OK. In fact, it is all very easy, there is just one point. Everybody follow me, there’s something I want to show you.

(all go from Chen’s office to the editorial room, where Li shows them a blackboard)

All these columns here I have copied from magazines that enjoy much popularity; this was my own idea. Since we are a general interest social magazine there’s no problem with digesting the most popular columns from other magazines and thus to remake the columns of our *Renjian zhinan*. As to content, we must thoroughly change our dull and lifeless style and the long and laborious articles full of hackneyed and stereotyped phrases. We must focus on what the people would like to read and hear, and exclude everything that causes distress and anxiety; our articles must be short and concise, full of novelty, as well as appealing in style and easy to read. They should have intellectual depth and be delightful at the same time.

Chen: Good! It seems that Li Dongbao has been diligent.

Li: [...] Old Chen, isn’t this what is called “making everything flourish with a mere word” (*yi yan xing bang* 一言兴邦)? If we act according to my prescription, wouldn’t our *Renjian zhinan* be restored from death back to life?!

Just like aunt Niu, Li attributes the journal's decline to its content. However, it is not a lack of ideological commitment, but rather *Renjian zhinan's* outmoded style and the dull and boring articles that have made readers turn away. He therefore proposes not more, but rather less politics as a prescription: Li hopes to appeal to the readers with a light and popular style. Accommodating to the tastes of the journal's readership is for him the way to success. Walking this path is not difficult either: other journals have long since shown the way, so all *Renjian zhinan* must do is copy their strong sides – in this case, their most successful columns. This eclectic approach – which is in fact outright plagiarism (remember to the numerous rip-offs on *Bianjibu's* predecessor, *Kewang*) – is typical for Li Dongbao who likes to take the path of least resistance. He is not picky in choosing his means either: “his” proposal turns out to be a cooperative product of him and Ge Ling, and his line “this was my own idea,” is not just the odd attempt to copyright the technique of plagiarism, but a blatant lie that eventually costs him Ge's vote in the spoilt election for the new editor-in-chief. Li's proposal is of course not original either: copying and imitating successful formats was rampant across the Chinese media sector in the 1990s. Borrowing ideas, or, put differently, copyright infringements, is thus a rather convenient way to attract audiences and secure financial success, while steering a middle course that avoids politically or otherwise contentious issues. The expansion of the commercially driven mainstream was a result of the Party's introduction of economic stimuli into the media sector, and of the political climate after 1989.

The concepts proposed by Yu Deli, aunt Niu, and Li Dongbao stand for three radically different strategies addressing the same problem: how to revive a journal that has come to the brink of bankruptcy due to the economic pressures that the change in government policy in the late 1980s had created. In *Renjian zhinan's* case, editor-in-chief Chen decides to solve the question of the journal's direction and its future leadership by announcing to stick to his post while adopting all three proposals at the same time: he commissions to Yu the task to attract advertising clients to improve the journal's bottom line; he promises to accommodate to aunt Niu's demand to strengthen “thought work” so as to stress the journal's educational function; and he accepts Li's and Ge Ling's proposals for



new columns that would have the effect of increasing *Renjian zhinan's* entertainment value and its attractiveness to the readers.

This “solution” is the ultimate pun on the situation of the Chinese media in the early 1990s. Keeping the old guard in place and trying to adopt minimal doses of three contradictory if not mutually exclusive approaches to media making looks like a sure recipe for inviting the worst of three worlds. In a sense, so the script writing team seems to suggest, this is just the direction into which the Chinese media sector is headed. The three proposals symbolize the competing demands confronting the media sector: all that newspapers, journals, and TV stations could try to do was expanding advertising income and other sources of revenue, steering clear of contentious issues by means of endless copying of proven formulas, and paying lip service to ideological pressures from conservatives quarters such as the PD. The “great integration” proposed by Li Baodong is a caricature of the modernized interpretation of the media concept. The CCP had hoped that the media become financially self-reliant while at the same time remaining organs of Party propaganda and value education, and appealing to the audiences in a consumption-oriented, individualized society. Within the bounds allowed to them, and through the veil of irony, the media workers express grave doubts about the viability of this compromise formula. Wang Shuo and the other writers of the series demonstrate the consequences of the “a little bit of everything” approach most clearly on the linguistic plane: much of the series’ success lies in the comic effects created by the recontextualization of randomly selected decontextualized linguistic fragments. The economic jargon of Yu Deli, the youth speak of Li Dongbao, and especially the highly charged political language constantly used by aunt Niu are all familiar to the audience, but their juxtaposition makes a mockery of each of them – and, by consequence, of the Party’s attempt to bridge ideological prescriptions with market elements. Contrasted with each other, they expose themselves to ridicule; neither Yu’s advertising efforts nor aunt Niu’s struggle to keep the ideological banner flying gain any credibility. What is pure fun for the audience, however, is a rather sobering message to the advocates of an integrative approach to the media’s function: the sophisticated audiences of the 1990s are no longer comparable to those of the “time of the new democratic revolution” that aunt

Niu refers to in her speech; they will see through the efforts of the Party to sell them products they don't appreciate – and react by poking fun at it.

So what is the implicit alternative that *Bianjibu de gushi* proposes? The series is the product of an age of commercialization, declining belief in political ideologies, and nihilistic cynicism. With their series, the makers of *Bianjibu de gushi* make a point by showing the most promising approach to television production and media making in the 1990s. Their soap opera appeals to the tastes of the audiences – as long as the audiences are satisfied (here through the means of irony) the cash flow will be right. On the other hand, it is the economic variable that determines the bottom line of being more responsive to the audiences; securing profits is a basic condition for media making. What is entirely ruled out is the moralistic and ideological approach of aunt Niu. Yet this is no longer necessary, since the Party has started to redefine its overall approach to ideology: once economic construction and social evolution rather than revolution have become the main aim of the CCP, the media must change their approach as well and shift to other means to support the Party line – the first of the demands of the media concept. It is striking to see how three TV series as different as *Heshang*, *Kewang*, and *Bianjibu de gushi* do all end up providing support for the Party's general direction (or at least for the ideas promoted by the dominant faction within the leadership). At the same time, none of the three is a product of Party propaganda in the traditional sense. All three allow other interests to be accommodated, in particular the fiscal needs of the media enterprises that have to survive in a marketized setting. Under these conditions, the CCP even allows the media to pay only lip service to Party principles. Many media outlets, for example, have joined the nationalist discourse not so much to participate in the CCP's campaigns of patriotic education, but rather because popular nationalism was on the rise and would appeal to the audiences. The follow-up to *Bianjibu de gushi*, the series *A Beijinger in New York*, is probably the most prominent example of this kind. The media have not become depoliticized, as the ironic undertones of *Bianjibu de gushi* show. Yet the Party has decided to tolerate these forms of laughter, as long as they do not turn into rebellion. Newspapers, journals, and television can indulge in tears and laughter, as long as their emotional appeal remains compatible with

the general line and the media keep clear of that small number of core areas that are of direct concern for the Party.

### *Conclusion*

The tidal wave of marketization and economic pressures that engulfed the Chinese media sector since the late 1980s has certainly transformed the *xitong* more thoroughly than any other earlier challenge. In this light, what has remained of the modern Chinese media concept that was conceived in Yan'an and was instituted across the nation after the CCP's takeover in 1949? To answer this question, it will be necessary to look at the different aspects of the concept one after another.

The media concept first of all required the media to represent the unified voice of the Party and made them into tools of Party propaganda and Party building. Building on its producers' ties with the government, the 1988 series *Heshang* tried to appropriate the voice of the Party on the modernization issue and experimented with a modernized version of political propaganda, broadcast to an increasingly sophisticated audience. It was the tragedy of Xia Jun, Su Xiaokang, and the other makers of *Heshang* that there was no single, unified voice they could represent. As the CCP leadership was deeply split, the radical policy package that the documentary advocated was associated with the environment of Zhao Ziyang, and when Zhao's position became untenable, *Heshang* very much became a victim of this political allegiance (an alliance, it must be said, into which the filmmakers had entered consciously). In the tightly controlled climate after 1989, *Bianjibu de gushi* opted for another technique: with the consent of the Party which had to provide the population with a measure of diversion while ensuring the profitability of the major media, the producers of the series refrained entirely from active propaganda, and even went so far as to poke fun the Party's propaganda efforts. The CCP was ready to accept a certain amount of nihilism and cynicism that spoke from the series, because just like *Kewang*, *Bianjibu de gushi* portrayed a rather conservative value package and refrained from challenging the status quo and touching politically sensitive subjects. The bottom line emerging in the 1990s was that most of the mainstream media were allowed to reduce active propaganda

to a minimum as long as they steered clear of off-limits topics and did not openly question the Party line in any crucial aspect. This retreat, however, remained a temporary one, as the Party would reactivate its call on the media as propaganda tools whenever it felt necessary – for example at high-level political events, or during campaigns such as those against the *Falun gong* 法轮功 sect in 1999 or the SARS epidemic in spring 2003.

On a similar note, the media's task to raise the consciousness of the people and to educate them was reduced on the daily agenda but was not lifted entirely. The normative claims of television are most apparent in *Heshang* with its sermonizing commentator and the manipulative imagery that try to convince the population of a policy package centring around reform and opening. In *Bianjibu de gushi*, such appeals appear in ironized fashion if at all; however, the latter's refusal to lecture the audiences is tolerated only as long as this isn't felt to be detrimental to the government's efforts to educate the populace. The normative project continues to loom in the background, and the media must be prepared to make compromises in order to avoid being accused of "spiritual nihilism" or of spreading "corrupting influences," especially to the youth. The risks involved, however, are relatively small for the media, as long as major political issues are avoided; they seem acceptable especially in view of the profits that can be made.

It is the mass factor, the fourth element of the media concept, that has turned out to be the dominant factor in media making in the 1990s: in a reversal of the earlier understanding, however, it is no longer the Party alone that determines the objective needs of the masses. Instead, the media are claiming more room to appeal directly to the subjective tastes of the audience in a competitive setting. This has led, since the 1980s, to the re-emergence of the strong, century-old tradition of popular culture: martial arts novels, tales of love and romance, as well as popular music have returned to the media sector after being banned from there for almost half a century.<sup>60</sup> The CCP has been remarkably tolerant of this trend, as long as the Party's right to control those areas defined as critical is not charted. *Kewang* and *Bianjibu de gushi* are typical representatives of this kind of

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<sup>60</sup> On the re-emergence of popular culture see Barmé. In the Red. Wang Jing (ed.). *Chinese Popular Culture and the State*. Perry Link, Richard P. Madsen, Paul G. Pickowicz (eds.). *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Modernizing Society*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002. Craig. *Global Goes Local*.

entertainment. With a conservative value model, embodied by the main characters of the series, and an apolitical message, both stay clear of those topics defined as sensitive: the role of the CCP, the political system, foreign relations, or religion. Lists with topics considered off-limits have been published all through the 1990s.

So what remains of the media's role in class struggle, the last aspect of the media concept? The bloody suppression on the 1989 Democracy Movement and the consequent crackdown on the media have demonstrated dramatically that the liberalization in the media field introduced after the Third Plenum does not mean that the media concept's last clause is no longer relevant. It lies dormant, only to be reactivated whenever needed. The accusation of anti-socialist conspiracy remains a last resort to deal with dissent, and it has resurfaced time and again: the makers of *Heshang* were accused of supporting anti-Party, anti-Socialist activities. Similar accusations were levelled against individual journalists who dared, for example, to call for the rehabilitation of the victims of the Democracy Movement, but also against newspapers pursuing a too active role in exposing cases of high-level corruption.<sup>61</sup> The class struggle clause lies dormant most of the time, but it has not disappeared.

Marketization and commercialization thus have deeply transformed the Chinese media landscape. The sector has exploded in both quantity and diversity of supply to the audiences. Choices for readers and viewers have increased dramatically, and especially entertainment – symbolized by new cultural icons such as Liu Huifang 刘慧芳, the female main character of *Kewang*, or Li Dongbao from *Bianjibu de gushi* – has emerged as the winner of the economic reforms introduced into the media sector. Yet while the diversity has definitely increased, the room for the expression of political opinion has not expanded to any significant degree. The fate of *Heshang* was a painful lesson for anyone in the media field. The indirect means of control that have characterized the CCP's media policy ever since 1949 remain an effective approach, in particular vis-à-vis the enormously expanded number of media outlets. The Party does not insist in permanent and universal enforcement of its prescriptions, and in the course of the 1990s, many niches have emerged that allow for a media diversity unheard of in China for most

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<sup>61</sup> See, for example, "Beijing hits media for not toeing party line," *Taipei Times*, June 20, 2001, at <http://www.taipetimes.com/news/2001/06/20/story/0000090751> (downloaded June 22, 2001).

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the media concept continues to define the general direction of the media sector which is, just as before, considered to be a crucial section of the propaganda *xitong*. The CCP has gone to great lengths to ensure if not the constant control of the media, then at least the constant potential to impose controls wherever and whenever it feels necessary to do so.

## Chapter Ten China.com: Media Control and the Internet

*“We must study the characteristics of [the Internet] and adopt forceful strategies to meet these challenges. We must take the initiative and attack, and we must strengthen our positive propaganda and our influence on the Net.”*

*(Xie Haiguang, 2002)*

*“Providers of Internet information services must supply their users going online with good services, and they must guarantee that the contents of the information they provide is legal.”*

*(“Methods for the Administration of Internet Information Services,” 2000)*

Economic liberalization and marketization have greatly enhanced the diversity on the Chinese media market in the 1990s. The supply and the variety of media products has grown steadily, in particular in the area of entertainment. Chinese consumers today have more choices than ever before. The CCP and the Chinese government have allowed or even fostered this trend with the objective of furthering a consumer society that is capable to sustain long-term economic growth. High growth rates are necessary to enhance the overall “national capacity” (*guoli* 国力) of the PRC, and to secure the legitimacy of the CCP’s rule. While the Party has retreated from micro-level planning in the course of the 1990s, the general architecture of media control and the Party’s claim exercise supervision remain in place.

This architecture, the mechanics of control discussed in chapter four, has been challenged since 1997 by the advent of the Internet in the PRC. In the past, the CCP had dealt successfully with the challenges posed by technological innovation: audiovisual media such as radio and television, but also sound and music recordings, could be integrated into the existing structures of control with relative ease. The net-related media technology, however, has produced a new quality of challenges. These challenges must be attributed, in the first place, to:

- the decentralized structure of the Internet that makes hierarchical networks of editorial control increasingly difficult;
- the blurring of the border between private communication (telecommunications) and public communication;
- the potential of interactivity and user anonymity;

- the blurring of the boundary between technology (traditionally administered as an industry in the economic affairs *xitong*) and the media (belonging to the propaganda *xitong*).

With view to these challenges, a radical overhaul of media paradigms has once been proposed.<sup>1</sup> More recently, however, analysts have taken a more pessimistic outlook on the Internet's potential to erode authoritarian regimes and to foster democracy.<sup>2</sup>

So how has the proliferation of the Internet affected the Chinese media sector? Has the media concept finally become obsolete, or did the CCP see the need to modify it significantly? After the initial enthusiasm created by a short period of "web anarchy," most assessments of the prospects created by the Internet have become more cautious. Learning from its early failures, the CCP has been ever more successful in limiting those influences of the Net it considers harmful. What is more, the Party has grasped the importance and the potential of the Internet and wants to exploit the new technologies to its own advantage. The prospects for political and social change through new technological and media thresholds therefore look bleak at least in the short to mid term.

In this chapter I look at the Internet as a new medium of public communication. I argue that the CCP regards the "Chinese" Internet as a virtual space codeterminous with the national territory of the PRC and claims the authority to regulate and govern the Net in close analogy to the traditional media. The media concept has been adapted and applied to the Internet in the same way it is used to control the traditional media. The Party has opted for a generally liberal interpretation of the media concept, so as not to impede the growth potential of the Net and its stimulating effects on the Chinese economy. Chinese consumers thus have gained a significant amount of choices in the media sector; the variety of both entertainment and news has increased, as has the speed and

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<sup>1</sup> In a March 2000 address, Bill Clinton likened the effort of controlling the Internet to "nailing jell-o to the wall." See "Remarks by President Bill Clinton on China – Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies" (<http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/press/release/2000/clinton38.html>). More recently, weblogs and citizen journalism have been celebrated as the next cyber revolution likely to topple authoritarian regimes across the globe.

<sup>2</sup> See Shanthi Kalathil, Taylor C. Boas. *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003. Michael S. Chase, James C. Mulvenon. "You've got Dissent!: Chinese Dissident Use of the Internet and Beijing's Counter-Strategies." Santa Monica: RAND, 2002. Also available online at <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1543/> (downloaded Nov. 10, 2003).



timeliness of news delivery. With regards to those activities or contents that were labelled as sensitive or forbidden in the print and broadcast media, the CCP has adopted a policy of heavy-handed intervention. Making use of the full array of web-related technologies, the government's interventions into the Internet have grown more sophisticated and effective as time has passed.

The first section of this chapter sketches the growth of the Chinese Internet. I will then investigate the evolution of the regulatory regime that governs Internet activities in the PRC. The government guidelines and regulations issued between 1994 and 2000 show a growing understanding of the nature of the Internet; yet the CCP's learning process also reflects the Party's efforts to integrate the Internet with the existing regulatory framework for the traditional media. I will go further and probe into a key question: does the CCP try to exploit the potential of the web for proactive approaches to ideological thought work, as it has done in the case of the traditional media? A short review of several projects reveals that the Party's efforts in online propaganda look half-hearted at best and seem to have failed more often than not. This is the result of both the nature of the Internet that provides an unprecedented breadth of choices to users, and of the further retreat of the CCP from interventionist approaches to governance.

So with what means does the Party try to establish a degree of control over the new online media? As this emerges to be the crucial question of this chapter, I take a closer look at the various techniques used to produce compliance of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and Internet Content Providers (ICPs). I will discuss these issues primarily through an analysis of one of China's most popular Internet portal, Sina.com. A download of parts of this website on a randomly selected day reveals a surprising degree of freedom in online discussions among web users, but also a tendency on behalf of the site operators to avoid sensitive issues especially in their news section. Another finding of this chapter is that restrictions on news reporting for commercial ICPs are exceptionally strict; Internet news is effectively tied to offline news. Finally, we will have to take a closer look at some of the issues that have triggered a negative reaction of the authorities in charge of Internet control: the closure of websites, the censorship of Bulletin Board Systems, and the harassment of Internet cafés. All these instances serve to illuminate the borders and the grey areas where the CCP sees the need to defend

its grip on the media. Approximately six years into the proliferation of the Internet in the PRC, the Net has become another segment in the Party's media apparatus.

### *The Growth of the Chinese Internet*

The Internet initially reached China not much later than most other countries, but not until in 1997 did the Net “take off” for a belated start in the PRC. Both technology-related and non-technological reasons are responsible for China's late entry into the Internet age. Most important among the latter is the – until recently – low computer penetration rate in Chinese households and workplaces, due to high costs. Only the rapid rise of disposable incomes in the 1990s, as well as the emergence of cheaper domestic brands, have brought the purchase of a personal computer within the range of consideration of both urban households and many employers (including schools and universities). Prior to 1997, for all practical purposes only research institutions and leading universities had computer equipment and could link up to the Internet.<sup>3</sup>

The first email message from China was sent in 1987, and administration of the country code top level domain .cn for China was laid into Chinese hands in 1990. But only in 1994 did the first Chinese website go online,<sup>4</sup> and in January 1997, only 1,003 websites were registered under the domain .cn.<sup>5</sup> It was only in the second half of that year that the growth of the Chinese Net gathered momentum. The number of registered websites reached 5,100 by the end of the year and then exploded (see table 10.1).<sup>6</sup> The first Chinese Internet users were

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<sup>3</sup> On the growth of the Internet and especially the technical infrastructure see Eric Harwit, Duncan Clark. “Shaping the Internet in China: Evolution of Political Control over Network Infrastructure and Content.” in *Asian Survey* XLI.3 (2001), p. 377-408. William Foster, Seymour E. Goodman. “The Diffusion of the Internet in China” at <http://cisac.stanford.edu/docs/chinainternet.pdf> (downloaded July 26, 2001). Some information can also be found in Manuel Fries. *China and Cyberspace: The Development of the Chinese National Information Infrastructure*. Bochum: Bochum University Press, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> See Monika Ermert, Christopher R. Hughes. “What's in a Name? China and the Domain Name System” in Christopher R. Hughes, Gudrun Wacker (eds.). *China and the Internet: Politics of the Digital Leap Forward*. London: RoutledgeVerzon, 2003, p. 127-38, here p. 131f.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics are available from CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Center, Zhongguo hulian wangluo xinxì zhongxin 中国互联网络信息中心) that administers the domain, at <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/registration/domain1997.shtml> (downloaded Sept, 29, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Chinese content providers can also apply for .com domains that are administered by VeriSign Inc., a private sector company in the United States. .com addresses based on servers in the PRC must

thus overwhelmingly academics. It was this computer-literate, highly educated, and highly institutionalized segment of society that first discovered the significance of the Internet – the consequences of this discovery were still felt years later: the notorious distrust of the government towards independent-minded intellectuals was carried over to the Internet when the Party, with some delay, began to react to its subversive potential.

Table 10.1: Number of registered .cn websites

Jan. 1997	1,003
July 1997	2,760
Jan. 1998	5,375
July 1998	10,764
Jan. 1999	19,608
June 1999	29,045
Jan. 2000	56,502
Jul. 2000	103,203
Jan. 2001	127,928
July 2001	128,152
Jan. 2002	128,013
July 2002	126,530
Jan. 2003	182,263
July 2003	256,346

Source: CNNIC statistics at <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/registration/tongji.shtml> (downloaded Sept. 30, 2003)

The second half of 1997 became the short “golden era” of the Chinese Internet: by then, the various networks of universities and research institutions had been interconnected and the web community had grown to a point where the Net reached momentum as a discussion forum with an unprecedented reach. The Party’s initial slowness to respond to the emergence of the Internet must be attributed to a lack of expertise on behalf of the cadres in the propaganda apparatus, and to bureaucratic infighting. The PD awakened only after other groups – intellectuals, students, and dissidents – had started to use the web for their own purposes. Yet the PD’s early attempts at regulating the Internet were frustrated by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication (MPT), owner of the fibre-optic communication grid that powers the Net, and the Ministry of Electronic Industries (MEI), responsible for the high technology industry, which defended its

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seek approval from CNNIC, which does not, however, disclose the number of these websites. The exact number of Chinese websites is therefore unknown. See Ermert. “What’s in a Name?,” p. 134.

claims in the lucrative field of hi-tech.<sup>7</sup> Infighting between the MPT and the MEI was particularly protracted and severe, and ended only after the two ministries were merged into the Ministry of Information Industries (MII). Yet the MII, too, belongs to the economic affairs *xitong* and sees its core objective in fostering the technological advance and the economic development of the nation. Officials in the MII feared that a more heavy-handed approach, such as called for by the PD and also the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT),<sup>8</sup> would cripple a fledgling technology that was poised to become a crucial segment of the national development strategy.<sup>9</sup> The conflict over interests, objectives, and bureaucratic turf illustrates the rigidity of the borders of the *xitong* in the Chinese political landscape.

Since 1998, however, the CCP has adopted a more proactive position towards the Internet issue and has come forward with a series of regulations and directives. These documents and the motives that triggered these interventions will be discussed in the next section. The government also reacted with police actions on infringements of the new guidelines as well as violations of other laws and regulations existing in the PRC. These interventions were designed primarily to deter other potential violators.

With increasing quantity and diversity of Internet content, the number of users has also exploded. In late 1997, there were less than a million Internet users; the number had risen to five million in July 1999, ten million six months later, and reached 68 million in July 2003 (see Figure 10.1).<sup>10</sup> In less than five years, the Internet had thus become a mass medium in the PRC.

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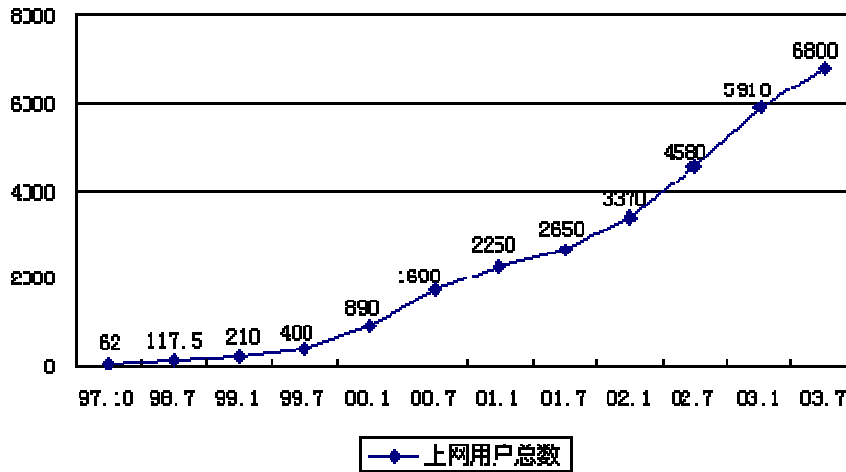
<sup>7</sup> The inter-bureaucratic struggles (that eventually even turned into physical violence) surrounding the authority over the Internet have been discussed repeatedly. The most complete study to date is Junhua Zhang, "Network Convergence and Bureaucratic Turf Wars" in Hughes (ed.). *China and the Internet*, p. 83-101.

<sup>8</sup> Until 1998 the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television.

<sup>9</sup> On the increasing role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the Chinese Five Year Plans see Dai Xiudian, "ICTs in China's Development Strategy" in Hughes (ed.). *China and the Internet*, p. 8-29.

<sup>10</sup> Numbers taken from CNNIC. *Zhongguo hulan wangluo fazhan zhuangkuang tongji baogao (2003/7)* at <http://www.cnnic.cn/develst/2003-7/> (downloaded Sept. 30, 2003). Karsten Giese points out, however, that the numbers given by CNNIC are notoriously unreliable. See, "Internet Growth and the Digital Divide: Implications for Spatial Development" in Hughes (ed.). *China and the Internet*, p. 30-57, here p. 31f.

Figure 10.1: Number of Internet users in the PRC (in 10,000)



Source: CNNIC statistics at <http://www.cnnic.cn/develst/2003-7/7-1.shtml> (figure 1-4) (downloaded Sept. 30, 2003)

The rapid growth of the Chinese Internet has also deeply transformed its character. This becomes visible from the social composition of Chinese Internet users. First of all, the Internet remains a largely urban phenomenon, with computer penetration being highest in the cities of the eastern coastal regions that are also China's most prosperous. Chinese Internet users are young (average age 27 years), male (but women make up a sizable 40 per cent of users), and have an above average education (high school or college degree).<sup>11</sup> 43 per cent of Internet users are students, with public service employees, especially in education, research, and culture, being the second largest group. They usually come from families with an above-average household income.<sup>12</sup>

The social composition of Internet users also decides their interests and uses of the Internet to a significant degree. The Internet is used, first of all, as a tool of communication: email, chat rooms and Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) have

<sup>11</sup> These and the following numbers are taken from Guo Liang, Bu Wei. "The CASS Internet Report (2000): Survey on Internet Usage and Impact in Five Chinese Cities," here tables AA, AB, and AC. The survey of over 3,000 respondents was conducted in February 2001. I am very grateful to Guo Liang for providing me with this survey. The survey results are discussed in Guo Liang, Bu Wei. "Internet Use in China: A Comparative Analysis" in Junhua Zhang, Martin Woesler (ed.). *China's Digital Dream: The Impact of the Internet on Chinese Society*. Bochum: Bochum University Press, 2002, p. 71-91. For a different survey covering similar topics see Jonathan J.H. Zhu, Zhou He. "Information Accessibility, User Sophistication, and Source Credibility: the Impact of the Internet on Value Orientations in Mainland China" in *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 7.2 (Jan. 2002), available online at <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol7/issue2/china.html> (downloaded Nov. 10, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> "The CASS Internet Report (2000)," tables AE and AL.

greatly enhanced the frequency in which urban Chinese exchange opinions and information; it is the interactive features of the Internet that have become its greatest attraction.<sup>13</sup> Yet survey respondents list accessing news on the second rank (with 57 per cent) when asked about their purpose of using the Internet, even before “personal hobbies.” While entertainment-related uses, such as “music” and “games” received high ratings, too (45 and 32 per cent, respectively), the number of people seeking serious information (high ratings for “expanding knowledge,” “remote learning,” and “enhancing computer skills”) is remarkable. The Internet in China is thus used – just like other media – for both entertainment and information.

Chinese Internet users spend an average of 10.5 hours weekly online, as compared to 13.5 hours watching TV, and 5.3 hours reading newspapers.<sup>14</sup> About a third of respondents admitted that after starting to use the Internet, the time he or she spends for other media, and in particular radio and television, had decreased.<sup>15</sup> Yet while the Internet was top ranked as a medium for information gathering on personal life (including shopping, travel etc.), to enhance knowledge and to study (here the Net was beaten narrowly by books), and for entertainment or personal hobbies, it came in third only in the category “knowing news.” Television and newspapers were still considered to be better suited to meet the users’ needs.<sup>16</sup> The reason for this judgement is apparently the higher degree of trust that the traditional media enjoy with Chinese users: 4-5 per cent of respondents said they “didn’t trust” or “not very much” trust domestic TV and newspapers, the majority (73-74 per cent) gave them a relative amount of trust, and 19 per cent each said they “extremely” trusted news from TV and newspapers.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, only 7 per cent said the same about the Internet, while ten per cent believed they could “not” or “not very much” trust online news.

So while the Internet as a source of news does still have a credibility problem, it is appreciated by a young, critical, and well-educated online community as an essential tool of information gathering and exchange. The speed, the diversity, and the interactive potential of online news have made them a crucial segment of the news media field. These developments have not escaped the

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<sup>13</sup> See *ibid.*, table CG “Your purpose of using the Internet is...”

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, table AM.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, table CN.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, table AR.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, table CR.

attention of the Party, and after an initial slowness to respond, the CCP has come out to actively shape the dissemination of news on the Internet. The next section will explore the measures taken by the Party to create a regulatory framework for the Internet that closely interacts with the existing regulations for the traditional media.

### *The CCP's View of the Internet: The Evolution of the Regulatory Regime*

How does the CCP perceive of the Internet and its nature? The regulations and laws put into place to govern the Net provide ample information on the evolution of the CCP's conceptions of the Internet. Internet-related legislation in the PRC dates back as far as 1994,<sup>18</sup> but early guidelines, including a set of temporary guidelines issued on May 20, 1997,<sup>19</sup> proved ineffective and showed a lack of understanding on the side of the government of the nature of the Internet and its peculiar complexities. The main concern speaking from the February 1994 "Regulations" is security, as their full name reveals: "Regulations for the Protection of the Security of Computer Information Networks." Article two gives a definition of "computer information networks" that is, however, too vague and does not succeed in clarifying the features of these networks. Three years after the creation of the World Wide Web it comes as a surprise that the State Council (the signator of the "Regulations") seems to understand the Net primarily as a kind of file- and information-sharing mechanism. Other articles give further testimony to the failure to grasp the significance of the Internet: article 15 relegates the prevention of computer viruses "and other harmful codes that endanger social public security" to the Public Security organs – the reader very much has the impression that protection from computer viruses was to be lumped together with the Chinese disease control regime. Article twenty-one demands that all network computers be stored in rooms complying with national security standards – not a very practical

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<sup>18</sup> *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jisuanji xinxi xitong anquan baohu tiaoli* 中华人民共和国计算机信息系统安全保护条例, issued by the State Council on Feb. 18, 1994. See <http://www.cnnic.cn/policy/5.shtml> (downloaded Sept. 30, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jisuanji xinxi wangluo guoji lianwang guanli zanxing guiding* 中华人民共和国计算机信息网络国际联网管理暂行规定, issued by the State Council. See <http://www.cnnic.cn/policy/1.shtml> (downloaded Sept. 30, 2003).

rule either. The obsession with security and the ideas of how to protect computers seems to be incompatible with the decentralized, open nature of the Internet.

The May 1997 rules, too, are characterized by vagueness concerning the nature of the Net, and lack specific prescriptions of activities considered illegal. Only on Dec. 30, 1997, the Ministry of Public Security issued a set of measures that set clear limits to the freedom of Internet-related activities and detailed a number of taboo areas.<sup>20</sup> The new instructions go far beyond the earlier regulations and are of a more restrictive character; apparently, the Party had been alarmed by the free spread of discussion and the exchange of information on the web that had emerged over the latter half of the year. Article five of the measures contains a list of forbidden topics that “no work unit or individual” is allowed to “create, multiply, read, or spread.”<sup>21</sup>

- (1) [Information that] instigates resistance, violates the enforcement of the constitution, the law, and administrative rules;
- (2) instigates subversion of state power and the overthrowing of the socialist system;
- (3) instigates secessionism and destroys national unity;
- (4) instigates ethnic hatred, ethnic discrimination, and destroys the unity of the different nationalities;
- (5) fabricates or distorts the facts, spreads rumours, and upsets the social order;
- (6) propagates feudal superstition, obscenity, pornography, gambling, violence, murder, terrorism, and instigates to crime;
- (7) publicly insults other people or fabricates facts slandering others;
- (8) denigrates the reputation of state organs;
- (9) or otherwise violates the constitution, the law, and administrative rules.

The above catalogue is a negative list that is intended to bring the information circulating on the Internet under the control of the Chinese state. The basic categories of banned and sensitive content – general political principles, religious issues, the minority question, pornography, violence – resemble those of similar catalogues found in other pieces of legislation for the media sector, for example, in the Publication Administration Regulations issued by the State Council on Jan. 2, 1997.<sup>22</sup> They also contain the vague point nine, that is found in similar fashion in

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<sup>20</sup> *Jisuanji xinxi wangluo guoji lianwang anquan baohu guanli banfa* 计算机信息网络国际联网安全保护管理办法. See <http://www.cnnic.cn/policy/7.shtml> (downloaded Sept. 30, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> See article 25 of “Chuban guanli tiaoli” in Zhongguo chuban nianjian she (ed.). *Zhongguo chuban nianjian 1998*. Beijing: Zhongguo chuban nianjianshe, 1998, p. 230-33, here p. 231. Similar catalogues have also been discussed in chapter four.



many legal documents from the PRC.<sup>23</sup> It is the Public Security organs that are entrusted with the exercise of overall control and supervision of the Net.

Besides the police, the Internet Service Providers (ISPs, here still called *jieru danwei* 接入单位) are made responsible for the enforcement of the rules and restrictions specified in the regulations. For all practical purposes, however, it is not feasible to charge ISPs with the responsibility for Internet content; rather, this task must be given to ICPs. Yet the idea to delegate responsibility for content downwards is the same as that underlying the editor responsibility system practiced in publishing houses, journals, and newspapers: to enforce compliance by increasing pressure on lower-level organs that are made responsible for content, and to encourage self-censorship.

With the regulations of late 1997, for the first time a clearer legal framework emerged that also signalled a better understanding of the Internet on the side of the Party. However, there are still points revealing that the CCP had not yet fully grasped the importance of the Net and the way it functions. The guidelines talk, for example, only about corporate users, that is, *danweis* or enterprises using the Internet. They do not yet consider individual users as a significant factor. Similarly, the guidelines overestimate the technical feasibility of controlling Internet access when demanding that all ISPs must set up files for all users and users must register whenever logging on to the Internet (articles 10 and 11). Security of data still seems to be the main concern of the authorities, and the conservative general attitude speaking from the regulations seriously underestimates the potential of the web. The CCP had not yet come up with a final answer: is the Internet primarily a technology or a medium of public communication?

By fall 2000, the latter had been identified as the more accurate answer. Modernized and more systematic legislation of the Internet was put in place when the State Council enacted two sets of guidelines for the information and Internet sector.<sup>24</sup> These latter rules were confirmed by a decision of the NPC Standing

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<sup>23</sup> On this calculated vagueness see Ronald C. Keith, Lin Zhiqiu. "The 'Falun gong Problem:' Politics and the Struggle for the Rule of Law in China" in CQ 175 (Sept. 2003), p. 623-42, esp. p. 641.

<sup>24</sup> *Hulianwang xinxi fuwu guanli banfa* 互联网信息服务管理办法, and *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo dianxin tiaoli* 中华人民共和国电信条例, dated Sept. 25, 2000. See <http://www.cnnic.cn/policy/18.shtml> and <http://www.cnnic.cn/policy/19.shtml>, respectively (downloaded Sept. 30, 2003).

Committee in Dec. 2000.<sup>25</sup> The most important of these regulations are the “Methods for the Administration of Internet Information Services” of Sept. 25, 2000. The “Methods” are a stratified version of the 1997 regulations. This becomes clear from the language and the formulations used, that are now brought into line with similar legal texts from other related fields of the propaganda *xitong*. The catalogue of the nine “don’ts” (here article 15), for example, has been streamlined: the first item now bans “[information that] violates the basic principles stipulated in the constitution.” As the preamble of the Chinese constitution mentions the “four basic principles” (the leadership of the CCP, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the socialist system, as well as Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought), more explicit references such as that to the Socialist system become redundant; the reformulation thus condenses the first and the second point of the 1997 regulations in a more elegant and more complete form. Moreover, the new formulation is almost identical with that found in the catalogue of the Publication Administration Regulations mentioned above.<sup>26</sup>

The Sept. 2000 “Methods” are speaking of the Internet (*hulianwang* 互联网), a term not yet used in 1997, and of information services (*xinxi fuwu* 信息服务). Both ISPs and ICPs are covered by this latter term. The “Methods” thus move further in defining the liability of the service providers for the content that runs through their servers. Especially important in this respect is article 13 that says: “Providers of Internet information services must supply their users going online with good services, and they must guarantee that the contents of the information they provide is legal.” The demand that ICPs *guarantee* the legality of any content on their pages requires them to take steps of controlling all information uploaded. They are made into effective censors at the grass-roots level – just as the editor responsibility system makes editors liable for anything they have signed off. The responsibility system is clearly imported from the traditional media into the realm of the Internet. Even more significant in this respect is article 14 that details the responsibilities of Chinese ICPs:

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<sup>25</sup> *Quan guo renmin daibiao dahui changwu weiyuanhui guanyu wei hu hulianwang anquan de jueding* 全国人民代表大会常务委员会关于维护互联网安全的决定 (dated Dec. 28, 2000). See <http://zgdxw.peopledaily.com.cn/gb/paper117/1/class011700003/hwz62384.htm> (downloaded Sept. 30, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> The latter reads *fandui xianfa suo queding de jiben yuanze de* 反对宪法所确定的基本原则的, instead of *fandui xianfa queding de...* . See “Chuban guanli tiaoli,” p. 231.

Internet information service providers engaging in services such as news, publishing, public information etc. must record the content as well as the time of publication and the Internet address or domain name of all information they provide; providers of Internet access services must record the time of access, the user account, the Internet address or domain name, and the telephone number of all users going online. The back-up records of Internet information service providers and providers of Internet access services must be kept for 60 days, and must be handed over to the state organs concerned during legal inquiries.

Both content and service providers are required to keep exact records that will allow the police, in the event of an investigation, to retrieve not only the offending piece of information with all relevant data, but also to track down users and reconstruct all their moves on the Internet. These stipulations give far-reaching powers to the police while keeping the providers responsible – users as well as providers can thus become targets of prosecution.

Another mechanism to gain control over the Internet is the introduction of licensing procedures. The objective of these bureaucratic measures – clearly modelled after existing procedures for newspapers or publishing houses discussed in chapter four – is to limit content providers to work units that the Party feels can be trusted or easily controlled: especially providers of non-commercial information need to have a sponsoring work unit (*zhuban danwei* 主办单位), which means that individual and private enterprises are excluded from running such websites on their own account. Websites intending to “engage in news, publishing, education, health, and pharmaceuticals or medical equipment Internet information services”<sup>27</sup> must furthermore obtain permissions from “the departments concerned” (*you guan bumen* 有关部门). A prospective Internet publisher, for example, must therefore register with the SPPA according to the Publication Administration Regulations, just as any other publishing house has to do. These regulations are even more strict than the Internet guidelines and contain detailed prescriptions concerning institutional affiliation, employee training, minimum capital, etc. (discussed in chapter four). Upon approval, the content providers receive a registration number and a permit that must be displayed “on a prominent place on the main page of their website” (article twelve). A typical permit looks as follows:

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<sup>27</sup> *Hulianwang xinxi fuwu guanli banfa*, article five. On the requirement for permissions see article eight.

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京教研[2002]17号 京卫网审字[2002]第8号 京药监市[2002]16号 广告经营许可证1000007000001号  
北京市通信公司营业部提供网络带宽



III. 10.1: ICP permits of Sina.com at <http://www.sina.com.cn> (downloaded Oct. 2, 2003)

On the bottom of the main page, the popular portal Sina.com carries its ICP licence, with the registration number *Jing* 京 (for Beijing) 000007. In addition, Sina.com displays its permits to run education- (*jiao-yan* 教研), health- (*wei* 卫), and medicine- (*yao* 药) related contents, and the licence for online advertising. Finally, the main page carries the “red shield” (*hong dun* 红盾), an emblem distributed by the Beijing Administrative Bureau of Industry and Commerce (Beijing shi gong-shang xingzheng guanli ju 北京市工商行政管理局). To run its website according to official guidelines, Sinca.com thus had to obtain a total of seven licenses. The “red shield” on the right side is a link to a site at the Bureau of Industry and Commerce that provides basic data on the owner of the website (Sina.com), including its address, telephone number, registered capital, and a description of its business scope (*jingying fanwei* 经营范围).<sup>28</sup> This website further carries the notice: “In case you discover that this website is engaging in any online activities violating state laws or regulations, please immediately report to the local administrative organs of industry and trade.” Web surfers are thus integrated into a comprehensive framework of licensing and control.

The licensing requirement does not only serve as a market entry restriction, but also as a convenient means of punishing offenders and closing them down. When the Publication Administration Regulations were enacted on February 1, 1997, article 56 required all publishing houses to renew their licenses by “going once again through the procedures stipulated in these guidelines.”<sup>29</sup> Article 26, the second last article of the Sept. 2000 “Methods for the Administration of Internet Information Services,” contains almost the same formulation: “[*Danweis* or people] that have engaged in Internet information services before the proclamation of

<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.hd315.gov.cn/beian/view.asp?bianhao=0102000102300001> (downloaded Oct. 2, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> “Chuban guanli tiaoli,” p. 233.

these 'Methods' must, within 60 days of the proclamation of the 'Methods,' go through the relevant formalities as required by the relevant guidelines in these 'Methods.'" As explained in chapter four, the Chinese government can declare existing business licences invalid at will and ask publishers, or in this case, ICPs to renew their licences, and might use this opportunity to withhold approval. Without a valid business licence, websites can be declared illegal and shut down. This is what happened to the popular BBS *Shiji shalong* 世纪沙龙 ([forum.cc.org.cn](http://forum.cc.org.cn)) that was closed in September 2003.<sup>30</sup> Through the licensing requirement, the CCP thus has a tight grip on content providers. The mechanisms to enforce the Internet providers' compliance are the same as those used for the traditional media.

The licensing requirements seem to be enforced in a rather lax manner, however. Many websites, and in particular non-commercial sites, do not display their permits as required on their main pages – if they have one at all. The rather strict licensing regulations thus are less a means of permanent bureaucratic control than a potential weapon in the hands of the authorities that can be enforced whenever this is considered necessary. As in other fields of the propaganda sector, the government is usually satisfied with having the power to intervene – an economic and yet very effective way of oversight. This approach has come to characterize the general attitude towards the media in recent years.

The guidelines issued in 1997 and 2000 for the regulation of the Internet were complemented by other, more specific guidelines, such as for online news and online advertising.<sup>31</sup> The "Temporary Guidelines for the Administration of Internet Sites Publishing News" from Nov. 2000 will be discussed later in this chapter. Since 2000, the government regulations for the Internet sector have reached a relative degree of stability, and have been propagated widely as the guiding legal documents for the Internet sector. However, for most of the past sixty years, the CCP has not been satisfied with ruling through regulative frameworks alone. We must now examine the Party's efforts to carry the proactive propaganda

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<sup>30</sup> See Kathy Chen. "China Cracks Down on Growing Debate Over Political Reform: To Quell Talk of Reform, Beijing Closes Internet Sites, Blames Foreign Funding" in *Wall Street Journal*, Sep. 25, 2003. More on this case below.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion concerning the effectiveness of a set of regulations governing business websites, issued in Sept. 2000, see Clara Liang. "Red Light, Green Light: Has China Achieved its Goals Through the 2000 Internet Regulations?" Vanderbilt University Law School, at <http://law.vanderbilt.edu/journal/35-01/Liang.htm> (downloaded Nov. 10, 2003).

approach into the new medium. How successful were the experiments with online ideological thought work?

*Political Thought Work Online? The Decline of the Normative Approach*

The growing choices available to media users in the PRC have made ever new adaptations of the original media concept necessary. Under the conditions of a confusing variety of sources of information and entertainment, the Party must work ever harder to make its own voice heard. In particular the second and the third provision of the media concept – “the media must represent the unified, single voice of the party; they are indispensable tools of party propaganda and party building” – have become increasingly difficult to enforce. How has the affirmative, proactive approach to using the media, an approach the CCP calls thought work (*sixiang gongzuo* 思想工作), evolved in the era of the Internet?

From a media perspective, perhaps the most surprising finding of the Chinese Internet is that there seems to be no co-ordinated Internet appearance of the CCP. In a world populated by organ newspapers (*jiguanbao* 机关报) and organ publications (*jiguan kanwu* 机关刊物), the “organ website” (*jiguan wangye* 机关网页) simply does not exist. The CCP has no website.<sup>32</sup> Neither has the CC. The CC organ, RMRB, has gone online (see the Renminwang 人民网 site at <http://www.peopledaily.com.cn>), yet this site serves primarily as a general information provider; the CC has not set up an independent website. Most of the CC departments and bureaus haven’t gone online either.<sup>33</sup> While the CCP traditionally has preferred to let others speak to the public on its behalf, there have always been publications addressing Party members, such as the theory journal *Qiushi*; periodicals serving Party construction and the ideological education of Party members have abounded on all levels of Party organization. The almost total

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<sup>32</sup> The best guess, <http://www.ccp.org.cn> (accessed Nov. 5, 2003) leads to a local Party website in Yunnan.

<sup>33</sup> Of 20 units under the CC listed at <http://www.peopledaily.com.cn/GB/shizheng/252/9667/9670/20021127/875830.html> (downloaded Nov. 4, 2003), only five have websites. While the United Front Work Department has a website (<http://www.zytzb.org.cn/zytzbwz/index.htm>) (accessed Nov. 4, 2003), none of the three other big Departments (Organization, Propaganda, and International Liaison) has built an Internet presence.

absence of the CCP from the web signals a changed approach to the media since the late 1990s.

There are of course Party websites. Some of these shall be examined now. To start with, the CC's United Front Work Department (Tongzhanbu 统战部, hereafter UFWD) runs an elaborate website at <http://www.zytzb.org.cn/zytzbwz/index.htm>. The UFWD, responsible for the CCP's co-operation with the "Democratic Parties" has traditionally been one of the more communicative CC bodies. The UFWD website carries a large amount of up-to-date news, as well as information for special target groups, such as the other parties, minorities, and non-Party intellectuals. Other resources include biographies of the current UFWD leadership, and a description of the internal setup of the Department. However, with the exception of the news section, other content seems to be updated infrequently. Conspicuously absent from the UFWD's homepage are links to other CCP websites. There are links to pages for the provincial-level UFWDs, that are – with the exception of the Guangdong site – based on the server of the Central UFWD and seem to receive little attention and maintenance; especially the pages of the poorer provinces are permanently under construction. In sum, a visit to the UFWD's website suggests little enthusiasm for online public relations efforts.<sup>34</sup>

While the central CCP apparatus has been hesitant to establish an Internet presence, regional and local CCP bodies have been more straightforward. Take the Sujiatun 苏家屯 website (<http://www.sjtj.gov.cn/>; downloaded Nov. 9, 2003) as an example. The Organization Department of the CCP committee of Sujiatun, a district of Shenyang city, has built, with the assistance of the local PD, an elaborate and well-maintained website that includes features such as "grassroots Party building" (*jiceng dangjian* 基层党建), "cadre work" (*ganbu gongzuo* 干部工作), "propaganda front" (*xuanchuan zhanxian* 宣传战线), as well as an "online Party school" (*wangshang dangxiao* 网上党校). Furthermore, the designers have added interactive features, such as a contact mailboxes for the Organization Department,

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<sup>34</sup> The Communist Youth League seems to pay more attention to its web presence and features a better maintained website at [www.ccy.org](http://www.ccy.org) (accessed Nov. 5, 2003). The CYL's colourful page is a full-fledged portal and mixes ideological and educational contents with lifestyle and has many links to other, non-Party websites. Obviously, the younger clientele of the CYL has prompted the League to opt for a more attractive format.



and a quick vote system; such features are rare for official Chinese websites. The Sujiatun website covers practically all aspects of Party life, and was built as a portal for the local cadres. Apparently, local governments and Party committees are often more eager to approach the public than the Party Center.<sup>35</sup>

Websites dedicated to thought work can be found at some institutions of higher learning,<sup>36</sup> and at the main institutions responsible for cadre training, the Party schools that exist on all levels of the Party hierarchy nationwide.<sup>37</sup> An exception, however, is the website of the Central Party School (Zhongyang dangxiao 中央党校) at <http://www.ccps.gov.cn/> (accessed Nov.4, 2003). The amount of information found on this website is scant, especially in comparison to the resources usually found on websites of most regular universities. In particular, information, resources, or links related to thought work, which would be expected from the Party's most prestigious theory think tank, are entirely absent. A number of links, including that to the "digital library" (*shuzi tushuguan* 数字图书馆) are permanently unavailable, a sign of neglect. Again, local level Party schools are often more forthcoming with information. If the actual web presence is any indication, at least the CCP Center attaches little importance to the Internet as a medium for the proactive advertising of its message.

The Internet has not entirely escaped the attention of the CCP. A major state-sponsored project was launched in summer 2000 to investigate the possibilities of helping "ideological and political work" to go online; the project was listed as a "key point program of the national social sciences fund" under the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. The results of this undertaking, that involved some seventy cadres and scholars, as well as thirty-six contributors from public sector companies, think tanks, and local governments, have been published since 2001 in form of a book

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<sup>35</sup> For other examples of well-run local CCP websites see Hongkou jiaoyu dangjian wang 虹口教育党建网, maintained by the Information Center of Shanghai's Hongkou district, at <http://www.hkedu.sh.cn/hkbbs1/index.htm>; and Yunling dangjian 云岭党建 at <http://www.ccp.org.cn>, which is run by the CCP Yunnan Provincial Committee (accessed Nov. 5, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, the website of the Organization Department of Beijing University, at <http://www.pku.edu.cn/administration/pkuzzb/> (accessed Nov. 5, 2003).

<sup>37</sup> See, for example the Chongqing Party School at <http://www.cqdx.gov.cn/>, or the website of the Hubei dangxiao at <http://www.hbdx.gov.cn/> that has links to other provincial-level Party schools (accessed Nov. 5, 2003).



series.<sup>38</sup> The head of the PD of Shanghai Jiaotong daxue 上海交通大学, Xie Haiguang 谢海光, was placed in charge of coordinating the project and the resulting publications. The most interesting of these volumes was published in April 2002 and contains 88 examples of “successful” political thought work on the Internet.

In the preface – carrying the title “The Internet era and our mission” – the editor summarizes the intention of the project:<sup>39</sup>

We must study the characteristics of [the Internet] and adopt forceful strategies to meet these challenges. We must take the initiative and attack, and we must strengthen our positive propaganda and our influence on the Net. Leading cadres on all levels must pay close attention to the new trends in the development of information networks and study them; they must strive to acquire knowledge about the web, must be good at using the Net in their work, and work hard to grasp the initiative in the struggle on the Net.

The participants in the project advocate an active and affirmative approach to the Internet: the web has the potential to carry the Party’s message in a globalized modern world. If the CCP wants to maintain the ideological leadership under the conditions of media convergence and an increasingly multipolar information market, it has no choice but to vie for an active role in the Chinese cyberspace. The anarchic nature of the Internet makes interventions by the Party even more necessary, especially in the area of ethics: “we must develop an information ethics.”<sup>40</sup>

Xie Haiguang defines several core fields where the Party may become active and gives the following recommendations:<sup>41</sup>

For example, we can set up on the Internet special websites dedicated to ideological thought work; establish web-characteristic homepages; open up a large number of mainstream propaganda channels dedicated to news and current affairs, economy and society, character cultivation, psychological counsel, and popular legal education; on BBS we can urge their operators to set up areas where they post all kinds of positive information. Furthermore, we can discuss and practice web ethics and other ideological education.

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<sup>38</sup> Xie Haiguang. *Hulianwang yu sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo gailun*. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2000. Xie Haiguang (ed.). *Hulianwang yu sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo shiwu*. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2001. Xie Haiguang (ed.). *Hulianwang yu sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo anli*. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2002. Another publication, *Sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo wangshang zhi lu*, was distributed as a software package.

<sup>39</sup> Xie Haiguang. *Hulianwang yu sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo anli*, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

The CCP thus has a broad spectrum of options to intervene affirmatively in the world of the new, net-based media. The body of the volume details several dozen of such efforts. I will now look at two of these examples.

How can Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) be used to educate web surfers? The administrator of a BBS affiliated with Nankai 南开 University in Tianjin reports on the experience of his system when the Chinese Internet community exploded with heated discussions after the collision of an American “spy plane” and a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea on April 1, 2001. The Chinese jet was lost, while the U.S. plane was damaged and forced to land on Hainan island. Among the well over 1000 postings on the Nankai BBS, “there were some postings with too extreme statements or too vulgar language that were immediately deleted by the teachers in charge of supervising [the BBS].”<sup>42</sup> However, as a rule, the personnel overseeing the discussions on the website opted for other means to direct the debate. In this case, they tried to diversify the range of information by posting other, more moderate messages on their own system. When the U.S. side officially apologized about the incident, the administrators immediately posted this information and brought it to the attention of surfers.

Trying to influence the direction of discussions on some of the public spaces on the Internet certainly is one option of positive interventions. Yet the limits of this approach are obvious: it is closely tied to negative interventions (such as censorship in the above case), and it becomes prohibitively expensive as the scale of the Chinese Internet grows. The establishment of websites of an affirmative (*zhengmian* 正面) character is thus another key strategy. One such website, [www.chinaredweb.com](http://www.chinaredweb.com), was built and developed by the automobile class of Qinghua University. [chinaredweb.com](http://www.chinaredweb.com) was perceived as “a theory study website centring on ideological and political education.”<sup>43</sup> The site featured collections of classic Marxist texts and other material for political education, information on how to become a Party member, a news and commentary section, and a discussion

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

forum, among other items.<sup>44</sup> Initiated by students, the website received logistical support from the university administration and from the school's Party branch.

How lasting are the strategies proposed by the experts around Xie Haiguang? If chinaredweb.com is any standard to go by, they are a failure. Little over a year after the publication of the volume, the website no longer exists. Other case studies presented by Xie's crew must be considered as naïve; yet others are lack in concreteness. The state-funded project does not seem to have produced tangible results. The survey of online thought work websites has led to the impression that the CCP's efforts to build a proactive (*zhengmian*) approach to the Internet and making "political thought work" go online have led nowhere, and the "achievements" reported in the Xie Haiguang volume raise doubts even about the sincerity of the Party's efforts.

The conclusion from these findings is that in the course of the 1990s the CCP has changed its general approach to governance, a shift in emphasis that has affected the media, too: the gradual retreat from many sectors and the concurrent expansion of market forces that has started in the 1980s, has greatly gained speed. All the while, the CCP has fine-tuned its macro-management capabilities to reduce costs and raise efficiency. The Party has not, however, abolished the media concept or changed its attitude towards the media. The CCP is still present, and it makes its presence felt by anyone who dares to infringe upon those narrowly defined key areas of concern where the Party sees its primary interests at stake. The next two sections will illustrate this.

### *Indirect Approaches to Control: The Popular Internet*

The efforts of the CCP to carry the proactive thought work approach onto the Internet seem to be half-hearted and little successful. The main reason for this failure is the nature of the Net that gives people the opportunity to choose freely from the marketplace of information and entertainment. To see how modern web-based media operate within the constraints of the media concept, we must turn our attention to those websites that are most popular with Chinese surfers. In this section, I will take a closer look on Sina.com, one of the most frequented Internet

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<sup>44</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 11.

portals in the PRC; the goal of this investigation is to understand how a successful Internet operator manoeuvres in the matrix consisting of the technical possibilities of the web, the heterogeneous demands of its customers, and the restrictions imposed by the government. How far does the freedom of the online media go, and where are the limits?<sup>45</sup>

The portal Sina.com (at [www.sina.com.cn](http://www.sina.com.cn); the Chinese name is Xinlang 新浪) was set up in December 1998 when the Beijing-based Sitong Lifang 四通利方 company acquired Sina, a U.S. based portal popular with overseas Chinese. The company was first and foremost looking for a way to distribute its hugely popular Richwin software online.<sup>46</sup> In the short time span of four years, Sina.com became one of the most popular Chinese language Internet portals with 68 million registered users; in March 2000, it applied as one of the first Chinese hi-tech companies for a listing on the American NASDAQ exchange. The early success of the website must undoubtedly be credited to the decision of the parent company, to distribute Richwin free over its website. The new version of Richwin, back in 1998 the most popular software available for writing and reading Chinese characters, was attracting droves of customers to the fledgling portal. Sina.com reacted fast and capitalized on this early success by constantly adding features to its websites, providing computer technology-related information and increasingly news, sports, entertainment, and lifestyle content.

Significant events in Sina.com's history were the 1998 soccer World Championship tournament in France and the May 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy at Belgrade. During the first event, the Sitong company had set up a website especially to cover the event (<http://france98.srsnet.com/>); the servers of this direct predecessor of the later portal were still based in the U.S. (due to insufficient bandwidth capacity in the PRC). The site was able to establish a reputation as a provider of fast and accurate reporting with extensive coverage of all games, and earned the respect of a soccer-fanatic audience. Sina.com built on this success at subsequent major sports events, such as the 2000 Olympic Games

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<sup>45</sup> Since an Internet portal like Sina.com is subject to constant change, I have downloaded the front-page and parts of its subdirectories. This download has been deposited in the Digital Archive for Chinese Studies (DACHS) and is available through the following website: <http://www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/dachs/volland050530.htm>. Download date was Nov. 6, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Information in this and the following paragraphs comes from Interviewees 217 and 219. See also the account of Sina.com's history at [corp.sina.com.cn/chn/sina\\_info.html](http://corp.sina.com.cn/chn/sina_info.html).

in Sydney, and the 2002 soccer world cup in Japan and Korea. When NATO airplanes bombed the Chinese embassy on May 8, 1999, reducing the building to rubble and killing three staff, Sina.com reported the incident within 30 minutes, being the first news organ in the PRC to do so. As crowds floated to Sina.com, the portal was once again able to highlight its position as the leading Chinese online news site.<sup>47</sup> Since then, Sina.com has grown steadily to about 40 million registered users in September 2002 (of whom 10 million were said to be regular visitors to the Sina.com website) and 68 million a year later. In the 2002 Annual Report,<sup>48</sup> the company lists assets of US\$ 130 million and revenues of US\$ 13 million.

Sina.com is a comprehensive Internet portal, offering the complete range of services from email management and chatrooms to e-commerce, business information, entertainment, and news. The function of Sina.com as an online news provider is undoubtedly the site's most critical feature; a detailed investigation of the news content provided by Sina.com will follow later in this section. First, however, I will take a look at the other areas of the website's business scope. I will first turn to the interactive features, email and BBS, that are unique to Internet-based media.

Sina.com offers free webmail services to registered customers. To get an email address, a new user must first become a "member" (*huiyuan* 会员) of Sina.com; his membership also allows him to access other services, such as BBS. The guidelines analyzed above require ISP's to verify the identity of their users, which is, however, difficult to accomplish. Upon registration, prospective users must submit their date of birth as well as the number of their identity card; this allows for some degree of verification, as the latter number contains the birth date in a coded form. This system, however, is far from secure, especially as users are also allowed to use student ID's to register.<sup>49</sup> The registration rather seems to be a pro forma act; supervision remains elusive, especially if users access their email accounts from public computer terminals. Strictly speaking, however, electronic mail is a form of private communication, and not public communication, which is

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<sup>47</sup> Random questioning of Chinese students in September and October 2002 confirmed this assessment.

<sup>48</sup> Available online at [corp.sina.com.cn/chn/Annual\\_Report\\_2002\\_Final.pdf](http://corp.sina.com.cn/chn/Annual_Report_2002_Final.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> The registration forms are at [unipro.sina.com.cn/cgi-bin/neoregi\\_3.cgi](http://unipro.sina.com.cn/cgi-bin/neoregi_3.cgi) and [unipro.sina.com.cn/cgi-bin/neoregi\\_3a.htm](http://unipro.sina.com.cn/cgi-bin/neoregi_3a.htm).

the subject of this study. Lower standards of regulation are therefore tolerated for email, as long as it is not used, for example, to circulate information that violates national laws and regulations (see article 3.4 of “Xinlang wangluo fuwu shiyong xieyi” 新浪网络服务使用协议, that users must agree to before registering<sup>50</sup>). Enforcement of these regulations is left to the police force that controls email traffic, for example, at the international gateways that connect the “Chinese” web with the Internet. Stricter standards of supervision apply to another of the interactive features offered by Sina.com, its BBS systems.<sup>51</sup>

In its BBS section, Sina.com offers hundreds of chatrooms to surfers. These can be grouped into two general categories: topical BBS and news-related BBS. The former includes chatrooms with titles such as “Chatting on heaven and earth,” “Jin Yong guesthouse,” and “Sports salon.” The amount of cosmic background noise devoid of even the slightest amount of meaning constantly produced by thousands of bored Internet surfers is outright amazing. Much of the gobbledygook on these forums does not even pretend to be related to the theme of the BBS. Consequently, it is undoubtedly the other category of chatrooms that is more interesting, as it allows Internet users to share thoughts about current and evolving news events.

On the sample day of my download, a fire in an apartment complex in Hengyang 衡阳 city in Hunan had killed scores of people, including fire-fighters, and injured dozens more. Sina.com set up a BBS section to discuss this incident. Voices in the forum were mixed.<sup>52</sup> Some expressed grief and called the fire-fighters heroes and martyrs. Some opinions, such as “Those burnt were just trash,” were obviously provocative. However, the number of critical voices was surprisingly high. One comment read: “Grief! But it is bureaucratism and corruption that are responsible, this was just a lesson.” Another more elaborate statement linked the tragedy to official complacency and policy failures:

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<sup>50</sup> See [mail.sina.com.cn/fwtq\\_sina.html](mailto:mail.sina.com.cn/fwtq_sina.html).

<sup>51</sup> On the monitoring of BBS see also the detailed report “‘Living Dangerously on the Net:’ Censorship and Surveillance of Internet Forums.” Reporters without borders, May 12, 2003, at [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=6793](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=6793) (downloaded Nov. 10, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> For a snapshot of the discussion see [comment.sina.com.cn/cgi-bin/comment/comment.cgi?channel=gn&newsid=2061715&face=face3&style=1](http://comment.sina.com.cn/cgi-bin/comment/comment.cgi?channel=gn&newsid=2061715&face=face3&style=1) of the download, from which following quotations draw.

These days, the government and its departments all day long mull over how to keep their system running, and only after something has happened they come out eloquently saying we have already issued so-and-so many circulars ordering changes, we have so-and-so many times visited and inspected sites [of disasters], we have convened so-and-so many meetings on [construction] security, we have so-and-so often implemented the spirit of the leadership[‘s policies], we have issued so-and-so many documents... and all this has been documented in the relevant files! They do not really grasp fire-fighting and [constructing] security issues. [...] The government must examine itself and draw a lesson from this bitter experience, so that such tragedies won’t happen again! [...] We stand in silent tribute to the people who have perished! A very long road still lies ahead until all people in China have developed a sense for fire prevention! It is an undeniable fact that after all, citizen quality (*guomin suzhi* 国民素质) in China is still rather low! The increasingly lopsided spending on education in China makes the poor even poorer; in this vicious cycle [people’s] quality will become ever more polarized; so in the long run, how could the citizen quality comprehensively rise?”

The line of thought in this contribution meanders from one conclusion to the next, and its deductive logic sometimes gets lost. Nevertheless, the author (probably some person with close contact to the education sector, as his concern for the issue of government spending in this sector suggests) points to some fundamental problems that result in pointed criticism of government policies and demonstrates a considerably high level of reflection. Other voices tried clearly to stay within the confines of government discourse: “The policy of the central [government] is good, but as soon as it reaches the localities, it turns bad – pay our respects to the martyrs!” It is a common argument of the government and the media that corruption and malpractices are a grassroots phenomenon and are in fact a distortion of well-intended policies. Thus, it is easy to find scapegoats for tragedies like the Hengyang fire – local officials: they are punished harshly to prove that the central government can act decisively, and to let the people feel that justice has been done. The longer comment translated above, in contrast, is much more subtle, implicating the national education policies (probably with the idea that a lack of responsibility leads to shoddy construction standards).

BBS pose the biggest headache to the CCP and the bureaucracies concerned with propaganda and media control. It is here that communication transcends the traditional divide between the private and the public sphere. While filter software may go after the individual email message, email is not prone to affect the sensibilities of the propaganda sector, because it is usually directed at individually defined recipients. In contrast, it is impossible to predict how many readers a message posted on a BBS might find. The message thus becomes part

of public communication which is usually subject to much stricter supervision – mostly in the form of responsible editors. The only way to control BBS effectively is through the constant presence of human “monitors” or supervisors who might intervene and censor messages that have “crossed the line.” Chinese ISPs are held to ensure that their chatrooms are monitored whenever online. This has led Renminwang, RMRB’s website, to close its popular “Strong Nation Forum” (*Qiangguo luntan* 强国论坛) BBS every evening at 10 p.m. to save personnel costs.<sup>53</sup>

Why was the posting translated and discussed above not deleted by the “monitor”? This question is hard to answer. Decisions lie with individual “monitors” who may be overwhelmed with the number of postings. Possibly the posting had as yet escaped the attention of the monitor – it was posted at 18.29 p.m. Beijing time, the page was downloaded at 18.34. A more likely reason was suggested by interviewees: complaints of users who had their messages deleted appear frequently in the chatrooms; monitors who are perceived to be all too pedantic do quickly draw the wrath of users. Given the volatility of the online community, such chatrooms might be abandoned in a matter of minutes by entire crowds of users who shift their discussions to other locations. Yet due to their popularity, BBS are valuable assets: ISPs need the advertising revenue created from their BBS and therefore instruct their monitors not to be too picky – they simply cannot afford excessive censorship.<sup>54</sup>

BBS monitors are thus left alone with the decision on how far censorship should go. Sometimes, topics make it onto the pages of BBS that are clearly beyond what the CCP is ready to tolerate. Such happened on April 15, 2003, when a user at *Shiji shalong* 世纪沙龙, a BBS popular with Beijing intellectuals, reminded other surfers of the 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of former Party general secretary Hu Yaobang – an incident that had become the catalyst of the 1989 student movement. Others reacted quickly with postings such as “give history back its true face,” “commemorate Hu Yaobang, remember Zhao Ziyang,” “Mao, Deng,

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<sup>53</sup> For the rules governing *Qiangguo luntan*, that allow the censoring of postings found to be inappropriate see <http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/guest> (downloaded Nov. 9, 2003). On censorship in *Qiangguo luntan* see also Tao Wenzhao. “Censorship and Protest: The Regulation of BBS in China People Daily” [sic]. *First Monday* 6.1 (Jan. 2001), taken from [http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6\\_1/tao/index.html](http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_1/tao/index.html) (downloaded March 19, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Interviewees 216, 217.



and Jiang do not understand how a modern political system works.”<sup>55</sup> Given the government’s sensitivity on this particular topic, a discussion would either be a dangerous oversight by the monitor, or a courageous case of benign neglect. Neither could have been the case here, since the original posting was from the evening before, had been read 1,440 times and triggered 70 responses. Even more, it had received a recommendation from the monitor in the form of a small icon next to the message title.<sup>56</sup>

What sense, then, can we make of the discussion on the merits of the late Hu Yaobang? If thinly veiled calls for a reversal of the verdict on the democracy movement, positive comments on a *persona non grata* like Zhao Ziyang, and criticism of Jiang Zemin’s policies can all appear on a forum like this, the monitor must certainly be using the BBS for his own agenda, showing sympathy to the discussion, if not to the individual postings. Monitoring of BBS thus does not necessarily mean heavy-handed control. As with other media, the personnel involved might try to use the power available to them to pursue their own goals – such as to promote a freer climate of discussion in China. The Internet in particular has the potential to build such niches. In the case of *Shiji shalong*, however, the lenience of the BBS monitors backfired. Two weeks later, when the outbreak of the SARS epidemic neared its climax, *Shiji shalong* announced a weak-long closure of its forum, allegedly voluntarily, to let things cool down. Only few users believed the closure to be a voluntary act.<sup>57</sup> The forum briefly reopened after a week but soon thereafter was again permanently unavailable. In August 2003, it was reported to have been closed down for the reason that it had no valid business license. The real reason was supposedly connected to a nationwide crackdown on a debate on democratic reforms that had originally been launched by the new leadership team

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<sup>55</sup> See [forum.cc.org.cn/luntan/china/showcontent.php3@db=1&id=134601&id1=41155&mode=1](http://forum.cc.org.cn/luntan/china/showcontent.php3@db=1&id=134601&id1=41155&mode=1) (downloaded April 16, 2003).

<sup>56</sup> See [forum.cc.org.cn/default.htm](http://forum.cc.org.cn/default.htm) (downloaded April 16, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> On the closure see Nan Shui. “Linshi guanzhan, zema ji gonggongxing, zhishifenzi liangzhi” at <http://www.sinoliberal.com/academic/nanshui%20on%20century%20salon%20shut.htm> (downloaded July 12, 2003), and Qiu Feng. “Shiji shalong ziyuan guan zhan, hen zhengchang” at <http://www.sinoliberal.com/note/qiufeng%20on%20century%20salon%20shut.htm> (downloaded July 12, 2003). Ironically, Qiu Feng, who held that the action of self-censorship was “very normal,” saw his own website, *China Austrian Review*, shut down by government orders in August 2003.

around Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao but that was brought to an end when the debate was overheating.<sup>58</sup>

Interactive features like email and BBS are only two – albeit enormously popular – elements of a large portal like Sina.com. The bulk of the website contains information on practically all provinces of knowledge, including large amounts of entertainment-related content. Entertainment as a main function of media emerged in the course of the 1980s and moved to the foreground of the Chinese media scene with the arrival of commercialization, as I have discussed in chapter eight. As a purely commercial website – Sina.com says it has never received government subsidies – it is only natural that entertainment is used to attract surfers and thus create advertising revenues. A computer game corner and online cartoons, some of them animated, belong to the stock of Sina.com's website as do ring tones that users can download on their cellphones free of charge. Delivery of entertainment is for online media just as attractive as for traditional media: it is unlikely to touch the various sensibilities and “don'ts” of the government and is unlikely to attract the Party's attention as long as it stays clear of sexuality, excessive violence, and religious propaganda. The consensus that emerged in the late 1980s does also apply to the online media: that the media are allowed to withdraw from active propaganda as long as the limits defined by the Party are not violated and a generally affirmative tone is maintained.

In contrast to many other Chinese ISPs and ICPs, however, Sina.com does also provide a significant amount of news, and has even built its reputation on its ability to deliver timely and accurate news. It is to this issue that I will turn now. Probably the most inconspicuous form of news is sports news, on which Sina.com drew so heavily in its early career. The most problematic aspect concerns news sources: while traditional Chinese media are relatively free to investigate domestic news wherever they happen – with the exception of major events, of course – all foreign news have until recently been the exclusive prerogative of the Xinhua

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<sup>58</sup> See Kathy Chen. “China Cracks Down on Growing Debate Over Political Reform: To Quell Talk of Reform, Beijing Closes Internet Sites, Blames Foreign Funding” in *Wall Street Journal*, Sep. 25, 2003. In November 2003, I discovered that *Shiji shalong* was accessible from within China, while it continued to be permanently unavailable from outside the country. This seems to open up an entirely new dimension of control, namely the return of limited public spheres: in analogy to “domestic circulation only” publications, foreigners are excluded from discourses in China. This is a reversal of the policy to block Chinese users' access to foreign media and dissident websites. I have been unable to find more evidence for this practice and it is unclear if this is an isolated case.

News Agency. So it caused a sensation when Sina.com was granted permission in 1998 to send two of its journalists to France to cover the soccer world championship. This step must be considered particularly unusual given the fact that Sina.com is a non-Party, commercial medium. Yet the experiment proved a success, and on consequent occasions, Sina.com could send more journalists of its own to major sports events.

Sports, however, is a comparatively inconspicuous subject: as long the patriotic consensus is upheld – which is likely to be the case – there are few sensibilities that might be touched on. Yet what is the situation with other news? A quick check reveals that Sina.com delivers a large amount of up-to-date news, but produces none of it itself. Rather, it buys news from partners: international news, for example, is likely to come from Xinhua.com 新华网, the news agency's online service.<sup>59</sup> Other articles might come from RMRB, or from local media, such as the popular *Beijing chenbao* 北京晨报. A report entitled: “Three central ministries publish circular: nude paintings in public places forbidden” was reprinted from *Xiaoxiang chenbao* 潇湘晨报, a Changsha-based newspaper. On its website, Sina.com lists its main cooperation partners that include mainstream media such as Xinhua, CCTV, *Jiefang ribao*, *Nanfang ribao*, and the English-language *China Daily*.<sup>60</sup>

Sina.com does not generate news on its own – because it is not allowed to. As a commercial entity, Sina.com cannot hire journalists, which is a prerogative of state-owned media. It is in this way that the CCP limits access to the crucial territory of news media and prevents non-Party players from entering. Just as no private newspaper can be registered in the PRC, no enterprise can hope to start an online news medium. A set of regulations, the “Temporary Guidelines for the Administration of Internet Sites Publishing News” was promulgated in November 2000.<sup>61</sup> It is article seven of these “Temporary Guidelines” that is relevant for Sina.com:<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See, for example, a report on large-scale unrest in eastern India, killing at least 21 people, that was reported as breaking news: [news.sina.com.cn/w/2003-11-06/16351069661s.shtml](http://news.sina.com.cn/w/2003-11-06/16351069661s.shtml).

<sup>60</sup> See [http://corp.sina.com.cn/chn/sina\\_parter.html](http://corp.sina.com.cn/chn/sina_parter.html).

<sup>61</sup> *Hulian wangzhan congshi dengzai xinwen yewu guanli zanxing guiding* 互联网站从事登载新闻业务管理暂行规定 (dated Nov. 7, 2000). See <http://www.cnnic.cn/policy/22.shtml> (downloaded Sept. 30, 2003). Also reprinted in RMRB, Nov. 7, 2000.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. My italics.

Comprehensive (*zonghexing* 综合性) Internet websites established legally by non-news units (below: comprehensive non-media unit websites) can, if they meet the conditions listed in article nine of the Guidelines, and after receiving approval, reprint news published by Central news units, by news units of the various organs and departments of the [Party] Center and the State, or by news units directly under the provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities, *but they are not allowed to publish news written by themselves or from other sources*. Other websites set up legally by non-news units are not allowed to reprint news.

As Sina.com was founded by the Sitong lifang company, a software enterprise, it could apply for a permission (article 8) to reprint news published by other sources, but was definitely denied the status of a *bona fide* news unit, banning it from creating news on its own account.

Websites thus can be grouped into three categories:

- websites such as Renminwang or Xinhua.com can receive full permission to enter the news sector, albeit always in tandem with their sponsoring unit, a traditional medium. Even such websites, however, have to go through an application process that requires final approval from the News Office of the State Council (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 国务院新闻办公室) (article six);
- “comprehensive” websites, obviously of the kind of Sina.com, that have no direct institutional link to a brick-and-mortar news unit can apply for a partial license that will allow them the reprinting, but not the writing of news. In this way the Party secures its monopoly, if not over news distribution, so at least over news writing. A news item that does not make it into some other news medium cannot appear on the Internet legally;
- other websites, mostly specialising into one particular area of interest, are barred from the online news business entirely. No university website, for example, is allowed to put any news on its website other than those relating directly to campus affairs.

In this way, the Chinese government has effectively transferred the institutional structure of control of the news sector from the traditional media to the new domain of the Internet.<sup>63</sup>

Other articles of the same document give testimony of the same transfer process. Article 13 gives a list of nine forbidden items, the famous “don’ts” we have already found in both the regulations governing the publishing sector, and in

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<sup>63</sup> Interviewees 217, 218, and 219 have confirmed this practice.

several Internet-related documents. The nine points of the enumeration are almost identical with that of the September 25, 2000, “Methods for the Administration of Internet Information Services” discussed above.

Another interesting restriction is that contained in article 14: “If Internet websites want to offer links to foreign<sup>64</sup> news websites, or if they want to reprint news published by foreign news media and Internet websites, they must specifically seek approval from the News Office of the State Council.” News produced outside the PRC proper escapes the CCP’s authority of ultimate control; normally, it is the task of the Xinhua news agency to ensure that the interpretation of foreign events, as well as foreign information on both foreign and domestic events that is released in China, is in compliance with the current Party line. Only in special cases will the Party give up this powerful prerogative. A point deserving special attention is the ban to provide even links to foreign news websites. For an open and decentralized medium like the Internet, this demand seems absurd, since it is exactly the links that make a “net” or a “web” out of the millions of individual sites scattered across the globe. Yet the phrase in article 14 is absolutely understandable from the CCP’s point of view; the Party wants to uphold its interpretive sovereignty. If a mouse click is enough to give surfers access to other, unfiltered, and potentially destabilizing information, the Party’s media hegemony would break down.

This passage of the “Temporary Guidelines” is probably the best of all possible illustrations of the CCP’s conception of the Internet: the Party regards the “Chinese” Internet as a virtual space literally codeterminous with the borders of the PRC. Just as the CCP rules the country’s physical terrain with unrestricted authority, it claims the same authority for “its” section of cyberspace.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the concept of sovereignty is copied from the confines of the nation-state into the Internet – or rather, Intranet. With projects such as the “Golden Shield,”<sup>66</sup> the CCP

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<sup>64</sup> *jingwai* 境外, lit. “outside the territory,” a term for foreign countries, as well as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau.

<sup>65</sup> This point has been discussed by Nicola Casarini in “Realistic Analysis of China and the Internet.” Paper presented at the XIV EACS Conference in Moscow, Aug. 26-28, 2002.

<sup>66</sup> Greg Walton. “China’s Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People’s Republic of China.” Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2001, taken from <http://www.ichrdd.ca/english/commdoc/publications/globalization/goldenShieldEng.html> (downloaded Aug. 23, 2002).

has tried to de-link the Chinese Net from the Internet: international data traffic is limited to only three gateways located in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou that can be controlled with relative ease;<sup>67</sup> international email traffic is filtered here, and so a ban on links to foreign websites is thus just a reasonable extension of the same logic. The efforts to regionalize the Internet make it abundantly clear that the CCP regards the Internet not as something entirely new, but rather as the application of a new technology to a long-standing system, in this case, the propaganda and media sector.

The CCP obviously regards online news with great concern and wants to handle its administration with utmost care. The main providers of online news – and of political news and information in particular – are still the large web portals linked with the traditional media: Renminwang and Xinhuwang, but also new institutions like Qianlongwang 千龙网. Qianlongwang was launched in March 2000 as the online platform for about a dozen Beijing news media, including *Beijing ribao* 北京日报, *Beijing wanbao* 北京晚报, Beijing renmin guangbo diantai 北京人民广播电台, Beijing dianshitai 北京电视台, *Beijing qingnianbao* 北京青年报 etc.<sup>68</sup> Together with RMRB's and Xinhua's online ventures, Qianlongwang belongs to a group of ten national key point projects that receive massive state funding and support.<sup>69</sup> While the Party's efforts of proactive online propaganda and thought work appear to be half-hearted at best, the CCP invests an enormous amount of energy in the control of online news. The chatter in BBS can be overheard as long as it does not get too loud, whereas news escaping the Party's grip would have immediate detrimental effects to its rule. News has direct political implications and does therefore belong to those few core areas that the Party guards with unrelenting strictness.

What can a website like Sina.com – that depends on delivering timely, accurate, and abundant information to its users – do in such a setting? A glimpse on the website reveals that little of the news at Sina.com is “hard” political news. In its news section (<http://news.sina.com.cn/default.htm>), a considerable number of the stories classified as “domestic news” or “international news” are in fact human

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<sup>67</sup> See Dai Xiudian. “ICTs in China's Development Strategy,” p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> See <http://www.qianlong.com/aboutus/> (downloaded Nov. 8, 2003).

<sup>69</sup> Information from interviewees 217, 218.

interest stories. Stories on low-level corruption, the beating of a Hong Kong resident in England, or a car accident in Shaanxi will attract readers but are not likely to touch on political sensibilities. Economic news consumes about half of the news page at Sina.com. Economics, too is a relatively safe terrain that will not create trouble as long as the articles do not question the fundamental economic architecture and the Party's current policies, which is unlikely to happen given that Sina.com acquires its news from other, state controlled news organs. In contrast, Renminwang – and even more so the website's "news centre" (*xinwen zhongxin* 新闻中心) – has a clear focus on Party and state politics, and on major international political events. A central feature of Renminwang, just as in the mainstream traditional media, is the day-to-day coverage of the activities of the Party and state leadership, as well as important speeches and documents. Such documents can only rarely be found on commercial websites like Sina.com. The strength of Sina.com thus lies not in permanent coverage of high-level politics, but in catering to the main areas of demand of its readers – chiefly human interests, entertainment, and economic information. In this way, Sina.com is even able to play an affirmative role: the articles appearing as news on its website echo the stress on the positive rather than the negative side of life that is found in Chinese newspapers. In a certain sense, thus, Sina.com thus takes on the educational function that is demanded in the media concept.

These two factors, the rule that Sina.com cannot write its own news and must carry news items produced by other, state-controlled news media, and the choice of the items it eventually sources, guarantee that Sina.com remains within the limits that the government has set for commercial online news providers. Flexibility and the high speed of its reporting have allowed the portal to maintain its popularity with users, who find their tastes being catered to, and feel that they can find all relevant information in good time on the site – it is this mix that gives Sina.com an edge over its competitors. On the other hand, the portal lives in a tacit form of symbiosis with the government: Sina.com does not challenge the Party's claims of authority over the virtual universe of the "Chinese" Internet, and in turn receives favourable treatment of the government that is willing to overlook minor transgressions of the rules – such as in the case of the chatroom discussions on the Hengyang fire – as long as the cornerstones of the Party's

agenda are not challenged. The CCP, finally, can present Sina.com as a successful new player in the crucial hi-tech economy, a growth sector: the portal is a home-grown company that plays according to the rules of a modern authoritarian government and at the same time has the potential to become a global player, as Sina.com's efforts to get listed on the NASDAQ exchange and a series of acquisitions in 2003 show. Sina.com thus is the perfect model of the domestication and regionalization of the once anarchic Internet, and the integration of a new medium into the existing infrastructure of the Chinese media sector.

*The Invisible Line: The Limits of Freedom on the Internet*

The CCP has been remarkably successful in shaping the Chinese Internet into a fiefdom linked to, but at the same time secluded from, the world wide web. Chinese players have by and large adapted to the situation and websites such as Sina.com have learned to play by the rules that the CCP had formulated half a century ago for the media under its control, and that have since dominated the Chinese media sector. In the last section of this chapter, we must ask: how has the CCP's approach to media management changed? What areas are considered sensitive enough to trigger a reaction of the Party? So where are the limits to freedom on the Internet? To answer these questions, we have to examine some of those incidents in which the CCP has decided to intervene in order to uphold and defend its principles.

The most common government intervention into the daily life of Chinese Internet surfers comes in the form of websites that are blocked, which means that access is denied to surfers using computers with Internet Protocol (IP) addresses registered in the PRC. A large-scale investigation carried out by researchers from the Harvard Law School has found about 20,000 Internet addresses that are permanently unavailable from computers in the PRC.<sup>70</sup> This number amounts to almost 10 per cent of all websites tested, a number that is high also in comparative perspective: the same authors found only 1.2 per cent of websites tested to be blocked in Saudi Arabia, another regime that tries to restrict information available

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<sup>70</sup> Jonathan Zittrain, Benjamin Edelman. "Empirical Analysis of Internet Filtering in China" at <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/china/> (downloaded Nov. 8, 2003).



to its citizens and to shape their thinking. An interesting result of the survey relates to websites with sexually explicit content: whereas 86 per cent of a sample 752 websites were blocked from Saudi Arabia, only 13 per cent of the same sites were blocked from China (see Figure 9.2).

Figure 10.2: Internet Filtering in China and Saudi-Arabia



Source: Zittrain / Edelman. "Empirical Analysis" at <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/china/>.

Note: ca. 50,000 websites tested in Saudi Arabia and subsequently in China.

The official proscription of pornography and its ban in all relevant regulations and guidelines notwithstanding, the Chinese government adopts a rather relaxed attitude towards this issue, in striking contrast to the Saudi kingdom. The puritanical fervour of past decades has long since given way to more lenience in this area: the CCP no longer regards love and sexuality as the major distractions of the "new man: the socialist project is supposed to build, but defines these dangers more narrowly. It is a very different complex of issues that the CCP feels most concerned of. The findings of the empirical study confirm my own conclusions in chapter eight, as well as those of other authors.<sup>71</sup>

If it is not pornography and sexuality that is most prone to poison the minds of the Chinese people, what then are the most sensitive areas? The Zittrain / Edelman study seems to provide some answers. As of fall 2002 (the time of their research), an especially high number of Taiwanese sites (often with the .tw top level domain) and those relating to Tibet were found inaccessible.<sup>72</sup> Issues relating to Chinese sovereignty thus top the list of sensitive issues. Next come keywords such as "democracy / China," "dissident / China," and "freedom / China," i.e. sites that are likely to contain information and opinions questioning the political system and the current leadership of the PRC.<sup>73</sup> The preservation of the regime and its national and international prestige emerges as a key priority of the CCP; any

<sup>71</sup> See Daniel C. Lynch. *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and 'Thought' Work in Reformed China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 197-205.

<sup>72</sup> The authors point out that the websites in question simply report errors, so that the user is left in the dark, not knowing whether his search has failed due to a technical glitch or to blocking. Saudi-Arabia has opted for a different option, telling surfers the reason why a certain website has been made unavailable. See *ibid.*, "Conclusion."

<sup>73</sup> See the graphic at <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/china/google-kw-chart.html>.

challenge in this regard that appears online is to meet with drastic sanctions. The rather crude nature of the filtering systems will make sure that access to an entire server is blocked even if only one piece of information classified as illicit is found there. Thousands of other pages on the same server thus disappear from the Chinese web; a prominent example was the website of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (<http://www.mit.edu/>). The authors found, however, that the Chinese authorities began to upgrade their filtering software in the course of summer and fall, 2002, now allowing for selective kinds of filtering that would block individual pages but not the whole server.<sup>74</sup> The sophistication of Internet supervision seems to rise rapidly.<sup>75</sup>

The findings of the Zittrain / Edelman study are remarkable in that they permit us to study the concerns of the CCP and to rank these sensitivities based on empirical evidence. It shows that different items that are all listed on the catalogue of “don’ts” do in fact range differently on a scale of *de facto* concerns. The findings of the study, however, are limited for two reasons. Firstly, it tracks the government’s strategies of selective Internet blocking filtering, but does not ask for the reactions of the media users (the study’s methodology would not have allowed the authors to do so). Yet while many surfers do not seem to care or are simply annoyed of the practice, a surprisingly large number of Internet users interviewed for the CASS survey admitted to having found their way around the blocking of websites: 35 per cent said that they had used proxy servers, the most convenient way to circumvent government blocking of websites, and 10 per cent answered that they were frequently using proxy servers.<sup>76</sup> How concerned is the government about resistance to its blocking strategies? In general, the CCP does not seem to be too anxious about individual efforts to exploit loopholes in the system. The state is working continuously to upgrade its technical infrastructure and to improve the controls. While gifted specialists, especially hackers, will always be ahead of the government in terms of sophistication, the average user is unlikely to keep pace for too long. The CCP is confident that with increasingly sophisticated means of control the effort necessary to escape these controls will rise beyond the abilities

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<sup>74</sup> Zittrain, Edelman. “Empirical Analysis,” “Conclusion.”

<sup>75</sup> For the same argument with reference to the selective blocking and rerouting of popular search engines see Joseph Kahn. “China Seems to Refine Bid to Restrict Web Access” in *New York Times*, Sept. 14, 2002.

<sup>76</sup> “The CASS Internet Report (2000),” table CJ.

of the average users; small communities of tech freaks, however, are a socially marginal group that does not pose too much of a threat to CCP rule.<sup>77</sup>

A different problem of the Zittrain / Edelman study is that it was executed overwhelmingly in English, which is certainly not the language of choice of Chinese surfers. While they used individual key terms such as *minzhu* 民主, *ziyou* 自由, or Falun gong 法轮功, this approach still escapes the subtleties of the Chinese political landscape. Search terms such as *liu si* 六四, Zhao Ziyang 赵紫阳, or *zhengzhi (tizhi) gaige* 政治(体制)改革 do not appear on their list of search terms, yet these terms do certainly touch on sensibilities of the CCP. It is therefore necessary to examine more closely the few incidents of persecution of “cyber dissent” that have become known to the public.

The closing of the popular *Shiji shalong* BBS has been discussed earlier; this incident was related to the discussions triggered by the SARS outbreak in spring 2003 and the widespread criticism of the government’s handling of the crisis. The recent closure of the *China Austrian Review* website (*Sixiang pinglun* 思想评论 in Chinese, at [www.sinoliberal.com/default.htm](http://www.sinoliberal.com/default.htm)), too, has already been mentioned. The closure of this rather academic platform came at a time when the government tried to close the lid on public debates on political reforms and possible changes to the Chinese constitution. *China Austrian Review* hosted many contributions by Li Shenzhi 李慎之, Liu Junning 刘军宁, Xu Youyu 徐友渔, and other prominent intellectuals of the liberal wing who came under attack in summer 2003.<sup>78</sup> Three years earlier, the *Tianya zonghe* 天涯综合 website ([www.tianya.com](http://www.tianya.com)), another popular forum for intellectual debate, had been shut down. The censorship and closure of websites that are found to have carried their debates into areas “beyond the line” confirms that political issues that relate to the CCP’s power monopoly are of particular concern to the Party.

Beyond the action taken against violations of the rules for Internet content, the government has sought to crack down on infringements of the rules governing Internet access. The most conspicuous targets here have naturally been Internet cafés. Internet bars and cafés have long posed a problem to states wishing to

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<sup>77</sup> Chase and Mulvenon come to the same conclusion. See “You’ve Got Dissent!”

<sup>78</sup> A partial download of the website, executed on May 15, 2003, roughly three months prior to the closure, can be found at <http://www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/dachs/volland050530.htm>.

control their citizens' Internet behaviour. While it is not too difficult with the right technology to track down users accessing the Internet from their home computers or from terminals at work units, the Chinese government has fought a protracted war with operators of Internet cafés. Internet cafés have allowed millions of surfers to gather their first experiences on the web and were an important institution for those who could not yet afford their own computers, many of them students. Since the CCP concurrently promoted the Internet and Internet use heavily in order to spur economic growth, the lucrative market for Internet cafés was growing quickly. The Party made the mistake of imposing too high market entry barriers on prospective operators, and thus drove many of them underground. When ever more illegal Internet cafés sprang up to profit from this lucrative business the CCP saw its ability to control the netizens in danger and ordered a crackdown that eventually led to the closure not only of the illegal backyard ventures, but also of the numerous legally operating businesses.<sup>79</sup> After a fire broke out in an illegal Beijing internet café in June 2002 that killed 24 students, the Chinese government used this accident as a pretext to launch a nationwide crackdown of unprecedented scale. In this way, the government hoped to solve the problem of uncontrolled and uncontrollable Internet access once and for all.<sup>80</sup>

In the case of the Internet cafés, the authorities tried to prevent the growth of grey niches on the Internet sector that had the potential to create trouble; the danger here was rather diffuse. Yet the police has also targeted individuals on very specific charges. In June 2000, Huang Qi 黄琦, an Internet operator from Sichuan province was arrested on charges of subversion: he had allowed for messages critical of the 1989 crackdown on the democracy movement, and even some calling for then-premier Li Peng to be put to trial, to be published on his website. Such explicit criticism of the Party's Achilles' heel was intolerable to the

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<sup>79</sup> One of these, the Feiyu 飞宇 chain that owned an entire street of Internet cafés door by door near the Southern gate of Beijing University, published its success story in form of a book just months before all its cafés were closed: Gan Yi. *Wangba Feiyu: Zhongguancun de linglei xin jiechu*. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001.

<sup>80</sup> See "Deadline Tightens Mainland Net Crackdown" in SCMP, July 1, 2002, and on the fire "Putting Out Fires" (editorial) in *Asian Wall Street Journal*, June 20, 2002. On earlier action against Internet cafés see "China has Shut Down 17,000 Internet Bars" by AP WorldStream, Nov. 21, 2001, and Thomas Crampton. "China Closes Internet Cafés" in *International Herald Tribune*, June 15, 2001. Taken from <http://www.iht.com/articles/22928.html> (downloaded Dec. 20, 2001).

CCP, and Huang was sentenced to a five-year prison term.<sup>81</sup> Even longer prison terms – eight and ten years – were handed to four dissidents who had set up a democracy study group on the Internet and criticized government policy.<sup>82</sup> In another incident, the computer entrepreneur Lin Hai 林海 was sentenced by a Shanghai court to two years in jail for selling 30,000 Chinese email addresses to the dissident online magazine *VIP Reference (Dacankao 大参考)*, at <http://www.bignews.org/>), this reportedly being the first punishment handed out in the PRC for a “cyber crime.” Lin was originally charged with “instigation to subversion of the state's power,” which would have sufficed for a lifelong jail sentence. From the perspective of the CCP, Lin Hai’s crime is a double one: not only had he supported a dissident organization, but he was also preparing the way for the subversion of the Party’s sovereignty over its virtual state territory: dissident organizations mass mailing their pamphlets to Chinese users are undermining the Party’s efforts to control the Chinese cyberspace.<sup>83</sup>

A different case, targeting not an overseas dissident networks, but rather what turned out to be a naive young girl, was that of Liu Di 刘荻, a 22 year-old Beijing student. Liu Di was arrested in December 2002 after a week-long hunt of the authorities for the owner of the pseudonym “stainless steel mouse” (*buxiugang laoshu 不锈钢老鼠*), under which messages calling for democracy had been posted in different chatrooms. Liu was an isolated individual who had made use of one of the most alluring aspects of the Internet, the anonymity it provides – up to a certain point.<sup>84</sup>

The harsh sentences handed out in all these cases and the relentlessness with which the government has persecuted these cyber-dissidents should not be mistaken for irrational panic reactions of the CCP. To the contrary, they are perfectly rational and understandable from the perspective of the media concept. It

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<sup>81</sup> On this incident and the trial see BBC News Online, Feb 13, 2001, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/world/asia-pacific/1167050.stm>, and May 19, 2003, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/world/asia-pacific/3039041.stm> (downloaded Nov. 8, 2003, and May 19, 2003, respectively).

<sup>82</sup> “Four Dissidents Jailed in Internet Dissent Case” in SCMP, May 29, 2003.

<sup>83</sup> On this incident see Greg May. “Spamming for Freedom,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 19, 1999. Taken from *The Nixon Center* website at

[http://www.nixoncenter.org/publications/articles/spam2\\_19\\_99.htm](http://www.nixoncenter.org/publications/articles/spam2_19_99.htm) (downloaded Nov. 8, 2003).

<sup>84</sup> Her case is documented at the “Stainless steel website” (*Buxiugang wangzhan 不锈钢网站*) at <http://171.64.233.179/> (downloaded Nov. 8, 2003). This site (hosted overseas) also contains 16 of the essays Liu Di published on the web. She was released from prison in Dec. 2003.

is the last clause, the Stalinist argument that the media serve as a weapon as well as a battlefield of class struggle, and the assumption that class struggle sharpens in the ideological realm after the revolution, that has triggered the harsh reactions in the above cases. Once an incident of open defiance in the media is identified and interpreted as a conscious attack on the CCP, the mechanism of class struggle is set into motion – even in the Internet era. No other factor can provide a convincing explanation for the severity of the penalties and the harshness of the accusations. All these cases illustrate how brutal the Party can act when it sees the need to defend the legitimacy of its rule against the murmur in cyberspace.

The three cases reported above are isolated incidents that cannot provide a comprehensive picture of the Chinese government's continuing efforts to crack down on Internet dissent. They serve well, however, to indicate the general direction of the CCP's actions. It is illustrative that not a single case of distributing online pornography or Internet-related economic crime has been publicized in the way the other cases were; the long sentences handed out to people like Huang Qi serve, in the first place, to deter others from committing similar acts. With a well-dosed mixture of deterrence, policing, filtering email and Internet traffic, and pressure on ISPs and ICPs, the Party hopes to uphold the control over a cyberspace that is regarded by the CCP as merely an extension of the bricks-and-mortar media infrastructure in the PRC.

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The introduction of the Internet in China posed a challenge to the CCP's established structures of media control. Since 1997, however, when the Party first became aware of the full dimension of the problem, it has found effective ways to handle the Internet. Most importantly, the Net has been effectively integrated into the existing structures of control that have been redefined in a way to accommodate the new, web-based media forms. The speed with which the Party has learned to make use of the potential of the Internet on the one hand, and to restrict its eventual negative impact on the other, is remarkable. Nevertheless, mixed signals keep emanating from China: while the Internet is promoted as a central pillar of the country's effort to build a domestic high-tech industry, and thus

of the national development agenda, the government persecutes web-based dissident activities with sometimes draconian measures. The promotion of the Internet as a vehicle of growth and prosperity clashes time and again with the Party's anxiety to keep under control the realm of public communication.

The ambiguity of the CCP's attitude towards the Internet must be attributed, first and foremost, to the hybrid nature of the web: the convergence of technology and communication is not compatible with the strict sectoral boundaries that have characterized the Chinese political *imaginaire*, the *xitong*. Transcending the borders between the economic affairs *xitong* and the propaganda *xitong*, the Internet forced the CCP to adjust its mechanisms of governance. Furthermore, the fusion of private and public communication that has become possible thanks to the unique technical features of the web, in particular its interactive potential, had initially irritated the Party. Since then, however, the CCP has found ways to make the structures that control the Chinese media apparatus work for the Internet too.

In this process, the Party has relied to a significant degree on its experiences with the traditional media. As I have shown in this chapter, the CCP has made use of many concepts and ideas developed for the newspaper and publishing sectors and which were consequently applied to the web-based media. This process is most obvious in the regulatory framework that has been put in place over the past years, parts of which have been copied almost literally from the offline media. Similarly, providers of online news are subjected to restrictions that closely resemble those of offline newspapers; as a rule, permits for online news ventures (the most sensitive area of the Internet) have been restricted to online subsidiaries of established media institutions.

Thus, the modern Chinese media concept has come to bear on the Internet, too. This becomes especially clear in those cases where the CCP intervenes to set limits to the freedom of web surfers. The Party has created a virtual national space codeterminous with the physical map of the PRC and controls its citizens' access to any information emerging from outside the CCP-controlled territory. The Party claims for itself the right to decide which information is suitable to the minds and the needs of its citizens, and what must be prevented from poisoning the brains of its citizens. The CCP has moved even more aggressively to persecute infringements on those issues it regards as crucially important for its own rule; the

punishments handed out to Internet dissidents have been as unrelenting as those given to anyone questioning the fundamental political assumptions of the Party.

In the course of the investigation of the Chinese Internet, several long-term trends could be observed that have been noted in earlier chapters. The comparatively lax enforcement of the ban on pornography, for example, shows that the CCP is drawing a sharper distinction between those issues that are an immediate threat to the regime, and others of secondary importance. The latter might be tackled in the course of periodic and targeted crackdowns, while the former are subjected to permanent control through a web of filtering software, blocking, online censors, and police monitoring. On another note, the failure of the Party to come up with a convincing comprehensive concept for online thought work suggests that the CCP has accepted in a modern society that has access to diverse sources of information, active propaganda can have but a limited impact. Especially with regard to a medium so variegated and anarchically organized as the Internet, the Party has concluded that the results that can realistically be expected from full-fledged online propaganda are simply not worth the effort. Rather, the Party employs more sophisticated methods to spread its message: influencing the selection criteria and the spin of news distributed by commercial content providers is more effective in a modern society than the frontal assault through dedicated propaganda outlets of the past. All this hints to a new understanding of governance: in a modern information society, the CCP has updated its macro-approach to social control and has concentrated on matters of direct concern to the core questions of politics; it will intervene only when it sees immediate danger to its core objectives. I have called this approach “governance through the potential” to intervene.

To make such an approach work in the media sector, the media concept has been reinterpreted. The case of the Internet, however, shows that the concept still determines the ways in which the CCP thinks of the media and how it acts. After all, the successful integration of the new web-related media into the existing framework must be credited to nothing else but this concept. The openness and the flexibility of the media concept have allowed for a creative new interpretation; thus, the concept that had originated in the Yan’an era been successfully transported into the twenty-first century.



## Conclusion

*“What is the mission of this newspaper? It can be summed up in one single sentence: to unite the people of the entire nation in their fight to defeat Japanese imperialism. This is the general line of the Chinese Communist Party, and it is also the mission of this newspaper”*

What can the lines above tell us about the media in the People’s Republic of China? This short statement, that has been quoted at the beginning of chapter one of this study, reveals a fundamental point of Chinese Communist newspaper making: the unity of interests of the Party and the press. It is taken from the editorial that announced the launch of *Jiefang ribao*, the CCP organ of the Yan’an era. Composed by Mao Zedong and published on May 16, 1941, the editorial was a hallmark in the development of Chinese media thinking. The CCP has never given up on the fundamental idea that the general line of the Party must concurrently be that of all the media. To ensure that this is the case, the CCP claims the right to exercise control over the entire media apparatus in the PRC – to the present day.

In the Introduction I have raised a number of fundamental questions: What are the media? And what are they about? What is their function? In the chapters of this study I have tried to find some answers that may explain the logic behind the Chinese media apparatus and the way it functions. Drawing from these chapters, I will now sum up some of the results of the investigation that will help us to answer these most fundamental questions; furthermore, I will address several general issues: the problem of perspective that deserves closer scrutiny in the discussion of the Chinese political *imaginaire*; secondly, the nature of the processes of cultural transfer that made a foreign ideological import such as the socialist media thinking appealing to the CCP; thirdly, the inherent tensions that plagued the media concept, but which are, somewhat paradoxically, responsible for the concept’s resilience and its ability to adapt to ever new emerging situations; then, the close interaction of the media with their social environment that makes the media into a micro-cosmos of the larger state-society framework and allows us to make broader statements concerning the evolution of the CCP’s approach towards governance. Finally, I will return to the relationship between ideology and

institutions, that is, between the media concept and the mechanics of control, and the implications of this relationship for further studies on the Chinese media.

The first issue to be addressed here concerns perspectives. Any discussion of the Chinese media should try as much as possible to proceed from the peculiar Chinese perspective on the media (in this case, we are talking specifically about the Chinese Communist perspective; however, much of what can be said for the CCP holds for the GMD as well). The investigation into the Chinese media has proceeded from a paradox: while newspapers, magazines, radio and television belong to everyday life in China just as they do anywhere else, there has until recent times been no linguistic or conceptual equivalent to the English term “media.” This presents a study of the media with the fundamental problem that it must either take for granted that the players in the Chinese media sector conceive of the media in the same way as other (Western) studies, or alternatively, it must make the effort to understand the particular Chinese perspective and define the media in those terms in which they are imagined by the players themselves. While the latter is a laborious task, I have chosen this path. The basic assumption of the present study is therefore that the functioning of the media in the PRC can be explained from the point of view of their cultural, social, and political background. The first part of this study has been devoted to this effort.

The central thread in this study has been the “modern Chinese media concept,” a formulation that is as awkward as it is artificial: the CCP has never come up with a coherent and universal theory of the media (or of newspapers etc.).<sup>1</sup> To some extent, this study has tried to do so, as it were, on behalf of the CCP. In this enterprise I have proceeded from the assumption that, the lack of an explicit theory notwithstanding, the Chinese media work not at random, but are guided by a set of highly normative rules that are relatively stable and that have been internalized by everyone in the media sector. In their totality, the rules or principles form a framework that governs the operation of the media in the PRC. The task I had set myself in the first half of this study was to make visible these general assumptions and to define their most important elements.

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<sup>1</sup> Which, of course, raises the question, why it never occurred to a regime as obsessed with formulations and definitions as the CCP to reflect on an issue as fundamental as this.

Any investigation into the Chinese media faces the problem to define its object. As demonstrated in chapter one, the Western concept of 'media' is structured in ways that differ significantly from the organisation of the corresponding conceptual space in Chinese. While newspapers, journals, books, films etc. do certainly exist in China, they are summarized under the concept of propaganda, as I have shown through a functional approach that has investigated the dimensions of the propaganda *xitong* in the Chinese political *imaginaire*. The consequence of this understanding is that the Chinese media are imagined in a socio-political environment that differs significantly from those of the media in, say, English-speaking countries. These differences become most obvious when the functions of the propaganda *xitong* as a whole are taken into perspective: the objective of the CCP is the formation of a new, socialist man who is free from the corrupting influences of pre-revolutionary society; the various components of the propaganda sector complement each other in the effort to care for the mental as well as physical health of this man. The media are closely integrated into this project.

This means, of course, that the findings established here for the Chinese media have at least some degree of validity beyond the media sector proper. The six clauses of the media concept can be found, in slightly modulated form, in other elements of the superstructure, in the larger propaganda *xitong* that has been mapped in the first chapter. Reflexive discussions very similar to those invested here have taken place in the fields of literature, the arts, or education: in 1949, in 1957, during the Cultural Revolution, and during the reform era, these sectors saw debates about issues such as Party character, mass character, enlightenment and education, and class struggle, that all sound familiar from the discussions in the media field. If the media sector is a microcosmos of the Chinese polity, then the theories guiding the media are indicative of the CCP's core ideology in general. To elaborate on this point and provide additional evidence would go beyond the scope of this study, but the interrelatedness of the media sector with its institutional environment should not get lost. Within this environment, however, it is clear that the media occupy a special position: many of the debates that raged on ideological issues in the past fifty years were brought to the point in the media sector and formulated sharper there than anywhere else. In the reform era, the

Party's continued close control of the media apparatus (in contrast to, for example, literature and art) attests to the importance the CCP attaches to the traditional and new media.

The second major issue deserving our attention are the processes that are responsible for the development of the media concept. The particular construct of the CCP's propaganda sector emerged during the late 1930s and early 1940s as a consequence of a protracted historical process. The formative period of the media thus culminates during the CCP's Yan'an era, a time when the Party experimented with styles of governance in the relative isolation of Northern Shaanxi. Concepts and methods were developed and tested for their practicability and then inscribed on the entire Party through the Rectification Campaign. In this process, central ideas concerning the media were imported from the Soviet Union: core texts were intensively studied, discussed, and quoted – such as Lenin's "What is to be Done?" or the *Short Course* commissioned by Stalin – that contained important ideas which were imported by the CCP and thus came to inform the Party's media concept.

This process of cultural transfer, however, was more complex than this description suggests, since the CCP did not simply accept the relevant Soviet ideas lock, stock, and barrel. Rather, the sinification of Soviet concepts and theories was subject to a selection process: the Chinese leadership accepted only those ideas and concepts that could be imagined from within their own cultural context and their past experiences, and that seemed to enjoy wide acceptance on the international marketplace of ideas. Functional approaches of the press were practiced by the GMD as well as various foreign powers, abroad, as well as on Chinese soil; even liberal nations were disinclined to engage in propaganda when it suited their purposes. I have first outlined the major ideas available to the CCP in the first third of the twentieth century, and then looked at several cultural factors that came to act as catalysts to understand Western media practice. The closest functional equivalents of the modern Chinese media in the recent dynastic past do necessarily deserve the greatest interest: the Kangxi emperor's *Sacred Edict* (*Shengyu* 圣谕) of 1670, the religious propaganda of the Taiping rebellion, and the indigenized early press in China, had all established modes of thinking and figures of thought that made particular components of the ideological imports from the

Soviet Union to possess more appeal and more power to convince than others: consequently, only those elements of the Leninist-Stalinist complex of ideas could be successfully sinified which could be explained and imagined from the perspective of traditional Chinese thinking. It was these components that came to make up the modern Chinese media concept.

The media concept, however, has never been a monolithic bloc. The very processes that were responsible for its formation also left their peculiar imprint on the concept. As elements stemming from different contexts and consequently containing different meanings came to be united in the modern Chinese media concept, the concept carries in itself the heritage of these various traditions. The demand that the media serve the masses, originally a product of the mass line developed in Yan'an, has been open to widely diverging interpretations. Not all of these multiple readings, however, were compatible with meaning structures created from other parts of the media concept. Since the 1940s, the media concept has carried with it an inherent tension between the single elements of which it was made up.

The CCP has shown capable of accommodating these latent tensions for long periods of time. Especially in political settings dominated by insecurity, such as the mass campaigns of the Maoist era, the tensions – for example, between the party character and the mass character clauses, or between the mass character clause and the class struggle clause – could become acute and sometimes even break through the surface, leading to violent clashes between different interpretations of the media concept. The demise of extraordinarily successful model of Sanlian shudian in 1949 and 1950s must ultimately be seen as a result of disagreements over how to interpret the media concept, and in particular its first clause that mandated the media's "Party character." In the enthusiastic situation of the founding years of the PRC, the clashes between the varying interpretations of the concept were still limited in scope. Not so in 1957, when a significant number of frustrated and disappointed intellectuals reacted to Mao's call for "blooming and contending." Several years into the regime, many of the hopes of 1949 had not materialized and uneasiness was widespread among journalists with the course of the media and the campaigns to learn from a Soviet model, a model that apparently not even Mao Zedong seemed to support honestly.

Yet when the Party, once again following Mao's lead, abruptly changed course and withdrew the offer of allowing for a new perspective on the media, the confrontation was inevitable: the media people were themselves too deeply engaged in the Hundred Flowers campaign to adjust immediately to the new situation. WHB was hit especially hard. Less than three months before the begin of the anti-Rightist movement, Mao had explicitly encouraged the WHB leadership and had endorsed their editorial line, that is, their interpretation of the media principle – an interpretation, or course that Mao himself had nurtured with his speeches in the Hundred Flowers context. So when the Chairman abruptly turned to a different interpretation of the media concept, now moving the concept's last clause, the class struggle element, in the middle of the debate, his shift wreaked havoc for all those who were caught up in the earlier interpretation. The public attacks on WHB and GMRB attest to this change of interpretations.

Clashes between different interpretations of the media concept, based on multiple interpretations that stress different elements of the concept, have not been limited to the Mao era. The Chinese journalists who took to the streets in May 1989 went to lengths to profess their loyalty to the Party and their intentions to serve the overarching goals set by the Party. It was honest sympathy with the student movement that driven them into the streets, yet with the students they also shared a common understanding that acknowledged in general the existing political structures; they demanded better working conditions for themselves, but they did not disapprove of the system as such – not least because it rendered them many advantages and privileges. The CCP reacted with particular sensitivity to what it perceived to be challenges to its regime: the media sector has always been a field of special concern and a core tool of governance, it could not possibly be allowed to slip from the hands of the Party. So in June 1989, in an unlikely reversal of the policies that had dominated most of the 1980s, an interpretation of the media concept, based primarily on the concept's final element and following the logic of class struggle, resurfaced. The demonstrating journalists could identify with the policies Zhao Ziyang, but after the latter's ouster their interpretations of the media's role clashed violently with those of the new Party leadership core group: the hardliners in the leadership interpreted the democracy movement and the protest of the journalists through the lens of the media concept's final clause,

as an attempt of class enemies to undermine the socialist system by targeting the Party at its weakest point, the superstructure. The collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the end of the Soviet Union in the next two years appeared to prove the interpretation right that liberation in the superstructure – which includes the propaganda sector, and thus the media – paved the way for the fall of the socialist parties; consequently, in the aftermath of the Chinese democracy movement, the media sector was cleansed from some of the most unreliable media personnel, i.e. the most vocal proponents of an alternative course.

Another issue that needs to be addressed concerns the CCP's approach to governance. After three decades characterized by an extremely tense political climate, the social atmosphere seems to have cooled down since the early 1980s. As has been remarked in passing in the last two chapters of this study, the media sector has experienced a period of rapid growth and diversification not despite the CCP's efforts to stay in power, but because the CCP consciously initiated a reform process and ordered the media to go along it. The price the media had to pay for the enormously increased amount of freedom was the continued pledge to follow the Party's lead.

The introduction of the Internet to China was a challenge for the CCP's project of media control in both technological and ideological terms. Not only did the fusion of private and public communication, as well as the speed, interconnectability, and decentralized nature of the Net create many a headache for the administrators of the media sector; the accelerating development also forced the CCP to redefine its position in the overall socio-political framework. A more prosperous setting and a diversifying society with increasingly heterogeneous demands required changed forms of governance from the Party. With increasing complexity, micro-level management is no longer feasible; anything else than a macro-approach would almost certainly be detrimental to economic growth. Yet since the CCP has built its legitimacy on the promise to provide the population with an increasing degree of affluence and a constant improvement of the life situation of the majority of the people, economic growth has become the Party's key objective. As a consequence, the CCP has continued on the road it had taken after 1989 and that has been indicated in chapter eight: a gradual withdrawal from many of the laborious tasks of day-to-day administration.

The media concept and the mechanics of control developed in the 1940s, were especially adept to implement this changing approach, as they had always relied on those indirect means of control (such as through the editor responsibility system) that were required now to steer a numerically much larger and structurally more complex media sector.

This direction as well as the amount of this withdrawal can be measured from the CCP's handling of the media. The trend to transfer an increasing amount of burdensome administrative affairs to second-tier agencies such as those of the government (for example, the PPA created in 1987 with the intention to assume the role of a bureaucratic regulator) or in the hierarchy of the "consultative" organs and associations, has accelerated in recent years. When management functions, and in particular those of day-to-day affairs, were transferred to other bodies or were no longer taken care of at all by the government, the Party bodies, the carriers of the most crucial political functions were freed from workload. They could consequently concentrate their energies on other fields, such as co-ordinating the activities of other agencies through agenda-setting, supervision of policy implementation, or most importantly, policy formulation and strategic long-term planning.

The perceived withdrawal, thus, does not mean the disappearance of the CCP. The Party continues to be present, and it can intervene whenever and wherever it sees the need to do so. The single most important development in the 1990s, as seen from the media sector, seems to be a substantial gain in self-confidence of the CCP. The Party has finally gotten rid of the anxiety that had plagued it since the days of its founding. In this new setting, the CCP has withdrawn to what I call the "commanding heights" of the Chinese state. The situation is characterized by a paradox: the laissez-faire approach that is visible across all sectors of social life stands in marked contrast to extremely harsh reactions to infringements on a small number of areas that the Party perceives to be crucial for its legitimacy and its survival. In these cases, extremely heavy-handed and usually well-publicized actions are the consequence; in most other areas, however, the Party is satisfied with keeping up a general degree of order. The moral education of the populace is no longer seen as a vital question for the CCP in a well-consolidated authoritarian state; hence the weak responses to



violations of the pornography ban. Openly questioning the nation's one party system, in contrast, is a sure way to bring into play the full might of state power.

This form of governance could be called "governing by potential:" the CCP is satisfied to rule the country by reliance on the certain knowledge that it can always and everywhere intervene if the situation should make it necessary to do so. Under normal circumstances, however, the Party will not make use of its power. This approach is highly economical and is a much more sophisticated technique of statecraft than the mass campaigns of the Mao era; the observer feels reminded of the notion of "acting through non-action" (*wuwei* 无为) often attributed to Daoist political theory. The fine-tuned and increasingly sophisticated handling of the Internet, a modern, commercialized, decentralized new mode of public communication, is perhaps the best illustration for this mode of government and shows how far the Party has travelled in its handling of the media – while at the same time keeping alive the very spirit of their media concept.

Finally, the relationship between ideology and institutions needs to be addressed. This study has placed emphasis on the former, rather than the latter. I have traced the emergence the CCP's media concept and have tracked its evolution through the sixty years since its inception in the Yan'an era. In contrast, I have treated institutions – formal organizational bodies, censorship mechanisms, discursive controls etc. – as merely a function of the underlying ideology, as the mechanics that are employed to implement the media concept. Most other studies of the Chinese media have emphasized the organizational surface structures, but as this study has shows, such attempts are misleading, since the mechanics of control can be redesigned and restructured in accordance with changing needs and priorities, suggesting change and discontinuities where actually continuity factors more importantly. The shortcomings of this organizational focus are most apparent in chapter seven: during the Cultural Revolution, the Propaganda Department and most other formal institutions were dismantled, producing a radically different institutional environment, but as the chapter shows clearly, the media concept remained in place even under these extreme conditions, and the Party remained in control of the media. This means, of course, that further studies of the Chinese media – and by implication, of other sectors of the propaganda *xitong*, such as the education system or the scientific research establishment –

should not neglect the ideological underpinnings that support the more readily apparent surface structures. In the early twenty-first century, the CCP adapts to a changing global environment and newly arising challenges, but the fundamental goals of the Party, and its ideological commitment to pursue these goals, remain in place. The media have been a core tool in the Party's ambitious project of social engineering, and they remain a crucial instrument of governance today.

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