

# MEDIA CONTROL IN CHINA

BY HE QINGLIAN

Following are translated excerpts from a book-length report written by He Qinglian and published in Chinese by HRIC. *Media Control in China* describes how China's much-lauded economic modernization has allowed the government to camouflage its pervasive control under the glossy façade of consumerism, with a shift from ham-fisted censorship to an elaborate architecture of Party supervision, amorphous legislation, stringent licensing mechanisms, handpicked personnel and concentrated media ownership. The following two excerpts examine control through the intimidation of journalists and restrictions on media ownership.

## PART 1: CHINESE JOURNALISTS IN FETTERS

The relationship between the Chinese news media and the Chinese government is diametrically opposite of that between the media and the government in democratic societies. In modern democracies, the media perform the function of a social watchdog. Government policy, the personal integrity of government officials and foreign relations are all objects of critical debate by the media. In China, however, the government exercises tight control over public opinion, has designated many areas off-limits for public discussion and has imposed penalties to restrict journalists' freedom of action.

According to an investigation published by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, between 1998 and 2002 38 Chinese journalists were arrested on charges suggesting a state frame-up, and 32 were incarcerated, the largest number anywhere in the world. While Chinese journalists live peacefully on the surface, any exercise of social responsibility or professional conscience brings them under risk.

In this section I describe the cases of a few journalists who

have suffered persecution, and briefly enumerate some other cases I have come across in recent years. It should be noted, however, that because this type of pressure and persecution is not made public, the evidence presented here is far from comprehensive.

Generally speaking, the central government controls the media by means of political power and a series of top-down coercive policies. Local governments, lacking the supreme power and authority of the central government, rely on a multiplicity of control methods: on their own local media they can exert direct political control. In respect of reporters outside their jurisdiction, they exert control either directly through violence or indirectly through what Chinese officialdom commonly refers to as "saying hello"—exerting pressure on officials from the reporters' place of origin to bring the offending organs into line.

Control is directed first of all at sources of information, in recognition of the fact that, in the words of the American media scholar Melvin Mencher, "News sources are a journalist's lifeblood. A journalist cannot do his job unless a news source tells him what happened." The more direct the source of information, the stronger the guarantee that the news will be timely and reliable. At the same time, a journalist needs to broaden the channels of information as much as possible. The essence of journalism is to collect information from all sources and then use a broad range of media, including newspapers, television and radio, to disseminate news to the wider public.

The government therefore uses its power to control news sources and to restrict ordinary people from providing information to Chinese media and especially to foreign media. Apart from the application of various laws and regulations, local government officials impose more arbitrary forms of control in accordance with the spirit of central government policy. Long years of suppression have bred in Chinese journalists a habit of "self-discipline," and most Chinese journalists resign themselves to playing the role of "Party mouthpieces" or seek to exploit their social influence for personal gain.

Journalists with a sense of social responsibility tend to adopt a sort of camouflage: they assume that the central government leadership is wise and that the Chinese socialist system is correct, and conclude that low-level corruption and its disastrous consequences can be attributed to the individual

actions of a minority of officials. According to this line of thought, by revealing the facts, journalists can help the top leadership understand what is really going on so these problems can be dealt with effectively. While these journalists believe their self-protective approach will guarantee their personal safety, events have proven them naive. The examples cited below show that in reality the central and local governments are united in their views of how to deal with the news media. When journalists are framed and attacked by local officials, as happens all too often, and are courageously supported by other local media, the central government maintains a shameful silence that amounts to tacit consent to and encouragement of the local government's unscrupulous behavior.

### **Control at the source**

Since the 1990s, China has witnessed a period of widespread graft and corruption accompanied by shocking events such as the Nandan coal mine accident in Guangxi, the Nanjing poisoning case and labor uprisings in Liaoyang, but these stories have very rarely been reported by the Chinese media. Any report of an industrial accident that appears in the press represents a hard battle by journalists to disclose it. It is difficult for non-journalists to appreciate the difficulties involved, not only in getting to the bottom of a story, but in battling the various levels of the Chinese bureaucracy. When such reports finally see light of day and compel the Chinese government to declare that it will "resolve the problem," they bring no honor to the courageous journalists who fought for them, but more typically spell the end of the journalists' careers, or even land them in prison.

Generally speaking, the Chinese government employs the following methods to control the media:

#### **Black eyes and blackouts**

Since the 1990s local leaders have demonstrated a growing tendency to instigate violent attacks against journalists in an effort to bring newsgathering activities under "unified control." While the people who carry out the actual obstruction of interviews and newsgathering activities are typically boozed-up layabouts, local bullies and members of the criminal underworld, they inevitably have local authorities behind them. The central government's failure to speak out against violent interference with news reporting has only emboldened local government in its abuses. Following a huge explosion at the Liupanshui coalmine in Guizhou Province, no less than the deputy provincial governor, Liu Changgui, ordered the arrest of journalists and the forcible exposure of their film. In notorious cases in Nandan, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and in Yichun, Jiangxi Province, the people responsible for interfering with journalist activities included local officials, public security officers and public prosecutors.<sup>1</sup>

After the mining accident on July 17, 2001 that killed 81 people in Nandan, Guangxi, the Nandan municipal government made every effort to impose a news blackout and ordered physical assaults on anyone who spoke to a journalist. When Guangxi TV, the *Nanqiao Zaobao* (South Morning Post) and the *Bagui Dushibao* (Bagui City Courier)—all three from

Guangxi—dispatched reporters to cover the story ten days after the accident, local government officials slammed doors in their faces and told them that nothing had happened. The people in charge of the mine also flatly denied that an accident had occurred. Collusion between Nandan mine management and the local criminal underworld discouraged miners from coming into contact with journalists.

One journalist for the *Bagui Dushibao*, having tried unsuccessfully to gain access to the mining area, came across an overhanging cliff from which he planned to take photos of the mine shaft, which was still leaking water. Suddenly two armed men emerged from a thicket, and one of them shouted at the journalist, "What are you doing here? Are you a reporter?" The other man said, "If he's a reporter, let's do him in and chuck him over the cliff." Scared to death, the journalist surreptitiously removed his press and ID cards from his pocket, threw them off the cliff and told the men he was in Nandan visiting relatives. Since the two men found no ID on him, they settled for simply chasing him from the mine area.

### **The central government's failure to speak out against violent interference with news reporting has only emboldened local government in its abuses.**

Local people eventually guided other journalists to a particular county that had been hardest hit by the disaster, where they photographed many miners' families weeping, performing funerary sacrifices and burning belongings left by the dead. The video footage was a breakthrough in the coverage of this story, but when the journalists showed it to local government officials, a number of them claimed it was faked, and flatly denied that there had been an accident. One deputy secretary of the Guangxi Autonomous Region even shouted abuse at a *People's Daily* reporter and shut him out of a news conference (literally, "unified control meeting") concerning the accident.<sup>2</sup>

During the course of this accident and its aftermath, the Chinese government gained considerable experience in controlling the news media. From then on, whenever a similar accident occurred, journalists found it extremely difficult to gain access to the scene to conduct interviews. The Jiangxi provincial government's actions following an explosion at a fireworks factory in Huangmao Township, Wanzai County illustrate how officials were able to effectively impose a full news blackout.

On December 30, 2001, with the Chinese public still distraught over the Nandan coal mine accident, a huge explosion shook Huangmao Township, turning several hundred meters around the fireworks factory into scorched earth. The blast flattened buildings and shattered nearly every window within a radius of several kilometers. Even iron gates were warped by the shockwave. It was a truly shocking sight.

After the explosion, local government officials did their utmost to impose a news blackout. The local public security bureau set up roadblocks at all main thoroughfares to prevent

journalists from approaching the scene of the accident, and local hospitals admitting casualties had armed police posted. Local Jiangxi media failed to report a single word about the incident. The official Xinhua News Agency, while reporting the recovery of 20 bodies by the early hours of December 31, made no mention of any missing people. Given the awesome power of the explosion, local people found it difficult to believe that only twenty people had died, and joked derisively that this was a case of “statistics with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>3</sup>

With Jiangxi media making no report of the accident, residents of Nanchang, the provincial capital, were unaware that an explosion that had shocked China and the world had occurred in their province. Only when Jiangxi natives overseas read about the accident on the Internet and telephoned home did people in the province learn the awful news. Netizens were aggrieved not only by the death toll, but even more by the extent of the news blackout.

Because Jiangxi provincial Party Committee Secretary Meng Jianzhu was a close friend of then-Party Secretary Jiang Zemin, even the national media were subjected to all sorts of restrictions. The *People's Daily*, which had previously played an important role in exposing the tragedy at the tin mine in Nandan County, failed to publish a single word about this accident.

The Jiangxi Provincial government claimed that the Wanzai County explosion was a “mishap” caused by a negligent female machine operator, a lie so brazen that it provoked fierce criticism from Beijing newspapers over which the Jiangxi government had no jurisdiction. On January 7, 2001, Beijing's *Gongren Ribao* (Workers Daily) published an editorial entitled “We Cannot Accept this ‘Mishap’,” which stated, “The use of the term ‘mishap’ is a misapprehension.”

Government officials continued to tell deliberate lies, but after the facts of the accident were widely circulated in Internet chatrooms, Premier Zhu Rongji was ultimately forced to make a public apology. Even then no senior government official said anything positive about the role journalists had played. On the eighteenth day after this accident that shocked the international community, the Chinese State Administration of Safety held a news conference on production safety. When some journalists raised the question of local government officials who had ordered journalists beaten for trying to inform the public, the agency's deputy director, who was presiding over the news conference, replied, “In principle, news reports should not make a big fuss about or exaggerate accidents affecting production safety. There must be unity for the sake of social stability.” He added, “Unified news management ought to be observed with respect to reports from the scene of accidents, the number of casualties and the handling of the situation.”<sup>4</sup>

#### Gentle persuasion

Violence against journalists is used all over China, but newspapers very rarely report such incidents. The case detailed below is typical:

On June 1, 2002, Zhao Jingchao and Lü Tingchuan, reporters for the *Jinan Shibao* (Jinan Times), and Yang Fucheng, a reporter for *Shandong Qingnian* (Shandong Youth) magazine, traveled together to follow up on complaints from villagers of

Ximeng village in Ninyang County, Shandong Province. Villagers had accused the local Party branch secretary, Liu Fangzhu, of corruption and of keeping a private jail cell where he had villagers tortured. While they were driving home after their interviews, the three journalists received a phone call from the magazine editor telling them that Ninyang County public security officers were about to intercept them, and that they should hurry back to Jinan. While they were still en route, several police vehicles overtook them at high speed with howling sirens and barred their way. At around 4:30 p.m., the deputy director of the Ninyang County Party committee propaganda department, Ji Weijian, arrived on the scene and took the journalists back to his offices, where he instructed the Sidian town mayor, surnamed Zhang, to take over.

Mayor Zhang ordered the town government work team that had beaten up the villagers to force the journalists to surrender all their film rolls, interview notes and audiotapes. At approximately 7:30 p.m., the two government officials left the office, and a dozen plainclothes policemen burst in and proceeded to beat and kick the three journalists, inflicting severe head injuries on Zhao Jingchao. Not one propaganda department official stepped forward to stop the assault. The three journalists were then taken to the public security bureau for interrogation, during the course of which Zhao identified the policemen who had assaulted him, only to be ferociously beaten once again. It was only after midnight, when a group of journalists dispatched by the *Jinan Shibao* showed up, that the police released the journalists.<sup>5</sup>

A person concerned about this issue collected newspaper reports relating similar attacks on journalists between September and December 2000:

September 16: Deng Qiang, deputy chief of the Ningde City public security bureau in Fujian, not only prevented journalists from covering a public court sentencing, but actually came to blows with them in broad daylight and confiscated their camcorders.

September 28: A group comprised of the China Association for Quality Promotion and the Xi'an Office of Quality Control went to Xi'an's Wild Rose Computer City (a computer and software mall) to conduct a statutory inspection. The general manager of the mall, Qian Xiaoyan, ordered his subordinates to tear up the inspectors' IDs and chase and beat up accompanying journalists. A CCTV film camera worth 570,000 yuan was broken and two inspectors were injured. According to reports, the general manager had political backing in Xi'an.

October 16: Zhang Xiuying, Party committee secretary of the Shanxi Medical Electronic Equipment Factory, led more than 20 men into the reference room of the *Shanxi Gongrenbao* (Shanxi Workers' Daily) and attacked two journalists, apparently in retaliation for a news article reporting a merger dispute involving his factory.

October 16: Members of a village protection team attacked two journalists from the *Nanfang Dushibao* (Nanfang Daily) with iron clubs and wooden cudgels while they were gathering information regarding a violent clan incident in the Baiyun suburb of Guangzhou. The journalists were beaten unconscious and had their cell phones and interview notebooks

snatched. Although a crowd of people witnessed the incident, no one reported it to the police. One of the assailants told the journalists, "How dare you reporters come here and nose around! We'll kill you."

November 7: On the eve of China's Journalists' Day, as the Chinese government proclaimed its commitment to protecting the rights and interests of journalists, a huge fire broke out at a Taiwanese-owned shoe factory in the outskirts of Guangzhou, razing three warehouses covering an area of more than 1,000 square meters. When four journalists for Guangzhou's *Yangcheng Wanbao* (Yangcheng Evening News) went to the scene of the accident to conduct interviews, they were threatened, pushed, chased and beaten by a mob at the instigation of factory management.

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November 9: On the day after Journalists' Day, a journalist for *Nanning Wanbao* (Nanning Evening News) who was involved in a traffic accident was assaulted by the other driver to prevent him from reporting the accident to the police and taking pictures of the scene.

November 20: A collapse at the building site of a heating plant in the southern outskirts of Jinan, Shandong Province, killed four workers and injured one. When journalists for *Shenghuo Ribao* (Life Daily) and *Qilu Wanbao* (Qilu Evening News) went to the scene, they were insulted, surrounded and beaten up by plant security staff. One of the journalists suffered a cerebral concussion and had his camera equipment destroyed.

November 22: When the singer Mao Ning was stabbed, two journalists for the *Beijing Qingnianbao* (Beijing Youth Daily) rushed to Zhaoyang Hospital to interview her, but were blocked and beaten by people at her bedside. Their cameras were stolen and their film exposed. This incident was followed with interest by the national media.

December 4: Six journalists for Shaanxi's *Huashangbao* (Chinese Business View) who were covering the Tianlong coal mine explosion in Hejin, Shanxi Province, were attacked with bricks and cudgels by goons working for the mine. Two of them went missing.<sup>6</sup>

#### The Blacklist

Some local officials attempt to legitimize their refusal to submit to public scrutiny by issuing their own regulations restricting media activities. For example, at the end of 2001, the Dunhuang City government in Gansu Province issued an "Opinion on strengthening the supervision of correspondents' offices in Dunhuang and journalists conducting interviews in Dunhuang." This "opinion" specifically stipulates: "Critical reports that involve the leadership of this municipality and cadres ranked assistant section chief and above must be submitted to the local propaganda department for approval, and must also be transmitted to the persons concerned and the relevant leaders."<sup>7</sup>

In August 2002, the Lanzhou City Public Security Bureau sent a letter to all news media in Lanzhou naming 16 journalists who had published "inaccurate" reports about law enforcement personnel breaking the law. These journalists, who were consequently banned from future interviews with public security officers, expressed shock and indignation over this blacklisting.

*Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend) reported on August 8, 2002 that on August 1 the managing editors of the *Lanzhou Chenbao* (Lanzhou Morning News) handed two of their journalists, Hao Dongbai and Liao Ming, an official letter entitled, "Regarding certain journalists' inaccurate exposés of police activities." Reporters from five other publications that published such reports were also included on the blacklist. *Nanfang Zhoumo* journalists checked out each of these so-called "inaccurate" news reports and found every one of them to be factual.

The allocation of journalistic oversight to the Public Security Bureau (PSB) is probably unique to China. The special privileges that the PSB enjoys in China is expressed by the wording in the letter issued by the Lanzhou City PSB. Their use of the phrase "right makes might" suggests how such people have come to take for granted the special power and privileges they enjoy.

#### Damage control

On August 24, 2001, the Web site of China News Service published the following news item: "Unsold editions of *Gongren Ribao* (Workers' Daily) in Lushi County, Henan Province, are reported to have been confiscated for running articles revealing that the county Party secretary was pursuing redundant and extravagant projects."<sup>8</sup>

On August 10, the weekend edition of *Gongren Ribao* had published a long lead story entitled, "Factual Report of how Du Baogan, Party Secretary of Lushi, a Poor County in Henan Province, Vigorously Pursues Redundant and Extravagant Projects." Following the publication of this article, people in the mountain areas and towns of Lushi County were seething with excitement, spreading the news and falling over each other in eagerness to buy copies of the paper.

That day, the *Gongren Ribao* spread like wild fire across Lushi County. Within a few days, some 10,000 copies of the *Gongren Ribao* had been sold or photocopied by local people. But on August 15, the deputy head of the propaganda department of Sanmenxia City, Henan Province, made a long-distance phone call to the head of the Lushi County post office, instructing him to confiscate the weekend edition of the *Gongren Ribao*, as well as the *Fazhi Wencuibao* (Legal Miscellany) newspaper and *Jinjian* (Golden Sword) magazine, which had reprinted the offending article.

What exactly had the newspapers published? Why did the government take the trouble to fight back by impounding newspapers? The focus of the newspaper story was how Du Baogan, Party secretary of one of the most impoverished counties in the nation, wasted public resources in egregious extravagance and corruption and, more to the point for this discussion, frequently had his critics thrown in jail on false charges. But the real story is how Du's intolerance of criticism

was of a piece with the government's control of the news media and its muzzling of public opinion.

Since 1997, Zhang Chongbo, a worker at a Chinese medicinal materials company in Lushi County, had repeatedly written to the news media complaining about Du Baogan's wasteful projects. When Du found out what Zhang was doing, he threatened the manager of Zhang's company with dismissal if he didn't find a way to keep Zhang under control.

On July 7, 1999, the *Dahebao* (Great River News) in Lanzhou published an article entitled, "How Can Houses be Pulled Down Only to be Built Again and Built Only to be Pulled Down Again? The Wild Construction Boom in Duguan and Xiaoji Townships, Lushi County." The article, advocating justice for the common people, was written jointly by Zhang Chongbo and a journalist for the *Dahebao*. Zhang subsequently wrote another article entitled, "Snubbing Public Opinion in Duguan Township: Pulling Down Houses and Replacing Them with Multi-story Buildings," which was published in the "internal reference" edition of the *Dahebao*. After that, Du Baogan decided to teach Zhang a lesson.

On August 6, 1999, Zhang Chongbo was arrested on a charge of "misappropriation of specially designated funds and property." On March 30, 2001, the Sanmenxia Intermediate Court upheld the original sentence, but reduced the time Zhang had to serve in prison to two years and six months. On the receipt acknowledging service of the appeal judgment, Zhang wrote, "Regarding China's corrupt judicial system, with

its peddling of influence and justice, let us fervently assert: I will never submit."

Zhang Chongbo was not the only "disobedient" person Du Baogan had thrown in jail. Everyone who brought Lushi County's problems to the attention of the media or the higher authorities was a target for Du's attacks. When Lan Cinai from Zhaizi Village distributed articles critical of Du Baogan published in Nanjing's *Zhoumo* (Weekend) magazine, Du denounced him as a "villain." Lan replied, "Villainous officials breed villainous citizens." For this, Lan was sentenced to 37 days in jail.

In the spring of 1999, Du Baogan took advantage of the Public Security Bureau's "Fight Crime" campaign to arrest more than 400 people. Some of them had expressed dissatisfaction with their village cadres; others had spoken up during village committee elections. This was enough to be jailed on accusations of "disrupting the elections" and other charges. Those arrested were only spared the humiliations of imprisonment if they pledged to take the matter no further.

In order to put a stop to Du Baogan, Zhang Wenxiu, the Party Secretary of Xiangziping Village, Wenyu County, lodged a written complaint against Du with the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection in Beijing. In mid-June 2001, Du dispatched public security officers to Beijing to arrest Zhang, instructing them to deceive the Beijing police authorities by accusing Zhang of being a "Falungong element" who had gone to the capital to set off a bomb. After being forcibly escorted back to Lushi County, Zhang was thrown in the



Photo: Reuters

county detention center on May 20, 2002. But what Du Baogan did not count on was that Zhang had already provided the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection with irrefutable evidence showing that Du had sought and taken bribes. The Commission immediately instructed the relevant departments to investigate and prosecute, and on June 4 Du was arrested on criminal charges.

It was this report about Du Baogan, a little more than two months after his arrest, that brought down the wrath of officialdom on *Gongren Ribao*, ostensibly because of the “[bad] image it projects of the Party and the government.”<sup>9</sup>

#### Declaring “state secrets”

The international community first became aware of the spread of AIDS in China when it was revealed that Chinese peasants from Henan Province had become infected after selling their blood. Because this story was brought to light by Gao Lujie and other physicians of international renown, the Chinese government could only temporarily treat Gao as “target of internal control.” But AIDS had already spread beyond Henan Province, and journalists who reported on a serious outbreak in the Shangzhou district of Shaanxi Province were investigated and prosecuted.

In the spring of 2000, five peasants from Shangzhou who had been suffering from a “strange illness” resistant to prolonged treatment arrived in Xi’an. Tests revealed that they had contracted AIDS. One of the peasants, a man named Zhao Yue’ai, died that year while waiting for a blood transfusion.

By the end of the Spring Festival, several hundred people were already found to be AIDS-infected. The results of spot tests were shocking: the rate of infection was four percent, far exceeding that of some African countries. Alarmed by the seriousness of the situation, the Shaanxi provincial government issued orders that no further random checks be conducted on tens of thousands of potential victims.

Zhao Shilong, a journalist for *Yangcheng Wanbao* (Yangcheng Evening News) in Guangzhou, and several journalists for *Shanxi Ribao* (Shaanxi Daily) and *Sanqin Dushibao* (Sanqin Daily), decided to provide society with a true picture of the AIDS situation. Filled with a sense of mission, the journalists traveled across seven mountainous counties in Shangluo district, where under difficult conditions they managed to interview several AIDS patients every day.

In March 2001, the Guangzhou media reported the results of investigations on the spread of AIDS in Shangluo Prefecture. When Premier Zhu Rongji read these reports, he immediately wrote an official response, causing an earthquake in Shangluo government circles.

The victims of this earthquake, however, were not the Shaanxi government officials who deceived their superiors and defrauded their subordinates. The great majority of Chinese local government officials had long before recognized that Zhu Rongji’s days in politics were numbered, and for quite some time Zhu’s instructions and official comments had gone no further than the paper on which they were written. These local officials managed to divert official wrath to the journalists who had brought the administrative negligence to public knowledge.

Zhao Shilong, the *Yangcheng Wanbao* journalist in faraway Guangzhou, was beyond the reach of the Shaanxi provincial Party committee and the provincial government, which were only able to butcher their own flocks. The Public Security Bureau’s Law and Order Department, which under current propaganda regulations in fact has no jurisdiction over news-gathering activities, twice summoned local journalists Du Guangli and Wang Wu for interrogation, demanding, “Who supplied the leads for conducting interviews? How did you meet Zhao Shilong? How does he gather news and conduct interviews under cover?” The Shaanxi provincial government was actually, as the Chinese saying goes, killing a chicken to frighten the monkeys—punishing “insubordinate” journalists as a warning to others.

### Even when accused of violating non-existent laws, defendants often have no way of proving their innocence.

The Shaanxi provincial government lost no time in having its decision implemented at the lower levels. The deputy director of the *Sanqin Dushibao*’s features section was dismissed from his post and two journalists were fired from the paper on accusations of “revealing state secrets and violating the State Secrets Law concerning unauthorized publication of information on serious epidemics.” As an internal regulation of the CCP Ministry of Propaganda stipulates that such people may no longer work on the “cultural frontline,” this put an end to the journalists’ careers.<sup>10</sup>

Having carefully read the State Secrets Law (its full title is Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of State Secrets) upon which the local officials based the penalties they imposed, I have found that none of its seven articles stipulates AIDS as falling within the scope of a state secret. This makes clear that the Chinese government applies laws according to its own capricious whims. Even when accused of violating non-existent laws, defendants often have no way of proving their innocence under the system of justice as currently administered in China. The leveling of trumped-up charges against a few socially responsible journalists who surmounted overwhelming difficulties to independently investigate and report the government’s culpability in the spread of AIDS is a testimony to the sorry state of present-day China.

Even so, the journalists discussed above got off lightly compared to some of their colleagues, whose cases I describe below.

#### The Iron Heel

##### *Case 1: The death of Feng Zhaoxia*

On January 15, 2002, Feng Zhaoxia, a 48-year-old editor and journalist for the Xi’an-based newspaper *Gejie Dabao*, died under mysterious circumstances. The police concluded that Feng committed suicide, but his family and friends raised many questions and expressed suspicion that he had been murdered in retaliation by the mafia. The local public security bureau failed to pursue the matter, hastily ruling that it was a case of

suicide that did not warrant further investigation. This bizarre attitude made people even more certain that there was something fishy about the case.

*Gejie Dabao*, which under the managerial control of the People's Consultative Conference of Shaanxi Province claimed a circulation of almost 100,000 and exerted considerable local influence, had in recent years created quite a stir with numerous exposés critical of corruption and organized crime in Xi'an and its environs. Many of the articles were written by Feng Zhaoxi, including one particularly controversial story exposing shady deals and scandalous stories involving ten Xi'an notables.

#### Case 2: *The jailing of Gao Qinrong*

Gao Qinrong, born on January 19, 1955, was a member of the Chinese Communist Party. Originally a journalist for the *Shanxi Qingshaonianbao* (Shanxi Youth Daily), Gao was later temporarily transferred to *Jizhe Guancha* (The Journalist Observer), a magazine published by the Shanxi bureau of the Xinhua News Agency. In May 1998, Gao was imprisoned on trumped-up charges after exposing a major irrigation project in Yuncheng district as an elaborate scam.

Following up on complaints from local peasants regarding the irrigation project, Gao noticed that the figures for the project were full of contradictions and began to investigate. After a year-long probe, Gao found that the "model" irrigation project, which had cost a staggering 280 million yuan, was in fact a corrupt and fraudulent waste of money and manpower intended to put feathers in the caps of local leaders.

Filled with righteous indignation and driven by a strong sense of social responsibility, Gao wrote an article in the internal reference edition of the *People's Daily* and told the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection the truth behind the irrigation project. Gao never expected that threats issued by the head of Xuezhong District against local peasants would soon be carried out on himself.

On May 27, 1998, the restricted edition of the *People's Daily* published Gao's article entitled, "Huge Sums Wasted on an Irrigation Project Scam in Yuncheng District, Shanxi Province." Numerous media outlets immediately picked up the story, including *Nanfang Zhoubao* (Southern Weekend), *Minzhu yu Fazhi Huabao* (Democracy and Law Illustrated), CCTV's *Xinwen Diaocha* (Investigative News) and *Jiaodian Fangtan* (Focus Interview), *Zhongguo Qingnianbao* (China Youth Daily), *Nongmin Ribao* (Farmers Daily) and *Zhonghua Xinwenbao* (China News).

On the evening of December 4, 1998, as he was writing once again to the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the All-China Journalists' Association, Gao Qinrong received a phone call from an acquaintance asking him to meet him at a certain restaurant. As he was walking to the restaurant in the dark, he was surrounded by a group of men, one of whom said, "Are you Gao Qinrong? Please accompany us!" Before the man finished talking, his accomplices had already tied Gao's hands behind his back, unbuckled his belt and piled him into a taxi, by which they secreted him back to Shanxi that very night.

Back in Yuncheng, Gao's captors took him to the Xia County detention center, but because there were no formal grounds

for detention and proper procedures had not been followed, the detention center refused to accept him, and his captors moved on to the Ruicheng County detention center instead.

Having detained Gao before deciding what charges to bring, Gao's abductors continued to change their accusations over the period that followed; one moment Gao was accused of "extortion and racketeering" and the next of "swaggering about and swindling the people," but none of these charges held water. Nevertheless, on December 26, 1998, Gao was formally arrested. The Yuncheng City People's Prosecutor's Office indicted Gao on April 4, 1999, and the Yuncheng City People's Court tried him *in camera*, ostensibly in the interest of individual privacy. On May 4, 1999, Gao Qinrong was sentenced to twelve years in prison on fabricated charges of "taking bribes, procurement of prostitutes and fraud." He is currently serving his sentence in Jinzhong penitentiary in Shanxi Province.

#### Case 3: *Recall of a "reactionary book"*

How the *Work Manual on Reducing Farmers' Tax Burdens* (*Jianqing Nongmin Fudan Gongzuo Shouce*), a manual compiled by the central government, could end up being labeled a "reactionary book" is a miscarriage of justice that foreigners can never understand, and that all Chinese people can understand but have no way of making foreigners understand.<sup>11</sup>

The heavy tax burden shouldered by China's farmers is a reality the Chinese government has been forced to confront, and the CCP and the government have issued numerous directives since the mid-1990s ordering local governments to lighten the peasantry's tax burden. Nevertheless, inquiries by the Jiangxi Province Rural Areas Work Commission revealed that grassroots cadres continued to levy unauthorized fees and taxes on farmers. In some localities, wanton government exactions had strained relations between cadres and farmers to the point of physical confrontations.

In light of this situation, Gui Xiaoqi, deputy editor of *Nongcun Fazhan Luncong* (Commentaries for Rural Development), a magazine published by the Jiangxi Rural Areas Work Commission, came up with the idea of compiling all previous statements and documents published by the central government on this issue into a manual. The idea was to familiarize farmers with their own rights and duties and ultimately reduce conflict between cadres and the people. The result was the *Work Manual on Reducing Farmers' Tax Burdens* published by *Nongcun Fazhan Luncong*.

The title page of the manual quoted CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin and State Council Premier Zhu Rongji on reducing farmers' tax burdens, and inside the front cover was the telephone number of the Jiangxi Province Rural Areas Work Commission, which readers could call to ask questions and lodge complaints.

Even before the manual was available in bookstores, farmers rushed to the offices of *Nongcun Fazhan Luncong* to buy copies, with some 12,000 sold between July 29 and August 11, 2000. The farmers used this compilation of government documents as legal substantiation for their claims against sub-county cadres, and in determining which taxes and fees were legal and which were arbitrary. Some cadres, on the other hand, claimed that it was a "reactionary volume" produced by the Falungong.<sup>12</sup>

Although publicizing official Central Committee policies and published with the approval of the provincial Press and Publishing Bureau, the manual met with unexpected misfortune. While the editors of *Nongcun Fazhan Luncong* were still celebrating their success in helping the farmers, they received an order from higher authorities on August 21, 2000 to stop selling the *Work Manual* and to confiscate copies that had already been sold.

Within six months, 11,000 of the 12,000 sold copies were confiscated and sent to Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi, where they were stored in a warehouse. A schoolteacher who photocopied the manual and distributed it to farmers was arrested on charges of “distributing a reactionary book.”

Gui Xiaoqi was initially suspended from his post and put under investigation, but the leaders of Jiangxi provincial Party committee disagreed over how to deal with him. The majority of Party committee members wanted him to be severely punished, but the top provincial leadership did not want to take responsibility and hesitated for a while. In the end, they agreed to have him arrested and to decide what crime to charge him with later on. When Gui learned of the decision, he made a run for it, managing to escape only two hours before he was to be arrested. Jiangxi officials ordered that if Gui Xiaoqi returned to Jiangxi, he was to be thrown in jail. To date, Gui is still on the lam.<sup>13</sup>

After the details of this case were reported in the influential *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend), no one could claim that



**Reporting disasters can be dangerous in more ways than one. Photo: AP Wide World Photos**

the central government and the top government leaders did not know what had happened. But even after Gui Xiaoqi personally wrote a complaint to the Ministry of Agriculture in Beijing, no one expressed any criticism of the Jiangxi Provincial government. This experience was a bitter disappointment to Gui, who was only trying to act in the interests of the Party. When I interviewed him, he said that his only consolation was that he was more fortunate than Gao Qinrong.

#### *Case 4: Jiang Weiping, jailed for subversion*

Liaoning Province has always been a region plagued by high levels of graft and corruption, but the people of the province dare not openly voice their indignation. From 1998 onward, Jiang Weiping, bureau chief of the Northeast China office of the Hong Kong newspaper *WenWei Po*, wrote a series of articles under a pseudonym exposing the corruption of the top leadership in Liaoning Province.

In an article entitled “The Citizens of Dalian Cry to Heaven Under the Autocratic Rule of Bo Xilai,” Jiang revealed that Bo Xilai, the son of CCP veteran Bo Yibo and a rising star among the “Princelings” (a group composed of children and relatives of the ruling elite), had played a leading role in a series of corruption and sex scandals. In an article entitled “Deputy Mayor of Shenyang Gambles Away 40 Million Yuan in Macau,” Jiang revealed that Shenyang deputy mayor Ma Xiandong had been gambling away public money abroad. Jiang also exposed a scandal involving Qian Dihua, mayor of Daqing, who used public funds to buy apartments for each of his 29 mistresses. Because such news cannot be published in mainland China, Jiang Weiping published his articles in various Hong Kong-based political magazines, such as *Front-Line*, which are considered “anti-communist” by the CCP.

Although Jiang Weiping used a pseudonym, identifying him presented no difficulty for China’s security services, whose intelligence-gathering capabilities are becoming stronger by the day. Under pressure from the Ministry of State Security, *WenWei Po* moved its Northeast China bureau from Dalian to Shenyang at the end of 1999, forcing Jiang to resign rather than uproot his Dalian-based family. In December 2000, Jiang was secretly arrested by the Dalian City Public Security Bureau. After more than a year, at 2 p.m. on January 25, 2002, Jiang was tried by the Dalian Intermediate People’s Court in “open” proceedings before 50 spectators hand-picked by the authorities. Many people had no understanding of the details of the case, and Jiang’s family members were not allowed to attend the proceedings.

Jiang Weiping was charged with “revealing state secrets to foreign nationals” and “incitement to subvert State power,” for which he was given a combined prison sentence of eight years, with subsequent deprivation of political rights for five years.

#### *Case 5: The arrest of Ma Hailin*

The enrichment of the children of senior cadres by exploiting their parents’ influence in business deals is a matter of common knowledge in China. However, Chinese news organizations have avoided reporting on these shady deal-



ings, since it would accomplish little apart from bringing endless grief to those involved in the exposé. It was therefore quite astonishing when *Zhengquan Shichang Zhoukan* (Stock Market Weekly) published an article by Ma Hailin entitled, “The Mysterious Huaneng Power International, Inc.,” detailing how former Premier Li Peng’s family had acquired its considerable wealth.<sup>14</sup>

The article immediately sent shock waves through the top echelons of the Chinese government, and foreign media competed to report the story.<sup>15</sup> *Zhengquan Shichang Zhoukan* was immediately censored by the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party Central Committee. All copies that had already been distributed were impounded, and the magazine’s December 1 issue published a “correction” apologizing for Ma’s article. Bizarrely, this new issue was also confiscated as part of the Party’s efforts to obliterate every trace of the original article. The magazine’s editor-in-chief, Wang Boming, son of CCP veteran Wang Bingnan, had to make several self-criticisms. Author Ma Hailin, who was also a cadre with the People’s Armed Police, was put under house arrest by his unit, and the unit commander wrote a letter to Li Peng voicing unanimous accord with the Central Committee and claiming that Ma’s wife had actually written the article.

## The government has failed to deal with the culpability of local officials, while busily eliminating journalists who have the courage to report the facts.

The cases presented above amply illustrate that in recent years the Chinese government has failed to deal with the culpability of local officials, while busily jailing and eliminating journalists and news media that have the courage to report the facts. When government departments at all levels insist that “developing public scrutiny is detrimental to social stability and unity,” they demonstrate their failure to recognize that the real causes of social instability are not the media that report them.

As everyone knows, the Chinese Communist Party has a long tradition of thought and speech control. Since the 1990s, the CCP has dealt with “crimes of conscience” involving questions of ideology and free speech according to a secret directive Jiang Zemin issued in Shanghai in 1994: “Handle political questions by non-political means.” Whenever possible, criminal convictions that bring offenders into social disrepute (such as visiting prostitutes, fraud, graft and corruption) are preferred; failing that, one of the following charges must be filed: revealing state secrets, incitement to subvert state power or endangering national security.

Unlike journalists in the West, whose most dangerous assignments are usually in war-torn countries, Chinese journalists court danger in their own country in peacetime. The people who harm Chinese journalists are none other than China’s rulers, and guarding against this sort of danger can be even harder than dodging bullets. Journalists who sacrifice

themselves to tell the truth don’t even enjoy the consolation of social recognition, as the Chinese government deploys the full might of the state to smear their reputations and to prevent them from vindicating themselves. This is the inevitable fate of journalists in a country where human rights are ignored.

### Containing foreign journalists

The mid-1980s marked a period of a temporary relaxation in Chinese politics. The Chinese media, long rigidly controlled, gained a certain amount of breathing room, and foreign journalists also saw some expansion in their room for maneuver. After the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre was made known to the world by foreign and Hong Kong journalists, the Chinese State Council promulgated the “Regulations Concerning Foreign Journalists and Permanent Offices of Foreign News Agencies” in 1990 to resume control over foreign journalists’ news gathering activities. The main method employed to restrain foreign news media is to control news sources, with pressure brought to bear on people interviewed by foreign journalists.

Because most foreign journalists tend to focus their reporting on Beijing and Shanghai, the Beijing municipal government has enacted more detailed regulations governing the implementation of the 1990 regulations. Following are a few articles from “Measures of Beijing Municipality for Implementation of the ‘Regulations Concerning Foreign Journalists and Permanent Offices of Foreign News Agencies’”:

Article 3: Foreign journalists resident in Beijing and foreign news agencies established in Beijing proposing to interview Beijing municipal leaders shall be required first to apply to and obtain approval from the Beijing Municipal People’s Government Foreign Affairs Office.

Article 4: The Municipal People’s Government and its subordinate departments and the people’s governments of the various districts and counties may hold periodic press-release meetings and press conferences and invite foreign journalists to attend. The Municipal People’s Government Foreign Affairs Office may periodically organize trips within Beijing for foreign journalists for sightseeing and news gathering purposes and may recommend to journalists items considered to be newsworthy.

Article 5: Foreign journalists and news agencies resident in Beijing proposing to employ Chinese citizens as staff or service personnel or to lease buildings for office premises must arrange these matters through the Beijing Foreign Affairs Personnel Service Bureau.<sup>16</sup>

Article 3 effectively restricts all activities of foreign journalists to those controlled by the Chinese government. Article 4 makes it clear that the Chinese government not only controls journalists’ activities, but is also the sole legally sanctioned supplier of news. Article 5 effectively subjects foreign journalists to the supervisory control of the Chinese government.

The above-cited regulations establish a set of principles, but even more detailed rules govern their actual implementation. Many such regulations focus on Chaoyang District, the office and residential compound for foreign embassies, foreign diplomats and major foreign news agencies. A directive issued in February 2002 entitled “On Strengthening the Management

of Interviews by Foreign Journalists,” stipulates that no work unit or individual may organize interviews for foreign journalists or receive them without authorization; that foreign journalists’ requests for conducting social surveys or opinion polls be tactfully refused; that propaganda materials and printed matter sent to foreign journalists be checked by the departments in charge of receiving the journalists, and that if such materials are found to contain anything illegal they must not be sent to the foreign journalists and must immediately be reported to the relevant foreign affairs, public security and security departments.

The directive also requires that foreign journalists be prevented from conducting illegal interviews in sensitive areas and about sensitive issues, including contact with practitioners of Falungong, democracy activists and their private residences; access to the courts and places of religious worship; and reporting related to ethnic minorities, religion, human rights and family planning. Work units that discover illegal newsgathering activities must put an immediate stop to them and report them to the Public Security and Foreign Affairs bureaus. Authorities may also confiscate journalists’ notes, audio equipment and cameras to prevent effective spot reporting.

## The directive requires that foreign journalists be prevented from conducting interviews about sensitive issues.

The directive stipulates that if an incident suddenly occurs within a work unit, foreign journalists must be denied entry in accordance with relevant regulations and the foreign affairs and public security departments must be promptly informed of the matter. If a foreign journalist is already on the scene, foreign affairs or public security personnel must politely persuade him to leave. If the journalist refuses to comply, a public security officer should forcibly remove him from the scene. After an incident occurs, the department concerned must quickly draft a public declaration and submit it for approval to the municipal and district authorities and appropriate leaders. Without proper authorization, no one may answer questions posed by foreign journalists.<sup>17</sup>

Some foreign journalists have recorded their feelings about how the Chinese government controls their activities. BBC journalist Wei Cheng, for example, wrote an article describing his observations during news conferences held by the Chinese government around the time of the 16th Communist Party Congress in November 2002. Wei reports that Chinese officials habitually turn news conferences into propaganda meetings touting government achievements. Before a news conference, officials pick journalists working for the official Chinese news media or foreign journalists who are “good friends” of the Chinese government, such as those working for Hong Kong’s *Ta Kung Pao* or the France-based *Ouzhou Shibao* (European News, a newspaper published with a financial subsidy from the Chinese government), and allow them to ask questions that give Chinese officials the opportunity to boast of their achievements. Such orchestrated events are news conferences in name only.<sup>18</sup>

Joan Maltese, who worked for CCTV-9, China Central Television’s English-language news channel, wrote an article entitled “How China’s Propaganda Machine Works” after being fired.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, David Lore, a “foreign expert” based in Shanghai, recounted his personal experience in an article entitled “The Perils of Speaking out in China.”<sup>20</sup>

Under these circumstances, unless they have many years of experience working in China, foreign journalists have almost no way of carrying out thorough investigations of China’s society, politics and economy.

## Tombstones

By the beginning of the 1990s, the Chinese media began experiencing two parallel trends. On the one hand, media organizations gradually lost financial backing from the government, forcing some into the red. On the other hand, official controls tightly restricted the supply of news sources, leading to fierce competition. The media described this situation as, “tying our hands and feet, and then putting us out to sea.” In their struggle for survival, many media organizations had no alternative but to test the limits with subjects that would attract readers without provoking censorship. Even so, there were frequent reports of newspapers, magazines and publishing houses being closed down.

In 1989, the following magazines stopped publication:

*Shijie Jingji Daobao* (World Economic Herald), *Hainan Shiji* (Hainan Report), *Shulin* (Treasury of Books), *Xin Guancha* (New Observer), *Dongfang Jishi* (Eastern Record), *Zouxiang Weilai* (Toward the Future); *Guoqing Yanjiu* (Contemporary Chinese Studies) and *Zhishi Fenzi* (Intellectual), a magazine that had recently moved back to mainland China from the United States.

The following media organizations were penalized in the 1990s:

In May 1996, Beijing’s *Qingnian Baokan Shijie* (Youth Press World) was ordered by the State Press and Publication Administration to discontinue a newly-launched column on the Cultural Revolution. When *Dangdai Gongren* (Contemporary Worker) in Liaoning Province published an article in 1996 by the Shanghai writer Ye Yonglie about the May 16 Circular that launched the Cultural Revolution, the Beijing Press and Publishing Bureau instructed the Liaoning Press and Publishing Bureau to order an investigation.

*Lingnan Wenhua Shibao* (Lingnan Culture Times) stopped publication on December 30, 1998. *Fangfa* (Method) was closed down in January, 1999. *Dongfang* (East) officially announced that it was stopping publication in 1999 (it had already been closed for two years for “reorganization”).

*Beijing Wenxue* (Beijing Literature) was ordered to make a self-criticism in 1999 for publishing an essay entitled “Death on May 4,” by Guangdong writer Lin Xianzhi.

*Jinri Zhongguo Chubanshe* (Today’s China Publishing House) had its license revoked in May 1999 for publishing my book, *Xiandaihua de Xianjin* (translated into English under the title *Pitfalls of Modernization*). The person who had planned the book and the editor responsible for its publication were banned from further employment in media or publishing.

At the beginning of November 1999 the Chinese newspaper

*Gongren Ribao* (Workers Daily) published on its front page a speech by Wei Jianxing, acting chairman of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, about China's labor unions. Because the speech contained the statement, "labor unions and the Party are in complete unanimous accord, therefore there is no need for the existence of labor unions," it was considered to be a "serious political mistake." *Gongren Ribao* director Zhai Zugeng and editor-in-chief Zhang Hongzun were dismissed from their posts.

In March 2000 *Shuwu* (Studio) magazine was purged for publishing my essay, "A General Analysis of the Evolving Structure of Contemporary Chinese Society"; its editor-in-chief, Zhou Shi, and the entire staff of the editorial department were dismissed and transferred to other posts.

In 2000, *Baihuazhou* (A Hundred Flowers) was officially criticized for publishing an essay by Xie Yong, a writer from Shanxi Province. *Nanfeng Chuang* (The Window of the South Wind) was officially ordered to make a self-criticism on several occasions. In November 2000 the People's Liberation Army investigated and took a series of measures against *Lanzhou Wanbao* (Lanzhou Evening News) for having allegedly damaged its reputation with a report detailing problems within the military. The deputy editor and the news manager were dismissed from their posts, and two editors responsible for the article were dismissed from the newspaper. *Bainianchao* (Hundred Year Tide) received several warnings from the police authorities, and its editor-in-chief was eventually replaced.

In 2001 the *Guangxi Shangbao* (Guangxi Business Daily) was ordered by the Party Committee of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region to stop publication because it had refused to be merged with the Communist Party newspaper *Guangxi Ribao* (Guangxi Daily). When *Yancheng Wanbao* (Yangcheng Evening News), published by the *Xinwen Zhoukan* (News Weekly), published a special interview with me on May 2, 2001, the Propaganda Department of the Party Central Committee ordered the Guangdong Propaganda Department to "deal severely" with the newspaper. When the Lijiang Publishing House in Jiangxi published my essay, "We Are Still Gazing at the Stars" ("Women rengran yangwang xingkong"), it was accused by the Central Committee Propaganda Department of satirizing the theory of the "Three Represents."<sup>21</sup> It was ordered to suspend publication for "reform," and the editor was dismissed.

In June 2001, *Jingji Zaobao* (Economic Morning News) was ordered to stop publication because it had printed an article entitled, "Character Determines Fate and Human Nature Determines the Character of Stocks" on its securities page. The Propaganda Department decreed that this article "ridicules central government leaders, and is really inane," and officially ordered the paper to stop publication.

Then there were publishing houses that published "problematic" books or that worked together with booksellers and were therefore repeatedly "rectified." Well-known publishers in this category include: Gaige Chubanshe (Reform Publishing House), Dianying Chubanshe (China Film Publishing House), Haitian Chubanshe (Haitian Publishing House), Shantou Daxue Chubanshe (Shantou University Press), Shanxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe (Shaanxi Normal University Press),

Guizhou Renmin Chubanshe (Guizhou People's Publishing House), Xinjiang Qingshaonian Chubanshe (Xinjiang Juvenile Publishing House), Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe (Changjiang Literature and Art Publishing House), Jinri Zhongguo Chubanshe (Today's China Publishing House), Daxiang Chubanshe (The Elephant Press), Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Chubanshe (Renmin University of China Press), Zhongguo Gongren Chubanshe (China Workers Publishing House), Qunzhong Chubanshe (Masses Publishing House), Liaoning Jiaoyu Chubanshe (Liaoning Education Press), Xinhua Chubanshe (Xinhua Publishing House), Nanfang Chubanshe (Southern Publishing House), Zhongguo Wenlian Chubanshe (China Wenlian Publishing Company), Hainan Chubanshe (Hainan Publishing House) and Chunfeng Wenyi Chubanshe (Chunfeng Wenyi Publications).

Books classified by the CC Propaganda Department as being "problematic" include: *Shan'ao li de Zhongguo* (China Between Two Peaks), *Lishi de Xiansheng* (The Harbingers of History), *Zhongguo de Zuohuo* (China's Leftist Disaster), *Wutuobangji* (A Memorial to Utopia), *Xuebai Xiehong* (White Snow, Red Blood), *Gu Zhun Wenji* (The Collected Works of Gu Zhun), *Guanchang Mijing* (The Secrets of Chinese Officialdom), *Zhongguo de Daolu* (China's Path), *Gulage Qundao* (The Gulag Archipelago), *Chenlun de Shengdian* (The Fallen Temple), *Zhongguo Diceng Fangtanlu* (Record of Underground Interviews in China), *Yu Luo KeYizuo yu Huiyi* (An Encounter with Locke's Posthumous Work and Memoirs), *Deng Xiaoping de Sanshang Sanxia* (The Ups and Downs of Deng Xiaoping's Political Career) and *Wenhua Dageming de Zhongguo Jundui* (The People's Liberation Army During the Cultural Revolution). Works written by Generation Y writers, such as Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby*, were also labeled "problematic." Needless to say, many more books could not be published because of their "sensitive" content.

In May 2001, the *Nanfeng Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend) newspaper was "rectified" through a purge over a very typical incident. Because *Nanfeng Zhoumo* had earned a reputation for its daring in-depth reports on corruption, the Central Committee's Propaganda Department had come to consider it a "bastion of liberal ideology" and frequently criticized it by name. In the late-1990s when Li Changchun (currently a Politburo Standing Committee Member of the Party Central Committee and Party propaganda chief) became secretary of the Guangdong Provincial Committee, he declared at a propaganda work meeting, "The Guangdong media have taken liberalization much too far, and have behaved outrageously. My main task here will be to rectify *Nanfeng Zhoumo* and other newspapers. In my own home, I won't let my children read the *Nanfeng Zhoumo*." This statement was turned into a butt of jokes by the Guangdong media.

The most serious rectification measure Li Changchun took was to have the Guangdong Provincial Committee Propaganda Department issue an order that the newspaper's editor-in-chief, Jiang Yiping, be transferred to another post (which was done in January 2000). Journalists at *Nanfeng Zhoumo* used to joke that writing self-criticisms to the Central Committee's Propaganda Department was one of the chief editor's basic skills.

After Jiang Yiping was transferred from his job, *Nanfeng*

*Zhoumo* showed some restraint, but because its journalists had a keen sense of social responsibility, the paper continued to report on local corruption. The Propaganda Department therefore issued orders for a purge under which acting editor-in-chief Qiang Gang was transferred, vice-editor-in-chief Chen Mingyang and the deputy assignment editor of the news department were dismissed, several key journalists were fired and a “politically reliable person” was transferred from *Nanfang Ribaoshe* (Southern Daily Group), the media organization in charge of *Nanfang Zhoumo*, to be the new editor-in-chief. All journalists who kept their jobs had their “conduct” (i.e., their attitude toward Party and government work) monitored for half a year to determine whether they would be kept on. With the journalists of *Nanfang Zhoumo* scattered to the four winds, China’s “premier weekly publication” lost its former luster.

The cases cited here involve only two of the many methods the Chinese government employs to suppress freedom of speech: threatening journalists’ livelihood and judicial persecution. Other methods employed by the state include deploying the Ministry of State Security to follow the movements of socially influential people, tap their phones, monitor their e-mail, open their letters and stake out and covertly search their residences, as well as exploiting the State’s monopoly over public opinion and various dictatorial methods to frame and smear dissidents and intellectuals critical of the government.

It should be pointed out that the list of people and media organizations named in the preceding pages is by no means exhaustive. I have only recorded a small fraction of the many victims, whose number continues to grow.

Editor’s Postscript: A Western journalist received the following e-mail message on February 10, 2004, from a reporter at Guangzhou’s *Southern Metropolitan Daily* in response to inquiries about a reported media crackdown: “As an employee of the *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, I have been told to keep silent on the aforementioned subject, that is why I did not write back immediately. I am sorry for that and hope you could understand. All I can say now is that the situation is difficult for us and can be even more difficult in the near future. There has been a lot of pressure and all kinds of rumours. We don’t know what fate is waiting for our newspaper. We can do nothing but pray that Dawn will come after the darkness.”

## **PART 2: WHO OWNS CHINA’S MEDIA?**

In democratic countries, the news media industry has independent legal status. A media company’s investors are its bosses; the market decides the life or death of a company, and a newspaper with no subscribers will fold. But this international principle does not apply to China. China’s government agencies have designated the broadcast media as a special commercial activity, and no matter who its investors are, a news provider is a publicly owned resource. As a result, all news agencies have just one shareholder: the Chinese Communist government.

Even more unusually, the survival of media companies

depends entirely on the government rather than the market. China’s 2003 news media reforms, although undertaken in the name of relieving market over-supply, were actually intended by the government to eliminate competition to national and provincial-level Party papers, boosting subscriptions to *People’s Daily*, *Qiu Shi* (Seeking Truth Magazine), and other such publications through government proclamations and guaranteeing a minimum number of subscribers for Party-sponsored papers. The 2003 Code of Practical Regulations (*Shishi Xize*), Part IV, Clause 1, clearly mandates that district, town and village level organizations, country primary and secondary schools and other local units must use public funds to subscribe to key Party-sponsored publications such as *People’s Daily*, *Qiu Shi*, provincial newspapers and periodicals and local and city papers. All groups using public funds for subscriptions must apply them first to Party papers and periodicals, especially national-level publications.<sup>22</sup>

Before the opening up and reform of Chinese society, when all Chinese media were funded and controlled by the government, rights of ownership were quite straightforward. At that time, any private individual who wanted to start a newspaper was automatically branded a criminal. But China’s market reforms have forced Chinese media providers to consider economics and income, and the bureaucratic nature of the Chinese media has thrown up obstacles in the road to marketization. In order to survive, government-sponsored media all over China have begun to think in terms of business strategies, opening a gap in the Chinese government’s control of news media.

### **The rise of popular media and the fate of the 2003 reforms**

#### **The decline of Party-sponsored newspapers**

Before the reform period, the Chinese media had no relevance apart from propaganda. But under the reforms, market forces have brought about the rise of new media organs. These include evening and metropolitan papers that Hong Kong and Taiwan researchers refer to as “popular media,” which began to enjoy ascendancy after 1992. These evening and metropolitan papers focus primarily on society, sports and entertainment news, with content especially appealing to city dwellers. Even so, they have not been able to enjoy the same degree of openness as Western media because of the Central Propaganda Ministry’s imposed rule of “Three Meetings, Three Nods of the Head” on any articles critical of any government or Party official. Under this rule, the reporter, the target of the criticism and the target’s superior all have to meet prior to publication, and the target and his superior both have to sign an authorization certifying that the article can be published.

However, fierce competition for readers has led industry players to engage in a new practice known as “blindsiding.” This type of reporting has injected new life into the Chinese media and made even the dry, monotonous, stifled Party-sponsored papers change the way they tell the news. The rise of the popular media also brought a decline in circulation for Party-sponsored publications. The circulation of *People’s Daily* once fell to just a few hundred thousand copies, and almost all of its

subscribers were public entities forced to maintain their subscriptions by government mandate.<sup>23</sup>

## The drop in circulation for Party-sponsored papers can also be adduced from their share of advertising income.

Previously, the officially published *Cankou Xiaoxi* (News Reference) was the only source from which Chinese people could get international news, and circulation at one point reached a peak of five million. Now, however, circulation has dropped to 300,000, and the main subscribers are older people who don't know how to use the Internet. Considering the percentage of national and provincial papers that are paid for by public funds, or that are provided for leisurely perusal by public servants while they should be working, it is clear how little these ideological propaganda publications are appreciated by the public at large.

The drop in circulation for Party-sponsored papers can also be adduced from their share of advertising income. In 1978, China's mass media was reborn after the disruptions of the Cultural Revolution. The total income from ads in 1983 was 73 million yuan, jumping sharply to almost 7.8 billion yuan by 1996, increasing at a rate of 39 percent per year. In terms of the share of ad income, Party-sponsored papers have clearly lost out to the popular papers. Before 1990, the top national

paper, *People's Daily*, was the unquestioned winner in the contest to attract ads, but it lost advertising steadily as the 1990s progressed. By 1995, the paper was unable to maintain its ranking among the top ten, and in 1997 it dropped below the twentieth slot.<sup>24</sup> Two Hong Kong researchers performed an investigation comparing Shanghai's *Liberation Daily* (a party-sponsored paper) with *Xinmin Wanbao* (New People's Evening Post, a popular paper); Guangdong's *Nanfang Ribao* (Southern Daily, a party-sponsored paper) with *Yangcheng Evening Post* (a popular paper); and Shaanxi's *Shaanxi Daily* (a party-sponsored paper) with *Xi'an Evening Post* (a popular paper). They came up with three conclusions: 1) The income gap first appeared around 1992; 2) The ratio of advertising income of provincial party papers to regional popular papers stands at between 1:2.5 and 1:3.1; and 3) Popular papers easily dominate advertising revenues, whereas provincial papers are in a weaker position.<sup>25</sup>

The lively popular papers clearly reflect a trend toward metropolitan papers among China's urban populations. These metropolitan papers first made their appearance after 1992 when provincial Party papers began publishing city-focused newspapers. Now there are more than 20 metropolitan papers in China (including early and morning editions), and some cities have more than one. The metropolitan paper industry was well established by around 1996, and its business strategies, reporting content, reporting methods and circulation methods are far and away superior to that of



Chinese news sources are fairly uniform. Photo: AP Wide World Photos

Party-sponsored papers. Circulation figures have soared: *Chu Tian Dushibao* (Chu Tian Metropolitan News) has reached a circulation of one million in the intense Wuhan media market; *Huaxi Dushibao* has already surpassed 350,000 subscriptions in the Chengdu region; and Hunan's *Xiaoxiang Morning Post* has overtaken the staid *Hunan Daily* and the official *Changsha Evening Post*.

Chinese news sources are fairly uniform, but the metro papers offer more attractive layout and photos as well as features on society and daily life. In the first half of the 1990's, the Chinese government still labeled the purely entertainment-focused tabloid (*baqia*) news as containing "unhealthy content," and occasionally imposed limits on the publication of stories relating to celebrity scandals and other popular tabloid topics such as get-rich-quick schemes, sex and murders. By the end of the 90s, however, the government's Propaganda Ministry came to the realization that in a society that could become politicized in the blink of an eye, tabloid news could effectively divert the attention of the public and induce them to fall in line. As a result, the bureaucracy has adopted a much more lenient attitude toward Hong Kong and Taiwan-style "scandal sheets," while reserving its strictest censorship and punishment for political offenses (with provincial governments following the example of the central leadership).

#### Media reform and the rules for survival<sup>26</sup>

If any news media can still make the claim of attracting readers' attention in any significant way, it is the popular media, including the metro papers. The number of news providers increases daily, a phenomenon causing enormous headaches for official censors. A culling process has now been initiated among weak, low-quality papers through the 2003 reforms, which mandate criteria for the survival and extinction of newspapers and periodicals. Publications that meet the following standards may continue to publish:

- The central government's "three papers and one magazine" (*People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, *Economics Daily* and *Qiu Shi*) and provincial Party papers and periodicals;
- Publishers with correct politics that have broken no laws for five years, are in solid financial shape, and whose percentage of paying private subscribers exceeds 85 percent (this only applies to provincial-level publishing houses);
- The offshoot publications of Party-sponsored newspapers. The following types of publications must cease operations:
  - Those with incorrect politics, or those that have broken the law within the past five years;
  - Party bureau publications with similar content must merge, and those with paying private subscriptions making up less than 50 percent of total subscriptions must close down;
  - All newspapers and periodicals published by foundations, think tanks and research institutions associated with administrative, public safety, financial, tax, commercial/industrial, life planning, traffic, public health, environmental, fire prevention or any other bureaus at the provincial level or below.

Publications that do not belong to the Party system and are

not being closed down are to be wholly absorbed into the Party-sponsored fold, or else merged with Party-sponsored papers at all levels.

It is not difficult to discern the true aims of this round of reforms. Cutting government bureau publications is a way of relieving financial burdens and concentrating the limited resource of publicly funded subscriptions on central Party publications, thereby restoring them to the pre-reform system of public subscription. But even more important is the drive to shut down papers with incorrect politics and with records of violating regulations. Based on my eight years of experience, the government has only political offenders in mind, and not financial offenders. Finally, the annexation of non-Party publications achieved by this executive order is nothing more than a reversion to total control by the Party.

#### Who actually owns the popular media?

It must first be noted that popular media production faces two limitations from the outset: 1) Official regulations clearly forbid private publications; every publication that applies for authorization must be run by the government or by government officials. This is set in stone. 2) Because of these restrictions, the funding of many publications must be concealed. For example, some publications don't receive direct government funding, but rather are offshoots of officially run publications (such as provincial papers) that have raised money through advertising and business sponsorships to launch papers more suited to the demands of the popular market. Examples include *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend) and *Nanfang Dushibao* (Southern Metropolis Daily), both started by Guangdong Province's official *Nanfang Ribao*; *Qilu Wanbao* (Qilu Evening Post), one of the top four evening edition papers in China, backed by the Shandong provincial paper *Shandong Daily*; *Jin Wanbao* (This Evening), which received funding and sponsorship for its launch from Tianjin's official *Tianjin Ribao*, and finally Shanghai's *Xinmin Wanbao* (New People's Evening Post), which drew its seed funds from the Shanghai municipal government.

Since China's media can't be privately funded, all private investment in publications is illegal. Under these circumstances, non-governmental money injected into a media company cannot be openly acknowledged. For example, *Xin Zhoukan* (New Weekly) was bought and taken over by Shenzhen's Sanjiu Group, but the change in ownership is only acknowledged behind closed doors, and the change of sponsoring organization has not been officially registered. The Guangdong Sociological Institute's *Gang'ao Jingji* (Hong Kong/Macao Economy) has been funded for some time by Zhuhai United Pharmaceuticals Group to the tune of two million yuan, but the magazine lists United Pharmaceuticals only as a supporter. No one dares to indicate that the Group is really the principal investor and owner.

Investing under these conditions is extremely risky. By way of illustration, Henan Communist Youth Group was unable to maintain its monthly periodical *Qingchun Shuiyue* (Youth), so they signed a contract with a private businessman surnamed Xue in November 2000. The contract stipulated that the original editing staff of the magazine would

continue to receive monthly salaries of 10,000 yuan while being relieved of their editing duties, and the magazine would hold the ownership rights to all published copy. The businessman agreed to provide backing of 300,000 yuan for each issue and to move the publication's offices to Shenzhen. As the revamped magazine's articles managed to suit the tastes of the "new generation," Mr. Xue invested additional funds in sales promotion. After the second issue of 2001, with sales looking good, the staff of *Qingchun* demanded that their contracts be revised with increased pay and benefits. Mr. Xue felt that the publication was still in its formative stage—it had not yet begun to turn a profit—and asked staff to delay the discussion. When the two sides failed to reach an agreement, the magazine threatened breach of contract. The 800,000 yuan that Mr. Xue had already invested went up in smoke; he had no room for negotiation, since the whole transaction was illegal in the first place.

The covert management of new publications is something that even Propaganda Bureau chief Ding Guan'gen has misunderstood. He believes that the increasing difficulty of controlling the media is due to its incomplete ownership by the government. In order to enhance government oversight, he suggested in 1998 that the Treasury come up with money to buy back the ownership of all the newspapers in China. Even the Chinese Communist Party's former leader, Jiang Zemin, was more realistic; at the 2002 National Propaganda Conference he referred to "state-owned media," apparently acknowledging existence of privately owned publications in China.<sup>27</sup>

Actually, the thorny question of "ownership" was quietly settled by the Chinese government in 1999 by way of a "legal shortcut." On October 21, 1999, *Xinwen Chubanshe* (News Publishing) got the scoop on an important story: The Public Affairs Bureau, the Ministry of Finance and the News Publishing Bureau stated unequivocally in a directive to the China Sociological Institute on the subject of their publications *Zhongguo Jingying Bao* (Chinese Economics) and *Jingbin Gouwu Zhinan* (A Guidebook to Fine Arts) that all of China's newspapers and periodicals are publicly-owned assets. Under current laws, the launch of a publication is subject to a permit system, and the publication's sponsoring organization is the principal investor by law; most papers in China today are funded by the population as a whole. When a publication is established, infusions of funding by individuals or groups must be treated as loans and debts. The News Publishing Bureau official indicated that the Ministry of State's three administrative offices have wide supervisory authority over this process, and that they will continue to make authorization decisions on a case-by-case basis until a national publications law is enacted, thereby setting clear limits on the entire media industry.

The official also pointed out the ways in which publishing houses are publicly owned: 1) Current publishing law requires a newly established newspaper to comply with the provisions of the "Administrative Regulations on Publishing" (*Chubanshe Guanli Tiaoli*) and the News Publication Bureau's "Provisional Rules for Administration of the Publication of Newspapers" (*Baozhi Chubanshe Guanli Zanshi Guiding*), to pass through the national administrative bureau's assessment process, and to

apply for a publication sponsorship permit; 2) Implementation of the sponsorship system creates a situation characterized by the publisher's subjugation to, dependence on and administration by the sponsor; 3) Control is imposed through the structure of Chinese newspapers and the present situation of the industry.

China's newspaper industry was built on the foundations set by Party-sponsored publications. After the reform and opening period, a large number of government agency newspapers were created—over 2,000 papers across the country—of which Party-sponsored papers and publications of the various levels of government made up over 1,000. These newspapers were generally financed or subsidized by the state. As for other publications, even if they were not directly financed by the government, they were founded under the bannerhead of state-owned institutions. According to this scheme, the ownership of all media companies is entirely public. And as for the formative stages of a new publication, according to the Agency official, seed funds are sometimes provided by the sponsoring organization, but often the sponsor leaves it to the publishing company to raise money. By official decree, the sponsoring organization is the only authorized investor, and other forms of fundraising cannot be called "investment." Funding can be drawn from corporate assistance in the form of charitable donations, or from individuals or corporations as money advances—a form of loan that must be treated as debt. Since a publication is treated as a special kind of commercial activity different from most business ventures, the business principle of "investor as owner" does not apply.<sup>28</sup>

The seemingly complicated question of publication ownership rights has been resolved without much fuss in the authoritarian style of the Chinese government, which sees no need to proclaim any clear rules. Investors have no room to negotiate deals, nor can they protect their ownership rights, because the Communist government has never recognized transfer of ownership and sponsorship. The government's so-called legal documents do not even require the legitimization of the People's Assembly's rubber-stamp approval. Even if they did require approval, it would be simply a matter of convening the assembly for one more meeting.

### **The myth of foreign investment and a free press**

It has been taken for granted that "when the media enter the world stage," which is to say, as China undergoes globalization, the news media will become a service industry and will simultaneously begin operating under WTO rules. Many scholars have published articles hinting that the "media entering the world stage" is already a *fait accompli*, and that foreign investment in the Chinese media market is already a reality. Chinese media organs protest that media imperialism has already forced its way through their doors; foreign scholars think it will lead to the marketization of China's media and severely weaken the Communist government's control over the press. These articles announce tremulously to the world that China is preparing to open up its media market; a slew of unprecedented changes and reforms are imminent. But does this conform with reality?

Tsinghua University journalism professor Liu Jianming has written an article rebutting myths about the eagerly awaited globalization of Chinese media, as follows:<sup>29</sup>

– According to a news report, “CCTV’s fourth season has already been broadcast in the U.S. by Time Warner on an American satellite channel. We had to repay them, so we opened up the airspace over the Pearl River Delta region and allowed non-news satellite broadcasts—Chinese arts programs, for example.”<sup>30</sup>

Liu: As far as I know, the high-level officials in charge of news and propaganda have not made any such decision, and it is pure fiction that CCTV’s fourth season has been broadcast over American satellite. Actually, this rumor is based on something that happened in January of 2002. Currently, a Murdoch News Group arts channel has been authorized to broadcast on Guangdong Province’s cable service, and one CCTV program can now be viewed in the U.S.<sup>31</sup> Apart from this, there are no hard facts showing that other foreign broadcasters’ channels have been allowed to enter China. Blind guessing or citing of foreign sources is not a substitute for scholarly evidence of domestic conditions.

– According to a news report, Viacom’s MTV broadcasts four 24-hour channels in Asia alone, reaching more than 120 million households across Asia. MTV’s Chinese language syndicate was founded in 1995, and the program “Tianlai Village” is a joint production of MTV Worldwide and Chi-

nese Cable Network. The sixty-minute daily segment of “Tianlai Village” has become the highest rated program created by a foreign-domestic cooperative venture.<sup>32</sup>

Liu: The unsubstantiated assertions in this article are really shocking. First, China has never had a “Chinese Cable Network.” Second, the notion of the daily segment of “Tianlai Village” enjoying top viewership ratings is pure nonsense. In China, only big hotels and a tiny minority of viewers receive the satellite service that would allow them to watch MTV programs.<sup>33</sup>

– In October of 2001, a Guangzhou paper quoted anonymous sources as saying that China was planning to allow more than thirty foreign stations to broadcast in Guangdong in the near future.<sup>34</sup> This news was widely disseminated over the Internet.

Liu: I asked the officials who would have been responsible for this decision, and I was informed that the government broadcasting offices have no such large-scale plans. They also had no idea where the talk of more than thirty foreign stations came from. Anyone who understands broadcasting coverage in the Southeastern coastal area knows that any household in Fujian or the Pearl River Delta can privately install a satellite dish and receive broadcasts from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. If you take the numbers involved in this phenomenon, add to them the small number of large hotels that get foreign satellite television, and look at scholars’ assertion that



Photo: Reuters



“after the globalization of the industry, foreign channels will be allowed to enter,” it’s obvious that this promise is mere smoke and mirrors—in reality, foreign stations have already been received for ten years or more!

[Authors note: I lived in Shenzhen, and as far as I was able to ascertain, Guangzhou and Shenzhen have required residents to use cable TV service since 1996; this allows the interruption of broadcast feed when Hong Kong television stations broadcast programs with “sensitive content.” For example, each year during the June 4th memorial ceremonies, and during the 2000 show “Ershi Shiji Lingshou Fengcai Dahufang” (“The Discreet Charm of Twentieth Century Leaders”), which commemorated numerous gaffes by Jiang Zemin, the signal was cut as it entered the country. This is based on my personal experience.]

- Reuters and Qingniao were reported to have initiated a joint venture to create a Web guide to Chinese media in affiliation with Chuanmei Shiye (Media View) magazine. This news led to reports that Reuters was financing Qingniao at Peking University, which would mean that foreign media capital has already made its way into a Chinese media business.

Liu: The funny thing is that after Reuters’ representative in Asia responsible for supervision of broadcast content, Jeffrey Parker, heard this story, he made a point of clarifying the facts during a speech. He said that the Qingniao.net that Reuters invests in is not Peking University’s Qingniao, nor has Reuters collaborated to create a Web guide to China’s media. From this we can see that the much-vaunted inroads of foreign capital into China’s media is really nothing more than a crazy story inspired by the illusion of a “looming media empire.”

Liu Jianming also says, “It is universally known that China’s treaty of accession to the WTO contains no agreement to allow foreign news media into China or vice versa. Yet in 2001, just about every news magazine ran articles repeatedly asserting just this—it was a very hot topic. News research based on illusion is a complete disaster. We have to ask, where on earth did our country’s scholarship go wrong?”

The political leanings of Liu Jianming’s article is clearly on the side of protecting China’s media, but the facts he states are impervious to politics. In addition, it should be clear from China’s daily tightening of control over the press and thought that the Chinese government has no intention of opening up the so-called media market.

In fact the media industry is a spiritual and cultural industry; its services contribute directly to a nation’s economic and social development. The services provided by the news media have dual significance. While providing news and entertainment to the public, the media also influence the political framework of a regime and a society; they can’t be treated as cavalierly as the import and export of material goods. China’s supervision of the ideological slant and political nature of broadcast media represents an attempt to make ideology a central method of control—a basic tenet of a dictatorial country’s strategy for dealing with the question of the press. For this reason, in discussions over globalization, China has made only

two representations regarding the media: 1) Foreigners may invest in international Internet providers, including those that furnish content currently prohibited by the Chinese government; and 2) The Chinese government will import twenty foreign movies each year and allow foreign movie and music companies to have a share in the profits. Apart from these undertakings, there is absolutely no question of allowing foreign broadcast stations to be received in China or of permitting the circulation of foreign publications.

In fact, statements by China’s high-ranking officials and relevant government documents repeatedly state that foreign political news may not enter China, and that foreign capital may not be invested in state-owned newspapers, periodicals, broadcast television stations or even state-owned Web sites. The few publications currently allowed in from Hong Kong are not considered to be examples of foreign investment; the CCID Group, for example, is nothing more than a corporation capitalized with Hong Kong and Macau money, and this kind of investment is completely unrelated to freedom of the press.

As another example, in 1996 the *Shenxing Shibao* newspaper was created as a joint venture by the *Shenzhen Tequ Bao* (Shenzhen SEZ Newspaper) and Hong Kong’s *Singtao Daily*. During its three years of existence, *Shenxing* reported political news in *Shenzhen Tequ Bao*’s bureaucratic style; the only area in which it took liberties was in its tabloid-style entertainment articles. In 1998 this so-called “Chinese-foreign capital joint venture” ended its short life in miserable financial condition, its circulation never having reached even 20,000.<sup>35</sup>

In 1997 it was reported that “the Murdoch Group invested 65 million yuan in the *People’s Daily* subsidiary Chinabyte,” but they have already divested themselves. The state-owned *Qianlong.net*, *Longying.net* and others all had visions of attracting foreign investment, but official permission has been consistently denied. The Chinese government’s attitude is quite clear: the state media are not part of China’s globalization process. China’s media officials repeat as their mantra, “This rule is for the country’s good; other nations have similar rules,” and they have emphasized that the prohibition against foreign investment in Chinese newspapers, broadcast stations and periodicals is sensible and wise. As one Chinese official has said, “This avenue is closed, there is no room for discussion. Television is too sensitive; it has a direct impact on national security and well-being.”<sup>36</sup>

This official clearly equates “national security” with “regime security,” the obvious result of the Chinese government’s propensity to equate itself with China as a whole. The truth is that opening up the new media would not pose a threat to China’s security; rather, official control of the media, particularly television, is a reflection of the authoritarian government’s concern that opening up the media would threaten its own security.

The most important factor in freedom of the press is not the identity of a publication’s investors, but rather a country’s political system and environment.

Part 1 translated by Paul Frank, Part 2 translated by Jonathan Kaufman

1. Guangzhou journalist Zhao Shilong, who has covered a number of significant national events, has written a vivid essay recounting his own experiences in a "high-risk profession." Zhao Shilong, "Shi shui zai zurao caifang?" (Who is stopping journalists from conducting interviews?), *Nanfeng Chuang* (The Window of the South Wind), February 2002.
2. Zhao Shilong, *ibid*.
3. *Tai Yung Po* (The Sun), Hong Kong, January 1, 2002.
4. *Fazhi Ribao* (Legal Daily), Beijing, January 17, 2001. Editor's note: On February 20, 2004, the Xinhua News Agency reported that Wan Ruizhong, a former county Party head in southwestern Guangxi, was executed after being found guilty of taking 3.2 million yuan in bribes from the operators of the Lajiapo tin mine in return for concealing a fatal flooding of the mine, which killed at least 81 people in 2001. The Xinhua report said that armed thugs were hired to keep reporters away, as a result of which the incident was not reported until two weeks after it occurred.
5. "Shandong jizhe fang tangwu'an zao jingcha duda" (Shandong journalists savagely beaten while investigating a case of corruption), *Pingguo Ribao* (Apple Daily), Hong Kong, January 8, 2002.
6. "Zhongguo jizhe de hong yu hei" (The Good and Bad Among Chinese Journalists), a critique of the current state of Chinese journalism. Source: [bbs.beida-online.com](http://bbs.beida-online.com).
7. *Zhongguo Qingnianbao* (China Youth Daily), January 14, 2002.
8. Translator's note: *Xingxiang gongcheng* could also be translated as Potemkin-village-style projects, i.e., redundant projects designed to boost the prestige and fill the pockets of the party leaders who pursue them.
9. "Pilu xianweishuji dagao xingxianggongcheng Gongren Ribao zai Henan Lushixian bei tongzhi shoujiao" (Unsold editions of the *Gongren Ribao* [Workers' Daily] in Lushi County, Henan Province, are reported to have been confiscated for running articles revealing that the County Party secretary was pursuing redundant and extravagant projects), *Zhongxingwang* (China News Service), August 24, 2001.
10. Zhao Shilong, *op cit*.
11. "Yiben qishu de qiyu" (The remarkable adventure of a remarkable book), *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend), front page, October 12, 200.
12. The Chinese government, through the Central Committee of the CCP, declared Falungong an illegal organization on July 21, 1999.
13. Personal interview between the author and Gui Xiaoqi in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, in May 2001.
14. See *Zhengquan Shichang Zhoukan* (Stock Market Weekly), Vol. 93, November 24, 2001, published by the Chinese Stock Market Research Center (Zhongguo zhengquan shichang sheji yanjiu lianhe bangongshi).
15. The December 4, 2001, issue of *The Sun*, a Chinese-language Hong Kong newspaper, reported that the *Zhengquan Shichang Zhoukan* article came as a big shock to the Beijing political elite.
16. "Measures of Beijing Municipality for Implementation of the 'Regulations Concerning Foreign Journalists and Permanent Offices of Foreign News Agencies'," promulgated on March 19, 1990, by the Beijing Municipal People's Government. For the Chinese version, see [www.mediachina.net](http://www.mediachina.net); for an English translation, see <http://product.chinawe.com/cgi-bin/lawdetail.pl?LawID=328>.
17. "Beijing Guanfang Ruhe Duifu Jingwei Jizhe" (How the Beijing Authorities Deal with Foreign Journalists), *op-ed*, *Duwei Xinwenshe* (Duwei News Service) May 10, 2002. For the regulations, see "Guanyu Jiaqing dui Jingwai Jizhe Caifang Shixiang he Guanli Gongzuo de Tongzhi" (On Strengthening the Management Interviews by Foreign Journalists), Foreign Affairs Office of Beijing Chaoyang District People's Government, February 9, 2002, signed and issued by Su Jingmei.
18. "Weicheng Riji: Jizhehui shang de Xujia" (Wei Cheng's Diary: Phoney Press Conferences), Chinese-language version of the BBC Web site, November 12, 2002.
19. Joan Maltese, "How China's Propaganda Machine Works," *Special for NewsMax.com*, Friday, July 4, 2003.
20. David Lore, "The Perils of Speaking out in China," *Dow Jones News Wires*, December 8, 2003; *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, August 13, 2003.
21. Translator's note: The "Three Represents" is the CCP doctrine that the Party represents and has always represented the development demands of China's advanced productivity, the forward direction of China's advanced civilization and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China.
22. "On Effecting the Adoption of the Provisions of the CCP Central Committee and the Ministry of State Central Committee's 'Notice on Enhancing the Management of Overabundance of Party Bureau Publications, and Using Official Authority to Promote Distribution and Lighten the Burden of Grassroots and Agricultural Units,'" *China News Publishing*, July 31, 2003, carried on *Chuanmei Guancha* (<http://www.chuanmei.net>), Aug. 2, 2003
23. "Central papers do not compete with local papers," *China Economic Times*, Dec. 24, 1998. This piece of information was provided by the National Statistics Bureau, the China Economic Prosperity Center, the New Generation Market Research Company, Ltd., and Britain's Market Research Bureau.
24. Chen Huailin, Guo Zhongshi, "Analysis of the Gap in Advertising Income Between Party-Sponsored Newspapers and Popular Newspapers," *Journalism Studies Research* (Taiwan), Issue 57, 1999.
25. *Ibid*.
26. All information for this section is from "On Effecting the Adoption of the Provisions of the CCP Central Committee and the Ministry of State Central Committee's 'Notice on Enhancing the Management of Overabundance of Party Bureau Publications, and Using Official Authority to Promote Distribution and Lighten the Burden of Grassroots and Agricultural Units,'" *China News Publishing*, July 31, 2003, carried on *Chuanmei Guancha* (<http://www.chuanmei.net>), Aug. 2, 2003.
27. *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), Jan. 12, 2002. Article by Vivien Pik-Kwan Chan
28. *News Publishing*, Oct. 21, 1999, 1st ed.
29. Records of the China News Research Center/China Media, Sept. 22, 2002, vol. 2.
30. "What is the connection between WTO membership and China's Broadcasting Industry?" *News Reporter*, Issue 2, 2001
31. *News Media Reference*, Issue 2, 2001, p. 5
32. *Collected Papers from the Third Annual Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Media, Technology, and Societal Development*, Nov. 2001, p. 62, print copy.
33. "Bureau of Television and Motion Picture Broadcasting Notice to Hotels and Restaurants Ordering that They Must Broadcast Only Domestic Radio and Television Stations," *Guangfa Shezi* (1995), no. 467. This document still has force of law today. The few foreign stations that can be received in China's large hotels have concluded individual negotiations with the Broadcasting Bureau; this does not indicate a change in the law as a whole.
34. Disseminated on Suho.com on Nov. 2, 2001: "More than thirty foreign stations will be received in Guangdong's special broadcasting region."
35. I experienced and followed firsthand the establishment of the *Shenzhen Star Times*, and I closely observed the paper's trajectory for a long time. When I was assigned to the library to critique publications, I would check its front page news every day, paying particularly close attention to how the headlines were written.
36. Peng Li, "China's Television after WTO," published in *Beijing Daily*, Oct. 28, 2001. See also Wen Xian, "China's Promises about the Propaganda Culture after Globalization."

China's media environment remains one of the world's most restrictive. As described in Freedom House's recently released report on the state of global press freedom for the year 2012, the Chinese government's press restrictions were complex, intricate, ruthless when necessary, and flexible when it suited the leadership's purposes. At the same time, these controls were subject to pushback from ordinary citizens outraged at the suppression of information about critical events. The CCP maintains direct control over news media coverage through its Central Propaganda Department (CPD) and corresponding branches at lower administrative levels that determine the boundaries of permissible reporting. Internal media of China enables the officials of China to access information that is subject of censorship in China. As He Qinglian documents in chapter 4 of Media Control in China, there are many grades and types of internal documents (Chinese: 内部文件; pinyin: nèibù wénjiàn). Many are restricted to a certain administrative level – such as county level, provincial level or down to certain official levels in a ministry. Some Chinese journalists, including Xinhua correspondents in foreign countries, write The fog of censorship. Media control in china. A human rights in china publication. He qinglian. This book is the translation of an expanded and updated version of Media Control in China (Zhongguo zhengfu ruhe kongzhi meiti), published in Chinese by Human Rights in China in 2004. The expanded and updated Chinese edition was published in Taiwan by Li Ming Cultural Enterprises in 2006 as Wusuo Zhongguo: Zhongguo dalu kongzhi meiti celue da jiem.