Journalistic Culture in Contemporary China: Media Control, Journalistic Corruption, and the Impact of Social Media

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for

the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Centre for Cultural Policy Research

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June 2014

Abstract

Over the last three decades, Chinese society has experienced dramatic social change. China[1] is now turning into a global superpower, both economically and militarily but not necessarily politically. Western media often embarrass Chinese political leaders for their suppression on free speech and deviation from political democracy. This is the wider social context in which this thesis locates its enquiries.

The Chinese media are deeply involved in this social transition. This thesis intends to provide an up-to-date investigation into journalistic culture in contemporary China, where journalism undergoes political suppression, commercial imperatives, and technological upgrades. This thesis examines the key tenets of practising journalism. It focuses on three areas: (1) the norms of practising journalism under political suppression, (2) the main forms of and roots of journalistic corruption that have brought forth by media commercialisation, and (3) the changes and continuities in journalistic practices associated with social media.

This research is mainly based on six individual interviews and six focus group interviews, carried out between January 2012 and February 2012 in Beijing and Shanghai. The research is also supported by materials gained through personal communication in these cities.

The research concludes that self-censorship and journalistic corruption are two prominent features of contemporary Chinese journalism. Social media have brought both changes and continuities to journalistic practices and media control methods. In analysing the factors shaping contemporary journalism, journalists tend to highlight the impact of traditional Chinese culture. This research, however, suggests that culture does not always play a determinative role. Political, economic and cultural factors, alongside other elements, all contribute to shaping journalism. We need a more dynamic and comprehensive perspective in examining journalism, which should be spatial-temporally constructed.

[1] China refers to mainland China in this research unless states otherwise. Besides, in this research Yuan refers to Chinese currency which can be currently converted into British pounds at the rate: 100 Yuan=9.62 Pounds.

Acknowledgements

It would not have been possible to finish this doctoral thesis without the support and help of a number of kind people around me, only some of whom it is possible to mention here.

A big thank you to the Scottish Funding Council, which funded me through the Scottish Overseas Research Student Awards Scheme. Also, I am most grateful to the University of Glasgow for financial, academic, and technological support.

My sincere gratitude also goes to my supervisors, Professor Philip Schlesinger and Professor Raymond Boyle. Not only did they help me apply the funding but they also gave me invaluable support both academically and emotionally. On the rough road to finish this thesis, their insightful comments always helped me identify the real problems; and their constant encouragement inspired me to hold on to the end.

In particular I would like to thank my master supervisor, Professor Chen, Changfeng at the Tsinghua University, China. Her wisdom, generosity, and encouragement guided me throughout my studies. She is not only a responsible supervisor in studying but also a truly mentor in life.

My genuine gratitude also goes to my family, especially my husband, who has offered me immense encouragement, patience and support throughout my studies in the U.K.. I am sure he will be my lifelong best friend despite being husband.

I am also grateful to my English tutor, Janette Mcquade, and my proofreader, Jon William Carr, who have given me rewarding help. This thesis would not have been realised without their support.

Last, but by no means least, I give my heartfelt appreciation to the dozens of people who have shared their journalistic experiences and occupational ideas with me. Sadly, they would like to remain anonymous in this thesis. I have great respect for some of them for maintaining their ideals in this tough, and even dangerous, environment.

Author's Declaration

This thesis represents the original work of Xu, Di unless otherwise stated in the text. The research upon which it is based is carried out at the University of Glasgow under the supervision of Professor Philip Schlesinger and Professor Raymond Boyle during the period October 2010 to December 2013.

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Introduction

During Xi, Jinping's first overseas visit to Russia, the new leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), gained overwhelming support in both traditional media reports and online chat-rooms. His appealing public persona and common touch aroused new hope for political liberty. However, a vice editor-in-chief of a mass-appeal newspaper commented, 'it is hard for us to join the cheering crowds as the hands on the media are choking ever tighter' (Personal communications No. 10, 24 March 2013). This is just one example of the changing environment in which the Chinese media are contextualised. Chinese authorities are modernising the ways of media control by combining coercion, censorship, propaganda, and spin. My research intends to sketch the key tenets of practising journalism in such context.

This research is based largely on the researcher's own experience as a political journalist for four years in mainland China. During that time, I pondered two questions: why has media control always been effective and why do journalists argue for professionalism on the one hand but end up with corruption on the other hand. This research is motivated by three areas of interest. The first is to explore the norms of practising journalism under tight media control. In this area, the common forms of media control will be explored. It is generally believed that it is self-censorship that keeps the media in line. The key task of this research is to probe what factors induce self-censorship. The second interest centres on journalistic corruption. This is a significant aspect of contemporary Chinese journalism, but it is highly under-explored. This research intends to investigate the prevalent forms of journalistic corruption. The essential aim is to analyse the roots of corruption. The media are experiencing dramatic changes worldwide due to the impact of new technology, especially social media. Thus, the third interest is to examine the new changes brought forth by social media. This is very much a dynamic area characterised by a fast-changing media landscape. Thus, this research intends to provide a preliminary observation regarding the impact of new technology.

To these ends, the thesis is structured in two parts. The first part, which includes three chapters, constructs the theoretical, historical, and methodological framework within which the research has been conducted. The argument of this research is mainly based on journalists' own accounts of their experiences, for they are the agents shaping contemporary journalistic culture and also the cornerstones of future Chinese journalism. Thus, the analysis relies heavily on interviews. Notably, this research employs focus group interviews in an effort to explore common beliefs and norms shared by the participants. Beijing and Shanghai were chosen in this research as the fieldwork sites. These two megacities are China's cultural and economic centres respectively. Choosing the two cities is both a theoretical concern and a practical result. From a theoretical point of view, the media in the two cities are leading figures in Chinese journalism and are often set as exemplars for the media in other cities to follow. Therefore, they are more representative of the future of journalism. From a practical view, the researcher used to work in those cities, making it easier to access to the interviewees both geographically and psychologically.

The second part, drawing upon the findings in the fieldwork, is divided into three chapters. Chapter 4 examines the forms of media control and factors leading to self-censorship. Chapter 5 looks at journalistic corruption in great detail. The forms and roots of corruption are also explored. The final chapter focuses on the emerging impact of new technology. This line of analysis is further developed in the conclusion chapter to identify the key tenets of journalistic culture in contemporary Chinese context, which has been drawn on the findings of previous chapters.

Drawing upon journalists' own experiences, it is hoped that this up-to-date research will shed some light on the drivers shaping Chinese journalistic culture. This research is largely based on Western media theories to conceptualise Chinese journalism. It is also hoped that the fascinating changes occurring in Chinese journalism will enrich media theories through its unique practices.

Part I: Theory, history and methods

Chapter One: Journalism Studies: Research and Context

1.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the dominant themes in journalism studies, drawing upon key research from the United Kingdom, the United States, and mainland China, in an attempt to construct a conceptual framework to analyse Chinese journalism. It comprises five themes: findings from the journalist surveys to explore who journalists are; the concept of professionalism; issues around media and source relations; debates about propaganda; and the main themes in Chinese journalism research. This chapter concludes by pointing out a number of gaps this research intends to fill. Initially this research begins by briefly identifying and discussing four key approaches to journalism studies that have emerged from previous media and communication research.

The political economy of communication

In summarising studies on media sociology, Schudson identifies three key approaches that are commonly employed: the political economy of communication, the sociological approach, and the cultural approach (Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). This research adds a further fourth approach, political communication, which is relevant to the enquiries of this research. Subsequently, this chapter briefly reviews each approach. The first approach, the political economy of communication relates news production with the existing power structure in the wider society, especially political and economic forces in society (Murdock & Golding, in Curran *et al.* eds., 1977). The approach primarily emphasises the economic foundation of the media (Golding & Murdock, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). Its research agenda centres on the origins and consequences of media ownership, media conglomeration, the role of advertising, and so forth (Zhao & Xing, in Liu & Hong eds., 2007). For example, this approach argues that an increasing number of media outlets are controlled by a limited number of corporations. The economic elites who own the media are often aligned with the political elites. Thus, this alignment presumably inhibits any radical or grassroots voices. Embracing a critical view, this approach puts the inequalities of production, circulation, and consumption in the media sphere under the spotlight and argues that the inequalities are entangled with wider social inequalities. Furthermore, the inequalities are reproduced and presented as natural by the media (Golding & Murdock, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). In this sense, the news media play a hegemonic role by preserving the existing social order.

This approach is illuminating in examining Chinese media commercialisation (and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2), whereas it lacks symmetrical attention on the impact from the political forces (Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). In contemporary mainland China, political power, economic power, and professional norms all have impacts on news production (Lu & Pan, 2002). Political power, however, plays a dominant role. Neither economic power nor professional norms can compete with it (Lin, 2010a). Chinese media began the process of commercialisation at the beginning of 1980s. From then on, the media have been increasingly relying on advertising revenue. In the same timeframe, the notion of professionalism was introduced into Chinese journalism and the tenets of professionalism, such as objectivity and detachment, began to gain currency. The Chinese media commercialisation, however, has its own unique characteristics. The political imperative, which is exclusively exerted by the party-state, has always been the primary principle of the Chinese media. Therefore, an emphasis on the political side is required to explore Chinese journalism. Herein, it is helpful to employ schoalrship on political communication.

Political communication

Political communication specifically focuses on the dynamics between the political sphere and the media sphere. A fruitful research tradition in political communication is to model media systems primarily based on the interactions between the media and politics. The earliest effort of this kind was made by Siebert *et al*. (1963), who divided the world's media systems into four models: authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Soviet communist. In the authoritarian model, the media are under the control of the government. A representative case of the libertarian type is the Anglo-Saxon model, within which the media should serve as a free market of ideas. The third model argues that the media should provide access to all social groups and be independent from commercial forces. The Soviet communist model, taking this name from the former Soviet media system, functions in such a way that the media are propaganda and agitation tools of the party-state.

McQuail (1983) further extended the four into six models with two new categories: development and democratic participant. The democratic participant model emphasises that minority groups should have equal access to the media and promotes community media. The development model requires more attention here as it resonates with contemporary China (Du, 2011). The model is usually seen in transitional societies that are undergoing transition from underdevelopment or colonialism to independence, where a free-market media cannot be sustained due to a lack of money, infrastructure, and audiences (McQuail, 1983). In such societies, the media are supposed to primarily serve national development and advocate national solidarity; press freedom comes after economic development and social development needs. In some circumstances, the state is entitled to intervene and restrict journalistic freedom for its developmental goals (ibid.). However, in practice, the development media theory 'was invoked to justify a repressive political system and the arbitrary exercise of political power' (Curran & Park, in Curran & Park eds., 1999: 5). A Chinese daily newspaper, *Global Times* (*huanqiu shibao*), based in Beijing, is a keen advocate if the development media model. The newspaper argues that the national interest and national development are its primary goal, so sometimes reports need to be adjusted to meet this goal (Du, 2011).

The research of Siebert *et al*. (1963) has pioneered the study of the relationships between the media and state. However, harsh criticism has began to accumulate since the early 1990s. The research was accused of being ethnocentric and parochial (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Curran & Park, in Curran & Park eds., 1999). From the 1990s onwards, a growing number of media scholars became aware of the limitations of existing media theories, which were often conceptualised in the context of Western experiences, particularly Anglo-Saxon practices, and called for a de-Westernisation of media theories (Curran & Park, in Curran & Park eds., 1999; Downing, 1996). Since then, media studies have experienced a subtle shift in recognising media pluralism, emphasising local abilities and theorising comparatively (Curran & Park, in Curran & Park eds., 1999).

Thereafter, Hallin and Mancini made a notable effort to compare media systems across national borders in their book *Comparing Media Systems* (2004). Their research is noteworthy in three ways. First, they based their argument on a large quantity of empirical data from eighteen countries. Second, they conducted the comparison in a scientific manner, designing a four dimensional framework to identify differences between media systems. The four dimensions are: 'the development of media markets; political parallelism, that is, the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties; the development of journalistic professionalism; and the degree and nature of state intervention in the media system' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 21). According to this framework, they proposed three models to differentiate media systems in certain countries:

- The polarized pluralist model: ‘the news media are similarly characterized by a high degree of external pluralism, in which media are seen as champions of diverse political ideologies, and commitment to these ideologies tends to outweigh commitment to a common professional culture. Ties between journalists and political actors are close, the state intervenes actively in the media sector, and newspapers emphasize sophisticated commentary directed at a readership of political activists’(ibid.: 298).
- The democratic corporatist model: ‘the media culture is characterized by a surviving advocacy tradition that sees the media as vehicles for expression of social groups and diverse ideologies, and at the same time by a high level of commitment to common norms and procedures. State intervention in the media is extensive, but a high value is placed on media autonomy’ (ibid.).
- The liberal model: the role of the media is more of providing information to citizen-consumers and being a watchdog of the government. Journalistic professionalism is developed, and government intervention into the media sphere is limited.

Last but not least, Hallin and Mancini were very cautious about generalising their models, and they repeatedly argued that the models are not universally applicable. In fact, they confined the application of the models to North America and Western Europe, claiming that for them to ‘fit China onto the triangle defined by [the] three models would simply be silly’ (Hallin & Mancini, in Hallin & Mancini eds., 2012: 5). This is a notable contribution in media studies that realises the limitations of the notion of the ‘Western media model’. Actually, the researchers argued that one of the objectives of their analysis was to:

> demystify the notion of a “Western media model” to some degree, both by showing that there is not in fact a unitary “Western model,” because media systems in the Western world have developed according to several distinct patterns, and by treating media systems not as abstract ideals but as concrete social formations that developed under particular historical conditions (Hallin & Mancini, in Hallin & Mancini eds., 2012: 1).

This objective has been well accomplished and their analysis draws attention to the uniqueness of various media systems. Following this, de Burgh (2005) extended the efforts of de-Westernising media theories further by compiling various journalistic norms from different regions into one book, *Making Journalists*, in which he argues for recognising diverse media models and emphasising the role of culture in shaping journalism (more details on this are given later). This section now discusses another approach, the sociology of journalism.

The sociology of journalism

This approach derives mainly from sociological theories. The key tenet is that news is socially constructed (Tuchman, 1978a). The task of sociologists is to unravel the social constraints in the news making process. This approach concentrates on examining news organisational constraints, professional norms, media-source relations, and so forth. ‘The world is bureaucratically organized for journalists’ (Fishman, 1980: 51). Therefore, the allocation of journalists closely resembles the bureaucracy of government. Journalists are assigned to different beats to cover the news. The word ‘beat’ originally referred to the regular patrol route of a police officer. Applied to journalism, the term ‘beat’ denotes the range of topics a journalist is assigned for reporting. Occupying a beat, a journalist can get a continuous and steady supply of raw material for news production (Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). Professional requirements, such as objectivity and detachment, further facilitate journalists’ reliance on official sources, for the official sources are normally regarded as authoritative and reliable. This entails the perspective of media-source relations. The heavy reliance of journalists on official sources narrows the spectrum of news and erodes the journalistic claim of serving the public interest.

This chapter delineates theories regarding professionalism and media-source relations. The concept of professionalism has been warmly welcomed by Chinese journalists and keenly promoted by Chinese media scholars, even though it is an Anglo-Saxon concept. Examining what this concept means for and how it is used by Chinese journalists is of both theoretical and practical value. In terms of media-source relations, Chinese journalists rely heavily on official sources, which is an outcome of tight media control. Yet with the flourishing of social media and new communication technologies, it is argued that the spectrum of sources, which had been dominated by officials, has been widened (Xiao, in Shirk ed., 2011; McNair, 2006). This research intends to explore whether media-source relations are changing in the new digital age.

Cultural studies of journalism

The cultural approach emphasises the cultural impact on news production (Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). This approach intends to find the ‘symbolic determinants of news’ (ibid.: 189). For example, a cultural angle is particularly helpful in identifying ‘generalized images and stereotypes in the news media’ (ibid.). De Burgh (2005) has argued that different cultures entail different news models. Some basic journalism concepts differ across cultures (Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). What counts as news is coloured by cultural elements (ibid.). For example, the former Soviet media paid very little attention to the events that happened in the prior 24 hours (Mickiewicz, 1988, cited in Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000: 192). They focused on reporting long-range political plans and stockpiled stories (ibid.). Moreover, what constitutes news is also influenced by culture. Gans (1979) has identified eight core cultural values underpinning American news: ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, order, and leadership. These eight values are the unquestioned and taken-for-granted assumptions through which American news is gathered and framed (Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000: 192). As a culturally and historically rich country, Chinese traditional culture affects journalism in various aspects. However, a cultural approach to analyse Chinese journalism is relatively in low stock in the existing scholarship. The political point of view and the political economy perspective are dominating Chinese journalism research (more details are presented later in this chapter). This research intends to include the examination on the role of traditional Chinese culture in shaping journalistic practices.

The above approaches have weaknesses as well (Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). The political economy view focuses on the economic foundation of the media. Its underlying assumption is that media ownership affects media content. Yet in some cases, the link 'is not apparent' (ibid.: 178). For example, a private Spanish press, which adhered to ideological purity under the Franco regime, turned to profits priority after the Franco period (de Mateo, 1989, cited in Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). Furthermore, the blending of state-controlled and market-oriented media makes it more difficult to understand by only taking the political economy view (Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). In the Chinese context, media ownership patterns are not easy to define for the media are theoretically owned by the party-state, while operating under commercial imperatives (more details are presented in Chapter 2). Therefore, other perspectives are needed.

In examining media-source relations, the sociological view argues that journalists heavily rely on officials as sources. This is because the world is bureaucratically set for journalists to report and journalists are assigned to cover governmental agencies (Fishman, cited in Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). Yet what the sociological view overlooks is that the reliance on officials as sources may also be attributed to cultural and historical factors. In the case of China, it is a cultural tradition that official information is generally viewed as more authoritative than information from other sources. This tradition is also an outcome of history. In the feudal period and in the Mao era, due to the control of information, official reports were the only available information that could be accessed by the public. Therefore, a cultural and historical perspective is needed.

De Burgh (2005) has called for the resurgence of the cultural paradigm in examining journalism, in which culture is regarded as 'fundamental and cannot be explained away by economics' (ibid.: 17). He argues that 'how journalism operates in a given society… is the product of culture' (ibid.). Yet the difficulty in employing this approach is that what culture is shows no sign of being settled. Furthermore, culture is 'difficult to quantify, and operates in a highly complex context with psychological, institutional, political, geographic, and other factors' (Harrison, in Harrison & Huntington eds., 2000: xxv).

Each of the above approaches explores news production in one dimension. An integration of the approaches has been called for (Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). Nonetheless, the integration remains a challenge for journalism research, as systematic research combining the approaches has not yet emerged. Moreover, there is no well-developed framework or practical guidelines on integrating the approaches, and in fact, there exists some tension between the approaches. Taking one approach often means insulating from the others. For example, in analysing tabloidisation,[2] a political economy view attributes the phenomenon directly to the commercial incentives of the media (de Burgh, 2005; Esser, 1999). However, what journalists have put into tabloids is culturally associated (de Burgh, 2005). If taking too rigid one view, it would make the whole picture inexplicable (Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch, eds., 2000). Besides, all the approaches fall short of 'comparative and historical perspectives' (Schudson, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000: 177). This research intends to provide some comparative and historical information that adds depth and range to the existing material in this area. Chapter 2 explores the history of Chinese journalism. The next part of this section focuses on journalist survey findings and data, which allows for a comparison of journalistic culture.

1.2 Journalist survey research

To explore the Chinese journalistic culture, it is first necessary to know the composition and features of the journalist workforce. The survey research provides comprehensive

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[2] The term 'tabloidisation' refers to a trend in news reporting that downgrades hard news, while emphasising scandal, sex, and entertainment news, as well as sensationalising news through the use of bold font headlines or illustrations and so forth (see Esser, F. 1999. 'Tabloidization' of News: a Comparative Analysis of Anglo-American and German Press Journalism, *European Journal of Communication*, 14: 291-324). The term is based on its etymon 'tabloid', which originally referred to 'a pharmaceutical trademark for the concentrated form of medicines as pill or tablet. This narcotic tabloid effect and the fact that it is easy to swallow have been readily transferred to the media' (Esser, 1999: 292). In the early 20th century in London, the word 'tabloid' began to refer to the size of the newspaper which could be easily folded and read on buses or trains (ibid.). In the present day, tabloids represent a type of newspaper, which use eye-catching stories and emphasise saleability.

information regarding the demographic features of journalists, which helps in providing a general picture of who journalists are and how the workforce is changing. Notably, the survey findings, obtained by quantitative methods to provide macro-level information, are also supplementary to this research, which generally employs qualitative methods to probe micro-level information. Furthermore, this research looks at contextual factors, such as cultural tradition, in shaping Chinese journalistic culture. A comparison between Anglo-Saxon journalists and Chinese journalists helps in identifying the differences, which facilitates locating the contextual factors. Thus, the following part first reviews the survey findings of American and British journalists.

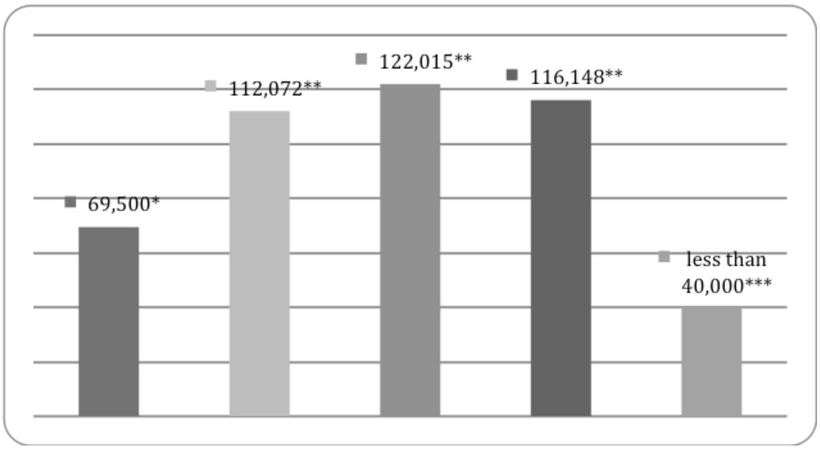
The U.K. and U.S. journalist surveys

The following section first looks at the demographic features of journalists. Age, education, marital status, gender, and ethnicity have all been explored. The first nationwide American journalist survey was conducted in 1971. Modelled on this survey, Weaver and colleagues have developed the American journalist survey into a decennial one. Weaver *et al*. (Weaver & Willnat, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012) creatively reported on the demographic features of U.S. journalists by portraying the profile of a typical journalist: the average U.S. journalist in 2002 was a married White male, just over 40, holding a bachelor's degree. The 2002 survey found that 89 per cent of all journalists held a four-year college degree, which was significantly higher than the percentage among all adult Americans, being only 26 per cent in 2002 (Brownlee & Beam, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012: 352). Moreover, compared with journalists ten years earlier, the U.S. journalists were more likely to hold a four-year college degree. The 2001 U.K. survey revealed that 55 per cent of U.K. journalists were younger than 34 years old; 59 per cent were married; 49 per cent were women; and 69 per cent had an undergraduate degree (Sanders & Hanna, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012: 225-28). A comparison of the 2001 survey and the 1995 survey (Henningham & Delano, in Weaver ed., 1998) showed a notable rise in the proportion of women and undergraduate degree holders, with a 24 per cent and 20 per cent increase respectively. It is suggested that these increases were due to changes in the higher education system (Sanders & Hanna, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012: 225-28).

Working conditions, working hours, income, job satisfaction, and career commitment have all been examined. Survey data imply a deterioration of working conditions nowadays with a shrinking number of journalists working longer hours than before. The U.K. survey showed that the average number of working hours per week for British journalists was 41.6

compared with 35 as an average for all occupations in 2001 (Sanders & Hanna, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012: 229). Meanwhile, due to economic and technological challenges, the journalist workforce is downsizing. A retrospective estimation of the number[3] of U.S. full-time journalists through the decades illustrates the trend (see figure 1).

Figure 1 The trend of the U.S. journalist workforce size[4]



Sources: * (Johnstone *et al*., cited by Weaver, in Weaver *et al*. eds., 2007: 1)
** (Weaver, in Weaver *et al*. eds., 2007: 1)
*** (*The State of the News Media*, 2013)

As shown above, from 1971 to 1992, the estimated number of U.S. journalists was rising. In 2002, the number dropped slightly, and in 2012 the number decreased sharply. 'Newspaper newsroom cutbacks in 2012 have brought the industry down 30 per cent since 2000 in the U.S.' (*The State of the News Media*, 2013). Heavy job cuts also hit British journalism. Since 2006, at least '3,500 editorial/journalism jobs have been lost in television, radio, and in the regional and local newspaper sector in Britain' (Sanders & Hanna, in Weaver & Willnat ed., 2012: 223). The reasons are complex, but the two most

[3] It is difficult to identify the exact number of journalists in the U.S. and the U.K. for four reasons. First, journalists are not licensed by any authorities, and so there are no nationwide organisations to track the workforce data. Second, although memberships in professional groups may be indicative of the journalist workforce, not all journalists like to join professional groups. Third, journalism is in turbulence nowadays with constant job-cuts. Therefore, the workforce size is comparatively more dynamic than in previous times. Last but not least, who qualifies as a journalist is highly debated. The line between journalist and audience has been significantly blurred by new journalistic genres, such as user-generated content, amateur journalists, and citizen journalists. Different surveys employ different parameters to define journalists. For example, the 1997 U.K. survey estimated that the total number of journalists was 31,596 during 1995-1997, whereas the 2001 U.K. survey estimated 60,000 to 70,000 that year. Sanders and Hanna (in Weaver & Willnat ed., 2012: 224) argued that it was unlikely that the U.K. journalist workforce nearly doubled within 6 years. Therefore, the gap between numbers was probably due to methodological differences. As a result, this research merely reports on the U.S. workforce trend based on the decennial surveys of Weaver *et al*., for they have employed a consistent definition of journalist.

[4] Journalist was defined as full-time workers with editorial responsibilities in U.S. English-language mainstream news media in the 1971 survey. The 1982, 1992, 2002 surveys are modelled on the 1971 survey, which facilitates the comparison of survey data.

prominent are the economic downturn and the impact of new technology (more details in Chapter 6).

The U.S. and U.K. journalists appear to be far more satisfied than dissatisfied with their jobs. The 2002 U.S. survey showed that 84 per cent of journalists were at least fairly satisfied with their jobs, and 77 per cent intended to stay in the business for the next five years (Brownlee & Beam, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012: 354). The 2001 U.K. survey found that 78 per cent were content with their work, and the majority planned to remain in journalism (Sanders & Hanna, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012: 229). Given the job losses in some newsrooms, it is suggested that job satisfaction and job commitment may be due to a lack of other job opportunities (Brownlee & Beam, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012: 354).

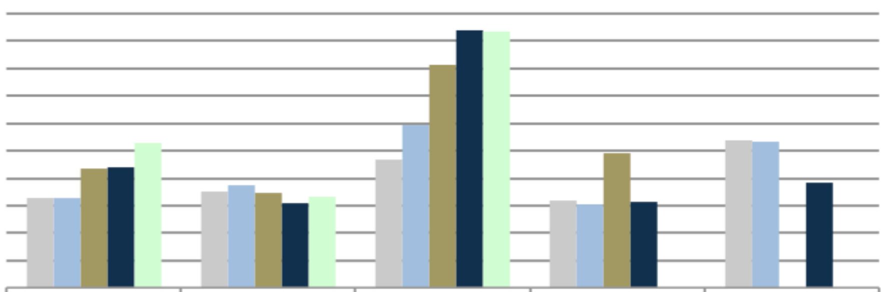
The situation in terms of salaries is mixed. By and large, journalism is not a well-paid job compared with, for example, doctors and lawyers. The 2001 U.K. survey showed that the median annual salary of journalists was £22,500 that year (Sanders & Hanna, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012: 229). It is reported that 50 per cent of journalists were satisfied with their salary, and 48 per cent were dissatisfied (ibid.). Yet according to the research of the National Union of Journalists, nearly half of all British journalists earned less than the nation's average wage. Moreover, the starting rate for journalists was £7,000, much lower than the median starting rate for graduates (ibid.). A similar situation is reported in the U.S. as well. In 2012, the median annual starting salary of journalism graduates was $32,000, over $10,000 lower than that of all 2012 graduates, $42,666 (Becker *et al*., 2013). The relatively low starting rate may require new journalists to have other financial sources of income (more discussion on this given later). Another impact is that journalists may look for freelance jobs to supplement their incomes. The 2012 U.S. survey reported that 43.3 per cent were working part-time jobs on the side (Becker *et al.*, cited in Boyles, 2013). This may endanger the quality of reporting and the integrity of the work.

A notable concern is the socio-economic backgrounds of journalists. The 2001 U.K. journalist survey shows that 68 per cent of new entrants to journalism came from a professional or managerial family background (Sanders & Hanna, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012: 226). A possible reason for this could be that media jobs usually require several months of internships that are often unpaid, which may deter some graduates with low budgets from entering this sector, meaning that media jobs are more obtainable for better-financed graduates (ibid.). This has raised two concerns. First, as journalists are more likely to come from a higher social class, they may be less concerned with working class people (Schudson, 2011). Second, journalists and politicians tend to belong to the same microcosm, and the intertwining of their lives may foster similar narrow views (ibid.). In-depth interviews conducted with journalists working at Westminster in the U.K. further confirmed the concern revealing that '40 per cent of political journalists have frequent lunches with politicians and almost 60 per cent consider at least one politician as a friend' (van Dalen & van Aelst, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012: 518). This may pose a danger to journalistic detachment, plurality, and democracy. The next section discusses the results of survey data that has examined the journalistic culture of Chinese journalists.

Chinese journalist surveys

In the last two decades, mainland China has been undergoing dramatic social changes, which have had a profound influence on journalists. A comparison of the findings regarding the basic aspects of journalists in different surveys (Zhang & Su, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012; Lin, 2010a; Lu & Yu, 2003a, 2003b; Yu, 1998; Chen *et al.*, in Weaver ed., 1998) may provide a comprehensive understanding of the trends and changes as shown in the figure 2.

Figure 2 Trends and changes in Chinese journalists[5]



	Female ratio (%)	Age	Education (%)	Major in journalism (%)	CCP membership (%)
1995N	33	34.9	47	32	54
1997N	32.9	37.4	59.5	30.6	53.1
2002SH	43.3	34.7	81.4	49	
2005GZ	43.8	31	94	31.6	38.4
2010N	52.9	33.1	93.4		

Sources: Data extracted from five surveys (Chen *et al*., in Weaver ed., 1998; Yu, 1998; Lu & Yu, 2003a; Lin, 2010a; Zhang & Su, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012) (sources are listed as the same order as the surveys listed above).

By and large, Chinese journalists are getting younger and better educated, resembling the trends of American and British journalists. They are more likely to be female and less likely to be Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members. The rise of female journalists and educational level may be an outcome of the changes in the higher education system since the 1980s (Lu & Yu, 2003a).

The other two notable changes are in age and CCP membership. The two nationwide surveys in 1997 and 2010 showed that the average age dropped from 37.4 to 33.1. The median age also dropped from 34.9 in the 1995 nationwide survey to 31 in the 2005 Guangzhou survey. It is suggested that the drop may be related to structural changes in the media industry. Since the mid-1990s, new entrants have flooded into the Chinese media market standing as mass-appeal newspapers (*dazhonghua baokan/shichanghua baokan*). They are inclined to recruit and promote younger staff, which may pull down the average age of the workforce (Lin, 2010a). A concomitant to a younger generation of journalists is the relatively shorter amount of work experience.

[5] 'N' refers to nationwide survey; 'SH' and 'GZ' refers to Shanghai and Guangzhou respectively. The 2002 SH and 2005 GZ survey reported statistics from print media only; whereas, the three nationwide surveys reported figures from both print and broadcasting media. The year refers to the time when the survey was conducted. Age figures of the 1995 N and 2005 GZ survey are median; and others are mean. The figure for education refers to the proportion of people who hold a bachelor's degree or above. The percentage of majors in journalism refers to people majoring in journalism out of all people holding a bachelor's degree or above. The figure of CCP membership reflects the proportion of journalists who are members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Figure 3 Trend of working experience

Items	Working in the media sector for 11 years and over	Working in the media sector for 5 years or less
The 1997 nationwide survey	48.4%	28.8%
The 2010 nationwide survey	33.2%	38.6%

Sources: (Zhang & Su, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012; Yu, 1998)

As clearly shown in figure 3, journalists with richer work experience are dwindling, while relatively inexperienced journalists are increasing. To be a journalist is increasingly a short and transitional job. When getting older, journalists prefer to find other more lucrative and more stable jobs. Therefore, journalists are becoming less committed and more short-term in their career (Zhang & Su, in Weaver & Willnat eds., 2012). This marks a significant change with profound implications, which unfortunately is under-exploited in survey studies, leaving a gap for this research to fill.

The changes in CCP membership are also noteworthy. The number of journalists that are members of the CCP has decreased from 54 per cent in the 1995 national survey (Chen *et al.*, in Weaver ed., 1998) to 38.4 per cent in the 2005 Guangzhou survey (Lin, 2010a). At face value, the drop may indicate a loosening bond between journalists and the governing party. These changes, however, do not mean that political freedom is more tangible in the media sector. The 1995 nationwide survey indicates that 'job rank has the strongest association with the CCP membership' (Chen *et al.*, in Weaver ed., 1998: 21), and 89 per cent of the top-level executives and 80 per cent of the mid-level directors were party members (ibid.). CCP membership remains a key factor leading to promotion.

In terms of job satisfaction, the survey findings generally show that Chinese journalists are content with and proud of their jobs. It is reported that 64.29 per cent of journalists were satisfied or very satisfied with their work (Lin, 2010a). Lu (2004) insightfully explained that the relatively high evaluation on job autonomy did not indicate the degree of press freedom or professionalism. Instead, it was a result of self-adjustment, where a number of journalists have adjusted themselves to the existing system in order to justify their jobs and gain career achievement within the bureaucracies. However, Lu did not provide in-depth descriptions about how individuals accommodated to the existing order, which leaves a vacuum for this research to fill (more discussion in Chapter 4). Another possible explanation could be that journalists 'have their eyes on both the past and the future' (Chan *et al.*, 2004: 266). Journalists may think the media environment has improved compared with the past in the Mao era and will continue to improve in the future (ibid.).

Furthermore, journalists also responded positively to questions about job autonomy with 65 per cent of journalists somewhat agreeing or completely agreeing that they had a great deal of autonomy at work (Chen *et al*., in Weaver ed., 1998). This also poses a paradox with the reality that the party-state constantly suppresses the media. A possible explanation from Chan *et al*. (2004: 266) suggests that 'journalists are no longer the idealistic enthusiasts that they were in the 1980s'. A significant number of journalists have turned into materialists who concern more for material gains than journalism independence. Survey studies have provided the same finding: journalists are least satisfied with their payments and benefits (Zhang & Su, in Weaver and Willnat eds., 2012; Chan *et al*., 2004; Lu, 2003; Yu, 1998). Journalists also put payments as their top stress factors (Zhang & Su, in Weaver and Willnat eds., 2012). Unlike the U.S. and U.K. journalists who were paid less compared with the average level of the whole working population (as discussed previously), Chinese journalists were generally well paid. For instance, in Shanghai in 2002 the average monthly salary of journalists was three times compared with that of Shanghai urban workers (Lu & Yu, 2003a). The discrepancy between journalists' concern about payments and their comparatively better income may be due to their unmet expectations (Chan *et al*., 2004). This explanation, however, is a scholarly guess, which should be testified by journalists themselves. Furthermore, the payment conditions of Chinese journalists may have implicit connections with unethical practices, which is lacking in the existing scholarship.

Journalism ethics occupy an important place in Chinese journalist surveys. Yu (1998) reported a number of pervasive corrupt forms of conduct, such as the acceptance of gifts, free meals and free travel, favourable reporting in exchange for advertisements, asking for cash for publicity, taking bribes, and so forth. Five years later, the Shanghai survey showed that the scale and extent of journalistic corruption was even worse with an increasing number of journalists even more tolerant of unethical behaviour (Lu & Yu, 2003d). Unfortunately, almost all survey studies were vague about the reasons behind corruption. The contemporary situation and roots of corruption deserve thorough investigation, which this research intends to work on and discusses in Chapter 5. The next part of this chapter reviews sociological research that has centred on the concept of professionalism within journalistic culture.

1.3 Professionalism

Debates around the concept of professionalism offer an interesting perspective that allows us to examine contemporary Chinese journalists. How the concept has been adapted to the Chinese context, and for what Chinese journalists use it, may enrich scholarly understanding about the concept. This can be also seen as an effort to de-Westernise media theories by providing evidence from non-Western countries (Curran & Park, in Curran & Park eds., 1999). This section begins by exploring the difficulties in defining it. The second part looks at professionalism in the case of journalism. The third part reviews scholarship regarding Chinese journalistic professionalism.

The problem of definition

The research into professions is very much centred on how to define it. The earlier literature was dominated by a trait approach, which listed a set of attributes to differentiate a profession from an occupation. Millerson had provided a list of twenty-three elements, the core of which were 'skills based on theoretical knowledge; the provision of training and education; the testing of the competence of the members of the profession; organisation; adherence to the professional code of conduct; altruistic service' (Millerson, cited in Tumber & Prentoulis, in de Burgh ed., 2005: 59). The problem with listing, however, is that researchers cannot reach a consensus regarding the core elements. Another approach is to subdivide the stages of professionalisation. Based on American evidence, Wilensky (cited in Tumber & Prentoulis, in de Burgh ed., 2005: 60) identified five stages of professionalisation:

- The emergence of a full-time occupation
- The establishment of a training school
- The founding of a professional association
- Political agitation directed towards the protection of the association by law
- The adoption of a formal code

This approach views professions in a more specific and dynamic light. Yet still obscure is the end-state of professions, towards which an occupation may be moving (Freidson, in Dingwall & Lewis eds., 1983: 21). Additionally, scholarly literature up to this time had neglected professions' wider contract with society (Dingwall, in Dingwall & Lewis eds., 1983: 7).

The work of Elliott (1972) links the development of a profession with the changes in class system. He suggested two phases of professions in Britain's history: the status profession in pre-industrial society and the occupational profession in post-industrial society (Elliott, 1972). The representative cases of the former are the original learned professions of medicine, law, and the clergy (including university teaching) (Freidson, in Dingwall & Lewis eds., 1983). Such professions achieved high social status primarily because of their associations with the gentleman class. Expertise was not a concern. The most crucial factor for a profession was that 'only man of the necessary social standing could get access' (Elliott, 1972: 30). After the Industrial Revolution, members of the emerging middle class began careers as architects, accountants, and so forth. These new occupations queued up for the title of 'profession' and Elliott refers to these new aspirants as 'occupational professions' (1972: 16). It is important for such occupations to gain recognition as a 'profession' in that the title can be translated into social prestige and was also crucial in negotiating for 'a state-sanctioned market shelter' (Freidson, in Dingwall & Lewis eds., 1983: 24, original emphasis). Such a claim is also reflective of the social demands of the new middle class. This research explores how the term, profession, was introduced into mainland China in Chapter 2. The term firstly appeared in university classrooms in the early 1980s when China started its reform and opening-up policy. It was fuelled by political reforms in the 1980s and then suppressed after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. The following part analyses professionalism in the case of journalism.

Professionalism in the case of journalism

The tenets of journalistic professionalism include objectivity, detachment, and independence (Huang, 2005). Scholarly writings mainly centre on two themes: whether or not journalism is a profession and how journalistic professionalism is used in practice. The following paragraphs firstly discuss the former theme.

The debate about journalism as a profession

Whether journalism is a profession or not is very much in debate. Journalists are keen to embrace it, whereas scholars are equally keen to question it. The survey is extensively used to explore whether shared professional norms or values are in place, allowing us to judge whether journalism is a profession. By comparing the findings of 31 journalist surveys conducted in various parts of the world, Weaver *et al*. (2012) argued that universal journalistic culture and shared professional values have not yet emerged. Thus, journalism as a profession is under-developed. Yet Splichal and Sparks (1994: 40) claimed that journalism in a number of countries ‘would be well on the road to professionalisation’ based on the striking similarity among journalism students in arguing for journalistic independence and autonomy. The Chinese journalists survey also reported that journalists are becoming professionals (Lu, 2003), as they hold consensus on professional values: objectivity, impartiality, and accuracy. Although the conclusions are different, they are all based on the same underlying assumption: a shared value is an indicator of a profession. This is, however, only one indicator of a profession, which is not sufficient to make a definite conclusion.

Another approach is to evaluate journalism based on traits by drawing from classic professions, such as medicine. As discussed previously, licensing systems, shared professional values, professional associations, theory-based expertise, and codes of conduct are generally regarded as parameters. Journalism therefore presents a number of difficulties as a profession. First and foremost, journalists themselves often do not want to be licensed, certificated or classified by any official authorities (Weaver, in de Burgh ed., 2005: 44). No licence is the key deficiency in differentiating journalists from other occupations. Second, journalists have less interest in joining professional organisations (Weaver & Wilhoit, in Weaver & Wilhoit eds., 1986: 127-8). Third, journalism is not based on any systematic theory. A considerable number of theories from other subjects are borrowed to fill the textbooks. The statistics of seven journalism and communication textbooks reveal that 249 theories are entitled as communication theories, with only 7 per cent mentioned in three or more textbooks and 195 out of the 249 theories only mentioned in one textbook (Anderson, 1996, cited in Wu, 2009a: 6). This situation indicates that there is no consensus on the core theories of journalism and communication. Additionally, journalism as a subject is still struggling to legitimise itself along with law and medicine in the college stance (Tumber and Prentoulis, in de Burgh ed., 2005). In some outstanding universities, journalism is seen as sub knowledge either affiliated to humanities school or to sociology school. Additionally, a degree in journalism is often optional (Hallin, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000: 220). In fact, only 36 per cent of American journalists held a journalism degree; and the proportion in Britain is only 4 per cent (Weaver, in de Burgh ed., 2005: 47-8). Moreover, a journalism degree has no added value to career routes (Elliott, in Curran *et al.* eds.,1977) and an emphasis on practical skills brings journalism closer to a craft than a profession (Tumber & Prentoulis, in de Burgh ed., 2005: 58).

This is the case in Britain, where there exist no accepted career routes, entry requirements, and self-policing systems (Marr, 2004). In the United States, however, journalism as a profession has 'mostly succeeded' (ibid.: 3). American journalism graduates are moulded by standards and in return are achieving social status (ibid.). From its origin, British journalism has been closer to a trade than to a profession. In the 17th and 18th centuries, British journalism was performed by young people coming from lower classes with limited education. They normally obtained practical skills through a long period of apprenticeship with low payment. Since Victorian times, the status of journalism began to rise due to wider social reforms, such as the abolition of stamp duty and the emergence of mass democracy, and particularly an alliance with politics. At the beginning of the 20th century, the National Union of Journalists was set up, which was first and foremost a trade union rather than a professional organisation, focusing on labour issues (Marr, 2004; Splichal & Sparks, 1994). Around the 1950s, the national journalists training body was formed. Journalism was becoming a 'semi-profession' (Marr, 2004: 35). In the present day, British journalists are rather cynical and sceptical about their jobs. Interestingly, journalists call themselves 'hacks' (Marr, 2004). 'Hack' is a shortened word for hackney, which originally referred to an easy-riding horse. Applied to journalism, it deprecates journalists' work as short-written and low-quality merely for payment. Even elite journalists such as Andrew Marr, working for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), would call his own job a trade rather than a profession.

The majority of journalists, however, still strive for the professional title. An important ideological basis supporting journalism's self-assertion as a profession is that journalism holds a special place in democracy. Journalism provides vital and neutral information to serve the public interest, which is crucial to maintaining a healthy democracy (Schudson, 2008). This argument, however, encounters a number of discrepancies in practice. First, contemporary media organisations, which are often privately owned, are highly commercialised, emphasising profit rather than serving the public interest (McNair, 2009; Hallin, in Curran & Gurevitch eds., 2000). Second, existing scholarship generally indicates that news can never be neutral (Taylor & Willis, 1999). Raw materials are first bureaucratically set for journalists to gather. Then journalists' subjective views, news organisations' commercial interests, and other social forces all colour the news (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978a, 1978b; Tuchman, 1972; White, 1950). In fact, the notion of objectivity grants more to journalists than to the general public. Journalists employ a number of skills and procedures, such as presenting both sides of the story in structuring facts, and using 'quotation marks' to indicate their objective standpoint. The stories, however, are predominantly provided by the officials, and both sides of the stories are 'within the legitimated opposition of political parties or branches of government' (Tuchman, 1978b: 110). Thus, objectivity becomes a 'strategic ritual' (Tuchman, 1972: 660), which functions as a bulwark for journalists to counter back critics (Tuchman, 1978a; 1978b; 1972). The following part explores what professionalism means for journalists and how it is used.

Professionalism as a control mechanism

Journalistic professionalism is actually 'a double-edged sword' (Soloski, 1989: 218). On the one hand, professionalism can be interpreted as cultural capital (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003). News judgement is a key constituent of this capital, which differentiates newsmen as professionals from ordinary people as laymen. Thus, the selection of materials can be labelled as selecting suitable news for the public good. Not only do professions presume to tell the rest of their society what is good and right for it, but they can also set the very terms of thinking about problems that fall in their domain (Dingwall, in Dingwall and Lewis eds., 1983: 5). Scholars have found that professionalism also empowers journalists to thwart interventions from management on the claim that journalism as a profession must be independent. News organisations could also employ the same claim to counter back interventions from different social forces.

On the other hand, professionalism provides an efficient framework to control journalists. Soloski pointed out two ways of control through professionalism: first, it sets standards and norms of behaviour, and second, it determines a professional reward system (1989: 212). The first way can be achieved through professional training or education. Additionally, a shared cognitive base also facilitates the control. For instance, objectivity is widely accepted as the most important professional norm, which requires journalists to hold back their own thoughts and follow standardised writing styles, such as the inverted pyramid structure and using direct quotes. Thus, journalists' personalities and creativities are tuned according to the shared professional norms. Challenges and any radical changes to this shared value system are often considered as deviant from professionalism. Writing styles, however, as well as meeting deadlines are more organisational needs than professional requirements (Elliott, in Curran *et al*. eds., 1977). As mentioned previously, objectivity may protect news organisations from legal charges. Moreover, the monopolistic status of news organisations will not be threatened as long as they claim they are reporting objectively.

The second means of control is to prescribe a professional ladder for journalists. To get promoted, journalists must abide by individual organisational policies. Conforming to companies' policies is simulated as the requirement of professionalism (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003). Additionally, managers and superiors are normally regarded as more professional than subordinates, as are their work judgements. Thus, disobedience to managers and superiors can be translated as unprofessional or making one unfit for the job. Therefore, bureaucratic control is implemented by the virtue of professionalism (ibid.). Furthermore, Soloski (1989) reported an interesting finding from participant observations in the newsroom. Individual news organisations had policies regarding their own taboo topics. Journalists generally accepted such policies as part of their professional tasks and found them not to undermine their ability to inform citizens. In light of this, the wider social control laid upon news organisations is internalised into organisational control and further becomes a professional requirement taken for granted by journalists. Additionally, to achieve professional fame and justify their professional status, journalists continuously adjust themselves to the individual working environment. Therefore, the self-control mechanism is provoked unconsciously yet actively by journalists themselves. 'The discipline of selves has become the self-discipline, where the key controls are internalized and proactive rather than external and reactive' (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003: 556). This is very much illustrative of Chinese journalism which is discussed later. The following part looks at scholarship regarding Chinese journalistic professionalism.

Chinese journalistic professionalism

American and British scholars are rather critical of journalistic professionalism, whereas Chinese scholars regard it emancipatory for Chinese journalism (Wu, 2009a; Lu, 2003; Pan & Chan, 2003; Lu & Pan, 2002). This existing scholarship is highly concentrated on one theme: the logic of professionalism versus the logic of party propaganda.

Professionalism is emancipatory in that it stands as a direct competitor to party journalism (Pan & Chan, 2003), the latter of which stresses that the media are the mouthpiece of the ruling party. Professionalism advocates objective and detached reporting, aimed at delivering impartial information, whereas party journalism emphasises an intervening way of reporting in order to spread propaganda and mobilise people (ibid.). Thus, idealistically, professionalism helps to wipe propaganda information away from news reporting. In reality, however, 'the professional logic is not strong enough to oppose the political logic'

(Lin, 2010a: 421). This invokes the question why is professionalism still gaining popularity among Chinese journalists and for what it is used.

Based on survey data, Lin (ibid.) finds a double paradox when Chinese journalists employ professionalism. First, when encountering conflicts involving political, legal, or economic concerns, Chinese journalists embrace professionalism. They do not actively engage in action, even though they possess liberal attitudes. Second, when confronted with moral or cultural issues, Chinese journalists tend to discard professionalism. For instance, a quarter of respondents in the survey admitted being involved in paid journalism, which is obviously against ethical standards. The research has discovered interesting phenomena for further exploration. In this short journal article, Lin did not provide contextual explanations, such as what the conflicts are with political or cultural concerns. Moreover, the reason behind these paradoxes is obscure. This research intends to fill in the gaps.

The above research takes the connotation of Anglo-Saxon journalistic professionalism to examine journalism in the Chinese setting. The problem is that professionalism denotes different things in the two settings. In a brilliant study of Chinese journalistic professionalism, Lu and Pan (2002) find that the tenets of professionalism are deliberately handpicked to constitute its Chinese version. Professionalism was imported into mainland China in the early 1980s. Unlike their American and British counterparts who promoted the concept themselves, Chinese journalists learned it from university classrooms. From then on, objectivity and impartiality began to be adopted by journalists as the new way of news reporting (Zhao, 1998). Compared with professionalism originated in Anglo-Saxon settings, the Chinese version is fragmented. Operational skills, such as the inverted pyramid writing style and the use of quotation marks, are adopted, whereas the essence of serving the public interest is discarded. The main reason is obviously related to coercion from the party-state, for the party still manipulates the media in its own favour. Furthermore, a number of scholars emphasise that the Chinese version of professionalism is a mixture of Chinese traditional culture and journalistic skills (Lin, 2010b; Rui, 2010; Wu, 2009a; Lu, 2004; Lu & Pan, 2002). Chinese journalists generally regard themselves as traditional intellectuals, or the literati, who prioritise the nation's interests over individual's rights (Lin, 2010b; Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005). Thus, when confronted with political orders, cultural elements work as a 'convenient expedience' (Lin, 2010b: 181) to resolve the paradox between professionalism and party journalism through translating political orders into national interest issues. This is insightful research but it lacks in-depth description. What cultural elements are evoked, to what extent does culture play a role, and how do journalists adjust themselves in this paradox all demand further investigation. This research directly addresses these key questions in Chapters 4 and 5.

The tenets of professionalism argue that journalists should be independent from any social power. The media should serve as the 'public sphere' (Habermas, 1962) or the 'free market of ideas' (Schudson, 1981). The ideal role of the media is not the focus of this research. These ideals, however, are what media scholars expect. In reality journalists heavily rely on officials as news sources (Gans, 1979; Sigal, 1973). In the Chinese context, media control further exacerbates the reliance of journalists on official sources. Yet, new communication technology, such as social media, seems to have weakened this reliance and changed journalistic culture (Xiao, in Shirk ed., 2011; McNair, 2006). In order to explore the changes, a theoretical perspective of media-source relations is needed. The next part of this chapter discusses media-source relations.

1.4 Media-source relations

The relationship between the media and sources is 'a key issue' in the study of media sociology (Schlesinger, in Ferguson ed., 1989: 61). Gans has argued that studying the source 'is the best way, or perhaps the only one, to connect the study of journalism to the larger society'.[6] The source, in narrow terms, refers to information providers. Gans (1979) regards sources as actors whom journalists observe or interview, including interviewees and those supplying background information or suggestions. The current focus of media-source relations emphasises the reliance on officials as sources (Hall *et al.*, 1978; Sigal, 1973). Such a reliance may have consequences on the news content transmitted to audiences. This section reviews three pieces of research which represent three distinctive views in this research area.

Journalists and sources undergo mutual selection in everyday practices. Journalists receive raw materials provided by various agents who are potential sources. According to certain criteria, such as news values and organisational policies, journalists select and edit some materials into news and then the agents who provided them can become news sources. The agents also select journalists to get their materials publicised. Agents may prefer journalists

[6] The quote was originally a personal correspondence between Schlesinger P. and Gans H. (22 July 1988), obtained from Schlesinger, P. & Tumber, H. (1994) *Reporting Crime: the Media Politics of Criminal Justice*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

who work for prestigious media organisations. They may also select journalists with whom have personal ties for personal concerns.

Gans (1979) provided a systematic and thorough study on media-source relations in which he identified two basic aspects constituting the relations. On the one hand, to become potential sources, information providers must meet four conditions: incentives, power, the ability to supply suitable information, and geographic and social proximity. To be specific, information providers must have incentives to become sources. Power, which is both an outcome and an ingredient of the hierarchies in society, in general terms, rests with one's social status. Power largely affects whether one can get access to journalists. For example, the president has instantaneous access to all news media, whereas the powerless must resort to civil disturbances to obtain it (Gans, 1979: 120-121). In addition, potential sources that could provide newsworthy and least-checking information have better chances of becoming sources. Furthermore, they must be socially and geographically close to journalists. Journalists, on the other hand, evaluate sources' suitability based on their past suitability, productivity, reliability, trustworthiness, authoritativeness, and articulateness. Public officials are assumed to be reliable, authoritative and can provide official information on a regular basis. Moreover, official information normally requires the least checking which appeals to journalists. Thus, it is availability and suitability that makes public officials the most frequent and regular sources. Notably, mutual selection between journalists and sources is normally asymmetrical in that more often sources lead journalists, especially when sources have certain power. Furthermore, sources, according to Gans (1979), provide information as members or representatives of organised and unorganised interest groups as well as larger sectors of a nation and society. It is, therefore, essential to investigate for whom sources act and speak.

Gans has pointed out the asymmetrical relationship between the media and their sources. Hall *et al.* (1978) take one step further suggesting a structured view of media-source relations. Hall *et al*. (1978) suggest that the structure of sources is hierarchical. Those in powerful and privileged institutional positions are believed to have more accurate and specialised information so their views are supposed to be more credible and convincing. This is exactly the case in what Becker has called the 'hierarchy of credibility' (1967: 243). They are regarded as 'accredited sources' on whom the media rely. Under the professional demands of being objective and the constant pressure to meet deadlines, journalists normally resort to 'accredited sources', which facilitates preferential access to the media for those in power. Therefore, they can establish an initial definition of controversial topics to the public. The result of this structured preference in giving opinions on the media is that those in power become the ‘primary definers’ of topics (Hall *et al.*, 1978: 58). The media, therefore, in a structured relationship with sources, plays a secondary role in constructing reality by reproducing the definitions of the powerful. Therefore, the ideas of the ruling class become the ruling ideas. In light of this, the media implements their ideological function by reinforcing the existing power structure in society’s institutional order (Hall *et al.*, 1978: 58-59).

The research of Hall *et al.* is insightful, yet the boundaries of primary definers are still obscure (Schlesinger, in Ferguson ed., 1989: 66). Hall *et al*. refer to MPs and ministers as primary definers. Yet access to media among MPs and ministers is unequal as some may enjoy privileged access over others (ibid.). Thus, to draw a definitive boundary around primary definers is not an easy task. Additionally, Hall *et al*. failed to draw attention to the disputes among the privileged themselves (ibid*.*). The privileged may have unequal access to the media. Even if they are equally powerful, they may hold different opinions on certain issues. Thus, who has the final word remains a problem. Hall *et al.* tend to view them as a unified body. Furthermore, there are strong grounds to doubt whether the media always hold a subordinate position. In an objection, Schlesinger argues that ‘the media may take the initiative in the definitional process by *challenging* the so-called primary definers and forcing them to respond as in investigative journalism’ (Schlesinger, in Ferguson ed., 1989: 67, original emphasis). In a refined model, Schlesinger contends that sources are ‘conceived as occupying fields in which *competition for access* to the media takes place, but in which material and symbolic advantages are unequally distributed’ (Schlesinger, in Ferguson ed., 1989: 77, original emphasis). As for Schlesinger, the powerful cannot secure the defining primacy in virtue of their positions only. Rather, they can achieve this primacy in this imperfectly competitive field by virtue of successful strategies. By designating an imperfectly competitive field, Schlesinger claims that the material capital, symbolic resources, and other resources are unequally distributed in this contested field. However, those who are preferentially given these resources still have to employ strategic actions to achieve dominance. Thus, the ‘primary definition becomes an achievement rather than a wholly structurally predetermined outcome’ (Schlesinger, in Ferguson ed., 1989: 79). Schlesinger further provides an ideal type of source strategy involving four minimal conditions: a well-defined message, optimal media outlets to place the message, timing, and anticipated opposition. Besides, resources are crucial in assessing source strategies, which includes the financial base, cultural capital, and institutional power (ibid.). Schlesinger creatively presents a dynamic yet structured field within which potential sources compete for access to the media.

All of the above studies, however, were developed in the West, or more specifically in the Anglo-Saxon context. In mainland China, however, the media are under overt censorship and propaganda imperatives. The party-state regularly issues directives to the media and censors media content. In this sense, sources can hardly operate in a contested field. Actually, Schlesinger (in Ferguson ed., 1989) particularly suggests further investigation on the impact of propaganda and censorship in media-source relations. Mainland Chinese journalism thus provides a telling case to be explored. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introductory part, it is suggested that new communication technology has democratised access to the media. A number of Chinese social media studies also argue that the internet has allowed grassroots voices to be heard, which had been precluded from the traditional media (Qian & Bandurski, in Shirk ed., 2011; Xiao, in Shirk ed., 2011). Thus, this issue of whether new changes in the media sector have brought forth new media-source relations is discussed specifically in Chapter 6.

Propaganda has always been a key word in Chinese journalism. The following section now reviews previous research that has focused on the relationship between journalism and propaganda.

1.5 Propaganda

Propaganda in its broad sense pervades all aspects of public life and plays an increasingly central role in modern society (Ellul, 1965). This section first discusses the changes of its connotation through history, which is closely associated with historical and ideological backgrounds. The term was born with a sacred meaning in religion (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, 2012). Nowadays, it often has an unfavourable meaning in the West, especially in Britain and America, which contrasts with that of in the East, such as China and the former Soviet Union. An examination of its evolution helps to unpack the historical and ideological elements, which have coloured the meaning of propaganda. The key scholarship regarding propaganda is then reviewed. Propaganda possesses an essential place in approaching Chinese journalism, but it lacks a symmetrical place in the existing scholarship. The final part reports on research of this kind. The following section explores the evolution of propaganda.

The evolution of propaganda

In the present day, propaganda is very much a value-laden word, but it was originally used as a sacred word with 'highly respectful connotation' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, 2012). In 1622, Gregory XV established a formal organisation, the sacred congregation for the propagation of the faith (*the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*[7]) to spread Catholic doctrines to non-Christian lands and to oppose Reformation. Thus, the word was associated 'with doctrines based on faith rather than on reason' (Lambert, cited in Fellows, 1959: 182). Additionally, the word carried unfavourable shades in Protestant countries that it did not have in Catholic countries (O'Donnell & Jowett, in Smith ed., 1989), which indicates that its connotation is entangled with the social context of where it is used.

During World War I (WWI), propaganda was developed into an organised practice conducted by the state. A number of chief participating countries established governmental organisations specifically in charge of propagating war information. For instance, Britain established the Propaganda Policy Committee. Notably, deceit and lies were involved in information circulated to the public by such organisations (ibid.). Just after WWI, a considerable amount of material was published exposing the purposeful exaggeration, falsehood, and fabrication involved in wartime propaganda. A good case in point is George Creel's *How We Advertised America*. The author, the former head of the Committee on Public Information of America, 'proudly hastened to make his exploits public' (Jowett, 1987), only to find that he had sparked great concern or even resentment. The general public realised propaganda could pose great threats to democracy if left unchecked.

In the interwar period, the connotation of propaganda forked in two polar directions: a highly negative meaning in the West and a holy meaning in the East. In 1937, the Institute of Propaganda Analysis (IPA) was set up in America to 'help the educator and the layman detect propaganda so that he will be more intelligent in choosing the variety of propaganda he will follow and in reaching his own decisions' (Cantril, 1938: 221). By that time, propaganda was regarded as a set of techniques that could be countered. With the rise of the Leninist party, propaganda gained an entirely new connotation.

[7] The formal title of the organisation is '*sacra Congregatio christiano nomini propagando*', see 'Propaganda', *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* [Online]. Available at: http://original.search.eb.com/eb/article-9109443#cite (Accessed: 7 December 2012). 'Propaganda, Sacred Congregation of', *Catholic Encyclopaedia Online* [Online]. Available at: http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=9668 (Accessed: 8 December 2012).

The Leninist party in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) carried propaganda to its very limit. Four features characterised Soviet propaganda at that time. First, propaganda evolved from merely focusing on changing people's minds to become more concerned with mobilising people into action. Second, propaganda began to be associated with ideology in a fundamental way (Bytwerk, in Smith ed., 1989) and became indispensable to legitimate the sole-party regime. The Leninist party laid its legitimacy not on mass voting but on mass acceptance of Marxist-Leninist doctrines and communist ideology. Propaganda had been introduced as an essential tool to indoctrinate people and spread communist ideology. Third, both the scale and the penetration of Leninist propaganda into society climbed to a higher level compared with the wartime propaganda. Everything had been propagandised, including transportation vehicles, statues, memorial days, films, and books, all of which became propaganda tools (Schudson, 1989). Most importantly, the propaganda organisation was systematically built into the party's bureaucracy. Propaganda departments were established firstly at the central level in the early 1920s and then set up at each party level (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, 2012). Drawing from the above discussion, the essence of propaganda development in the Soviet context is that it became the cardinal state apparatus after which mainland China was patterned.

Coinciding with the Leninist-Stalinist period, the Nazi was another prominent host of total propaganda (details given later), which to a predominant extent aggravated hostility of the public towards propaganda. After World War II (WWII), with the booming in advertising and the public relations industry, propaganda began to be seen as an inevitable phenomenon and in a less unfavourable light. In the present day, China and America are two prominent hosts of contemporary propaganda, which Ellul (1965) called 'sociological propaganda' meaning entire life style propaganda. The propaganda information of this type is systematically embedded in cultural and historical settings and is closely associated with social climate. The content of such information is usually abstract and vague yet inspiring. The public may accept such information unconsciously. The 'American Dream' is a good case in point. The 'American Dream' argues that anyone can achieve prosperity and success through hard work. In light of this, one's hardships in life are seen as a personal problem, ignoring the social and systematic problems such as the unequal access to resources (more discussion on this is presented later). Figure 4 summarises the main changes that the word propaganda has undergone:

Figure 4 The evolution of propaganda

Period	Prominent user	Features	General perception
17th century	Catholic church	Spread doctrines	Sacred meaning in Catholic countries, less favourable in Protestant countries
The WWI and interwar period	Extensively employed by all war participants	Organised activity conducted by governments	Negative connotation
	Leninist party in the USSR; Nazi Germany	Addressing to all members of society; bureaucratically set up as state apparatus	Respectful meaning
The WWII	Nazi Germany, Leninist-Stalinist party in the USSR, America, Britain	Total propaganda conducted in a scientific manner	Strong negative connotation
Post-war	Advertisements, public relations	Pervasive usage	Less unfavourable
Contemporary usage	China, America	Sociological propaganda, life-style propaganda easily inducing unconscious acceptance	Vague, less certain

From what has been discussed above, propaganda was associated with the organisation that spread doctrines. Later on, it came to describe the doctrine itself (Jowett, 1987). At the beginning of the 20th century, propaganda was used to mean the techniques used to change people's minds (ibid.). Additionally, the evaluating flavour of propaganda is closely linked to the social context, in which it is applied. The following section reviews key propaganda research.

Propaganda research

A groundbreaking work on propaganda was conducted by Lasswell. In his dissertation, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* in 1927 (reprinted in 1938), he examined the definition of propaganda, the categorisation of propaganda content, propaganda techniques, and its effects. This was the first systematic and scientific research on the topic in which he pointed out the fundamental mechanism of propaganda: the manipulation of symbols. He defined propaganda as techniques managing the 'collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols' (1927: 9; 1927: 627). Interestingly, he claimed that propaganda facilitates 'social solidarity' (Lasswell, 1927: 221). Additionally, he linked propaganda with the modern world by arguing that power in the modern society is subdivided and diffused, and can therefore be won more by illusion than by coercion (Lasswell, 1927: 222). These are insightful ideas, which unfortunately lack elaboration, since Lasswell only mentioned them in the final part of his dissertation in few words. Moreover, his work centres on war propaganda, which may not be applicable to other types of propaganda. The contribution of Lasswell is that he discarded the general antagonistic view towards propaganda at that time and conducted his research in an unbiased tone. Lasswell's work provoked interest in this area. Propaganda research reached a climax when the Institute of Propaganda Analysis was founded in 1937 (*cf*. the evolution of propaganda). Propaganda research at that time, however, mainly employed a humanistic method, which was charged with lacking systematic and serious theoretical implications (Jowett, 1987; Sproule, 1987). Furthermore, the negative connotation of the word further damaged its academic legitimacy (Sproule, 1987). Therefore, since the end of 1930s, propaganda research gave way to the new emerging statistical communication research (ibid.).

More than three decades later, the work of Ellul (1965) provides a rather radical and subversive argument regarding propaganda in modern technological society. He linked propaganda with modernism as well as the structure of modern society. Among all his insightful findings, three are more prominent. First and foremost, Ellul claimed that propaganda and modern technological society are interdependent echoing the ideas of Lasswell but in more detail. 'Only in the technological society can there be anything of the type and order of magnitude of modern propaganda, which is with us forever; and only with the all-pervading effects that flow from propaganda can the technological society hold itself together and further expand' (Kellen, 1965: v, translator of Ellul's work). That is, on the one hand, modern technological society provides handy tools for propaganda, such as the media, to reach every household in the society. On the other hand, propaganda integrates all the people in the society both mentally and materially (more details given later).

Second and probably the most powerful argument of Ellul is that propaganda is a 'necessity' of modern society (Ellul, 1965: 118). This has twofold meanings. On the one hand, the state needs propaganda. In a democracy, in theory, the state must base its public decisions on the will of the public. In reality, however, the state cannot simply follow the public opinion, in that the opinion may be vague or against national interests. Thus, the state needs propaganda to tune public opinion to its ruling demands. This idea echoes what Lasswell (1927) had briefly claimed: when the use of force was no longer the instrument of rule, propaganda stood out as a substitute. On the other hand, propaganda is also in need of propagandees. He subverts the general belief that modern man is a victim of propaganda. Instead, the individual 'not merely lends himself to propaganda, but even derives satisfaction from it' (Ellul, 1965: 138). In modern technological society, the individual is absorbed in a crowd in which he is lonely enclosed. Urbanisation further makes individuals feel even more weak and diminished. Moreover, man is deeply dependent on public facilities, such as public transportation and public servants. Thus, propaganda ‘springs from the modern man’s actual living condition’ which functions as ‘the true remedy for loneliness’ (Ellul, 1965: 144-160). Furthermore, the inability to process complicated, voluminous and intensive modern information also creates the need for propaganda as guidance. Besides, to work successfully, propaganda must address individuals ‘enclosed in the mass and as participants in that mass’ (Ellul, 1965: 6). The reason for this is that individuals share common beliefs and feelings within the crowd. If propaganda succeeded in reinforcing his prejudices and stereotypes with other members in the crowd, he feels justified. Through propaganda, the uncertainty of life is reduced, and the individual feels himself needed and engaged in political activity.

Third, Ellul insightfully pointed out that the key characteristic of modern propaganda is that it is total propaganda. Drawing on the term ‘total war’, total propaganda is not aimed at the matter in hand, or short-term mobilisation, but is intended for long-term integration of all members of society. Furthermore, total propaganda employs all types of media and addresses all social aspects, including politics, economics, culture, and education. Moreover, propaganda pervades all aspects of people’s social life and invades every moment of an individual’s life. Furthermore, Ellul provided a typology of propaganda, in which he listed four pairs of propaganda forms. This research focuses on one of them, ‘sociological propaganda’ (Ellul, 1965: 62), which is very much relevant to the situation in mainland China. Sociological propaganda is entire life style propaganda which ‘unconsciously moulds individuals and makes them conform to society’ (ibid.). This form of propaganda is the most vast, the least certain and normally vague. No deliberate propaganda actions are needed; instead, sociological propaganda is ‘permeated through social climate, unconscious habits, and customs’ (Ellul, 1965: 65). For instance, U.S. citizens are originally from many different parts of the world; thus, it employs a way of life as its ‘basis of unification and as instrument of propaganda’ (Ellul, 1965: 67). In addition, the uniformity also plays an economic role by determining ‘the extent of the American market’ (Ellul, 1965: 68). ‘Mass production requires mass consumption, which is based on widespread identical views regarding what the necessities of life are’ (ibid.).

Ellul’s work is criticised for being radical and lacking scientific methods. Besides, in his view, propaganda is so ‘all-encompassing that everything becomes propaganda’ (Bytwerk, in Smith ed., 1989: 37). Furthermore, a key deficiency of his work is that he deterministically argued that all propagandees are keenly eager for propaganda. A number of audience studies have suggested that communication is an interactive process in which the receivers may create ‘dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings’ (O’Shaughnessy, 2004: 26; Hall, 1973). The three types of reading stance may not simply be applied to the readings of propaganda information. Propagandees may also develop oppositional reading from the propaganda information. Research suggests that audiences in the former Soviet Union and Mainland China are especially apt at reading between the lines (Shirk, in Shirk ed., 2011; Ma, in Curran & Park eds., 1999). Ellul’s work, however, is helpful in guiding Chinese propaganda research. He argued that mainland China and the United States are two striking hosts of sociological propaganda. Accordingly, this research applies his ideas to explore Chinese propaganda in Chapter 4.

The work of Ellul has been more or less neglected in academia, possibly because he argued that intellectuals are the most vulnerable to propaganda. Later on, in 1988, Herman and Chomsky elaborated the propaganda model, which provoked worldwide debates (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). From a political economy view, they traced the routes ‘by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalise dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public’ (ibid.: 2). They argued that the American media systematically fulfil a propaganda role, which is far from how the free media are generally perceived. The ‘essential ingredients’ of the propaganda model are the five filters of news (ibid., original emphasis):

- The size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms
- Advertising as the primary income source of the mass media
- The reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and ‘experts’ funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power
- ‘Flake’ as a means of disciplining the media
- ‘Anticommunism’ as a national religion and control mechanism

In light of this, the U.S. media can be seen as analogous to totalitarian media in which conformity is secured (Schlesinger, 1989a). This work had received harsh criticism and has even been labelled as ‘conspiracy’ (Herman & Chomsky, 1988: xii). One of the key critics comes from its ‘deterministic’ character (Schlesinger, 1989a: 297). The model is held to have predictive ability by which news is censored by the five filters. The fifth filter, anticommunism, however, is backstage and is being replaced by the War on Terror (Sparks, 2007). Furthermore, the propaganda model is based on the performance of the American media; whether or not it can be applied to other social settings remains questionable (Sparks, 2007; Schlesinger, 1989a). It may be too radical to view the media in democratic society as merely a propaganda model. In mainland China, however, the media as a propaganda model is very much alive. This research explores news filters in Chinese journalism in Chapters 2 and 4. The next section of this chapter now reviews some key research into Chinese propaganda.

Research on Chinese propaganda

Propaganda is the most prominent feature of the Chinese media system, although it remains an understudied area in Chinese journalism research. This is partly because it is a highly sensitive topic for mainland Chinese scholars and because Western scholars may have difficulties accessing such information (more discussion on this in the following section). Here, three key studies in this area are briefly reviewed.

In the 1990s, just after the Tiananmen Square crackdown, the party-state launched its second wave of reform to rebuild its legitimacy (more details in Chapter 2) (Zhao, 2008). The policy change had great influence in the media sector. A number of scholars had explored whether propaganda remained as a sole dimension in approaching the media after the 1970s (Lynch, 1999; Chang *et al*., 1993). Among such works, Lynch's work is one of the most thorough studies regarding the changes in propaganda and thought control in mainland China. Based on case studies and interviews, he argued that administrative fragmentation, property-rights reform, and new communication technologies, such as satellite TV and the internet, largely eroded the party-state's ability to control the media and thought work. For instance, the media may take the risk to publish sensitive content to attract a larger audience in order to gain more advertising revenue. Lynch optimistically implied that the party-state began to lose its media control and no longer heavily relied on thought work or propaganda to control society. Lynch's work noticed these new changes. However, the status quo indicates that he overrated the role of economic reform. The authorities still heavily use the methods of thought control and propaganda.

Work by Zhao (1998) arrived at the similar conclusion that media commercialisation added a new dimension to the Chinese media. Due to commercialisation, the Chinese media had gone through a fundamental change. Most of the media are economically independent from the party. Advertising and market forces began to play an increasingly important role in the media sector. Nonetheless, media control has never been loosened. Thus, the media are caught between two masters: the political, that is the party-state, and the commercial, that is the audiences. In light of this, Zhao argued for a propagandist/commercial model to frame the Chinese media. Zhao provided a succinct observation regarding the intertwining condition of the Chinese media between party control and market imperatives. Her work is probably the most cited study regarding Chinese media in Western academia. Yet her arguments are mainly based on trade journal articles, which lack first-hand or frontline information from journalistic practitioners. Besides, her model fails to take account of cultural factors, which this research intends to highlight. Furthermore, this model overlooks the contradictions between propaganda and commercial forces. This dichotomous model cannot explain the priority issue. That is, when confronting each other, which side will have the final word, propaganda or commercial interest? This remains an open question in Zhao's dichotomous model. Zhao later extends her thinking in examining media conglomeration, which is discussed in the next section.

It is widely acknowledged that the Central Propaganda Department oversees all media in mainland China. Yet this institution is naturally clandestine, so the area lacked any systematic study (Hassid, 2008). Based on internal documents and reports, Brady (2008) presents an extraordinarily comprehensive study of the whole propaganda system in mainland China. She provided a thorough description of the structure, the function, the working mechanisms, and the staffing issues of the central propaganda department as well as the local ones. The most exciting finding lies in her claim that contemporary Chinese propaganda is modernising to meet new needs. Particularly, 'China's propaganda system has deliberately absorbed the methodology of political public relations and other modern methods of mass persuasion commonly utilised in Western democratic societies, adapting them to Chinese conditions and needs' (Brady, 2008: 3). A good case in point is that the Central Propaganda Department changed its name into the Central Publicity Department to reduce its negative image (Brady, 2008: 73). Additionally, governmental officials have been given lectures on 'how to improve their public images' (Brady, 2008: 86). The model of Blair government's spin-doctor was even introduced into China as an information officer (*daoxiang zhuanjia*). Furthermore, Brady identified a number of new tactics systematically employed by propaganda departments to control the media after the Tiananmen Square crackdown, including regular briefings with media editors, monitoring groups issuing both prizes and punishment, a new approach to funding politically favourable media, and so forth (Brady, 2008: 49). Brady's study was the first book-length research into the propaganda system in China, which provided extensive accounts regarding the bureaucracies and the working mechanisms of the system. The researcher claims that China is clearly an alive ‘propaganda state’ (Kenez, 1992, cited in Brady, 2008: 1) in that propaganda is the very lifeblood to legitimate the sole-party regime.

The above three studies all have illuminating points in guiding this research. However, they all left journalistic practitioners unquestioned, leaving a gap for this research to fill. The following section discusses the main themes regarding Chinese journalistic culture in journalism research.

1.6 The main themes regarding Chinese journalistic culture

There exists a profound gap regarding Chinese journalism research between mainland Chinese scholars and those from Western countries. The two kinds of research are different in their research agenda, orientation, and methodology. A predominant number of the mainland Chinese studies are administrative research in the sense that they are funded by governmental bodies or even propaganda departments and taken as references for policy-making. Questionnaires are commonly used in such studies. The conclusions are descriptive words rather than analytical accounts (Wu, 2009b). Additionally, scholars are rather cautious in arriving at any findings that may be offensive to the authorities. Interestingly, there is clear division in terms of the research perspective between studies of Chinese issues and studies of Western issues. In approaching the Western issues, Chinese scholars adopt cultural imperialism or a political economy view to criticise the inequalities in the world communication system (Wu, in Zhang & Huang eds., 2002). It is reported that a research project with 0.6 million Yuan funding (approximately £60,000) invited researchers to explore the fake nature of Western press freedom (*xifang xinwen ziyou de xuwei benzhi yanjiu*).[8]

This research largely relies on Western scholarship, especially British and American media theories, as the theoretical basis for analysing Chinese journalism. It is worth pointing out that such a reliance does not mean to set Western journalistic norms as ideals for journalists in other countries to follow. Actually, ‘North America and Western Europe are the marginal cases globally, the leading exceptions to how the media work in much of the world’ (McCargo, in Hallin & Mancini eds., 2012: 207). Additionally, such a reliance may

[8] ‘2013 National Key Research Projects Call for Applying’, *National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science* [Online]. Available at: http://www.npopss-cn.gov.cn/n/2013/0130/c220880-20371686.html (Accessed: 10 September 2013).

promote doubt as to whether Western theories are relevant or applicable to the examination of Chinese journalism. This issue is far beyond the scope of this research, yet it is necessary to explain the choice of this research strategy to some degree.

First, as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, one of the objectives of this research is to probe journalistic norms under tight media control and to investigate the factors inducing self-censorship. The existing scholarship on this issue is essentially conducted outside of mainland China. Interestingly, such research is largely done by Chinese nationals educated in Western countries. As discussed above, Zhao, Yuezhi is a good case in point. Second, Western media theories are not necessarily only applicable to Western countries. A number of theories developed in the West also take Chinese experiences into account. For example, as discussed previously, Ellul's analysis on propaganda included Chinese propaganda practices in the Mao era (Ellul, 1965), and his analysis is referred to frequently in this research. Furthermore, as Zhao has pointed out, it is important to acknowledge Western influences and the American hegemonic power on media development in non-Western countries (Zhao, in Hallin & Mancini eds., 2012). Actually, modern media systems in many non-Western countries, including the Chinese media, were 'a Western imposition to begin with – colonial and missionary agents set up the first modern newspapers in colonized or semi-colonized port cities' (ibid.: 146) (more details on this in Chapter 2). Moreover, objectivity, detachment and other tenets of professionalism developed and promoted in Anglo-Saxon journalism have gained currency in Chinese journalism since the 1980s. Although there is far greater gap between ideals and practices, Chinese journalistic practitioners have paid considerable lip service to professionalism (Lu & Pan, 2002).

The acknowledgement of Western influences, however, does not mean a total and uncritical acceptance of Western media theories, as it has been a trend in media studies to be aware of the limitations of Western theories (Waisbord, in Lee ed., 2014). To a larger extent, journalism is a kind of cultural production, which is coloured by geographically-bound and historically-shaped cultural elements. Thus, an emphasis on Chinese culture may serve as a remedy to borrowing Western theories in order to analyse the Chinese media. The following section discusses the existing scholarship regarding Chinese journalism, which centres on three main themes: media control, news reform, and journalistic corruption. At the end of this section, this research briefly explores the scholarship investigating Chinese journalism principally from a cultural perspective and provides a further synopsis of the essence of Chinese culture.

Media control

Aside from the propaganda research discussed previously, a number of studies explore the concomitant of propaganda: censorship. Link (2002) provided a short but brilliant piece of work arguing that Chinese media control has relied primarily on inducing self-censorship. Furthermore, it is the use of vagueness which makes self-censorship pervasive. There exists no explicitly stated banned list or written rules explaining what is unacceptable. Link (2002) points out the following four advantages of such vagueness[9]:

- A vague prohibition frightens more people
- A vague accusation pressures an individual to curtail a wider range of activity
- A vague accusation is useful in maximising what can be learned during forced confessions
- A vague accusation allows arbitrary targeting

Based on the succinct findings of Link, Hassid further expanded these 'through the theoretical lens of organization theory' (2008: 421). Hassid attributes self-censorship to uncertainty. No media law, no explicit control rules, and no formal documents listing banned topics all contribute to pervasive self-censorship. Moreover, uncertainty also creates a pro-self-censorship environment in the newsroom. Veterans who deal skilfully with political risks and politically reliable media workers may receive enhanced power and privileges. It is also suggested that uncertainty is a deliberate strategy employed by the Central Propaganda Department to control the media.

Echoing the above research, de Burgh (2003) also claimed that it is through self-censorship rather than the correcting or elimination of texts that orthodoxy is maintained. In a rare case, the cultural and historical aspects have been taken into account in de Burgh's research. Historically, Chinese journalists saw themselves as 'the throat and tongue' of the governing party, and this remains so in the present day. He stressed that Chinese culture is inextricably bound with the role of journalists as well as their identities. Paternalism and patriotism as elements of Confucianism are also widely held by Chinese journalists. Moreover, Chinese journalists enjoy their social status as a privileged class. They see the audience as 'masses' instead of 'citizens' to be educated and enlightened. Accordingly, they are sceptical about the appropriateness of democracy for China. De Burgh named this neo-conservatism. Similarly, Lee (2009; 2000; 1990) also emphasised cultural traditions in

[9] Link, P. (2002) 'China: The Anaconda in the Chandelier', *The New York Review of Books*, 11 April [Online]. Available at: http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2002/April/11/china-the-anaconda-in-the-chandelier/ (Accessed: 15 January 2013)

shaping Chinese journalism. Actually, democracy and press freedom were introduced as early as the 1900s. The Confucian ethos, such as sacrificing personal rights to serve the good of the nation, transformed their application in the Chinese context. They were not seen as ends but as means to national modernisation.

Under tight media control, the media are primarily conceptualised as the propaganda instrument of the party-state. Yet since China launched its reform and opening-up policy, the media have taken on double imperatives: the party's and the market. The change is analysed under the name of news reform, which is discussed in the next part.

News reform

News reform is 'a catch-all phrase encompassing everything from technical improvements in writing and editing to proposals for the structural overhaul of press organization and ownership' (Polumbaum, in Lee ed., 1990: 37). News reform is actually a part of social reforms launched just after the Cultural Revolution, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. News reform is primarily characterised by 'a wave of commercialization and marketization' (Pan, in Lee ed., 2000: 68). Thus, the research regarding news reform focuses on media commercialisation (Chen, C., 2003b; He, in Lee ed., 2000; Zhao, 2000; Chen, H. L., 1999; Ma, in Curran & Park eds., 1999; Zhao, 1998; Pan, 1997; Chan, in Yu-shek & Brosseau eds., 1993; Polumbaum, in Lee ed., 1990).

To investigate how media commercialisation evolved in an authoritarian country, scholars endeavour to identify the trajectory and characteristic of commercialisation. The key characteristic is that commercialisation took place in a 'commandist' media system, which is 'an embellished Leninism-Stalinism built on traditional feudalism that intrudes into every facet of social life and puts individual thought and behaviour under scrupulous control' (Lee, in Lee ed., 1990: 5). To be specific, this remarkable process of media commercialisation occurred in the Chinese power structure as Lee (ibid.) explains as follows:

> National power is totally centralized in…a unified 'party-state-military-economic-ideological' complex in which a small corps of senior leaders atop the pyramidal structure make final decisions. This power structure rests on state coercion, breeds cults of personality, and monopolizes ideology and mass media. The 'small society' is thus absorbed by the 'big state' and depends exclusively on it for survival. (Su, cited in Lee, in Lee ed., 1990: 5)

In this power structure, the media are not first and foremost a commercial entity; rather, it is the propagandist instrument (Pan, in Lee ed., 2000). However, in the process of media commercialisation, the media were given both political and market imperatives, which is believed by many as two contradictory forces (Chen, L., in Pan & Wu, 2008; Pan, in Lee ed., 2000; Zhao, 1998).

The majority of studies regarding media commercialisation employ a political-economy perspective, since 'politics and economics are too deeply intertwined to be separated' (He, in Lee ed., 2000). The scholars reside in three camps based on their views of the relationship between political forces and economic forces. One favours a political-versus-economic dichotomy emphasising the antagonistic reaction between the two with one always outweighing the other (Chen, C. 2003; Chen, H., 2000; He, in Lee ed., 2000; Chen, H. L., 1999). The representative argument claims that the market economy weakens political control or vice versa. He (in Lee ed., 2000) creatively metaphorised the interplay as a tug-of-war. Another view sees the two forces mutually incorporating and negotiating (Huang, 2007; Pan, in Lee ed., 2000; Pan, 1997). The third view sees political forces playing an increasingly active role in pursuing a marketised media. In an insightful study of press conglomeration, Zhao (2000) argues that political forces purposely induce economic forces and keep them under control.

In sum, the political-economy perspective provides extensive insights into the evolution of the Chinese media. In fact, it works within the state-society framework, with the economy functioning as a societal actor. The state-society framework dominates the study of Chinese media reform, which is not a limitation but a realistic choice, for all reforms in China were devoted to reconfiguring the relationship between state and society (Pan, 2008). Before the reforms, China was run under a planned economic system, in which the central government controlled almost all resources and planned everything regarding social development. For example, all companies were owned by the state. Private ownership was strictly banned. At that time, the society was completely subordinate to the state. Since the launch of the reforms, the central government has begun to advocate the market economy system. The government has loosened its control over resources and empowered societal forces to energise the economy. Since then, private ownership has been boosted. Thus, societal forces can bargain with the state over certain issues. Nonetheless, the societal forces still depend on the state in terms of resource allocation. In the media field, the state monopolises media ownership, while loosening its control over media finances. The unprecedented media commercialisation brought forth a prominent concomitant:

journalistic corruption. The next part of this chapter reviews research regarding journalistic corruption.

Journalistic corruption

The research regarding journalistic corruption is special in that it is largely neglected in Western research about Chinese journalism, whereas it has attracted extensive academic attention in mainland China (Chen *et al.*, 2010; Zhang & Lu, 2008; Chen, L., 2007; Zheng & Chen, 2004; Lu & Yu, 2003; Luo *et al.*, 2001; Yu, 1998). The studies have found a range of corrupt behaviours conducted by journalists, such as taking free gifts and all expenses-paid interviews (ibid.). As to the reasons behind the corrupt behaviour, some (Zheng & Chen, 2004; Lu & Yu, 2003a; Yu, 1998) provided a rather vague explanation: that it is due to profound systematic factor failing to specify the constituents of the factor. Chen, L. (2007) offered a more developed argument. First, the mainland Chinese media are under transition from a pure propaganda tool into a more market-oriented institution. At this particular moment, the media are half part of the party-state system and half part of the market system. Thus, the media are far from an independent professional organisation policing its employees. Second, professional norms and values are absent in mainland China. Third, a more practical reason is that journalists lack the protection of rights and interests, which may trigger corruption.

Most of the above studies employ questionnaires, which pre-set the choices for the respondents to choose from. In other words, the questionnaire method might inhibit a diversity of thoughts from emerging (more discussion on this in Chapter 3). Largely based on journal articles, Zhao provided another explanation: ‘corruption has been part and parcel of the process of media commercialization’ (1998: 72). Zhao locates the corruption root in ‘the contradictions between the Party’s old ways of conceptualizing and organizing journalism and the new commercialized environment under which journalism operates’ (1998: 84). According to Zhao, ‘the contradictions between [the party logic and the market logic] provide fertile ground for paid journalism’ (ibid.). To give one example, the party still attaches propaganda tasks to the media. The media have to report on dull party meetings but are forbidden from conducting investigative reports, which makes journalism unchallenging. Thus, the ‘journalists’ talents are being diverted into businesses’ (ibid.). In other words, there is nowhere for journalists to realise their professional aspirations and journalists end up practising corruption. Zhao argues that there is an element of ‘passive political resistance in the practice’ (1998: 88). Zhao’s analysis falls within the political economy communication framework, with the cultural aspects left untouched. Also, the journalistic practitioners' accounts are kept out of sight. The next part briefly discusses Chinese culture and its application to understand journalism.

Chinese culture

As discussed previously, the existing scholarship mainly adopts a political economy and sociological view to examine Chinese journalism, while cultural influences are largely neglected. De Burgh has argued for a reemphasis of the cultural paradigm (2005). He doubted whether there is a universally applied model of journalism. Although globalisation and new technology have homogenised journalism worldwide, an ideal form of journalism cannot exist (ibid.). As for de Burgh, culture should be regarded as the core criterion to differentiate types of journalism in varied locations. An emphasis on the role of culture, however, does not mean that culture is the sole factor colouring the news. Nor does this mean that culture plays a deterministic role. This research intends to add a cultural dimension to examine Chinese journalism, despite research of this kind being relatively low in stock.

De Burgh (2003) has conducted a thorough research on Chinese journalists, which contains considerable analysis of the influences of Chinese history and culture on journalism. He acutely discovered that Chinese people are obsessed with history and that history often serves as a validation for current undertakings. If a measure or move was taken in the past, then the current undertakings of a similar kind could be validated. Additionally, de Burgh has argued that topics for public discussion in mainland China are not only confined by political diktat, but also more of 'the wider cultural framing' (2003: 112). He claims that in Chinese society, 'approaches to authority and to relations with others are different from those encountered in anglophone societies and condition work in many different ways. Authority is expected to be paternal in style, mirroring family relationship, and obedience is due regardless of the behaviour of those in authority' (ibid.). The products of the typical Chinese family form are dependent on an established leadership (ibid.: 113). Whenever such leadership is lacking, Chinese people tend to 'create situations of total predictability or control' (ibid.). Therefore, the anglophone tolerance of complementary or competing authorities is foreign to the Chinese (ibid.). Such social conformity to a single and established authority is actually a barrier to professionalism (ibid.).

De Burgh presents a strong case in identifying the cultural influences that shape Chinese journalism. Following this, in a rare case, Zeng (2012) provides a comparative insight into how different cultural values underpin journalistic norms in two newsrooms: BBC World and Phoenix Television. Zeng found that, compared with the BBC journalists, the Phoenix journalists played a weaker role in the news production process. To be specific, there were strong factions in the Phoenix newsroom, forming a hierarchical working environment. 'Top reporters and top translators select the news, assign the work, decide the angle of reports on sensitive events, and check the correctness and suitability of scripts and video for every piece of news' (Zeng, 2012: 261). However, the BBC journalists played a stronger role in producing news with normally no superiors directing news angels. It is suggested that this difference can be attributed to cultural factors, specifically that Chinese people tend to be more respectful to authority (ibid.: 11).

The above studies are helpful in identifying cultural influences on journalism, yet the problem of this research strategy is in the term 'culture' itself. As mentioned previously, culture is not easy to define, making it difficult to be employed as a tool to analyse social phenomena. A number of scholars have endeavoured to discover the characteristics of a certain culture through a comparison with other cultures (Zeng, 2012; Liang, 2003). Liang has listed fourteen characteristics of Chinese culture, which include long history, no religion, stagnant culture, enormous population and large territory, family first (*jia benwei*), filial piety and so forth (Liang, 2003: 23—32). Drawing upon social psychology studies on culture (Chiu & Hong, 2006), Zeng (2012) has formulated a list of characterisitcs that distinguish Chinese culture from others:

- Power distance: referring to 'how people relate to one other in terms of equality or hierarchy.' (Zeng, 2012: 11) Chinese people tend to weigh more on hierarchy and authority than on equality.
- Individualism-collectivism: Chinese people are more bound by collective responsibility.
- Harmony/ conformity: referring to the values regarding consensus and confrontation.
- Causal attribution: referring to how people explain events and actions.
- Duties vs. rights: East Asian people are 'more conscious of duties than rights' (ibid.) compared with American people.
- Filialism: Filial piety is one of the most important 'traditional values that persist in present-day China' (ibid.).

Zeng further argues that the differences between cultures are rooted in 'family form' (2012: 8). Echoing this, Liang claims that the fundamental uniqueness of Chinese culture lies in its emphasis on family life (2003: 21). Family life constitutes the primary and principal social life of Chinese people. Moreover, all social relationships are formulated on the mode of the family relationship (ibid.). For instance, a governmental office is often seen as a family, with the head of the office viewed as the shaikh. This unique cultural trait has an essential impact on journalistic practices, which is discussed further in Chapter 5. This chapter now concludes by identifying the gaps in the existing scholarship.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed some of the important previous research related to this project. The last part of this chapter pulls together some of the key issues that have emerged and identifies those gaps in our knowledge that this research will explicitly address. First, this research adds a cultural and historical dimension in analysing Chinese journalism. Zeng (2012: 87) claims that 'debate on cultural influences on news production tends to be led by product study and pays more attention to audiences than to journalists.' Following her argument, this research emphasises the impact of culture on journalists. Second, the survey studies report a number of corrupt practices conducted by journalists. The surveys, however, fail to identify the reasons behind this corruption. Moreover, the perceptions held by journalists towards the corrupt practices are also lacking. The survey studies, which have prescribed the answers for journalists to choose from, may inhibit journalists' own thoughts from emerging (more discussion on this is presented in Chapter 3). Aside from the survey studies, a number of key research findings are based on trade journal articles or scholarly guesses, which have also left journalistic practitioners disregarded. This research bases its argument mainly on journalists' own accounts employing in-depth interviews and focus group interview methods to add to our understanding through the journalists' subjective accounts of their experience.

It is necessary to point out that this research is largely driven by the researcher's four-year career as a political journalist, during which time the researcher had struggled with propaganda directives. On the one hand, these experiences arm the researcher with journalistic jargon and norms, facilitating the interviews with journalists; on the other hand, however, these experiences may colour the selection and interpretation of research materials. These limitations are further discussed in Chapter 3.

Considering the aims of this research and the gaps in the existing scholarship, this research intends to work on four themes: cultural influences, propaganda control, journalistic corruption and the impact of social media. Thus, the research questions are listed as follows.

Regarding the cultural influences, this research explores:

- *What elements of culture are mobilised in influencing journalistic practices*? In the existing scholarship, when culture is referred to, the exact factors are ambiguously identified. Therefore, this research intends to point out the exact cultural elements that are normally involved in journalistic practices.
- *How do such elements interact with other social factors, such as political forces and commercial forces?* This question intends to map out a mechanism of the three key forces, which have been left untouched in the existing scholarship.

Regarding propaganda control, this research investigates:

- *The main forms of propaganda control in daily journalistic practices*. Brady (2008) has provided a number of propaganda forms as discussed previously. Yet she mainly based her argument on documents and reports. Therefore, it is hard to differentiate the daily used form from the relatively novel forms that may be rarely used. This research explores the main forms based on journalists' own accounts from their daily practices.
- *How do journalists react to the existing media control system*? This is a key research area, but it remains underexplored in the existing scholarship.
- *The factors inducing self-censorship*. A number of studies identified that it is self-censorship that toes the media in line (Hassid, 2008; de Burgh, 2003). Hassid argued that the uncertainty engenders self-censorship. As pointed out previously, this is a scholarly guess, which requires testimony from journalistic practitioners.

Regarding journalistic corruption, this research examines:

- *The main forms of corruption*. Although Zhao (1998) and Yu (1998) explored corruption forms, these studies are outdated. An updated probe into the main forms of corruption is needed, which this research intends to provide.
- *The roots and implications of journalistic corruption*. Chen *et al*. (2010) and Zhao (1998) have provided explanations for this as mentioned previously. Yet their arguments are again scholarly guesses.

This research also explores the impact of social media on traditional journalism and its practice. This is clearly a dynamic research area, which is attracting increasing academic interest and is characterised by a fast-changing media environment. As a result, this work offers a snapshot of journalism in transition, being shaped by political, economic, and technological factors. The research questions in this area include:

- *How have media-source relations changed in the new social media environment?*
- *How do social media impact on journalistic practices?*

Having looked at previous related research, the next chapter provides some important historical context within which the contemporary research later in the thesis needs to be located. The historical developments since the 1980s when China launched its Reform and Opening-up Policy (*gaige kaifang*) that dramatically changed the media landscape are thus an important part in understanding the current drivers of media change and are the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter Two: Historical Analysis

This chapter explores the Chinese media from a historical perspective. It focuses on the evolution of the media since 1979 when commercialisation started. Media commercialisation has brought fundamental changes to the media sector, which has altered the media structure, journalistic practices, and to a certain extent, reconfigured state-media relations (Zhao, 2000, 1998; Pan, 1997). This chapter first introduces the historical origins of the Chinese media to illuminate historical and cultural elements which still influence journalism in the present day. The second section then delineates the media commercialisation process. The third section looks at the media structure and administrative control in the present day. This chapter concludes by summarising and highlighting key features of media development since 1979. The next part of this chapter traces the historical origins of the Chinese media.

2.1 Historical origins of Chinese media

Scholars have traced the beginning of traditional Chinese journalism to the Tang Dynasty (from the 7th century to the 10th century) gazette (*di bao*), which was the official or semi-official encyclicals (Fang & Ding eds., 2009; Chen, C., 2007). Yet modern journalism started at the end of the 19th century, 'exclusively as the result of Western influence' (Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005: 107). This influence came from two aspects. First, the early press was initiated and financed by Western missionaries for whom many Chinese people worked as apprentices and learned practical skills (Wu, 2009b; Chen, C., 2007). Second, the Chinese set up their own newspapers later on primarily to propagate nationalism and mobilise ordinary people in order to resist the 'Western imperialist invasion' (Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005: 107). Therefore, at the very beginning, the chief function of the Chinese media was to propagate and enlighten rather than to provide information (ibid.). The early journalistic practitioners, such as Wang, Tao (*王韬*) and Liang, Qichao (*梁启超*), were regarded as the traditional literati (*wen ren*) instead of journalists or businessmen, which is reflective of the Confucian ethos. In fact, they also valued themselves as the literati. In the Confucian ethos, the literati can be characterised by the following three interconnected elements (Rui, 2010; Wu, 2009a; Lu, 2004; Lu & Pan, 2002).

First is '*responsibility*'. Confucianism emphasises that the literati should take the nation's good as their own responsibility. The realm of the responsibility is delimited by the 'three cardinal guides' (*san gang*), which is the core Confucian tenet. The 'three cardinal guides' is a set of rules that prescribe the social order: the ruler guides the subject (*jun wei chen gang*), father guides son (*fu wei zi gang*), husband guides wife (*fu wei qi gang*). Thus, the prioritised responsibility of the literati is to assist the ruler in guiding the ruled. Moreover, Confucianism contends that an individual's responsibility overrides his rights (Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005). Second is to '*get into the social affairs*' (*rushi qinghuai*). The literati were encouraged to be involved in the social affairs of their society. In ancient times, the literati used their wisdom to make the reign benevolent. The best way was to become officials and then comment on social affairs through consulting (*jinjian, 进谏*) activity, in which the literati raised social problems and offered resolutions to the emperor. A benevolent emperor was expected to accept the suggestions. If this failed, the literati were supposed to quit (*chu shi*); otherwise, they might encounter humiliation, such as dismissal or even purge. Third is '*elitism*'. The literati normally regarded themselves as being the elite class and represented the social consciousness (*shehui liangzhi*). The ordinary people, however, were viewed as the masses that need to be educated and enlightened.

This synopsis is again inevitably oversimplified, since China is a historically and culturally huge country. Yet this research argues that this synopsis contains the most essential elements of the literati from a historical-cultural view. When applied to journalism, the cultural elements play a latent role in framing the media pattern. In terms of state-media relations, the state is easily translated into the ruler, while the media equates to the subject. Therefore, the pattern of relations is that the state guides the media. In terms of media-audience relations, taking the elitist view, the audience are regarded as the masses who need to be educated. These elements are very much relevant to journalism in the present day (more details in chapters 4 and 5).

The above traditional cultural elements combining with the wider national crisis had fostered a special journalistic genre at the end of 19th century: political commentary from the literati (Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005: 111) (*wen ren lun zheng*). Two features of this genre are notable: news reporting and personal comments were mixed, and the comments were often fuelled with strong personal feelings (*bifeng changdai ganqing*) (Fang & Ding eds., 2009). The media were conceived as the instrument not only to 'get the ear of the monarch' (Cheek, 1989: 54), but also to enlighten the masses. Considering the national crisis, the literati took a rather proactive tone in advocating nationalism and national reforms. This journalistic genre still strikes a responsive chord in present day journalism.

The 1920s to the 1930s marked a 'golden period' (Zeng, 1989: 317, cited in de Burgh, 2003: 103) for Chinese journalism. First, political newspapers and privately owned commercial newspapers coexisted. Second, a great number of newspapers were able to stand high in the market as well as serve the public good. Third, press freedom was promoted. In 1930, 'Regulations for the Protection of Press Freedom were enacted' (de Burgh, 2003: 103). A prominent exemplar at that time was the *Da Gong Bao* (Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005), a privately owned commercial newspaper whose chief editor, Zhang, Jiluan (张季鸾), promulgated four editorial principles (ibid.):

- Do not 'align with any political parties' (Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005: 112) (*bu dang*)
- Do not 'be swayed by money' or 'accept political subsidies or investments' (*bu mai*)
- Do not seek private gains but serve the public (*bu si*)
- Do not 'be blinded by ideology or emotion' (ibid.) (*bu mang*).

The first principle is similar to the detachment claim in Western professionalism as discussed in Chapter 1. The third is rather like serving the public good in Western professionalism. The *Da Gong Bao*, not only achieved national renown and high circulation but also gained the foreign press award from the University of Missouri School of Journalism in 1941 for its journalistic integrity (ibid.), and scholars claim that the *Da Gong Bao* was the professional model (Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005). Journalism education was also on a fast track. Thus, it was suggested that professionalism began to emerge during this time (Chen, C., 2007).

A deeper look, however, may reveal another story. Zhang, Jiluan published an editorial note regarding the Missouri award saying that:

> Chinese media are different from Western media in that the Chinese media are basically the organ for the literati to deliver political comments rather than a business organ. … The humble value of the *Da Gong Bao* is that although it runs as business, it maintains its original feature as the organ for the literati to comment on current affairs. (Zhang, 1941)

The political commentary from the literati was still promoted. Moreover, the media were seen as the instrument for the literati to fulfil their responsibility, that is, to serve the nation. Although Zhang argued for a detached role and serving the public, this was far from achieved in reality. When the Japanese invaded China, the paper voluntarily submitted itself to military censorship (Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005). 'National survival overrode the professional autonomy it had long advocated' (Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005:

112). Zhang's principles are indeed similar to the tenets of Anglophone professionalism. This research, however, argues that the principles were mainly used to protect the paper itself. At that time, China was in political chaos with warlords and political parties constantly competing with each other. An alignment with any group could offend others and cause trouble for the paper. Thus, a detached political stance was employed to protect the paper. Nonetheless, the principles advocated ethical journalistic practices, which accorded with Anglophone professionalism.

Privately owned commercial media existed until 1956 when Mao launched the nationalisation campaign. All privately owned media organisations were taken over by the party-state. From then on, the party logic began to dominate Chinese journalism. During the Cultural Revolution,[10] party journalism showed its extreme version. No advertising was available through the media as it was considered capitalist spiritual contamination. The media merely relied on the party's subsidy to survive. A great number of media outlets had to cease publishing during that time. Yet the surviving media had to print quotes of Chairman Mao (*mao zhuxi yulu*) every day on the front pages. Politics first, facts second became the guiding policy for the media (Zhao, 1998).

A schema provided by Schudson (1989) is helpful to explain the trends and changes of communication in China. The schema divides political communication into four types (Schudson, 1989: 304):

- Elite communication: the governors communicate among themselves
- Hegemonic communication: the governors address the governed
- Petitionary communication: the governed address the governors
- Associational communication: the governed communicate among themselves

The schema 'is overly simple, but it facilitates defining the field of discussion and clarifying historical trends' (Schudson, 1989: 305). Generally speaking, from the modern origins to the 1970s (except the 1920s and the 1930s), hegemonic communication dominated the Chinese media. Yet, since the media began its commercialisation process, petitionary communication has begun to emerge. The next part of this section explores the process of media commercialisation.

[10] The Cultural Revolution started from 1966 to 1976. It was originally a political campaign initiated by Mao in the name of removing capitalists from the communist party. Mao brought up the idea that the key issue was the class struggle between the proletariat class and the capitalist class. Yet it was developed into a national turmoil which paralysed the country in all aspects.

2.2 Media commercialisation

This section traces the evolution of the media from 1978 to the present day, which has gone through three phases: the adoption of business management, the reintroduction of advertising, and conglomeration and capitalisation. These three phases followed in sequential order and have causal links, yet they are overlapping at some points.

Before looking at the phases specifically, it is necessary to contextualise media commercialisation. Media commercialisation started just after the Cultural Revolution. It was a critical moment when economic failure and political chaos coexisted. It was also a tipping point for the nation when the *Zeitgeist* was changing dramatically. By and large, the old dominant communist ideology was collapsing, while the new one was in demand. The party's leadership under Deng, Xiaoping, launched the Reform and Opening-up policy (*gaige kaifang*), which was intended to shift the focus from class struggle to economic development. Yet the old ideological remains still existed at that time. Deng took a 'shelving' strategy, that is, shelving ideological disputes about capitalism and socialism (*bu zhenglun xing she xing zi*), instead focusing on economic development. To some extent, Deng managed to shift the party's legitimacy from a predominantly 'ideology-based' one to a more 'performance-based' one (Pei, 1994: 47), and performance was principally evaluated by economic development. Thus, the stronger the economy, the more solid the one-party reign could be considered. To be more specific, the party-state changed to pursue a growth-based legitimacy. This strategy, according to Hu and Li (2005), disregarded the contradictions between the new economic development and the old ideological remains. This research contends that Deng's strategy can also be viewed as an effort to reconstruct the new ideology which can be best explained by his own words: 'development is the absolute principle and top priority' (*fazhan caishi ying daoli he shouyao renwu*), or in other words, 'economy first' (*youxian fazhan jingji*).

This was not an invention; rather Deng drew support from history and culture. Similar strategies were brought forth every time China was in times of upheaval in history. For example, after centuries of humiliation by the West in the Opium wars and the Second World War, it was nationally acknowledged that under-development left China vulnerable to attack (*luohou jiu yao aida*). A number of scholars (Chen, C., 2007; Jin, 1999) further suggested that becoming rich, powerful, and modernised had become the constant and priority pursuit of the Chinese since modern times. Development was the real need to feed the world's largest population, whereas constant humiliation by the West fostered a strong sense of nationalism. Thus, developmentalism and nationalism came to the fore to provide new sources of legitimacy for the party-state (Lee *et al*., 2007). In virtue of the cultural and historical heritage, Deng's snappy, rhyming, slogan-like phrases could readily gain consensus among the ruled. In this sense, 'economy first' (*jingji wei xian*) played a hegemonic role. The party increasingly attached overriding importance to economic development. Thus, media commercialisation started at the time when the party was looking for all possible ways to reactivate the economy.

Subsequently, a brief introduction to Chinese media commercialisation is provided here to give a general view. Chinese media commercialisation is not the party press simply being replaced by a commercialised media as had happened in the United States and United Kingdom in the nineteenth century. It was the theoretically party-owned media that were being commercialised (Zhao, 1998). Like the West, advertising became the dominant business model for mass media. However, the media's ownership was not handed over from the party to private enterprise. Ironically, the party's ownership contradicts the logic of the market in practice. First, the ownership is not for sale. Second, the media are not first and foremost an economic entity. Although economic interests, efficiency, and scale merits are highlighted, the media's primary survival skill in the market is not its economic success but its political obedience. The party arbitrarily intrudes into media, sometimes impeding the media's pursuit of economic interests; sometimes compromising with the media on a win-win deal; sometimes pushing the media for mercenary journalism. Thus, it shows a rather murky trajectory with various powers entangled in a Gordian knot that could only be understood on a case-by-case deconstruction (Thomson, in Grenfell ed., 2008). Thus, a number of scholars argue that it is incomplete commercialisation, conditional commercialisation, semi-commercialisation, commercialisation with Chinese characteristics (Zhao, 1998), or commercialisation without independence (Chan, in Yu-shek and Brosseau eds., 1993). Huang *et al*. (2008) further question whether 'commercialisation' is a suitable term to depict the changes in the media for it was not a free media market. In this research, commercialisation is used in its broad sense to refer to the ongoing process starting in the late 1970s characterised by the media's explicit pursuit of profits that brought forth a series of changes in the media financing and management sectors. The next part of this chapter explores the first phase of media commercialisation: the adoption of business management systems.

The adoption of business management systems

It is generally acknowledged that media commercialisation started when the first advertisement reappeared on 28th January 1979 in the *Jiefang Daily* (*jiefang ribao*), the party organ of the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China. In fact, scholars argued that there was one earlier step that laid the groundwork for future commercial reforms (Chen, H. L., 1999; Zhao, 1998): the adoption of business management systems.

In the 1970s, media finances were fully controlled by the corresponding governmental bureaus. For example, the *China Central Television* (CCTV) did not have its own financial department. All its expenses were met and its budget was allocated by the Ministry of Finance (MF). As a consequence, there was no need to allocate advertising time. Additionally, staff were paid at the organisation's administrative level (*xingzheng jibie*). For example, copy editors working for the *People's Daily* and the *Economics Daily* were paid the same amount for the two were both vice-ministerial level (*fu buji*) newspapers. There were no economic incentives for job-hopping.

In 1978, the *People's Daily* and a number of other major media organisations reported to the MF applying to employ a new business management system under which the individual media organisations could manage their own finances. The MF gave permission and selected a number of media organisations as pilots. The pilot media organisations were able to keep the surplus after turning in the assigned tax and spend the surplus on staff welfare and equipment upgrades, which presumably promoted their development in the market. This privilege, however, was selectively given to politically loyal media. In this sense, the political advantages were proportionally converted into economic benefits under the party's manipulation. Thus, the party managed to interlink political resources with economic results. For the media, in order to benefit, news organisations would follow the party's guidelines. This is a key strategy that the party employed in the process of media commercialisation. In virtue of the interlocking between political forces and economic forces, it was possible that the vested interest groups would become 'silent partners' in sustaining the current party-dominated media system (Zhao, 2000). Lee *et al*. (2007) insightfully depicted this interlink as 'clientelism' which is 'a pattern of (particularistic and asymmetrical) social organization in which access to social resources is controlled by patrons and delivered to clients in exchange for deference and various kinds of support' (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 184-185). For Lee *et al*. (2007), clientelism, on the one hand, reveals the purposiveness of the party's policy, while on the other hand it depicts the interlocking complexity between the media and the party. This characteristic also marks future reforms, which will be detailed in later parts.

Another notable change at that time was that 'the journalistic partisanship tilt[ed] away from the state and toward public interests and demands' (Polumbaum, in Lee ed., 1990: 36). The Cultural Revolution seriously depleted the party's legitimacy. It would be improper to strengthen media control just after the Cultural Revolution. Thus, China enjoyed a period of political relaxation. Besides, the party was also aiming to improve the administrative management, since it might facilitate economic growth. Scholars viewed the span from 1978 to 1989 as the best period for journalism since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Zhao, 1998; Tong, 1994). Journalists began to embrace 'petitionary communication' (Schudson, 1989) by contending public interests.

A prominent example is the reporting of the sinking of the Bo Sea No. 2 drilling ship (*bohai erhao chenchuan shigu*). On 25 November 1979, a drilling ship sank during moving operation on the Bo Sea, which caused huge economic losses and 72 fatalities. It was a typical case of a bureaucratic bungle, partly due to the poor management which violated working regulations. However, the governmental agency in charge covered up the wrongdoing by contending that it was caused by natural disaster. Eight months later, the *Workers' Daily* published a lengthy investigative report exposing the officials' negligence in this tragedy. The report provoked wide public criticism towards the governmental agency, which led to the sacking of a minister and a public apology from a vice prime minister.[11] Critical coverage like this and 'journalism of a quantity and breadth that had never before been seen in Communist China could be found in the newspapers' (de Burgh, 2003: 63). In 1981, the party issued propaganda guidelines, which advocated opinion supervision and public scrutiny (*yulun jiandu*) to expose and correct wrongdoings by officials. The reports of this kind boomed. A famous case is the report on the 1987 Greater Hinggan fire (*daxing'anling dahuo*), which took nearly a month to put out. The *China Youth Daily* published three consecutive reports disclosing the officials' malpractices and poor management. The reports forced the dismissals of two ministers.[12] Thus, the 1980s was marked with greater autonomy and freedom to conduct investigative reporting until

[11] A reflection report on this is available at: http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2008-11-25/104916720870.shtml, accessed 10 April 2014.

[12] Reports on this are available at: http://zqb.cyol.com/gb/special/2004-06/-1/content_880396.htm, accessed 10 April 2014.

1989 when journalists joined the soaring crowds to walk on the street calling for press freedom and political democracy for the very first time in Chinese history.

At the same time, journalism education was westernising with objectivity, neutrality, detachment, and other tenets of professionalism being introduced into curricula and textbooks (Polumbaum, in Lee ed., 1990). Even press freedom was seen as an overt issue. A draft of media law was discussed by the delegates of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China in 1989. According to one of the drafters, Hu, Jiwei, who was former editor-in-chief of the *People's Daily*, the core idea of media law was to protect freedom of expression (Zhao, 1998). The draft of media law in China was warmly welcomed, for the law would help restrain the interventions from the party-state. The Tiananmen crackdown in 1989, however, aborted the media law process and the media's pursuit of press freedom virtually ceased. After rectification from 1989 to 1992, commercialisation became the order of the day from 1992 onwards (Zhao, 1998). The commercialisation from 1992 to the end of 1990s was marked by skyrocketing development of media advertising, which is discussed in the next part.

Advertising as the new business model

The advertising industry expanded at an unprecedented rate. At the beginning of the 1990s, more than one-third of the 2,039 officially registered newspapers were self-sufficient, and many of those made handsome profits (Pan, in Lee ed., 2000). In late 1992, the party required all major newspapers to achieve self-sufficiency by 1994 (Zhao, 2000). However, the party continued to subsidise a small number of national party organs and national broadcasts. This support was rather symbolic. Take *China Central Television* (CCTV) as an example. CCTV received 8.27 million Yuan (approximately £0.83 million) in 2001, while its advertising revenue in the same year reached 5.18 billion Yuan (approximately £518 million), more than six hundred times the party's subsidy (Miao, in Shirk ed., 2011: 94). At the beginning of the 2000s, it is estimated that 95 per cent of press revenue came from advertising (ibid.). Thus, advertising revenue became the new lifeblood of mass media (Zhao, 1998) replacing the party's patronage. The media were then required to remit a portion of their revenues to the government as taxation or as donation. In 2004, it is widely appraised that the media jumped to the forth-largest industry in terms of its taxation contribution (*The Annual Revenue of the Media Industry Reached Over 100 Billion Yuan*, 2002).

The impact was twofold. First, advertising changed journalistic culture. A number of media organisations became financial giants, being able to use the surplus to build lavish office mansions, such as the *Beijing Youth Daily*, the *Shenzhen Special Zone Daily*, some of which were once the most magnificent buildings in the city. The media's handsome profits also significantly benefited journalists. One interviewee recalled, 'in the middle of the 1990s, my media organisation was so profitable that I got 3,000 Yuan (approximately £300) on my birthday annually' (Personal communications No. 6, 15 January 2012). Another interviewee said, 'I am really grateful to my media organisation. In the late 1990s, I was given a two-bedroom flat in Beijing for free plus a free car. Most of my colleagues got the same as I did. That was indeed a golden time for journalists' (Personal communications No. 5, 14 January 2012). Journalists entered into the 'new rich' class. One interviewee in the focus group said, 'journalists got well paid in the late 1990s with the monthly salary reaching over 10,000 Yuan [approximately £1,000], ten-fold compared with the average worker's month wages' (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012). On the one hand, journalists' ideal pursuit of a democratic system was crushed in the 1989 crackdown, but on the other hand, the sudden economic boom provided a new ideal for the journalists: material gains (Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005). Echoing the discussions in Chapter 1, surveys found that in the late 1980s, the majority of journalists were frustrated by lack of autonomy and the party's intrusion (Polumbaum, in Lee ed., 1990). In the 1990s, however, journalists seemed to be less sensitive to job autonomy (Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005) and became increasingly more concerned with material gains (Zhang & Su, in Weaver and Willnat eds., 2012). More importantly, a concomitant of media commercialisation was pervasive journalistic corruption, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

Advertising also facilitated a shift in journalistic practices. As the competition for advertising was fierce, media organisations spared no efforts in gaining more audiences in return for more advertisements. They endeavoured to provide better news reporting. A range of cash awards were introduced to encourage better reporting, such as exclusive news awards, best story awards, and so forth. In some cases, the awards were even thrilling. It was widely circulated that a journalist in the *Guangzhou Daily* who published a phenomenal report was awarded a two-bedroom flat in the city centre (*The Crazy Newspaper Man: the Red and the Black of Li, Yuanjiang*, 2008). This climate pressed journalists to improve their journalistic skills such as through polished writing, better photography, and unearthing exclusive stories. In addition, media organisations began to refine their internal structures. Operational and financial departments were set up which directly reported to the publisher. The editors-in-chief were then mainly responsible for news making. The financial department, which took charge of soliciting advertisements, became more powerful overriding the news-making department. A vice editor-in-chief complained that 'they [the financial staff] called occasionally and just ordered us to withdraw some fantastic stories in order not to offend the advertisers. We had no choice but to listen to them' (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012).

Second, the new business model changed the media structure. The prosperous advertising industry provided financial support for a media boom. The newcomers flooded in. In 1979, only 186 newspapers existed in Mainland China (Rosen, in Lee ed., 2000: 152), most of which were party organs. By 1993, openly circulated newspapers had reached 2,000 and have hovered around 2000 since then (ibid.). It is documented that from 1992 to 1994, a new title was published every 1½ days (Zhao, 2000). These new titles were mainly supervised by governmental bureaucracies and non-party organisations. As most of the new titles did not get any funds from their superiors or the party, they had to finance themselves. They put more emphasis on daily life stories and entertainment stories to appeal to the urban class. Thus, they were generally called 'mass-appeal media'. This was also the case for the broadcasting sector. More and more channels were set up mainly covering daily life information.

The most significant change is that the leading status of the party media in the market was eroded by the mass-appeal ones. At the early ages of economic reform, the editorial pages were too limited to accommodate advertisements. Advertisers who wanted their advertisement on the *Xinmin Evening News*, a mass-appeal newspaper in Shanghai, had to wait one and a half months until advertising pages became available (Chen & Huang, 1997). Consequently, a number of newspapers attempted to publish weekend pages. And then, the weekday pages also expanded. These pages, mainly about human interest stories and investigative reports, attracted large audiences, which in turn obtained more advertisements. The party media, however, had mandatory propaganda topics to cover, which were less attractive to audiences. Thus, they were less favourable to advertisers. The revenue figures further indicated the party media's declining tendency. Before 1990, the top party organ, the *People's Daily*, had been the top newspaper in terms of its advertising revenue. However, after 1990, it dropped to the bottom, and from 1995 onwards, disappeared from the top-ten advertising revenue list (Chen & Huang, 1997). Additionally, over 70 per cent of the party organs were in a loss at the beginning of 2000s (Li, 2004). More and more journalists who used to work for the party media jumped to more profitable mass-appeal media causing the party media to experience a brain drain. This was not only the case for ordinary journalists but for senior workers as well. For instance, the editor-in-chief of the *Huaxi Metro Daily*, a new mass-appeal newspaper, used to be the vice editor-in-chief of the *Sichuan Daily*, the party organ of Sichuan province. To some extent, the mass-appeal newspapers and channels deconstructed the orthodox party media's power. However, the declining tendency of the party media turned around when the party initiated media conglomeration.

Notably, advertising fostered a change in propaganda information as well. As the party still attached propaganda tasks to mass media, the media tried to dress them up in order not to annoy audiences. For example, the *Beijing Youth Daily* shortened propaganda information into less than three sentences placed on the top left corner of the front page. This smart tactic managed to highlight the political importance meanwhile leaving more space for the non-propaganda reports. The propaganda information was softened to cater to the public. For instance, the party set up a local official as the new moral model and ordered the media to propagandise his dedication to his job. One mass-appeal newspaper interviewed his wife to dig out his personal life which formed a touching and interesting story. This article was then widely circulated. The editor proudly concluded that the propaganda information could be dressed up into a newsworthy story (Personal communications No. 4, on multiple days). In this case, the boundary between news and propaganda is blurred. Furthermore, propaganda was able to become a commodity 'for sale' (Stockmann, 2007).

In order to reverse the downsizing situation of the party media, the party-state initiated a new policy, media conglomeration, thus allowing the profiting mass-appeal media to cross-subsidise the party media. The next part of this chapter looks at conglomeration.

Conglomeration, diversification, and capitalisation: a strategy led by the party-state

In the second half of 1990s, the party media suffered a downturn both in circulation and in influence. The party media began to publish spin-offs or to launch new channels to turn things around. For example, the *Nanfang Daily*, the party organ of Guangdong province, set up *Nanfang Metro Daily*, a mass-appeal newspaper. These subsidiaries targeted the urban family with juicy infotainment. The handsome profits were then allocated to support their 'mother' party media. The party tacitly approved this practice for it was in the favour of the party. In other words, the money was virtually appropriated from the market to feed the party's propaganda. In this sense, the market and the party reached a fusion. The fusion was further enhanced when conglomeration started.

In 1996, one of the most commercially successful party organs, the *Guangzhou Daily*, was handpicked by the party to pilot a media group. Actually, the paper had already experimented with running six subsidiaries (Zhao, 2000). Given further operational autonomy, the paper began to diversify its business area. At the end of the 1990s, the paper invested a large sum of money in buying land from relocated enterprises and soon became the top real-estate broker in Guangzhou (*The Crazy Newspaper Man: the Red and the Black of Li, Yuanjiang*, 2008). Moreover, the paper set up dozens of kiosks which vigorously promoted its sale.

This conglomeration was principally driven by the party which presented a top-down trajectory. Party media officials viewed conglomeration as a means to realise political and economic coalition. The purpose, as the party leaders explicitly put it, was to 'enable party organs to consolidate a powerful economic base through the market mechanism and ensure the better fulfilment of the Party's propaganda objectives' (Tan, 1997: 254, cited in Zhao, 2000). The party planned roughly ten groups in the first stage, which enclosed profitable mass-appeal media organisations and politically important party media. Through conglomeration, profitable party organs were strengthened; unprofitable ones were cross subsidised by commercially successful mass-appeal ones; chaotic competition was weakened; and the proliferation of minor media outlets was limited (Zhao, 2000). The key characteristic was that the conglomeration was led by the party-state instead of a spontaneous market imperative (ibid.). The merger was at the party's will rather than according to market imperative.

Conglomeration brought joy to some and sorrow to others. In the case of the *Xinmin-Wenhui Group*, the marriage proved to be a miserable one. In 1998, Shanghai authorities forced the *Xinwen Evening News* to merge with the *Wenhui Daily*. The former was the second mass-appeal newspaper in terms of advertising revenue, and the latter was destitute but elitist. The consolidation centralised the advertising management and shuffled the managerial personnel. After this feudally arranged marriage, both suffered downward circulation. Moreover, the present whole advertising revenue is smaller than the sum of its former parts (Lee *et al*., 2007: 29). Another case, the Beijing Daily Group, also showed this predicament. A journalist in the *Beijing Evening News*, the top driving force and a mass-appeal one within the group, said, 'it is so annoying that we had to feed other poor publications. We used to have quite a comfortable life. But after the merger, our salaries were reduced to make odds even within the group' (Personal communications No. 6, 15 January 2012). Yet the party organs gained considerable benefits. They obtained financial support from the profitable mass appealing newspapers. In virtue of this, the propaganda information on party media was paid for by the advertisements on mass appealing papers. The mass-appeal media were hit badly by this coalition. An interviewee complained that 'journalists' wages had never been raised since the middle of the 1990s' (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012). In fact, after the conglomeration started, journalists working for mass-appeal media organisations suffered a downgrade in terms of the salary and welfare benefits. However, the party media increased their salary levels thanks to the money appropriated from the mass-appeal subsidiaries. Thus, the party media enjoyed a reverse exodus.

From the beginning of the 2000s, the party further initiated media capitalisation. Only a few of the major media groups were allowed to pilot this. As mentioned above, the party owns the media theoretically. Nevertheless, the most bizarre and odd part is that no one specifically exercises rights and duties as the owner of a title. In 2007, the Jiefang Daily Group was listed on the stock market, putting the Shanghai Municipal Propaganda Department as its property owner (Chen, L., in Pan & Wu ed., 2008: 20). In practice, it is normally the chief propaganda official who exerts the decisive power on behalf of the party. The executives of the media groups are less engaged with the final decisions. They are appointed by the party and perform duties under the directives from the propaganda official. One executive of a media group said wryly, 'the party is the boss. I am merely a wage earner authorised by the boss to take care of state assets' (Cited in Lee *et al.*, 2007). Another added, 'It does not matter whether you yield decent profits or not as long as you are not in a loss. The profits have nothing to do with your own purse, but may promote you into a political path. If you choose to stay in journalism, it must be the ideals instead of any material incentives that support you' (I-6, Beijing, 17 January 2012).

It is sometimes not as attractive as it looks to be a media executive. In spite of lacking material incentives, they constantly encounter dilemmas: to defer to the propaganda official's will or to follow the market imperative. For instance, a vice editor-in-chief complained, 'money in your pocket does not mean you can spend it. The propaganda superiors often ask you to buy unprofitable propaganda units. We were told to buy a theatre. After we successfully turned it into a good business, the official ordered us to transfer it to another performing arts group at an unbelievably low price' (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). Another case is more illustrative. The *Wenhui-Xinwen Press Group* in Shanghai was told to remit 300-400 million Yuan to the party every year as taxation and donation (Lee *et al.*, 2007: 36). However, this was not enough. Occasionally, the group was forced to support other propaganda units. Once, the chief propaganda official ordered the group to finance the infrastructure of an opera house (ibid.). Another broadcasting group was forced to donate 100 million Yuan (approximately £10 million) to refurbish a theatre to be used by Fudan University from which the official himself had graduated (ibid.). Furthermore, in order to implement orders smoothly, the chief propaganda official and executives of the media had to foster good relationships. In reality, the relationships were built on personal ties. For instance, the president of the *Wenhui-Xinwen Press Group* used to be the classmate of the chief propaganda official. Additionally, the assistant of the official was promoted to the executive of a broadcasting group (ibid.). This is not unusual in the Chinese context where the interpersonal connection plays an essential role in everyday life.

This chapter has examined the development of media from its origins to its most recent state. This chapter now explores media structure and media administrative control in the present day.

2.3 Media structure and administrative control in the present day

This section first examines the scope and structure of the media and then discusses the administrative control over the media.

Media scope and structure

According to the annul report published by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, China was one of the top five press markets in the world based on copies of newspapers sold per day (Chen, Z., 2010). Based on the statistical communiqué from National Bureau of Statistics of China (*China Statistical Yearbook*, 2012), the numbers of newspaper titles, magazine titles, and broadcasting media are illustrated in figures 5, 6, 7 respectively.

Figure 5 The number of newspaper titles from 1978 to 2011

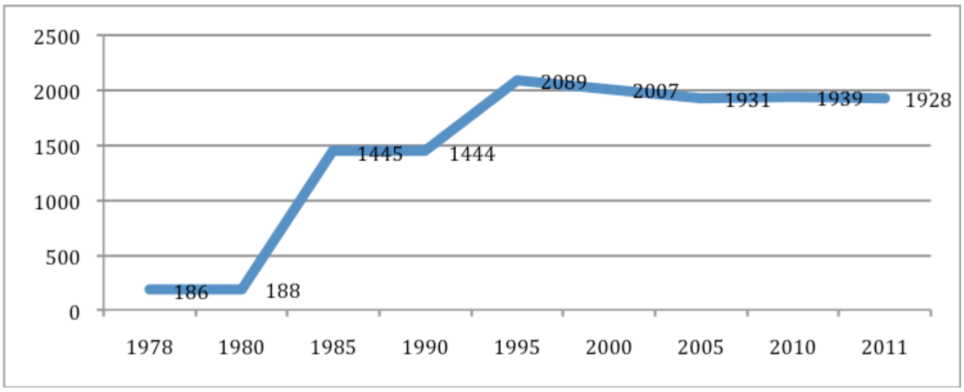


Figure 6 The number of magazine titles from 1978 to 2011

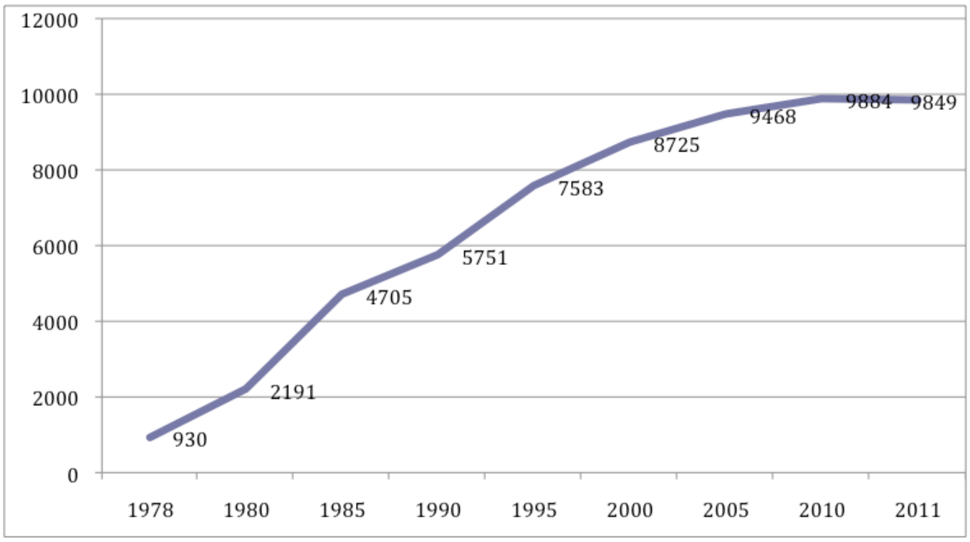
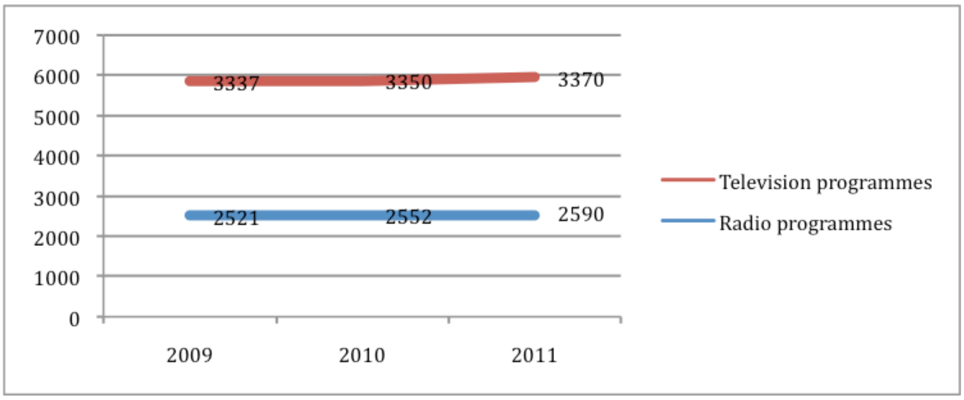


Figure 7 The number of radio and television programmes



As shown in the above figures, the number of newspaper titles was climbing from 1978 until the end of 1990s. From the 2000 onwards, the total number of newspapers stopped rising and hovered around 2,000. This is principally due to the conglomeration and consolidation of the media sector at that time. As discussed above, the party managed to keep the scale of newspapers steady making it easier to control. The number of magazines showed a striking increase. This is partly because of the statistical method in which trade journals and academic journal were all included. The number of broadcasting programmes remained relatively steady.

In terms of circulation, the Chinese media are large. Yet the real influence of the Chinese media is essentially under question due to its unique media system which is examined subsequently. For example, the *People's Daily*, the top party organ, sold approximately 2.35 million copies per year which is among top ten best-selling paid-for dailies in the world (Chen, Z., 2010). The high selling figure is actually based on the mandatory subscription which is imposed by propaganda departments at each level (*cf.* reports about subscription mobilisation[13]).

In terms of the media structure, it is considerably predictable, for it is more or less replicated at national, provincial, prefectural, and county level (Zhao, 1998). At the national level, the top four party media include one broadcaster, the *China Central Television* (CCTV), one news agency, the *Xinhua News Agency*, one radio station, the *Central People's Radio Station* (CPR) and one press, the *People's Daily*. Particularly, the *Xinhua News Agency* is also a component of the state council. At the provincial level, there is typically one radio station, one TV station and one party organ. These three usually play an agenda-setting role, especially in big events. For example, only journalists from these three are permitted to interview senior officials. The reports and editorials are often transmitted to other local news outlets for reprint. There are also mass-appeal newspapers circulated nationwide. Yet the majority of such newspapers are circulated within provinces or cities.

In terms of the typology of the media, the press can be classified into four levels according to circulation region: national, provincial, prefectural, and county. By function, the press can be grouped into three types: party organ, mass-appeal newspaper, and special interest newspaper. The special interest newspapers are normally funded by governmental agencies or quangos serving as propaganda instruments for such agencies. For example, the *China*

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[13] 'Seven Moves to Accomplish the *People's Daily* Subscription Mission in Xi'an', [Online]. Available at: http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/14562/2255675.html (Accessed: 18 September 2011). It is reported that propaganda officials required that governmental agencies should appropriate financial budget funds if needed to accomplish the subscription. Several cases available as follows: 'Mobilizing the *People's Daily* Subscription in Shangrao', [Online]. Available at: http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper40/8073/764516.html (Accessed: 18 September 2011); 'The Video Phone Meeting to mobilise Subscription of the *People's Daily* in Shanghai and Other Cities', [Online]. Available at: http://www.aiyoubian.com/youbiannews/3/353/ (Accessed: 18 September 2011).

Transportation Newspaper is funded by the Ministry of Transportation, which is specialised in reporting achievements in the transportation system. By revenue basis, there is the market-driven press, or in other words, the mass-appeal press, and party subsidising press. Normally, the mass-appeal press does not receive subsidies from the party. Yet the revenue basis of the party organ is a mixed one. It not only receives subsidies from the party but also gains advertising revenue from the market. Additionally, the party organ also gets revenue from its subsidiary mass-appeal newspapers.

The broadcasting media are heavily controlled by the party-state, for it is the primary instrument to deliver propaganda into every household. Zhao identified two characteristics of the broadcasting media: hierarchic and monopolistic (1998: 94). The former is reflected in the structure of the broadcasting media. The party-state designed a four-layered broadcasting structure (*siji ban tai*), which closely resembles administrative bureaucracy (Huang *et al.*, 2008). That is, the broadcasting media were established at national, provincial, prefectural, and town level and affiliated to propaganda departments at each level. The broadcasting media are monopolistic in that only one television and one radio station is permitted to set up at each administrative level.[14] As indicated, there is only one television station in Beijing, the *Beijing Television Station*. Thus, there exists no inter-organisational competition. In the 1990s, the broadcasting media began to multiply its channels. For instance, CCTV has over 10 channels. Thus, intra-organisational competition began between different channels. The party still subsidises the broadcasting media. Meanwhile, the broadcasting media also makes handsome profits from advertising. Thus, its revenue basis is a mixed one as well. Yet it is fair to claim that the broadcasting media are digital version of party organs since they must only be set up by governmental agencies or propaganda offices. A typology of media is provided as follows:

Figure 8 The typology of Chinese media

	By region	**By function**	**By revenue basis**
Newspapers and magazines	National/provincial/prefectural/town	Party organ/mass-appeal/special interest	Market-driven/mixed revenue
Broadcasting	National/provincial/prefectural/town	Party organ	Mixed revenue

As discussed above, the media are set up to resemble the bureaucratic structure of the governmental agencies. This chapter now turns to look at how the media are administratively controlled by the government.

[14] Shanghai and Guangzhou are two exceptions, for there are two television stations in the two megacities.

The administrative control of media

The Chinese media control system was originally patterned after the former Soviet model created by Lenin. Its core argument is that the mass media should be the party's collective propagandist, agitator, and organiser (*Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, 2012). CCP media control theory was based on Lenin's legacy. Just after the CCP was founded in 1921. The party issued its media control rules: 'journals, daily publications, books and booklets must be managed by the party's central executive committee' and 'no central or local publications should carry any article that opposes the party's principles, policies and decisions' (Zhao, 1998: 19). Later on, the party systematically elaborated its media control theory in 'the party principle of journalism' (*xinwen shiye de dangxing yuanze*). The principle has three basic components (Zhao, 1998):

- The media must accept the party's guiding ideology as its own
- The media must propagate the party's policies and directives
- The media must accept the party's leadership and stick to the party's organisational principles and press policies

In sum, in the party's view, the media should be the mouthpiece of the party. This is accomplished by two means: ideological control by the Central Propaganda Department[15] (CPD) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and administrative control through corresponding governmental agencies, such as the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) and the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT).[16] This chapter focuses on administrative control measures, which are explicit and often drafted in written documents. The ideological control mechanism, however, is relatively implicit or even insidious, which is explored in detail in Chapter 4.

Administrative control is achieved through three main measures: a licensing system, administrative level control, and staff control. As discussed above, there is no law regarding media establishment issues. Consequently, the GAPP and SARFT issued managing rules to regulate the press, magazines, broadcasters and radio stations in 2005 and 1997 respectively: *the Press Publication Regulation* and *the Broadcasting*

[15] As mentioned in Chapter 1, the official English name of this institution used to be the Central Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China. Recently, 'Propaganda' was replaced by 'Publicity' in order to lessen the negative connotation. Its Chinese name did not change because '*xuanchuan*' in Chinese can be either propaganda or publicity.

[16] These two institutions were merged into one in 2013 when this research was in drafting. The GAPP was originally supervising the press, whereas the SARFT oversees the broadcasting media.

Regulation.[17] According to the regulations,[18] all of the press are obliged to be affiliated with a party cell, governmental agency or admissive organisations which are politically qualified for publication and answerable to the propaganda departments at the corresponding level. The party cells then apply for the license from the GAPP. If approved, the press will be set up under the direct supervision of the party cell. Radio stations and broadcasters must only be set up by the administration of radio, film and broadcasting at the corresponding level. Therefore, private ownership of media is prohibited. Furthermore, private investment into the media is also blocked.

Furthermore, all media are built into the administrative bureaucracy and organised according to the ranks similar to governmental institutions. Each medium stands one level below its licensing sponsor and must be supervised locally. For example, the *Beijing Youth Daily* (BYD) is a mass-appeal newspaper sponsored by the Beijing Communist Youth League (BCYL). The BCYL is at the departmental level (*ju ji*) in Beijing, and so the BYD is at the vice departmental level. All governmental agencies and party cells that are above the level of the BYD can issue orders to the BYD. The BYD is directly supervised by the BCYL in theory. In reality, however, the BYD is directed by the Beijing Propaganda Office.

In terms of staff control, the key measure is that the publishers and the editors-in-chief are appointed by the joint efforts of the party's propaganda office, the party's organisational office, and the licensing sponsors. Furthermore, all media workers must take courses and pass exams, which centre on the party principle of journalism, organised by the GAPP and the SARFT to get the certificate. A journalist card with personal ID photo is then issued. Unlike Western journalists who are normally against a state-sanctioned certificate, Chinese journalists are commonly in favour of the certificate and the journalist card in that the right

[17] 'The press publication regulation', *the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP)*, [Online]. Available at: http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=7DtDCpACBfk7pv2dWqYZrnTEn8VZxL0wzaxeOY3WSTIUsryTCtsn3tANf9lCwxow (Accessed: 11 February 2011). 'Broadcasting regulation', *the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT)*, [Online]. Available at: http://baike.baidu.com/view/438163.htm (Accessed: 11 February 2011).

[18] In the Chinese context, the regulations issued by governmental agencies often have law-like status, not to mention that certain governmental agencies have the power to make laws. In general, the National Congress of the People's Republic of China and its Standing Committee has the power to make laws. Yet in reality, congress has authorised a number of governmental agencies to make laws. For example, congress has authorised the central government to make laws regarding levying taxes. The issue of law-making in China is not a concern in this research, yet it is necessary to point out that the difference between the regulations and rules issued by the governmental agencies and the laws issued by the congress is rather vague. Ordinary people often regard the regulations and rules as the laws.

to interview is somehow better guaranteed if such certificates are presented. This is because it is commonly required to present the journalist card to enter some gated governmental buildings. Interestingly, it also exists because some people may disguise themselves as journalists and blackmail businessmen by threatening to expose their illegal activities. After such cases were widely reported, journalists found it difficult to approach interviewees. Thus, the GAPP and the SARFT set up a public website which listed registered journalists (related discussion given in Chapter 5). This chapter now concludes by summarising key historical elements that have left footprints on contemporary journalism.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has first explored the historical origins of Chinese journalism. Exploring the origins is significant not only because the origins have laid the foundation for the journalistic patterns in the present day, but also because historical evidence is often employed to validate the existing order (*cf*. Chapter 1). Furthermore, as a centuries-old country, China has an essentially bureaucratic historiographical tradition (Jenner, 1994: 5). The most influential histories are exclusively complied by the central governments who have taken history much too seriously to allow the future to make its own unguided judgements about them (ibid.). In this sense, Jenner argued that history has a homogenising effect (ibid.). In short, history provides sources of legitimacy, and the sources have been approved by the state.

This chapter has revealed that journalistic practitioners in the early days regarded themselves as literati characterised with a strong sense of social responsibilities, getting involved in social affairs as an elite class. The historical context and the traditional culture created a specific journalistic genre: political commentary from the literati, which mixes personal emotional opinions with news. This genre is a variant journalistic form compared to Western professionalism. This form still pervades contemporary journalism and journalists still regard themselves as intellectuals (Lu, 2004), which can be traced back to the literati. This research discusses the implication of this cultural tradition in more detail in Chapter 4.

This chapter has also discussed media commercialisation in great detail, which started at almost the same time as other social reforms enacted by the Reform and Opening-up policy. The party-state loosened its economic control by introducing the market mechanism into the media. Simultaneously, the party-state contends that the media should continue to be the party's 'throat and tongue' (*hou she*). More importantly, although advertising revenue became the business model of Chinese media similar to that of the Western media, the media's ownership is still in the hands of the party-state. The proprietorship, however, is symbolic as vividly illustrated in the case of the Jiefang Daily Group, which put the local propaganda office as its proprietor when listed on the stock market. Yet nobody can exercise proprietor's rights.

It is commonly believed that tight media control contradicts the free market logic which may deter media development. The case of Chinese journalism, however, presents counter evidence. The party-state managed to reconcile the two poles by deliberately granting market-friendly policies to politically loyal media. By virtue of this, the media can achieve a leading place in the market. Lee *et al*. (2007) have identified this as clientelism, in which the party offers patronage in exchange for conformity. 'Clientelism' seems to hold strong explanatory value for some of the key measures taken in the process of Chinese media commercialisation, such as the adoption of business management systems, conglomeration, and capitalisation. In the case of capitalisation, the party allows a small number of media groups to be listed on the stock market. The party grants opportunities for lucrative returns, meanwhile the media expect more profits. This is not a fair trade in that the party controls the social resources and owns the media theoretically. Thus, the media's material gains benefit the party's purse.

This research has constructed a conceptual framework by reviewing the existing scholarship regarding journalistic culture in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, the historical context has been examined and the current drivers of media change have been located. This research now reports on the methodology in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology employed in this research, which is composed of two stages: desk research and fieldwork. Thus, the first section reports on the aspects of the desk research. In terms of the fieldwork, two research traditions are available: the quantitative and the qualitative. This research embraces a qualitative approach. The second section gives an overview of qualitative research as an effort to elaborate on the reasons behind the researcher's choice of methods. To be specific, focus group interviews and individual interviews are employed as the main data collection tools. The third section delineates the key features of the focus group interviews and the individual interviews respectively. This chapter concludes by providing a summary and a self-reflection on the fieldwork. The next part of this chapter reports on desk research.

3.1 Desk research

The desk research was carried out from October to November 2011. Initially, the researcher intended to have a general view of what qualitative research entails. Consequently, the first stage of reading mainly focused on the theoretical writings, such as Denzin and Lincoln's *Handbook of Qualitative Research* and Bryman and Burgess's *Qualitative Research*. Second, the researcher turned to read guidebooks illustrating 'how to do' focus group and individual interviews, such as Morgan *et al.*'s *The Focus Group Kit*. Morgan *et al*. have supplied exhaustive procedures to conduct focus group interviews with extensive examples. Whereas the *Kit* (1997) is predominantly designed for conducting market-oriented focus group interviews, and is therefore relatively lacking in theoretical concerns.

Thereafter, the researcher aimed to locate specific studies conducted by media researchers with detailed fieldwork considerations. Unfortunately, it seems that fieldwork issues are somewhat ignored by media researchers. Lunt and Livingstone (1993) have provided a summary of focus group interviews in communication research, but this lacks a practical guide to conduct one. *The Nationwide Audience* (Morley, 1980) is regarded as a remarkable piece of research employing the focus group interview in media research which merely presents a one-page explanation for how the interviews were organised. Notably, Schlesinger (in Christian ed., 1980) has provided a detailed report on fieldwork aspects such as the access and the relationship between the researcher and the subject. The method, however, is participant observation, which is excluded in this research. This research has provided a description of the fieldwork proceedings. The researcher believes that, on the one hand, a faithful account of the fieldwork is valuable for further research, but on the other hand, it facilitates the researcher to articulate on self-reflection during the fieldwork.

This research employs a qualitative approach. Thus, the reading work heavily concentrated on this. In the United States, the quantitative method dominates communication research. The decennial survey of American journalists conducted by Weaver and his colleagues (1986; 1996; 2007) is representative of quantitative studies. Owing to the standard and systematic questionnaire data, Weaver (1998) was able to compile similar journalist surveys worldwide for comparison, which infers journalism to be a non-profession. However, the 'nomothetic' (Bryman, in Bryman & Burgess eds., 1999: 36) nature of quantitative findings, referring to the 'general law-like findings irrespective of time and place' (Bryman, in Bryman & Burgess eds., 1999: 41), is questionable in the perspective of the present-day qualitative research. Qualitative research claims that all inquiries and writings are inextricably selective (Peshkin, 1993; Bryman & Burgess eds., 1999). Furthermore, since meanings are socially, historically, and contextually constructed, it would be inadvisable to pursue a 'nomothetic' explanation.

Accordingly, a number of methodological options are available, such as participant observation and different forms of interview. Schlesinger (in Christian ed., 1980: 363) highly recommends an ethnographic approach, namely participant observation, to examine news production. Participant observation 'permits the theoretically informed observation of the actual social practices which constitute cultural production' (ibid.). Schlesinger further claims that 'all forms of external analysis of products face intractable problems of inference concerning the production process as such, and therefore contain an explanatory lacuna' (ibid.). This research, however, employs focus group interviews and individual interviews as the main data collection methods, for the researcher believes that the two methods are well fitted to the researcher's personal background. The researcher worked as a political journalist for four years in Beijing and Shanghai, which has armed the researcher with sufficient knowledge of newsroom jargon, norms, and news production processes that would alternatively be provided through ethnographic methods. In the fieldwork, the researcher acted as an insider who was knowledgeable of professional norms and a collaborator who was working with the subjects to generate meanings. In other words, this research views the subjects as the active agents whom the researcher learns from and co-operates with.

As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, this research is largely based on the researcher's personal experience as a political journalist for four years. This working experience facilitates mutual understanding between the researcher and the participants. In fact, the research questions are somewhat sensitive in the Chinese context. Before the fieldwork, the researcher worried that the participants might be reluctant to disclose any corrupt practices they had taken part in. The fieldwork discussions proved that the researcher was over-anxious. Due to similar working experiences, the participants regarded the researcher as an insider who shared similar feelings with them rather than an outsider who came to judge and exploit from them. Although the researcher very much regrets the corrupt practices she conducted during her working years, the researcher would not judge the participants 'using hindsight' (Ellis *et al.*, 2011[19]) but try to understand the reasons behind their practices.

The project is also a self-reflection journey for the researcher. The researcher who breathes the same air as the participants is emotionally engaged with this project. The research is driven by the researcher's own desire to find out the answers to her own questions. Furthermore, what the researcher intends to probe is also what the researcher hopes to improve in reality. However, the emotional engagement with the subjects has its costs as well, as the researcher may lose her awareness of being a researcher and 'is seduced by the participants' perspectives' (Bryman, in Byrman & Bungess eds., 1999: 38). To resovle this, the researcher frequently reported progression to her supervisors, who reminded her to maintain distance both from the research sites and from the participants' perspectives. Such engagement was not always negative in that it enabled the researcher to collaborate with the subjects and to understand their concerns. The following section provides an overview of the qualitative research in order to lay the foundation of the enquiry's stance.

3.2 An overview of qualitative research

Nowadays, there has been considerable growth in the usage of qualitative research, although its definition is certainly not an easy matter (Bryman & Burgess eds., 1999). Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 576) argue that qualitative research originates from diverse subject areas and is continuously influenced by various thoughts and theories. Consequently, qualitative research is featured with multi-faceted connotations and multiple

[19] Ellis, C., Adams, T., & Bochner A., 2010. 'Autoethnography: An Overview', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12 (1) November [Online]. Available at: http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095 (Accessed: 30 December 2013)

focuses which leads to an uneasy task of definition. Alternatively, some scholars have endeavoured to identify key features of qualitative research. Chen, X. (2000) concludes with five key features of qualitative research: it tends to be conducted in natural settings; the meaning construction of the subject should be interpretively understood; the researcher is the 'bricoleur' of social reality providing simultaneous meaning; inducement is usually employed to examine data, and the relationship between the researcher and the subject is highly regarded. Others (Walker, 1985) infer the elements which constitute qualitative research through comparison with quantitative research. Generally speaking, the latter argues that the social reality can be understood neutrally and objectively through scientific approaches, whereas the former advocates a contextual, inter-subjective understanding of social reality (Chen, X., 2000:1, preface). Bryman (in Bryman & Burgess eds., 1999) has listed eight categories of differences between the two research traditions. For example, quantitative data is generally hard and reliable, whereas qualitative data can be rich and deep. Besides, the scope of findings from quantitative research is 'nomothetic' whereas qualitative is ideographic. After scrutinising each category, Bryman claims that the division of the two research traditions is more of a convention than it ought to be. An integration of the two would ensure more complete accounts of social reality (Bryman, 1988). In contrast, a number of scholars reject this integration (Chen, X., 2000; Filstead, 1979). They underpin this rejection by referring to the two research traditions as contrasting 'paradigms' representing mutually exclusive epistemological positions, instead of being only a technical issue. A representative description of this view is as follows:

> Quantitative and qualitative methods are more than just differences between research strategies and data collection procedures. These approaches represent fundamentally different epistemological frameworks for conceptualizing the nature of knowing, social reality, and procedures for comprehending these phenomena. (Filstead, 1979: 45)

Furthermore, quantitative research is committed to employing scientific methods for gathering information from the subject, which is seen as the reservoir of knowledge to gain access to the authentic reality based on positivism. Qualitative research, however, advocates the idea that social reality is contextual and historically and politically bounded. As a result, the researcher merely investigates relative knowledge to interpret ideographic reality which is supported by constructivism and criticism.

More importantly, the transformation of qualitative research, which took place in the early 1990s, seems to sharpen the division between the two traditions. The changes are mainly driven by postmodernism, constructivism, and ethno-methodological enquiry which highlight the relationship between the researcher and the subject. In other words, the researchers become more and more sensitive to the relationship between the researcher and the subject in the process of enquiry. The matter of representation has inspired a host of attempts to deconstruct research to reveal its reality-constituting practice (Gubrium & Holstein, in Bryman & Burgess eds., 1999:127). The research process is seen as an effort to empower the subject to collaborate with the researcher in the construction of meaning. Besides, it is generally acknowledged that all enquiries, even writing itself, are political rather than innocent practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, in Bryman & Burgess eds., 1999; Peshkin, 1993). To sum up, Guba and Lincoln (1994:105) argue as follows:

> Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, which we define as the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.

This research embraces a qualitative perspective because the researcher believes that the meaning of professionalism is socially and historically constituted. Second, the qualitative method fits well with the researcher's personal background. As mentioned above, the researcher used to be an insider, a journalist, which presumably favours better collaboration with the subject both physically and emotionally. Additionally, another technical reason is that there has been high volume of quantitative research regarding Chinese journalists. An alternative qualitative account seems lacking in present-day academic currency. As a result, this study adopts a qualitative perspective. Specifically, individual and focus group interview methods are employed in the data collection process which are detailed later.

However, it is necessary to remember that 'every method of data collection is only an approximation to knowledge. Each provides a different and usually valid glimpse of reality, and all are limited when used alone' (Warwick, cited in Peshkin, 1993: 28). The qualitative method is useful in providing a 'detailed portrayal of a small sector of social life' (Bryman, in Bryman & Gungess eds., 1999: 45), but it is often questioned over its random sampling, or in other words purposive sampling, for being unscientific. Actually, this research employs purposive sampling when recruiting research participants. It is a limitation of this research that the participants came from only a tiny handful of all the media outlets that exist in China. Furthermore, purposive sampling may affect the representativeness of research subjects, which will then influence the reliability and validity of the research findings. However, the researcher endeavoured to recruit participants from various types of media, ranging from party organs, mass-appeal newspapers, and broadcast media in order to cover the media spectrum. In this sense, the composition of the participants has a certain degree of representativeness. Additionally, the researcher chose Beijing and Shanghai as the fieldwork sites, which excluded Guangdong. This is yet another limitation of this research. Generally speaking, the Guangdong media are more open and forward-looking compared with the media in Beijing and Shanghai. However, the fieldwork sites were a pragmatic choice, since the researcher had worked in the two cities facilitating the reach to research participants. Moreover, the researcher had only two months to organise six focus groups, six elite interviews, and a number of personal communications. Thus, future research with a longer time frame could take the Guangdong media into account in analysing Chinese journalistic norms.

3.3 Focus group interviews and individual interviews

This section first introduces the features of focus group interviews and then discusses its pros and cons. The second part of this section looks at individual interviews.

Focus group interviews

There has been a remarkable upsurge of interest in focus group interviews in social science research since the 1980s (Morgan, 1996; Lunt & Livingstone, 1993). Nowadays, focus group interviews can be used either as a self-contained method or in combination with surveys and other research methods (Morgan, 1996: 129). The focus group interview was originally employed as a market evaluation method in the 1920s (Kitzinger, in Bryman & Burgess eds., 1999). It is Robert K. Merton who takes credit for developing focus group interviews for research purposes in the 1950s, although he saw focus groups as a precursor to further quantitative research (Lunt & Livingstone, 1993:81). Focus group research disappeared after World War II only to re-emerge in the 1980s with a particular link to communication research. The most notable case is the research conducted by Morley (1980) about the *Nationwide* audience which shifts the paradigm of media effects and the conception of audiences. To some extent, the resurgence of the focus group interview is somewhat in tune with the current transition in audience research which is redefining the audience as a plural entity rather than single one. Nowadays, the focus group interview is extensively used in social science studies.

A preliminary definition

Generally speaking, a focus group is a group interview which is focused on a specific topic. Morgan (1996: 130) has provided a widely accepted definition which views focus groups as a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher. This definition points out three key elements of focus group interviews: the active role of the researcher; the primary aim of data collection; and group interaction as a source of data. However, scholars diverge on whether the focus group interview should be distinguished from other kinds of group interviews. This study embraces the idea suggested by Boyle (2010) that focus groups require interaction between participants allowing a multi-directional flow of information, whereas group interviews tend to have a one-to-many or one-to-one format.

Key features of focus group interviews

The most distinguishing feature of the focus group interview is the explicit use of interaction as research data (Kitzinger, in Bryman & Burgess eds., 1999: 138). The interaction is highly regarded for the primary reason that it occurs in the group context. Besides, the interaction entails a participant synergy effect which makes the unearthed information visible. The group context is of value in two dimensions. First, the meanings constructed within a group context are socially constructed. A comparison with the individual interview would make this point more comprehensible. In individual interviews, many of the social interactions, which constitute social practices, are stripped away. In contrast, the group context of focus groups can mimic social settings which bear sufficient resemblance to the social relations (Lunt & Livingstone, 1993). Second, Moscovici (cited in Lunt & Livingstone, 1993) claims that social representations are generated not so much through individual cognitive processes, but through everyday conversations. As with discourse-based approaches, focus group interviews are viewed as a simulation of everyday conversation, which is understood to be socially generated, rather than simply an articulation of an individual's thought process. In this sense, it is an ideal research method to examine topics involving social representations. Furthermore, good interactions help the research participants to act as co-researchers who both query each other and explain themselves to each other, which in turn facilitates unvoiced accounts (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, in Denzin & Lincoln eds., 2005; Morgan, 1996). Morgan (1996) stresses this interaction has a 'synergy effect' which makes the discussion in focus group interviews more than the sum of individual interviews. Through this synergy effect, the consensus and diversity among participants can be identified. Moreover, the researcher has the opportunity to ask for further explanations of personal views regarding the divergence between participants.

Group interaction can be further categorised into two types: complementary and argumentative (Kitzinger, in Bryman & Burgess eds., 1999). The complementary side indicates agreement and shared common experiences. It is believed that, in contrast with individual interviews and observation, the focus group interview facilitates the exploration of collective memories and shared stocks of knowledge that help to reveal group norms and normative assumptions (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, in Denzin & Lincoln eds., 2005: 903). On the other hand, the process of argumentative interaction allows the researcher to observe how people theorise their own accounts in relation to competing perspectives (ibid.).

Debates about advantages and disadvantages

At the practical level, the focus group can probe a range of topics in a given time. In this sense, it is efficient for generating large quantities of material from a sizeable number of people in a relatively short period. Besides, the free flow of information might inhibit the authority of researchers to allow participants to take over and own the interview space (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, in Denzin & Lincoln eds., 2005: 903).

Criticisms of the focus group are mainly directed against its reliability and validity. Since the sample process of focus group is not that rigid compared with survey studies, it is criticised and questioned for lacking representativeness. Moreover, data gathered through the random sample cannot be used to speculate on the generalised situation. Counter arguments claim that both reliability and validity are introduced to evaluate quantitative research. Consequently, they are not applicable to qualitative research. Furthermore, it is also argued that the focus group is inappropriate for sensitive or taboo topics. However, vivid case studies prove that participants being with others who share similar experiences can encourage expression. In particular, participants support each other when they encounter the same situations or difficulties. Consequently, the focus group has the capacity of empowerment which has a special niche in feminism studies.

As discussed above, the most salient strength of focus groups is their ability to promote socially constructed interaction which is a direct outcome of the group context. Opposed to this beneficial argument is the idea that all of the interactions are contextual (Dahlgren, 1988: 292). Additionally, personal behaviour is not cut off from public discourse and personal action does not happen within a cultural vacuum (Kitzinger, in Bryman & Burgess eds., 1999). In this sense, the group context is not that significant. Additionally, the group context also has the disadvantage that it may censor certain views that deviate from accepted norms, which could inhibit people from expressing divergent thoughts. However, these muted voices are of great value for the research. Instead, Kitzinger (in Bryman & Burgess eds., 1999) argues that the participants can provide mutual support in expressing feelings which are common to the group, but which may be considered a deviation from mainstream culture.

This research highly regards group interaction due to its potential ability to facilitate a synergetic effect. In this respect, the more homogeneous the composition of each group is, the better the interaction should be. This research has set up six focus groups made up of full-time journalists as participants. Each group consists of journalists with similar social backgrounds maximising the homogeneous aspect. Notably, one group is made up of news workers from internet content providers in order to draw a comparison with journalists from traditional media outlets. The description of the composition of each group is provided in a later section. The following part discusses the individual interviews.

Individual Interviews

Interviewing is undoubtedly the most widely applied technique for conducting a systematic social enquiry. It is estimated that '90 per cent of all social science investigations employ different kinds of interviews' (Holstein & Gubrium, in Byrman & Burgess eds., 1999: 105). Largely influenced by postmodernism and constructivism, as has previously been discussed, the interview for qualitative research has three distinctive features: the active subject, the contextual meaning construction process, and focusing on the 'how'. A comparison with news interviews will illuminate these particular characteristics.

The news interviewer views respondents as repositories of knowledge to be passively exploited, whereas the qualitative interview conceives of the interviewee as a co-operator who is actively involved in a collaborative process of meaning construction. Furthermore, the former believes that the proper way of asking questions will result in desired information as reliable social facts. Notwithstanding, the latter holds the view that scientific neutrality and the techniques to achieve it are largely mythical. To take it further, the interviewer is a person, carrying unavoidable conscious and unconscious motives, desires, feelings, and biases – hardly a neutral tool (Scheurich, 1995, cited by Fontana & Frey, in Denzin & Lincoln eds., 2005). Besides, the spoken or written word always has 'a residue of ambiguity' (Fontana & Frey, in Denzin & Lincoln eds., 2005: 697) which could colour the meaning interpretation. Thus the interview is inextricably biased by its very nature. Furthermore, the news interview is keen to obtain 'what' has been said. However, the qualitative interview does not only focus on the 'what' but emphasises 'how' this information is constructed through interaction between the researcher and the subject. The meaning of qualitative research is socially, interactionally, and dynamically constituted. In this respect, the interview can be seen as 'a site of producing reportable knowledge itself' (Holstein & Gubrium, in Bryman and Burgess eds., 1999: 106). As a result, Holstein and Gubrium (in Bryman and Burgess eds., 1999: 107) argue that the qualitative interview may not be assessed in terms of reliability and validity. Instead, reliability and validity can be gained if situated experiential realities which are conveyed can be locally comprehensible.

The individual interviews of this research comprise two parts. The first part was conducted before the focus group interview. The second part was personal communication with journalists who had regular contact with the researcher either online or face-to-face throughout the three years in writing this thesis. The final section of this chapter concludes with aspects of the fieldwork.

3.4 Aspects of the fieldwork

This research has conducted 6 focus groups, 6 individual interviews, and 10 personal communications, which have involved 41 journalists and editors in total. This section provides a summary and reflection on the fieldwork. Figures presenting demographic features of the participants are provided at the end.

The fieldwork started with the individual interviews, of which the interviewees are all in a senior position: three are editors-in-chief and the other three are senior journalists or editors. They are all male and hold an undergraduate degree or above. The three editors-in-chief are in their forties and the other three are in their thirties. Notably, all of them are CCP members echoing the argument in Chapter 1 that job rank is closely associated with party membership. The interviewees were selected on the purposive sampling based on the objectives of the research and the personal background of the researcher. The individuals interviewed are familiar with the researcher. The individual interview list is given in appendix I. The research postulates that job ranks and different job responsibilities may colour views regarding propaganda control and journalistic corruption. The findings, however, indicate the opposite answer. The elite media workers generally share the same views as ordinary journalists about the two issues (details in Chapters 4 & 5).

The focus group interviews were conducted in Beijing and Shanghai respectively. Beijing is the capital of China and it is also seen as the centre of politics and culture, whereas Shanghai is the most economically developed city in China. Both of the cities play leading roles in the progression of China's Reform and Opening-up. Presumably, the fast-changing political and economic circumstances may impact upon the journalistic culture. Notably, in the 1980s and the 1990s, a number of media outlets in Beijing and Shanghai pioneered news reform (*cf*. Chapter 2). The media in Beijing and Shanghai have set the reporting models after which a great number of media outlets in other cities are explicitly patterned. Another practical reason to select these two locations is related to the researcher's personal background. The researcher used to work in the two cities making it much easier to gain access to the subjects both physically and psychologically.

This research conducted 5 focus groups in Beijing and 1 group in Shanghai. All the participants are full-time journalists working for mass media. The research employs a purposive sampling method to select the participants. The researcher first contacted the informants and sent them the research information sheet. Then the informants spread the sheets in the newsroom and invited their colleagues or peers to join the research. Before each group started, the participants were required to sign a consent form (appendix IV) and a registration form (appendix V). All the participants stressed that they needed to keep their names confidential. Some participants required keeping their employers confidential as well. Thus this research does not name any participants. Instead, their accounts are coded as shown in the appendices. All groups were directed through standardised questions in order to make comparisons between each group.

The media type was also taken into account in forming the groups. Thus, the participants in focus groups covered a range of media including national party organs, mass-appeal newspapers, national broadcasting media, local broadcasting media, and news websites. A list of the composition of groups is presented in appendix II. Among all the groups, three are relatively homogeneous in that the participants of each group come from the same media organisation. The other three are heterogeneous for the participants come from different media organisations. Morgan (1997) argue that a homogeneous group would greatly facilitate discussions, which would further contribute to identify group norms, while the heterogeneity within each group adds more value to the comparative work which may discover different norms caused by organisational culture. Before the first focus group started, the researcher worried that participants might have concerns regarding the questions about media control or journalistic corruption given that they come from the same party organ. The proceedings of the first focus group, however, exceeded the researcher's expectations. The participants not only commented on media control but self-exposed their unethical behaviours. This reminds the researcher to discard any pre-judgement or bias before going into the field (Chen, X., 2000). Self-exposure also prompted other participants to reflect on their own behaviours. A participant said to the researcher after the discussion: 'this is a really good talk. It is the first time I truly know how my colleagues view the existing system' (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2013). The participant also intended to learn this method from the researcher. Furthermore, the comparison between different groups also achieved fruitful findings. These issues are discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

The focus group interview is rarely used in existing Chinese journalism research. This is one of the reasons that this research employs it. During the focus group interviews, the participants were reasonably active. In some cases, the researcher was even invited into the discussion and the researcher took the opportunity to join. In the view of quantitative research, this may be against the objective rule and so labelled as unscientific. This research, however, claims that objectivity is a highly questionable concept in social research in the present day. As discussed previously, this research adopts the view of constructivism. Thus, the researcher participated in the focus group discussion. In light of this, the barrier between the researcher and the subjects was removed. The researcher was not working as an arbitrator to judge the participants' accounts and behaviours but as a collaborator working with the participants. Therefore, a 'fusion of horizons' was realised. This research also shows that focus group interviews are promising in exploring shared values or beliefs, which should be given more attention in future.

Another notable method in this research is personal communication. The participants in this part are former colleagues or peers of the researcher. Through online chat, Skype video calls, or face-to-face chat, the researcher managed to maintain regular contact with the participants. Throughout the contact, the participants provided vivid evidence and frontline information, which the researcher greatly appreciated. In this part, the researcher occasionally became a participant in that the researcher shared the agony and joy and discussed the career options with the participants. Thus, the research is empowered both with mutual understanding and encouragement. Subsequently, this chapter ends by providing figures illustrating the demographic features of the interviewees.

Figure 9 Sex ratio

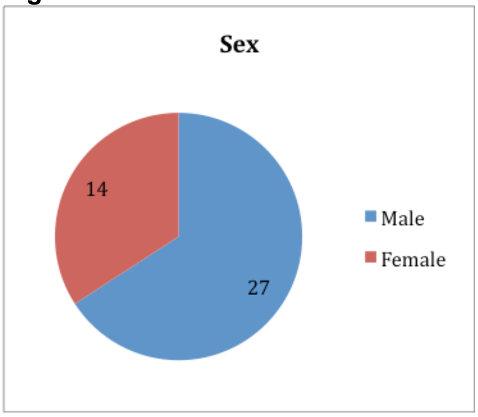


Figure 10 Age ratio

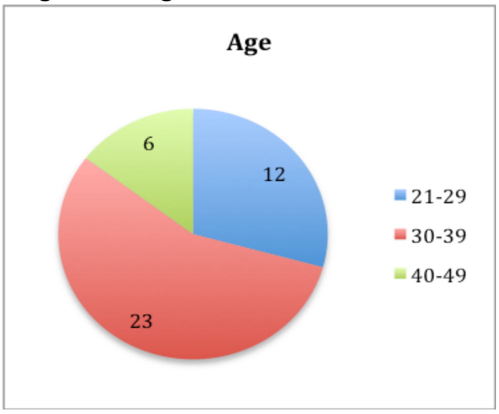


Figure 11 Educational status

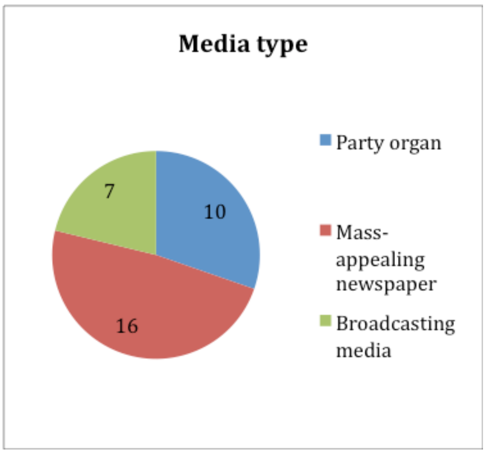


Figure 12 Media type ratio

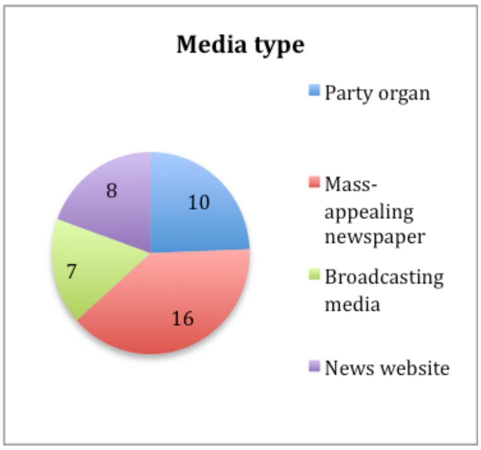
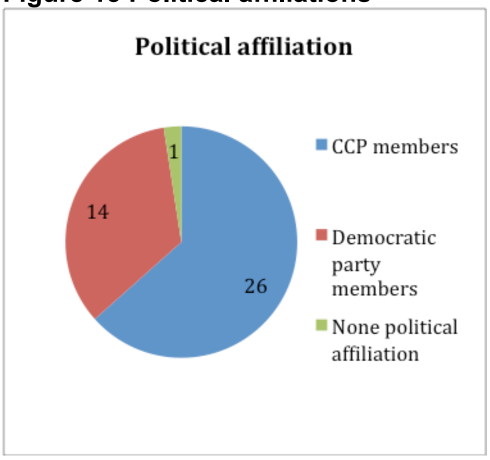


Figure 13 Political affiliations[20]



[20] Democratic parties are the joint name of nominally eight minor political parties, which are sanctioned by the party-state. They merely function a symbolic role, with the leaders being chosen by the CCP.

As shown in the figures, the majority of the participants are male, aged from 30 to 39, holding an undergraduate degree. Most of them are from mass-appeal newspapers. Notably, the majority are CCP party members. The demographic features of the participants show discrepancies with those in the survey findings in Chapter 1 in that the predominance is not of female journalists but for CCP members. This does not affect the validity of the findings of this research. As mentioned previously, this research does not aim to make generalisations but to provide vivid cases and in-depth descriptions and facilitate multi-faceted understandings of present day journalism.

This research has now built up the theoretical framework, historical context, and a methodological guide. The thesis reports next on the main findings in the following three chapters. First, the subsequent chapter looks at the norms of practising journalism under control.

Part II: Contemporary Journalistic Culture

Chapter Four: Practising Journalism Under Control

This chapter explores the implications of practising journalism under tight media control. As mentioned previously, this chapter focuses on ideological control exerted mainly by the propaganda offices. The first section looks at the forms of ideological control in the present day. This research does not intend to provide an all-encompassing checklist including all control methods in contemporary Chinese journalism. Instead, drawing upon the fieldwork data, the frequently mentioned forms and new techniques are highlighted. A typology of control forms is also provided. The second section looks at self-censorship. A number of scholars argue that it is self-censorship that effectively keeps the media in line (Brady 2008; Hassid, 2008; Lee, 2000). Most studies regarding Chinese media control stop here failing to identify how self-censorship works in daily journalistic practices. Based on the fieldwork data, this chapter provides a detailed description regarding how self-censorship works in the news production chain. As to the drivers inducing self-censorship in Chinese journalism, almost all studies attribute self-censorship to mystery and uncertainty about the permissible boundaries (Stern & Hassid, 2012; Hassid, 2008; Zhao, 2008; Link, 2002). This claim was supported by a number of interviewees in the fieldwork but was countered by others, which indicates that more causal explanations are needed to demystify self-censorship. Additionally, it is generally argued that journalists are critical of censorship. Yet this assumption was only echoed by a number of interviewees. The majority of interviewees make efforts to validate censorship. Paradoxically, in the meantime, a large number of interviewees also argue for objective reporting and watchdog journalism. Caught between the ideals and the reality, journalistic practitioners may adjust or adapt themselves to the existing system. Thus, the third section explores the reactions and strategies employed by journalists towards the existing system. This chapter concludes by discussing the implications of practising journalism under severe control.

It is first necessary to specify the differences between censorship and propaganda. The analyses are largely based on common sense and a contextual basis. In Chinese journalism, censorship is more associated with negative reporting (*fumian baodao*), whereas propaganda is normally associated with positive reporting (*zhengmian baodao*). The prominent form of negative reporting is investigative reporting which exposes the malpractices of the authorities. Positive reporting is committed to extolling or glorifying the achievements of the party-state with the aim of creating long-term favourable effects. Journalists normally view censorship as a way of blocking bad news, and propaganda as steering good news. In practice, the two are generally complementary. The following section firstly investigates the general forms of ideological control.

4.1 Forms of ideological control

A vice editor-in-chief of a national party organ told his colleague, after he retired, that he would publish two books based on the daily propaganda directives (*xuanchuan yaoqiu*) he received: 'one will be named "must report (*bixu baodao*)"; the other will be called "must not report (*buxu baodao*)"' (F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2013). These were the two most common forms of control acknowledged by interviewees in the fieldwork. Before looking at common forms, a brief reflection on how the media are supervised in China is needed. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is no media law in China. The media are owned by the party-state in theory. In practice, however, the media operates under the jurisdiction and regulation of the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) and the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT). All media must be affiliated with sponsoring institutions, which are approved by the party-state to obtain licences. However, it is the propaganda department that has the final word on the media's survival and content at each corresponding level. Each media organisation is hierarchically located within the administrative bureaucracy system (*xingzheng jibie tixi*), which holds one administrative level lower than its sponsoring institution and presidial propaganda office. Furthermore, senior leaders of the media are originally chosen by propaganda departments and nominated in coordination with organisation departments. The functions of the Central Propaganda Department (CPD) are not only confined to supervising the media, but also range from propagating Marxism, guiding public opinion, overseeing textbook writing, and administering cultural activities (*Spokesman Introduced Eight Functions of the CPD*, 2010). The CPD is the cardinal supervisor of all media in China. In practice, propaganda departments at the provincial, prefectural, and county levels oversee media organisations at their corresponding levels.

Propaganda directives are currently issued to media organisations on a daily basis. 'Normally they came to us before five pm everyday', a vice editor-in-chief of a newspaper said in the fieldwork (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). Directives could be of two kinds: a banning order or a must-do order. Almost all interviewees identify this as the most common form of control. The following section explores each form mentioned by the interviewees respectively. Then a typology of various forms of control is given.

Banning order

The first and foremost form of control is the banning order, issued on a daily basis, which forbids or limits certain topics from being reported or commented on. This part first delineates how it works and its content and then explores the changes in banning orders identified by the journalists in the fieldwork.

Procedure and content of banning orders

Generally, the orders are issued following an official procedure. The propaganda officials on duty will first make landline calls to its inferior media organisations to notify the issuing of the orders. Then the office of the editor-in-chief of each media organisation is responsible for receiving orders by fax. The files are classified and stamped with red official seals. The office of the editor-in-chief will then distribute orders to all news desks. Normally, the orders will be announced at the editors meeting in the afternoon at which all the editors on duty will be present. After the meeting, the editors inform the journalists affected by the orders, who then stop writing or retreat from the topic. If journalists have already finished writing, the articles will be killed (*bi gao*) without any hesitation. In this case, all journalists' efforts would have been in vain, which often seriously upsets them. A number of interviewees mentioned that banning orders are normally pinned up on bulletin boards in the newsroom (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012). In one newsroom, the orders are put in the most prominent place next to chief editors' cash awards notice. In light of this, all journalists and editors are made fully aware of these orders. An interviewee said his superior, a chief editor of local news, preferred to read out the orders in full at meetings (Personal communications No. 5, 14 January 2012). He reckoned that his superior intended to lessen his responsibility by passing the orders on. Nowadays, in order to block the rapid spread of online information, propaganda officials tend to make phone calls or send text messages to notify media workers about banning orders.

Banning orders generally arrive as one sentence with no reasons being given. According to the interviewees, banning orders are layered in terms of their discourse strategy (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012; F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012). The most rigid one is 'not allowed to be published with no exceptions' (*yilv bu yunxu baodao*) which means no words can be put into the public domain. Drawing upon journalists' personal experiences, the taboo topics in this category include political reform, religious conflicts, minority conflicts, military affairs, the issue of Taiwan, and collective protests. Certain information related to the Politburos is also limited. The second type usually prohibits other media organisations except the party-organs and the state-run broadcasting to report certain events (*bu yunxu zicai*). This method gives the state-run *Xinhua News Agency*, the top party-organ *People's Daily*, and the party broadcaster CCTV the priority to report certain events. Other media organisations are only allowed to reprint reports from the above two. It is a tacit rule that reports about the Politburo Standing Committee members are exclusive of the three. The interviewees also mentioned that the coalmine disasters, and even breaking incidents that caused heavy causalities, are exclusive to the three as well (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012). Then comes the third type which usually arrives in a row with three 'no's: no comments, no sensationalisation and no exaggeration (*bu pinglun, bu chaozuo, bu xuanran*). For example, it was recently suspected that a primary school principal had raped several pupils by taking them to a hotel overnight. The local people were outraged. Thus, the CPD issued the three no's order (*A Weekly Summary of Directives from 'the Truth Department'*, 2013). At face value, 'no comments' is easily comprehended, while the other two orders are rather 'obscure and ambiguous' (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012). The extent to which something might be considered sensationalisation or exaggeration varies highly on a case-by-case basis. However, in practice, media organisations seem to have reached a generally accepted resolution: to take the story off the headline or the front page to obey the order (I-2, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012; I-5, an editor-in-chief, Beijing, 11 January 2012; F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012; F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012).

Changes in banning order

A significant number of journalists acknowledged that banning orders are changing in that they have become 'more professional and cunning' (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012; F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012; F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012; I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). An editor working for a news website said, 'you may even be surprised to find how expert they are' (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012). He explained,

> In the past, they simply ordered not to report. But there is nowhere to hide information in the internet age. Thus, they became smarter in supervising us. For example, sometimes, they required that this topic could not hit the headline. Sometimes, they told us not to put this headline in red and bold. I remember once they told us to put two stories side by side; meanwhile highlighting one of them by using bold fonts which is an apparently extolling story and weakening the other investigative report through zooming out. (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012)

Journalists from two focus groups were also surprised by the working efficiency of propaganda departments. 'In the past we used to think the banning orders were on their way after we arrived at the incident locale. But now we are on the way when the banning orders are issued', one journalist said (F-2, a party organ group, Beijing, 9 January 2012). Another journalist echoed similarly,

> Banning orders are actually good news sources. You may even learn what had happened only through their orders. Moreover, media did not know the incident. But how did they know? I guess they must have some channels to work so efficiently. (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012)

However, the above comments, which are provided by traditional media workers, are downplayed by journalists from news websites. A representative counter-argument is as follows,

> They are still learning the internet. Weibo (a Chinese version of Twitter) is only two years old. Some officials do not even know how to use it. Besides, information spreads quickly online. You are deleting it; meanwhile netizens are uploading it. It cannot be easily blocked altogether online. (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012)

Furthermore, a vice editor-in-chief of a market-driven newspaper said that 'banning orders are also changing to target different sectors of audiences' (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). His newspaper received more banning orders than his competitors due to its larger readership of officials. Similarly, journalists in the competition paper said that they are more restricted in reporting scholars' criticisms of governments presumably due to its popularity among intellectuals (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012).

A party-organ journalist approved these changes positively, 'they are at the moment trying to draw a better fine line between prohibition and conditional permission. At least, we can report some issues although under certain limitations' (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012). Her colleague added,

> It is not suitable to continue with the old way of managing media. Simple and bold prohibition is out of time. We are happy to see these new changes. Propaganda departments also need to keep up to date. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012)

Actually, propaganda departments also keep up to date with economic development. An editor in a market-driven press complained,

> In some cases, there are brokers making profits out of banning orders. They take money from companies and then sweep unfavourable reports for the companies. Some banning orders have no relation with our party. They do it for the benefits of their staff welfare or for personal gains. (Personal communications No. 3, on multiply days)

Two journalists in the focus group interviews also doubted whether there might have been some under-table deals behind banning orders. One journalist always wondered 'merely a phone call can kill an article. Sometimes I feel that there are behind-the-scene dealings' (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012). Another journalist said with sarcasm,

> They do not tell you why this topic is banned. You may find the CPD is the most mysterious institution. Their address and phone numbers are highly secret. I am always suspicious they might make hoax calls. Some banning orders might not be organisational decisions. Anyone who works in that building can just make a phone call to kill an article. He also might do it for his relatives and friends. All he needs to do is just to pick up the phone. (F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012)

A journalist reporting congress affairs shared his real experience,

> I remember that day I received a phone call shown as six zeroes. I thought it was the national congress. A woman said on the phone: "a secretary of a top leader requires you to stop reporting this issue". I asked who this leader was. Then the woman replied with resentment: "you do not need to know". Finally, we did not run the story. But how can you know who killed your article. The real problem is how dare you. (I-4, a senior journalist, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

His colleague added there was one courageous editor who intended to find out who the person was,

> Anybody who attended the internal meeting yesterday should know the propaganda chief was outraged. The editor-in-chief of an internet company had been dismissed simply because he requested an official fax of a banning order. He received a text message requiring him to delete an article. But he was not sure whether the text message was really from the propaganda department so he did not delete the article. It turned out to be a real order. It is said the propaganda chief heard of this and instructed his subordinates to teach him a

> lesson. Now everybody learned the lesson: do not take risks; just follow instructions from anybody's texts and calls. Isn't it ridiculous? (I-4, a senior journalist, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

The opposite side of banning orders are the must-do orders (*bi ling*), which is discussed in the following part.

Must-do Orders

As suggested by its name, must-do orders require that certain events or topics must be reported with a positive tone extolling the party-state. Journalists normally call such reports 'command reports' (*zhiling baodao*) (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012; F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting, Beijing, 14 January 2012). Compared with the banning order, the must-do order is relatively less frequently issued, and it normally lasts a longer period. Such orders can be divided into two types depending on their duration: cultivating favourable reports (*pudian baodao*) and propaganda campaigns.

Cultivating favourable reports

The first type is issued before certain political events, such as the 18th Party Congress meeting and the annual national congress meeting. These orders aim to orient media coverage to create a favourable public opinion (*yingzao lianghao yunlun huanjing*). This kind of order normally expires by the end of the political event. The orders are issued by the Central Propaganda Department (CPD) or local propaganda offices over briefing meetings or through official documents.

Journalists tend to view such orders as boring reports with little news value. One journalist dubbed must-do orders as 'chicken ribs', which are tasteless although it would be a pity to throw them away. He explained,

> When the Beijing Municipal People's Congress held elections, the Beijing propaganda department demanded that we publish special reports about this consecutively on the front page. But I can hardly find valuable things to report on a daily basis. Valuable things, such as candidates campaigns, were not allowed to be reported, whereas tedious procedures of elections are nonsense yet the only thing available to be reported. (I-4, a senior journalist, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

Although most of the interviewees in the fieldwork viewed must-do orders with disdain, a small number of them highlighted positive aspects of must-do orders. A party-organ journalist said,

> I have to admit must-do orders do help us sometimes. You may never get an interview opportunity with some big figures either in politics or in companies through normal channels. But under must-do orders they must cooperate with us. Actually, they would like to work with us for they know you are going to praise them. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012)

A vice editor-in-chief emphasised that journalists should find news values from must-do orders and write the ordered reports in a readable way (Personal communications No. 2, on multiple days). However, one journalist counter claimed,

> Does it really have news value? Journalists from different media organisations interviewed the same person at the same time in the same room under the same arrangement. Then published the article on the same day. You may find the same words in every newspaper except the author's name. (I-4, a senior editor, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

Propaganda campaign

The other type can be seen as a propaganda campaign, which normally lasts for a longer period and comes in a series. This type is normally initiated by the CPD, which employs multiple methods aiming for long-term favourable effects with all media organisations engaged. A recent representative campaign is called 'go to the basic unit, alter life style, change reporting style (*zou jiceng, zhuan zuofeng, gai wenfeng,* abbreviated as ZZG)'[21] which was extensively discussed in the fieldwork. The campaign ordered all media workers to go to the basic units such as factories, farms, and countryside units to dig out gems from ordinary people's lives. Media workers should gain first hand information, such as working with farmers, blue-collar workers, and other workers, to report on them. Newspapers and broadcast media should set up serial columns and special programmes to report such stories on notable pages or at prime time. The reports should glorify China's

[21] The ZZG campaign was initiated on 19 July 2011 when the CPD issued the official notice to all media-related organisations nationwide. The main aims as stated in the notice were to follow the instructions and spirits from the top party leaders; better implement mass work under new situations; strengthen the mass-line education; better publicise the party's opinions; improve propaganda reports quality; and adhere to correct orientation of public opinion. Propaganda campaigns have long been employed by the party-state to strengthen its thought control. In the Mao era, propaganda campaigns were also used as a political struggle tool to implement Mao's ideas. The ZZG campaign was initiated just after Hu, Jintao, the top party leader, launched his talk on 1st July 2011, which emphasised the media's role in new situation and argued for strengthening mass work. The official notice can be accessed at http://www.dongman.gov.cn/cygc/2011-09/15/content_27350.htm.

rise and the improvement of people's living standards. Moreover, the stories must be readable and lively to achieve wider audiences.

The CPD also formulated multiple methods to achieve its goals. As stated in its official notice and confirmed by journalists in the fieldwork, the first step is political education. Actually, political education is to some extent a voluntary action long employed as a thought control method in China (Lynch, 1999). All institutions including universities, hospitals, and even joint venture companies organise political education sessions to learn talks of top party leaders. The aim of political education is to make sense of new trends, indoctrinate participants, unify thoughts, and provoke collective actions. Forms of political education are varied across media organisations. A party-organ journalist said, 'our editors-in-chief are learning instructions from the central party committee every day. They have regular meetings with propaganda officials to know new trends' (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012). A journalist working for a market-driven newspaper said that, after the campaign was launched, the editors-in-chief from local newspapers were called together into propaganda departments to learn the party's instructions. The meetings are generally known as briefing meetings or update meetings, and provide background information and guidelines for the media to follow (I-4, a senior journalist, Beijing, 9 January 2012). Subsequently, the office of the editor-in-chief of each media organisation invited specialists and professors on party issues to give a talk to all editors and journalists (ibid.).

Another more practical method is to tie material gains with performance in the campaign. This is another common method for the party-state to control the media. The CPD had introduced a grading system to supervise the media. The propaganda achievements in the campaign would improve the media's grade which would potentially solicit subsidies and other contract deals. As for the media's senior leaders, this was also a good opportunity to show their propaganda talents which could help them achieve promotion. The CPD also launched the ZZG news prize to award journalists with money and promotion (*Notice of the ZZG Campaign*, 2011). A journalist working for a market-driven newspaper said,

> The prize was generous. Our newspaper will double your award if you hit the ZZG news prize list. Sometimes you even get an additional bonus. One of my colleagues was awarded 5,000 Yuan (approximately £500) after he hit the first grade ZZG news prize. This is good business. The winning journalists also have better chances of being promoted. (Personal communications No. 5, 14 January 2012)

One journalist working for the state-run broadcasting media approved of the ZZG campaign as follows,

> Themes have been given. We do not need to do more desk research. Local propaganda departments have arranged all things for you. We had thought that there was no news value in such programmes. But we did not expect that ordinary people welcome these. You can never imagine a state-run broadcast journalist working in the farm fields with peasants. Such programmes are funny and lively. Party leaders like to watch it. Audiences like to watch it. When ratings reports arrived, we were surprised to find that such programmes are really popular appealing to both party leaders and ordinary people. (F-4, a national broadcaster, Beijing, 14 January 2012)

His superior made a personal comment just after the focus group interview,

> The command reports are journalists' favourites, which are well-planned, low risk, much better than investigative reporting. The command reports must be aired. Thus your efforts get paid. In terms of investigative reports, you normally put in more effort but cannot guarantee it to be aired. (I-3, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012)

Aside from the above two main forms, a number of journalists also mentioned other forms which are discussed subsequently.

Submission for Review (*song shen*)

A number of key scholars on Chinese media control claim that there is no formal and systematic pre-publication censorship in China (Brady, 2008; Hassid, 2008; Zhao, 2008; Link, 2002). This is one of the differences between the Chinese media control system and the former Soviet Union system (Brady, 2008). Hassid (2008) argues that there is no need to launch pre-publication censorship organs, since political education and pervasive indoctrination activities can keep the media in line. However, evidence has emerged from the fieldwork showing that pre-publication censorship exists systematically. Journalists like to refer to such censorship as 'submission for review'. That is, to submit the news draft to the authorities to get approval for publication. A journalist reporting congress affairs stated,

> Political news is different from other news beats. I usually report congress news. The news office of congress requires us to submit our drafts for review before going to print. It is an unspoken rule. All journalists on this beat must respect this rule otherwise they will not issue the security card for you to enter into the congress building. As far as I know, congress news, party committee

> news, and political consultative conference news must be pre-censored. (I-4, a senior journalist, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

In addition, political events and political conferences normally have formal pre-censorship requirements. One journalist shared his own experience,

> Almost all political meetings require pre-censorship, such as party committee meetings, congress meetings, and political consultative conference meetings. Propaganda officials will set up site offices and a temporary censorship group at the meetings. All drafts must be printed out and attached with submission cover letters which contain news titles and signatures of editors on duty. If the drafts survive, the propaganda officials will sign their names on the cover letters. The letters will be kept well for further reference. If the article offends party leaders, the propaganda officials who approved it will also take punishment responsibility. (Personal communications No. 2, on multiple days)

Submission for review sometimes delays the production process. In the case of Beijing Municipal People's Congress meetings, there are normally four to five propaganda officials reviewing over one hundred articles everyday. The journalist commented, 'it is highly intensive work. Journalists always struggle to finish writing as quickly as possible to submit for review earlier in order not to postpone the editing process. On the other hand, editors have to prepare spare articles in case some articles will be killed' (ibid.). Although submission for review adds a further burden to the news production process, journalists still find positive value in it. One journalist in the focus group said, 'in fact, submission for review protects the media. Media organisations will be exempt from ex-post punishment after submission' (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012). His colleague in the same focus group added, 'it actually protects senior leaders. Nowadays, senior leaders of media will voluntarily ask for review to secure their positions. This is virtually self-censorship' (ibid.).

Journalists also mentioned coercion as a key ex-post form of control, which is the most severe punishment. According to the press freedom report by the international nongovernmental organisation Freedom House in 2012, China stood close to bottom, 187th out of 197 countries (*Freedom of the Press*, 2012). The figures provided by Journalists Without Borders shows that 29 journalists were jailed under the name of 'subversion' or 'divulging state secrets' in 2012 (*Press Freedom Index*, 2013). As indicated by Hassid (2008), the jailing of 29 journalists, however, is out of over 170,000 registered journalists. Thus, it is 0.017 per cent, a vanishingly small number. This indicates that coercion is not a frequently used method to control the media. Furthermore, this may imply that other control means have already kept the media in line. Almost all the focus group discussions stressed the role of coercion although the journalists could not name any exact cases regarding the jailing. Moreover, the journalists did not know the number of jailed journalists, for such information is normally kept secret. This indicates that coercion, as the most severe control method, has powerful psychological implications.

Two focus groups discussed writing self-criticism reports, a minor punishment, which is to discover your own faults through self-reflection (F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012). Two focus groups mentioned dismissal (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-5, a news website group, 15 January 2012). In such cases, journalists get fired due to politically unfavourable reports. Based on what has been discussed above, this research provides the typology of the forms of control as follows. As emphasised previously, this is not an all-encompassing typology. This typology merely focuses on frequently mentioned forms that emerged from the fieldwork.

Figure 14 The forms of control

	Forms		**Achieved through**	**Timing**	**Frequency**
Coercion	Jail/Purge/Dismissal/Self-criticism (*ziwo piping*);			After-publication	Occasionally
Censorship	Banning order (*jin ling*)	Not allowed to be published with no exceptions	Through official documents by fax, landline calls, mobile calls, text messages	Pre-publication	Daily
		Exclusively report by party organs or state-run broadcasting			
		No comments, no sensationalisation, no exaggerations			
	Submission for review (*song shen*)		Through onsite censorship office, tacit rules	Pre-publication	Periodically
	Self-censorship			Pre-publication	Daily
Propaganda	Must-do order (*bi ling*)	Cultivating favourable reports	Through official documents, political education, briefing meetings, update meeting (*tong qi hui/ chui feng hui*)	Pre-publication	Periodically
		Propaganda campaign		Pre-publication	

The following section discusses how censorship and propaganda control affect the news production process. As confirmed by interviewees in the fieldwork, media control directly solicits pervasive self-censorship in news production.

4.2 Self-censorship

As far as self-censorship has been examined, 'the analyses tend to focus on the political and legal conditions that cause self-censorship instead of journalists' own experience of the practice and how they reflect on it' (Skjerdal, 2010: 98). This research can be seen as an effort to fill in the gap based on Chinese journalistic practitioners' own perceptions and reflections. Furthermore, the current research that is based on accounts from journalists tends to present self-censorship as a personal psychological activity (Skjerdal, 2010; Lee, 1998). This research discovers that self-censorship is institutionalised in the whole news production process. Similar patterns of self-censorship cut across the boundaries of various types of media. This section firstly investigates how self-censorship works in the news production chain and then explores the factors that lead to self-censorship.

First of all, it is necessary to define self-censorship in news production, which is not an easy task. The critical point where normal news production activity ends and self-censorship begins is difficult to determine. Furthermore, self-censorship is usually insidious making it hard to detect, which further complicates efforts to define it. This research defines self-censorship in a broad way. Based on definitions provided by Lee (1998: 57) and Skjerdal (2010: 99), self-censorship in this research denotes a set of editorial activities, such as deliberately fine-tuning discourse, withholding journalistic materials, and distortion, by journalists and editors due to certain or uncertain pressures. This research is principally concerned with self-censorship activities in relation to political pressure.

Self-censorship in the news production process

The journalists and editors in the fieldwork generally acknowledged that self-censorship is pervasive in Chinese journalism. This part discusses how self-censorship works throughout the news production chain, from journalists to editors, and then to chief editors.

Evidence from the fieldwork also showed that self-censorship penetrates the news production process. A party organ journalist used 'gate-keeping' to describe the penetration,

> We have set up a multi-layered checking system which works pretty well. In terms of important reports, a journalist should check factual errors himself. Then his news desk editor checks again. When the article arrives at the office

> of the editor-in-chief, the general editor checks firstly. The chief editor at the office comes fourth. Subsequently, the director of the office is the fifth filter. The proofreader then checks typo errors. Finally, the vice editor-in-chief who is on duty has the final checking. You may see we have at least seven barriers to barricade against any types of risks. Each gatekeeper has his own strength and focus. For example, journalists themselves should guarantee the accuracy of facts. Whereas the vice editor-in-chief is principally responsible for eradicating political risks. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012)

Almost all interviewees agreed with this account of the gate-keeping process. Notably, the extent of self-censorship is varied depending on hierarchical positions in the newsroom. It is generally argued that journalists should not pre-censor themselves. A representative argument is as follows,

> Journalists themselves should not pre-censor themselves. This is the job of senior media leaders. As a journalist, you just follow the general rule of making news. You cannot excuse yourself by not going to the locale simply because you reckon the reporting will be banned. As long as you do not receive banning orders, you must go to the locale. (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012)

However, in practice, journalists who had not pre-censored themselves got the blame for ‘burying a land mine’ (*mai lei*), which means planting the seeds of future problems. Journalists in three focus groups had mentioned this; one of them shared his experience,

> Chief editors always say that journalists should just carry on writing. They will take care of balancing political risks. But when something went wrong after publication, they would blame you for burying a land mine. Recently two of my articles had issues with ministerial level officials. Our chief editor was not happy. I had heard that he said privately I was troublesome. I was depressed. It was also he who said that journalists should not pre-censor. I would never be so naïve again. (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

A number of veteran journalists advised that a better way is to reduce self-censorship to the minimum level. At the same time, it is journalists’ responsibility to notify editors or senior leaders about potential risks (F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012; F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012). However, journalists usually found they were more cautious than their senior leaders (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012).

As for editors, typesetting also involves self-censorship work. In terms of certain sensitive topics, editors working for market-driven media often make reference to party-organs, especially the *People’s Daily*. This tactic is generally known as ‘*dui biao*’ in Chinese which had been extensively employed in the Cultural Revolution era. One editor working for a market-driven publication explained,

> The aim of *dui biao* is to avoid any hidden risks. In the case of key political events such as the once-in-a-decade leadership transition, we will wait until the *People's Daily* completes its typesetting work. The *People's Daily* is a broadsheet whereas our newspaper is a compact paper. But we will put the same story at the same place roughly with the same proportional size. This tactic is especially useful for putting the images of party leaders. As you know, it would be deadly horrible if you were mistaken about the order of top party leaders. But if you copy the typesetting of the *People's Daily*, you should be safe. Besides, CCTV Xinwen Lianbo[22] can also be used as a compass. If one story runs over fifteen minutes in this programme, we will then leave half of the front page for the same story. (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

As for chief editors, they are supposed to take primary responsibility for blocking political risks. However, political risks are usually uncertain. As one party-organ journalist stated, 'there might be no exact order the very first time when the incident took place' (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012). Furthermore, sometimes banning orders are rather vague. 'Whether and how to report an incident is very much based on the chief editor's personal choice', a market-driven media worker said (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012). Different chief editors may give different weights to the same material. One market-driven media worker said,

> In the case where there is no banning order or a banning order is obscure, it is the chief editor's personality which determines how the news is reported. If the chief editor is conservative, he may even delete safe reports. (ibid.)

As has been discussed above, propaganda departments and organisation departments nominate senior media leaders, which further determine their career paths. Thus, the career goals of media elites also affect how news is reported. A state-run broadcast journalist stated,

> Risk control is top priority in our media. If you cross the line, not only will your job be at risk but also your superior's future career will be affected. We are the central state-run television, not a market-driven medium. Our superiors all aim to step into official careers. (F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012)

[22] Xinwen Lianbo is a daily news programme aired by China Central Television which is broadcast at 7pm on CCTV channel 1. This programme is principally used as the mouthpiece of the party-state reporting the daily activities of party leaders and announcing major policies. All terrestrial television channels must simultaneously broadcast this programme.

In addition, journalists working for the market-driven media also claimed that their superiors were too timid to offend the authorities in that they intend to build up their career into officialdom. A journalist working for a market-driven media organisation explained,

> It is not surprising to find that the majority of media leaders intend to step into officialdom. It is not to achieve political ambitions. Instead, I guess our leader is simply in search of better living standards, for example, better pension, better educational resources for their children, and a better welfare system. (I-4, a senior journalist, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

However, senior media leaders are not only expected to be capable of keeping the media safe, but also to be able to push the media forward (*tu po*). Some journalists from both party-organ and market-driven media outlets expressed a similar anticipation. An editor working for a market-driven organisation commented,

> Gate-keeping in terms of political risks might be the most difficult job. Two choices in front of you: go for it or just step aside. This is a real challenge for your wisdom. If you always turn your back, you may find fewer and fewer topics to report. Thus leaders always encounter such dilemmas in China. You need to report this within a safe realm. This is indeed very challenging. (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

Echoing the above comment, a party-organ editor said,

> Gate-keeping is the basic capacity, whereas this is definitely not enough. A leader must also be able to break through which would be extremely valuable for future development. But this breakthrough must be within the acceptable realm. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012)

One of his colleagues in the focus group added ‘media leaders must possess both political insight and political courage in China’ (ibid.). A number of chief editors in the individual interviews (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012; I-5, an editor-in-chief, 11 January 2012; I-6, an editor-in-chief, 17 January 2012) commented that being a senior leader has never been an easy job, for the senior leader always needs to balance the dilemma of the market imperative and the party imperative. Actually, the party also employs the market as a parameter in evaluating media senior leaders’ performance. If a media organisation proves to be a market failure, its leaders will not get promoted. Thus, a media leader who is looking for a promotion cannot always step back in front of potentially risky reports in that such reports may produce market returns. A journalist who had personal communication with the researcher revealed a real story (Personal communications No. 2, on multiple days). The journalist got a scoop exposing the fact that the Beijing government's deficit far exceeded the budget. The informant clearly stated that this information could be published only when the propaganda officials gave their consent. Yet the journalist published the article without the propaganda officials' consent. Her superior instructed her to do so as the story was not only an exclusive one but also of great news value, which might promote sales on the newsstands. In this sense, the market force opens a wider space for journalism. Yet it is always the political side that has the final word.

The chief editors need to employ different strategies to resolve this paradox. Clues emerging from the fieldwork indicate that the personal ties between propaganda officials and the chief editors are conducive to handling the dilemma. Actually, the two are easily allied based on mutual interests. The chief editors are appointed on the approval of the propaganda officials and the propaganda officials need the chief editors to cooperate and subordinate. In addition, the two often have personal connections. Lee *et al*. (2007) found that the propaganda chief and the chief editors in Shanghai had close personal relationships. They went to the same university or had worked for the same media organisation. Thus, they may have close bounds. Moreover, to a larger extent, they came from the same social stratum and presumably have similar views.

In practice, personal ties help to resolve the dilemma. A vice editor-in-chief (Personal communications No. 4, on multiple days) for a mass-appeal newspaper provided an interesting case. Some time last year, a rumour spread widely that the chief propaganda officer in Beijing was demoted due to corruption. The foreign media also reported this. One day, the party media in Beijing were ordered by the local propaganda office to report an event in which the propaganda chief was present. The event was of no news value, yet the propaganda chief was there which indicated that he was still in his position. Thus, the rumour was cleared. This is of great news value. Based on the general rule, however, the mass-appeal newspaper was not supposed to report such event and activities of the top party officials. The editor on duty was given instruction from the chief editor to carry on reporting this but not to highlight this item. Finally, the news was put at the left-handed corner on page 4 in three hundreds words. The vice editor-in-chief worried that the local propaganda office might have a problem with this. But later on, it proved that he worried too much. The vice editor-in-chief then asked the chief editor why they should process the news in this way. The chief editor explained that he reckoned the propaganda chief intended to clear the rumour. But he did not want to do it in a high-profile way, so he only ordered the party media to report. A low-key way to process this story accorded with the will of the propaganda chief. Besides, the report on a mass-appeal newspaper actually helped the propaganda chief by clearing the rumour among ordinary people. In light of this, it would be fine to do so. The vice editor-in-chief commented:

> It is not easy to guess what the propaganda superiors are thinking about. You have to admit our chief editor has political wisdom. But this is not enough. They are former colleagues and they worked together for quite a long time. So the chief editor can get the idea of the propaganda chief correctly. (Personal communications No. 4, on multiple days)

In addition, a journalist provided a case indicating that self-censorship had been institutionalised into media organisation. The newspaper hired a number of veteran journalists who had retired to work as in-house censors (*shen du yuan*) (F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012). These censors will provide personal suggestions regarding potential political risks to the editor-in-chief. It is the editor-in-chief who will make the final decision on reports. The newspaper was known for its investigative reports and sharp criticisms of the malpractices of the government. In light of this, the newspaper had to be reshuffled several times due to punishments which seriously damaged its running and circulation. In order to achieve long-term development and obtain a stable personnel system, the newspaper employs this self-censorship method. One of the in-house censors explained that his work is to 'help the paper dodge political risks, rather than to strangle freedom of speech' (Li, 2012). In this case, the in-house censor works as an extra gatekeeper in the news production process. The following part explores the factors leading to self-censorship.

Factors leading to self-censorship

Link (2002) argues that Chinese media control has relied primarily on inducing self-censorship which is too effective to set up any prepublication censorship organs. According to Link, it is the use of vagueness which makes self-censorship pervasive. There exist no explicitly stated banned list or written rules explaining what is unacceptable. Based on the succinct findings of Link, Hassid (2008) attributes self-censorship to uncertainty, which also creates a pro-self-censorship environment in the newsroom. It is also suggested that uncertainty is a deliberate strategy employed by the CPD to control the media (*cf*. Chapter 1). Evidence from the fieldwork agreed partially with the above findings. A number of interviewees confirmed that ambiguity and speculation induced self-censorship. Additionally, journalists who do not pre-censor their articles may be labelled troublemakers. However, a small number of interviewees counter claimed that the boundary is fixed and their superiors were able to handle potential risks. This section testifies the findings of Link (2002) and Hassid (2008). In the mean time, the reasons leading to self-censorship are presented.

In the fieldwork, one party-organ journalist expressed her anxiety:

> Risks are everywhere. Everybody might be deterred by unknown dangers. The reason is that there is no fixed boundary. You will never know when danger hits you. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012)

A number of interviewees confirmed that uncertainty induces self-censorship. Yet the real uncertainty, as one journalist suggested, is not due to a lack of written rules but because of the 'rule of man' (*ren zhi*) tradition. The rule of man originally referred to the ruling system in feudal China when the country was arbitrarily ruled on the will of the emperor. This ruling system is strongly supported by the Confucian tenet. In Confucianism, an ideal society should be ruled by a benevolent and wise emperor. It is his personality and ability that directs the country. In the present day, China is still run by one person or a group of people, namely, the Politburo members. The phrase is commonly used by ordinary people to satirise China as a despotic society. Although there exists the law, the officials stand outside the law. Moreover, the governmental administration is largely based on the officials' own will. The journalist explained how this tradition affected journalism,

> Sometimes you may find that a story you thought of as safe may offend some officials. It then really depends on your luck in terms of punishment. If the official turns a blind eye, you will be saved. But if he takes it seriously, you will be punished. So there is an arbitrariness in this which creates uncertainty. (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

A state-run news agency journalist echoed as follows:

> I personally think the fundamental problem is the "rule of man" (*ren zhi*) which leads to self-censorship. In fact, it is hard to come to a set standard. Every leader has his standard. Besides, every leader has his understanding in terms of the same problem. Everything is judged subjectively. (F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012)

To solve this problem, a party organ journalist shared his own experience,

> Different leaders may have different views on the same problem. In the case of one of our editorials, some party leaders openly criticised us for printing this editorial. There are also a great number of party leaders who showed their support. With such a dilemma, you should take two standards into account.

> First, you should follow the general path of the party-state. Second, you should check with your superiors. If they expressed various views, you should further check with the relevant authorities. That is the CPD. If the problem is still unsettled, then you should listen to what the Standing Committee members said. Our country is led by the elite group, seven members of the Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. If the elite group members said yes, you are definitely fine. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012)

The above personal experience further confirms that the decision making process is in the hands of the top-level party leaders. Actually, the problem regarding arbitrary judgement has not been solved, for the judgement criterion is still based on the will of a small group. Herein, the tradition of the 'rule of man' functions as the subtext.

From what has been discussed above, the interviewees confirmed that uncertainty induces self-censorship. It is not the lack of written rules but the tradition of 'rule of man' that results in uncertainty. As journalists convincingly pointed out, the 'rule of man' makes a generally accepted rule even impossible. Yet a small number of interviewees counter claimed that 'the boundary is clear' (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012; F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012). A party organ editor said, 'we know where the risks exist. Common risks can be filtered by common sense. Besides, we have multiple gates to keep risks outside' (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012). A journalist working for a mass-appeal publication also confirmed that 'there is a chip implanted in your brain. When potential risks arrive, the chip subconsciously runs to erase risks' (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012). Evidence from the fieldwork suggested that common sense and the subconscious are primarily derived from the banning orders (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012; F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012). As one journalist said, 'anything once on the banning list will be self-censored from future reports forever' (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012). A representative account is as follows,

> Topics which had been on banning order lists must be crossed out. This is the fixed line. But this does not mean that items not on the lists can be reported freely. The issue of Taiwan, strikes and corruption with relation to top party leaders are all over the line. Even though there exists no booklet listing all banning topics, you must have the feeling which is similar to common sense. Actually, every adult in China should know the boundary. (F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012)

The journalist further explained that 'culture, education, your family and peers all contribute to give you a sense of boundary' (ibid.). Thus, it would be natural to know where the boundary lies.

Furthermore, journalists also mentioned that the payroll is directly linked to the number of stories that are published. Thus, they have monetary incentives to self-censor their stories in order to ensure publication (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). Here, it is necessary to delineate the payment structure of journalism in the present day. As discussed in Chapter 2, before media commercialisation, a journalist's salary was mainly composed of the fixed base salary. The base was determined by the job title and the administrative hierarchy of the media (*xingzheng jibie*). After media commercialisation, the salary was no longer mainly determined on a fixed basis. Instead, the author's remuneration (*gao fei*) and bonus have taken the lead in the salary (Xia & Yin, 2009). It is estimated by some journalists in the fieldwork that the two parts account for over 70 per cent of the total salary (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; I-3, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012). The author's remuneration is based on the number of published articles. That is, the more articles published, the better a journalist gets paid. Moreover, the bonus is also linked to the quality of published articles. As both parts link to the articles that have published, the journalists are under an economic imperative to conduct self-censorship.

Journalists in the fieldwork also attributed self-censorship to a lack of protection. As mentioned previously, there is no media law to protect media workers. Journalists mentioned cases in which journalists were capriciously fired due to offending the authorities (I-2, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012; F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012).

Practising journalism under routine media control and pervasive self-censorship, the majority of journalists felt obliged to adapt themselves to the social milieu which is the focus of the next section.

4.3 Reactions to the existing system

As discussed above, censorship, propaganda control, and self-censorship are widespread in Chinese media practices. Control and self-censorship are not particularly different between party-organ and mass-appeal media. A large number of interviewees expressed their disappointment with journalism (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012, F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012;). A party-organ journalist expressed his feelings over control as follows,

> There is no doubt that rigid control hits journalism seriously. You usually feel powerless and foresee no hope for the future. It feels like scrambling in the Buddha's palm (*ru lai fo*).[23] You can never escape from that giant five-finger mountain (*wu zhi shan*). Many scholars and audiences criticised us as unprofessional and sensational. But this is due to the abnormal news environment. Under normal circumstances, political reports should hit the headlines. But in our country, it is the twisted political reports. Can you imagine what it would be if you put a rock on a bamboo root seed. The seed struggles to sprout from other directions bending its knees. That's us. (F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012)

The depressed feeling is not only confined to ordinary journalists; media elites also expressed their frustration. As one vice editor-in-chief said, 'you have no choice but to compromise with reality' (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). In the fieldwork, this research found that journalists and editors have employed various strategies to react to the existing system. The strategies show three positions: concessional, negotiated, and adaptive. Each position involves different strategies that are explained in the following section.

Concessional reaction

A small number of journalists react to control in a concessional way. Evidence from the fieldwork shows that some journalists would be willing to quit their jobs. Other journalists would transfer to other news desks with fewer restrictions, such as sports or entertainment news. A vice editor-in-chief said,

> Once a journalist told me he would quit his job and find another career. The reason is that he cannot tolerate day-to-day censorship. I can understand his

[23] The Buddha's palm is a literary allusion which comes from the novel *Journey to the West*, also known as *Adventures of the Monkey God* in English-speaking countries. The novel was written by Wu, Cheng'en in the 16th century (the Ming Dynasty). The novel is one of the four classics read by almost all Chinese people. In the novel, Sun Wukong, a monkey with a human brain, was born with talents and had learned to use magical powers. The monkey rebelled against the rule of the Heaven. The Buddha was one of the safeguard gods in the Heaven who was also talented with magic. The Buddha seized Sun Wukong in his giant palm. Then the Buddha trapped Sun Wukong under the mountain and sealed the mountain with a talisman for five hundred years. The five-finger mountain denotes both the Buddha's giant palm and the shape of the mountain which trapped Sun Wukong. When the five-finger mountain is referred to, there is an undertone that it denotes an ultimate power that ordinary people cannot escape from.

> feeling. But I still persuaded him not to quit for no jobs are immune from censorship. (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012)

A journalist who used to report on the political beat recently transferred to the management department in the newspaper. He commented,

> I have lost all my drive through years of censorship and directives. In the early years after graduation, I still made efforts to push forward. Several years later, I found I was just repeating myself. I decided to go to the management department. It should be more psychologically relaxed. (I-4, a senior journalist, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

In China, journalism tends to be a short career path more appealing to youngsters and job-hopping is common in this business. A journalist said 'your friends and relatives may look down on you if you reach thirty-five years old and you are still an ordinary journalist' (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012). This is partly due to harsh controls that make the journalistic job mentally exhausting and difficult to endure in the long term. Furthermore, this is also related to the payroll and welfare systems which are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

In the above cases, media workers took practical action to react to control. There are also cases in which journalists reduced their commitment to journalism to react to control. This research views this as a psychological action in retreating from journalism. A vice editor-in-chief working for a market-driven organisation admitted that he regarded his job as just a means to make a living. This claim was popular among a number of interviewees (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012; F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012). A chief editor working for a state-run broadcast media organisation concluded,

> You should bury your dashing spirits and the so-called news ideal in the ivory tower after graduation. Do not associate too much meaning with your work. This is only a job to feed your family. If you attach your ideals to your work, it will end up driving you mad. (F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012)

The above actions can be seen as passive reactions to control. The following paragraph explores a relatively active position taken by journalists in response to control.

Negotiated reaction

A number of journalists take a negotiated position by finding an alternative way in the face of control. A Chinese saying goes that 'there is always a way to circumvent bans' (*shang you zhengce, xia you duice*) which is commonly quoted among journalists. An editor-in-chief of a magazine provided a vivid case,

> You do not always need to take a directly oppositional position. There are many ways to present your wisdom. When you are not allowed to report certain topics, you need to find another way to speak it out. For instance, propaganda departments issued a banning order on reporting demolition related to Yan, Lianke,[24] a famous Chinese writer. However, we thought this was a valuable case. In a country without rule of law, even the elite class may suffer from injustice. In this case, we interviewed Yan, Lianke without mentioning anything about demolition. But we wrote his view of home. Readers can get the underlying meanings from the report. (I-5, an editor-in-chief, Beijing, 11 January 2012)

Another vice editor-in-chief also confirmed this method by saying that 'if the incident is blocked then you can report the victims' (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). This research further discovers other tactics to negotiate with control. A media worker from a major internet company said that his company would pay propaganda departments in exchange for wider space.

> Sometimes we thought the story was really of value and had nothing to do with politics. But they still issued banning orders. In such cases, we would like to pay 30,000 Yuan to propaganda departments in exchange for keeping the story. (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012)

This is not an exceptional case. Zhang and Lu (2008) also discovered this tactic existed in a well-known weekly newspaper. The newspaper regularly pays the local propaganda department in exchange for more tolerance on investigative reports. This monetary exchange has profound implications, which are discussed in the final section.

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[24] Yan, Lianke is a famous Chinese writer who had owned a house in a Beijing suburb. However, the local government planned to relocate residents from that area. Yan, Lianke wrote an open letter to top party leaders appealing to stop the demolition plan. Yet he failed to save his house. His house was destroyed without notice in advance. A press report from the *New York Times* can be found at http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/28/world/asia/harassment-and-house-evictions-bedevil-even-chinas-well-off.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

Adaptive reaction

On the basis of the fieldwork, this research has found that a great number of journalists make efforts to justify censorship, propaganda control, and self-censorship. Journalists working for party-organs and market-driven media organisations seem to hold similar views. This research views this justification effort as an adaptive reaction to control employed by media workers. The justifications mainly follow four lines which are presented as follows. Notably, the justifications are expressed in journalists' own accounts.

The first and foremost justification is related to nationalism. As a party-organ journalist commented,

> I feel that media control is necessary especially in terms of foreign policy issues. Ordinary journalists usually do not have enough knowledge regarding international issues. Under such circumstances, the authorities should issue directives to the media in order to protect national interests. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012)

Resonating with the above claim, a state-run broadcasting journalist added,

> In some circumstances, you must listen to what the authorities say in order to protect national interests. You cannot follow what the Americans say. The Americans always criticise our foreign exchange policy. If we follow their suggestions we will be doomed. There must be some level of orders to tell us how to report. (F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012)

This justification is not only confined to party-organs or state-run media. Furthermore, the protection of national interests is not restricted to foreign policy issues. Journalists from market-driven organisations also expressed similar views in relation to internal issues,

> I think banning orders and must-do orders did some good for our country. You cannot report however you like in terms of minorities or national security issues. Otherwise the reports might induce fatal damage to our nation. As a Chinese citizen, you cannot do this. (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

It is evident from the above comments that strong nationalism underpins the justifying argument. In light of this, self-censorship, censorship, and propaganda control have been justified in the name of the national good. This also reflects the media's role held by journalists. The media should protect national interests and support national development. Journalists see themselves as partakers in the national building process. To achieve these ends, journalists adapt themselves to the existing system by justifying media control and self-censorship.

The second justification is borrowed from the official discourse. A number of journalists justified media control and self-censorship by saying 'at this complicated development stage, media control is indispensable' (I-2, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012).

This discourse actually evolved from the official discourse, originally used by Deng, Xiaoping, the former top party leader. Deng initiated the reform and opening-up policy (*cf.* Chapter 2). As part of the reform, Deng argued for a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics (*you zhongguo tese shichang jingji*). This slogan-like discourse was originally employed as a tactic to counteract conservative forces within the party who regarded the market economy as an enemy of socialism. Subsequently, the discourse was attached by multiple meanings. Chinese characteristics were further developed to include sub-discourses: development stages, particularity, and other similar discourses. Particularity emphasises that China is unique in terms of its large population, diverse geological conditions, and great regional differences making it inadvisable for China to simply follow the general Western development path. This discourse is commonly employed by the communist party to defend its monopoly on political power. Furthermore, Deng claimed that China stood at a primitive stage of socialism. Taking this discourse into account, the malpractices of authorities and the underdevelopment of rural areas should be viewed as provisional problems. Resonating with the official discourse, a state-run broadcast journalist said,

> At this development stage, I tend to view media control as indispensable. China is the most populous country in the world with many complicated problems. Frankly speaking, the majority of Chinese people are not well educated and are easily agitated. Even the literati were easily manipulated. Therefore, media control is necessary to keep our country on the normal track. (F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012)

The argument indicates that the journalist holds an elitist view regarding the ordinary people as lacking education. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is a legacy of the Confucian tenet. Similar to this view, a media worker from an internet company said,

> China is extremely complicated. There is conflict between central and local governments. Different administrative agencies also have issues. Thus China has a strong particularity. In this complex situation, media control facilitates the development of our country. You definitely would not expect China to repeat mistakes of the former Soviet Union. The former Soviet Union lessened

> media control and collapsed immediately. (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012)

More than one focus group mentioned the mistakes of the former Soviet Union (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012; F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012), and journalists from different types of media held similar views as presented above: the collapse of the former Soviet Union further justified media control.

The third justification comes from the ownership situation of the media in China. A party-organ journalist said that 'all media are owned by the party-state. Therefore it is unquestionable that the party would issue orders' (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012). Another state-run broadcasting journalist further explained, 'in theory, we are more like civil servants than professional journalists' (F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012). A number of market-driven journalists supported this justification. One journalist said that 'in theory we are owned by the party-state. Although we do not receive subsidies as we used to from the party-state, we still get some benefits. In this sense, it is natural to listen to the party-state' (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012).

The final justification emphasises that there exists no perfect freedom in the world. A party-organ journalist made a convincing argument as follows,

> Freedom is always relative. Western media are also confined to various controls. The difference is we are more controlled by the party-state. However, they are more controlled by advertisers and media owners. It is reported that Murdoch occasionally interferes with news production. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012)

From what has been discussed above, journalistic practitioners employ four justifications to validate media control. The four justifications are sometimes complementary in practice. The final section discusses the implications of the above findings.

4.4 Conclusion

This research has found extensive censorship and propaganda activities in daily journalistic practices. Banning orders, which forbid or limit the reporting of certain topics, are issued by propaganda departments to media organisations on an almost daily basis. Journalists all confirmed this as the most common form of censorship. Notably, a number of journalists mentioned that the banning orders might be issued by propaganda officials for personal gains. This further exacerbates the news environment. Must-do orders, which require certain topics to be reported, are also common in controlling the media. This method aims for long-term propaganda effects and does not focus on changing people's minds. Instead, it intends to integrate social members by promoting sanctioned ideology and creating a certain social climate. Using this method, all the media are engaged. It has embodied the characteristics of total propaganda and sociological propaganda as discussed in Chapter 1.

This research has also discovered that pre-publication censorship systematically exists, which counters the generally acknowledged idea that China does not have systematic pre-publication censorship. Such censorship is embodied in 'submission for review' activity. This research has found that certain news beats, such as congress news, and certain reports, such as the national congress meeting, have set up a pre-publication censorship system. Journalists either send the drafts to the propaganda officials or submit to the on-site censors for approval before publication. Journalists also mentioned coercion as a key controlling method as well. China had jailed 32 journalists in 2012 and stood at the bottom of the press freedom list produced by international organisations (*Journalists in Prison Reach Record High: Turkey, Iran, and China among Leading Jailers*, 2012). Yet considering the large number of journalists, the jailing ratio is really small. Besides, journalists cannot name any exact cases of coercion although they frequently referred to coercion (Hassid, 2008). This indicates that although coercion is seldom used, it is a powerful psychological deterrent.

Journalists in the fieldwork also pointed out that media control is more professional and cunning. The propaganda offices are working efficiently in scrutinising the media. Additionally, new tactics, such as spin and public relations, have been introduced to control the media which has virtually turned China into a propaganda state (Brady, 2008) or public relations state (Schudson, 1989). Mass persuasion and propaganda are essential tools in sustaining the rule of the party-state.

This research discloses that self-censorship is pervasive in Chinese journalism. Evidence from the fieldwork shows that journalists primarily self-censor their articles based on knowledge of banning orders. Although journalists are advised not to pre-censor their articles, they felt obliged to conduct self-censorship in order to be responsible to their editors and superiors. In the news production chain, each division has different responsibilities in filtering political risks which function as multiple gates to block risks.

This research has found that senior media leaders take much of the responsibility in dodging political risks. Furthermore, it is highly dependent on senior media leaders to deal with hidden or potential risks. If the editor-in-chief is conservative and intends to pursue an official career, he may be inclined to conduct more self-censorship activities. The chief editors, however, are also expected to safely break through the existing boundary and open more space for investigative reports. Caught between the propaganda prohibition and the market imperative, the chief editors need to employ strategies to resolve the dilemma. Evidence from this research shows that the personal bonds between the chief editors and the propaganda officials may dilute the paradox.

The factors leading to self-censorship are a key focus of this research. Link (2002) and Hassid (2008) have insightfully pointed out that the vagueness and uncertainty, a lack of written rules and punishment without transparency, induce self-censorship. Some journalists in the fieldwork generally acknowledged that uncertainty leads to self-censorship. However, it is not a lack of written rules or fixed terms that leads to uncertainty. The journalists in the fieldwork attributed the uncertainty to the tradition of 'rule of man', which means that the country is arbitrarily ruled on the will of one person or a small group of people. This tradition carries the Confucian tenet, which argues that an ideal country should be ruled on the will of a benevolent and wise emperor. This tradition makes punishments unpredictable as journalists said that punishments were largely dependent on individual cases. In addition, the tradition also makes it difficult to reach a generally accepted rule, for different superiors may have different views on the same situation.

This research has further discovered that the payment structure and the lack of protection also facilitate self-censorship. A predominant part of a journalist's payment is from the author's remuneration, which is based on the number of published articles. Thus, journalists have monetary incentives to self-censor their drafts to ensure publication. It is still unknown whether this payment structure is deliberately employed to provoke self-censorship. However, in practice, this payment situation benefits media organisations. First, operational costs have been reduced. Through journalistic self-censorship, human resources and money are directed towards publishable articles, which facilitates a higher rate of investment returns. Second, by virtue of journalistic self-censorship, all staff inside media organisation take on the responsibility of risk control. Therefore, the political risks encountered by media organisations have been reduced and transferred to the staff (Xia & Yin, 2009). The payment structure links political risks with economic returns. Thus, political risks have been transferred to individual practitioners. By virtue of this, the party-state control has been implemented through organisational control by means of economic interests.

This research has also explored how journalists react to the existing media control system. A number of journalists metaphorised self-censorship as self-castration (F-2, Beijing, 9 January 2012), which shows their resentment over censorship. However, they often endeavour to justify media control. This research has discovered four main means of justification. First, journalists justify media control in protecting national interests. Strong nationalism underpins such justification. As Brady (2008) claims, after the Tiananmen Square crackdown, the party transformed its legitimacy primarily on nationalism and economic development. Evidence shows that the underlying nationalism integrates journalists into the existing control system. Journalists also expressed a need for media control when processing cross-national information. This finding resonates with what Ellul (1965) has argued that propaganda is the natural need of ordinary people in modern society. He also mentions international issues to explain his argument. He argues that ordinary people are usually unable to process complicated international information. Therefore, propaganda fills the niche by subsidising people psychologically. Although Ellul's argument is highly contested, especially in the Anglo-American countries, the journalists in the fieldwork expressed a similar argument. That is, journalists' inability to deal with international reports creates their appeals to media control. Second, journalists employed official discourse to justify media control by saying that media control is indispensable at this complicated developmental stage. Third, a number of journalists claimed that the media are owned by the party-state. In this sense, it is unquestionable that the media should listen to the party-state. Finally, the Western media are also under various controlling forces. Thus, Chinese journalists justify media control as existing everywhere in different forms.

As mentioned above, media control depends largely on the will of the top party leader. Thus, this research suggests that the way in which the media will be controlled in the future is highly unpredictable. A number of scholars (Zhan, 2013; Sun, 2012) argue for media law or written rules, which explicitly state banned topics. In light of this, topics outside of the law and the rules may be freely reported. However, this research highly doubts the possibility of this. First, self-censorship is profoundly and systematically embedded in Chinese journalistic practices. Although topics are available to be reported, it is equally possible that they will be self-censored. Second, the tradition of 'rule of man' further complicates and prolongs the efforts in drawing up the law and the rules. Furthermore, even though the law or written rules were set up, in practice, they are usually less effective than high-level political intervention. As discussed previously, officials are often not bound by the law and abuse the written rules. Third, in daily newsroom practices, courageous senior leaders may find opportunities to report certain sensitive topics without written restrictions. However, if rules and boundaries are fixed, they might have no chance to touch on such topics.

Additionally, the existing scholarship seems to view journalists as victims of media control (Xia & Yin, 2009; Brady, 2008; Hassid, 2008). This research argues that journalist can also be the active agent in sustaining the media control system. As discussed previously, journalists would like to conduct command reports. Such reports are easily handled, and in processing such reports, journalists are well treated. Most importantly, such reports must be published or aired. Just as one superior admitted, command reports are journalists' favourites (I-3, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012). The monetary news prize set up by the propaganda department further tempts journalists to voluntarily embrace propaganda reports. One journalist argued the prize was generous and the winner could have better chances of being promoted (Personal communications No. 5, 14 January 2012). Furthermore, the payment structure contributes to the alignment between journalists and the controlling system. Moreover, cultural elements, such as elitism and nationalism, all strengthen the alignment. Additionally, the inability to process complicated information in modern society also facilitates the need of journalists for media control.

In reality, since the Chinese media started its commercialisation process, journalists began to work under dual suppression: political and commercial. The next chapter discusses the side effect of media commercialisation: journalistic corruption.

Chapter Five: Journalistic Corruption

The soaring media commercialisation in Mainland China was accompanied by a prominent by-product: journalistic corruption. Descriptive words such as routine, systematic, structural, institutional, and rampant corruption are indicative of the extent of this. Actually, journalistic corruption has become 'a way of life' (Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005: 121). 'Unethical practices in journalism are not confined to China, but the degree and scope is perhaps China's unique contribution to world journalism' concluded Zhao (1998: 83) in her thorough investigation. Fifteen years on from Zhao's study, this situation has not changed, and is in fact worsening. A number of interviewees gave similar evidence. A representative example is: 'nobody could escape from conducting corruption if only he or she works for Mainland China media' (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012).

This chapter provides accounts from the journalistic practitioners themselves. Enquiries into how they conceptualise corrupt practices and what the contributing factors are in their view will be considered. Accordingly, this chapter focuses on three themes. First, the most common forms of corruption are examined. Meanwhile, the attitudes of journalists themselves towards corrupt behaviour are examined. Second, this research explores journalists' own accounts about the roots of corruption. This chapter concludes by looking at the implications of corrupt journalism. The most important task is to investigate whether journalistic corruption is a transitional phenomenon or not. This enquiry will also illuminate whether commercialisation can take predominant responsibility for the corruption in journalism.

First of all, it is necessary to clarify what this research means by journalistic corruption. Chinese journalistic corruption attracts considerable scholarly attention (Chen et al. 2010; Lin, 2010a; Lin, 2010b; Xia & Yin, 2009; Zhang & Lu, 2008; Chen, L., 2007; Chan et al., 2004; Zheng & Chen, 2004; Lu & Yu, 2003A; Luo *et al*., 2001; Yu, 1998; Zhao, 1998). However, seldom do scholars pay attention to its definition. Some prefer to define it by reference to the forms of corruption (Chen *et al.*, 2010; Yu, 1998). Yet the problem is that the forms are ever changing. Additionally, what corrupt behaviour comprises is bundled with cultural and historical elements. In light of this, it is necessary to take the social context into account in defining journalistic corruption. This research provides a definition exclusively applicable to the Chinese context. The World Bank has provided a useful definition, in which corruption is defined as 'the abuse of public office for private gains' (*Helping Countries Combat Corruption*, 1997: 8). Drawing upon this, journalistic corruption is referred to as the abuse of publicity power for private returns. The definition helps differentiate unethical practices from corrupt practices. For example, paying a source is not a corrupt practice but an unethical one, in that it does not directly involve the abuse of publicity power. In the Chinese context, corruption usually involves power-for-money transactions (*quan qian jiaoyi*). The following section looks at forms of journalistic corruption.

5.1 Forms of Journalistic Corruption

Corrupt practice emerged in the early 1980s, just after China had recovered from the Cultural Revolution and begun its economic reform (Zhao, 1998: 72; F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012). The forms of corruption are diverse and exhaustive since they are ever changing and sometimes disguised. This research concentrates on the most prominent forms. More than ten years ago, Zhao (1998) identified five main forms of Chinese journalistic corruption:

- All-expenses-paid news reporting
- The blurring of advertising and editorial functions
- Journalists moonlighting
- Bribery and extortion
- Advertising-as-news and news-as-fabrication

Later on, Zheng and Chen (2004) pointed out four prevalent types of corruption:

- Taking ‘freebies’, such as free lunches, free travel packages, and free trial usages
- Soliciting advertisement and auspices
- Taking cash wrapped in an envelope
- Reports flattering advertisers

This research also looks at changes of corrupt forms through the comparison between the current forms obtained from the fieldwork with findings from the above research. The following section first explores the most common forms of corruption identified by journalists: taking cash wrapped in a red envelope (*hong bao*).

Taking red-envelope-cash

It is estimated that over 90 per cent of the journalists in China take red-envelope-cash (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012), and some interviewees claimed that all Chinese journalists accept it. To some extent, it has become a professional routine (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14

January 2012; F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012; I-5, an editor-in-chief, Beijing, 11 January 2012). One interviewee explained,

> Taking red-envelope-cash emerged in the mid-1980s. In its early days, it was only 3 to 4 Yuan towards the transportation subsidy. However, the amount has surpassed the currency inflation climbing to 50 Yuan, 200 Yuan, or even more than 1,000 Yuan. In this sense, red-envelope-cash has gone bad. (F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012)

Giving a red envelope is originally a cultural tradition, in which a monetary gift, usually contained in a red envelope symbolising good luck, is given on festivals such as the Lunar New Year or on special occasions such as weddings. It is important to note that if the red envelope is from a peer it is a courtesy to reciprocate. The cash accepted by journalists, however, is not placed in a red envelope, but usually in a white or brown envelope so that it remains less noticeable. Additionally, the envelopes are handed over in a cunningly graceful way. Generally speaking, journalists sign in at the reception. Then there will be staff in charge of allocating a pack to the journalists. A pre-prepared article and a red envelope will be sealed in the pack. The signing list will be well guarded for future reference, which will involve keeping in contact with journalists and to check whether the article has been aired or printed. In most cases, journalists will rewrite the story based on interview information, and the prepared article is only for reference. However, sometimes, the prepared article fosters lazy journalists who form the news story almost entirely out of this material. Journalists themselves prefer to call it the transportation subsidy (*che ma fei*) to make it more acceptable. One interviewee described the red-envelope-cash as follows:

> The red-envelope-cash can be categorised into two types: the first is given in general interviews with no relation to any negative or muckraking reports. This can be called the transportation subsidy, normally not too much money; the second is given in large amount of money in exchange for keeping silence on scandals. (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012)

This view was shared by nearly all of the interviewees. The cash is generally paid by companies to call attention to their new products or publicity conferences. According to the interviewees, 'it is a general rule to hand out red-envelope-cash no matter whether the story is of news value' (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 Jan 2012; F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012). Nowadays, governmental agencies are regular payers of red-envelope-cash. Ironically, the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP), which is responsible for dealing with journalistic corruption and even launched an anti-corruption campaign in journalism, has joined the paying group (I-5, editor-in-chief, Beijing, 11 February 2012). One interviewee described his astonishment when receiving red-envelope-cash at a press conference organised by the United Front Work Department[25] at which a State Councillor who also holds a seat on the Politburo was present,

> Someone tapped my shoulder and passed me an envelope with an impressive heading: the United Front Work Department. 50 Yuan was in it. He said it was the transportation subsidy. We argue against taking red-envelope-cash; but can you imagine such a high level department would like to pay you this. (F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012)

Compared with previous findings, it seems that journalists are more tolerant with taking the red-envelope-cash nowadays. Journalists call it as the 'de facto tacit rule' (*qian guize*). Sex, age, educational background, social status, job titles, and all other background information do not make a difference to this view. Furthermore, it is not only held by journalists but also acknowledged by sources. One interviewee claimed that 'it would be abnormal if the transportation subsidy were not provided' (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012).

Although a few admit that this practice should not be permissible in rigid terms, they would add a 'but' to this point. A typical 'but' statement emphasises that the money does not affect professional judgement:

> Strictly speaking, journalists should not take red-envelope-cash. But the money is not too much and is not very harmful. Moreover, it is based on mutual willingness. Actually, the most important thing is the money cannot affect how you process the reports. If the event is of news value, you must go to report it even if no money is for you. On the other hand, taking money does not mean to guarantee the publicity. It only shows willingness to keep a good connection. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2013)

The media elites also hold a similar view. A representative one is as follows:

> It does not matter whether you take the transportation subsidy, whereas it does matter whether the story is of news value. (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012)

On the contrary, a small number of participants acknowledged that the 'money does make subtle differences':

[25] The United Front Work Department is under the direct supervision by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China which is in charge of managing non-party and minor political party relationships. The department also relates to issues over Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao.

> Before you go to the press conference, you might anticipate there will be a transportation subsidy. Actually, you already know you are going to say something nice instead of bad. Well, at least something constructive. (F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012)

> It is ok if you take the money and do not put it into print once. But it is awkward if you do it twice. I might feel guilty. I will try to promote the article to an editor who is easy going on weekends because there are less journalists working and more boring articles printing on weekends. (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012)

Even so, the participants agreed that this practice is trivial. Furthermore, the dominant view highly doubts whether taking a transportation subsidy counts as corrupt practice. An editor-in-chief said again and again: ‘it is a sophisticated cultural custom instead of being a form of corruption’ (I-5, an editor-in-chief, Beijing, 11 January 2012).

In their view, taking a large amount of money to remain silent is completely corrupt. Some call it ‘beneficial commission’ or ‘hush money’. The interviewees agreed that this money is harmful, dangerous, and unacceptable. The amount ranges from 1,000 Yuan to over 100,000 Yuan. This form has received little attention in previous research (Zheng *et al*., 2004; Yu, 1998; Zhao, 1998) probably because this form is closely related to the mining disasters, which became noted at the beginning of this century. A number of interviewees also made the link between hush money and the mining disasters. Even today, one can see a line of journalists waiting to pick hush money after a mine explosion. Interestingly, some idle people pretend to be journalists in the line and get their precious rewards (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012; F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012). A telling example is as follows, which has provoked national debate.

On 22 June 2002, a gold mine in Fanshi County of Shanxi Province exploded and killed 38 people and caused more than 10 million Yuan of direct economic losses. The mine owner and the local officials removed most of the corpses, hastily burying some and burning others in the wild. They then reported 2 deaths and 4 injuries. The desperate family members of the lost men were threatened not to utter a word to journalists. The *Xinhua News Agency*, the most authoritative state-owned news agency, dispatched four reporters from its Shanxi branch to investigate the disaster, including the deputy director of reporting and editing and the deputy director of photography. The four reporters received an overwhelming welcome. They were invited to fake a new version of the disaster in reward for 20,000 Yuan (approximately £2,000). Several local journalists also pocketed 8,000, 7,000, and 5,000 Yuan (approximately £800, £700, and £500). It is reported that three journalists from the *Shanxi Life Morning Post* were originally given 10,000 Yuan (approximately £1,000), which they claimed could not be shared between three people equally. As a result, they exacted another 5,000 Yuan (roughly £500). All the journalists accepted the cash offer and published the article reporting 2 deaths and 4 injures. On 25 June 2002, the family members of the victims made a phone call to the *China Youth Daily*, a quality national newspaper, calling for help to search for the bodies of their beloved ones. Two journalists then set about digging out the under-table transactions. Finally, they broke the scandal and revealed the site where the dead bodies were buried. Top party leaders in Beijing were furious. A special investigation group was initiated to further probe the malpractices. After an investigation lasting ten months, the group revealed that 11 journalists had accepted bribes in the form of cash and gold ingots from local officials and owners of the illegal mine. The four journalists from the *Xinhua News Agency* were dismissed. Additionally, all the media organisations were ordered to learn their lesson and to launch campaigns against corrupt behaviour. However, this issue is a chronic problem. There are scandals breaking constantly that some journalists are still taking bribes to keep silent.[26]

The predominant affirmative attitudes of taking the transportation subsidy contradict the finding of Yu (1998). Yu reported that journalists have a clear-cut idea of what constitutes wrongdoing showing a high ethical standard (ibid.) with 79.7 per cent of journalists arguing against taking cash from sources. Yet 34.8 per cent of journalists regarded such a practice as pervasive in journalism. Thus, there exists a discrepancy between perception and practice (ibid.). This research, however, has discovered that journalists tend to hold an obscure view of corruption. Based on the definition provided in this research, taking red-envelope-cash is indeed corrupt behaviour. It exchanges the power of publicity for cash. Yet journalists disagreed. An interviewee (F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012) contended that taking red-envelope-cash could not be regarded as corruption for it is normally a small sum. According to the governmental rules, taking 5,000 Yuan (roughly £500) qualifies as taking a bribe (ibid.). Although the majority of interviewees agreed that taking hush money is indeed corruption, they still preferred a case-by-case judgement. A number of interviewees said that 'you cannot be too harsh to Chinese media organisations which are already under severe political torture. At least, you have to leave some privileges for the media to enjoy' (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January

[26] Reports about the Fanshi scandal: 'War on Corruption Catches Journos in Crossfire', [Online]. Available at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/EK04Ad01.html (Accessed: 8 May 2012); 'Culprits in North China Cold Mine Explosion Punished', [Online]. Available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-09/15/content_1082625.htm (Accessed 8 May 2012),

2012). The evidence that emerged from the fieldwork indicates that the situation is worsening. An increasing number of journalists are committing corruption by taking the red-envelope-cash. Furthermore, in perception, journalists are more tolerant of such practices. Interestingly, journalists endeavour to justify corrupt behaviour on the excuse of political torture. The following part focuses on publicity power for rent.

Publicity power for rent

The phrase ‘power for rent’ was originally coined to describe the malpractices conducted by officials or corporate executives where they abuse their administrative power in exchange for personal gains, whilst avoiding regulation and punishment. Applied to journalism, administrative power is replaced by the power of making something public, in other words, publicity power (Zhang & Lu, 2008). The phrase gained popularity among journalists. As one interviewee (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012) put it: ‘the right to publish is a kind of power. Moreover, this power is intoxicating. As long as there exists power, there follows the exchange of interests’. Another interviewee expressed it more frankly: ‘news is nothing but interests’ (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2013). The forms of this practice are varied, and some media organisations are also involved. Besides, power can be exchanged for money or private gains. This section provides a number of telling cases given by the interviewees.

If this power-interests trade benefits journalists themselves, they tend to excuse themselves and embellish this as understandable. For example, an interviewee stated that one piece of investigative reporting about the Spring Festival Travel Rush[27] (*chun yun*) had to be removed in exchange for guaranteeing that all the staff received train tickets:

> The staff of the Ministry of Railways went to work at our office in the period of the Spring Festival Travel Rush. He is exclusively in charge of allocating train tickets to my colleagues. You have to know it is impossible to buy a train ticket through normal channels. But you can get any train tickets you want from him. Certainly, you’d better write supportive articles about the Ministry of Railways. But it is a good deal. You know this is not corruption; it is a kind of employee benefits. Anyway, it is of no help if you publish negative reports about the Travel Rush. The messy transportation is not due to the government.

[27] The Spring Festival Travel Rush usually begins 15 days before the Lunar New Year and will last for around 40 days. People make the round trip between their working places, normally metropolitan, and their hometown, usually inner land counties. The number of journeys at that time has exceeded the population of China, hitting over 2 billion in 2008. Obviously, this is a big challenge for any transportation system. It has been called the largest annual human migration in the world.

> It is because China is the most populous country. (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2013)

The above argument inspired his colleagues in the group. They agreed with this and added: 'journalists are ordinary people and have to go home for family reunions' (ibid.). However, if this benefit goes to their superiors, the interviewees changed their views:

> The journalist on the transportation beat enjoys the privilege because she knows how to appeal to her superior. She used to get the superior an army vehicle licence plate.[28] Then the superior rewards her a whole page to extol the top ten police poll event, which has nothing to do with audiences. This is exactly power for rent, disgusting. I think this should be banned. (ibid.)

The comment aroused nods among the focus group participants. Another corrupt behaviour conducted by the superior is to withdraw drafts for personal reasons. A vice editor-in-chief constantly encountered this. He claimed that, 'some top superiors just called you to remove a well-prepared draft without giving you any reasons. Even if the superior were not granted any cash, he must get rewards in other ways. I think this is corruption' (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). One journalist also complained that 'some superiors withdrew a draft only for the benefit of their relatives and friends, this is unacceptable' (F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012).

Two phenomena that Zhao (1998) revealed have faded out nowadays: journalists moonlighting and selling publishing licences being franchised by the government to companies. However, some media organisations still sell their editorial pages for promotional information. Normally, it is a flattering story to promote a company or a product that is not shown on an advertisement page but on an editorial page. The names of journalists and the editors are printed on the story. Regardless of whether the story is of news value, the important aim is to convince the audience that this information is as credible as news. As a result, audiences will be more willing to buy the products. Zhao (1998) named this advertising-as-news. Nowadays this trade is more elegantly disguised as 'transaction reports' (*jingji wanglai baodao*). An editor-in-chief explained:

> We will cooperate with some companies which might involve financial exchange. This kind of report is easy to identify. All the other media organisations are doing this but we try to present the reports in a special way.

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[28] The licence plate for army vehicles has privileged access on roads in Beijing, China. Other cars have to give way to the army vehicles. In addition, the police have no administrative rights over army vehicles.

> Whatever you call it, maybe public relation reports or anything else. This is what it is in China; it is particular in China. (I-5, Beijing, 11 January 2012)

In fact, most media advertising departments offer the publicity service at a high cost, and the price depends on which time slots or editorial pages are selected. Additionally, the more famous a media organisation is, the higher the price is to buy a page or slot. According to a report in the *New York Times* (Barboza, 2012) it costs $4,000 (roughly £2,500) per minute to be shown on *China Central Television* (CCTV), the state-run broadcaster, and $1 per Chinese character for a flattering report in the *Workers' Daily*, a national party organ. Most of the interviewees argued against this trade, while a few regarded it as understandable in order for the media organisation to survive. Aside from the above cases, illegal activities are also involved in journalistic practices, which are discussed in the next section.

Extortion

According to the focus group discussions, some media organisations require an advertising contract to remove a negative report. An interviewee remembered that a colleague who was preparing an investigative report about a company was instructed by his superior to threaten the company in exchange for an advertisement fee. This kind of practice is generally regarded as notorious by all interviewees. Additionally, they called for a more severe, iron-fist crack down on this behaviour. A recent case, which has provoked national debate and discussed in every focus group, is provided as follows.

On 10 and 17 July 2011, CCTV aired two reports on its most renowned investigative programme, the *Weekly Quality Report*. This two-series programme, conducted by Li, Wenxue, claimed that a luxury furniture retailer based in Singapore, Da Vinci, exported Chinese-made furniture parts to Italy and then shipped them back to China as premium Italian brands which sell at high prices. Da Vinci maintained that the furniture was made in Italy. However, the widespread media coverage hit its sales revenue badly. Later, Da Vinci released some unaired material showing that the CCTV journalist, Li, Wenxue, had fabricated the story. Additionally, Da Vinci publicised conversational recordings with Li, Wenxue and a broker, Cui Bin, from a Beijing newspaper. The broker asked Da Vinci to pay Li, Wenxue at 100,000 Yuan (roughly £10,000) in exchange for no further negative reports. Actually, Da Vinci had already remitted the money to a Hong Kong account provided by the broker on 25 July 2011. On 31 August 2011, the Shanghai Administration of Industry and Commerce released the investigation result claiming that Da Vinci was innocent. Then Da Vinci filed the case with the Beijing police and the corresponding media regulators including CCTV's party disciplinary committee. The case was broken by the most-respected Chinese magazine, the *Caixin-China Economics & Finance* in an article titled 'The Case about the Da Vinci Case'. One thing that needs to be pointed out is that *Caixin* was recognised by all the interviewees as the only media organisation in China whose journalists do not accept the transportation subsidy. The report of *Caixin* provoked huge national debates not only among the journalistic practitioners but also among the public. CCTV was soon under scrutiny. Gaining public support, *Caixin* further released an editorial written by its editor-in-chief, Hu, Shuli, calling for public scrutiny to sweep the dirty media rooms.[29] On 10 February 2012, the GAPP launched its investigation into the case. The investigative report was presented in a rather vague way saying that 'based on the available evidence, there is no extortion involved'. However, the report also revealed that Li was not a certificated journalist although he had worked for more than 5 years for CCTV. This allegation is of note because it is common for broadcast journalists not to hold certificates or employment contracts (details given in next section). *Caixin* released its follow-up evidence which clearly showed that the extortion was underway.

This case might be seen as exceptional. However, how the journalists viewed the case and how the regulators reacted to it are of importance. Most of the interviewees applauded *Caixin* as 'how courageous and brilliant to uncover the dark curtain' (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012). However, a U-turn took place in one focus group after an interviewee said the following:

> There must be some backstage protection for *Caixin* otherwise who dares to criticise CCTV. Any staff in CCTV may be relatives of the top officials. (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012)

Then the other interviewees who had firstly cheered *Caixin* changed their positions:

> Why bother to uncover the professional tacit rule. The corruptions conducted by the journalists are no more harmful than what the teachers or the doctors did. Hu, Shuli is just too idealistic. (ibid.)

> Absolutely, it is of no value to put the professional rule in public. Hu, Shuli just stands on a high moral ground overlooking all the other peers while flaunting herself as a moral guard. (ibid.)

[29] The serial reports about the case in English can be accessed at: http://english.caixin.com/2012-01-04/100345676.html

Another participant resonated:

> I agree. The media will be more cautious and the broker will be more sophisticated from now on. Hu is just labelling the profession as disgraceful. I heard that the journalists of *Caixin* have to stay over at their colleagues' on business trips. (ibid.)

Laughing ensued, and he continued:

> One can only pursue his lofty ideals after feeding his stomach. (ibid.)

The above discussion shows that journalists are inclined to excuse illegal activity. Moreover, the blurred investigation report by the GAPP also implies the regulator played a role in this corruption picture. The roots of corruption deserve careful scrutiny which is provided in the next section.

5.2 Roots of Corruption

As to the reasons behind the corrupt behaviour, existing scholarship (Zheng & Chen, 2004; Lu & Yu, 2003; Yu, 1997) provides a rather vague explanation, namely, that it is due to a profound institutional factor. Yet it fails to specify the constituents of the factor. Chen, L. (2007) offers a more developed argument in which he lists three causal links (*cf*. Chapter 1). First, Mainland China's media are under transition from a pure propaganda tool into more market-oriented institutions. At this particular moment, the media are half part of the party-state system and half part of the market system. The contradictions between the two create the demand and space for corruption. For example, since commercialisation, the party-state has cut off its subsidy to most of the media. The party-state also prohibits private companies from investing in the media. Thus, the media have limited investment sources, which has largely constrained their development (Chen, C., 2003). In order to acquire more funding, the media may commit corruption, such as selling editorial pages to private companies in exchange for cash. Second, the media have never been independent in China, professional norms and values are absent. Third, a more practical reason is that journalists lack the protection of rights and interests, which may trigger the corruption.

Journalistic corruption is not confined to China. Schudson (2011) revealed that envelope journalism is a common problem for a number of countries. Moreover, journalists are no more corrupt than any other occupational groups, such as officials, teachers, and doctors, in China (Zhao, 1998). Zhao (1998) argued that the most important structural reason for media corruption is the simultaneous operation of party logic and market logic (*cf.* Chapter 1). Sun (2012) blamed corruption on the absence of media law. Besides, all the interviewees in the fieldwork argued that China is unique in terms of its traditional culture: as a society of etiquette and favours, and a society of connections (*renqing shehui, guanxi shehui*). The cultural perspective is notably lacking in the existing scholarship. This section intends to probe the roots of corruption from the views of the interviewees. As a result, the factors are discussed in their own words categorised into four main types:

- De facto tacit rules (*qian guize*) and sophisticated society (*renqing shehui*)
- Running the beat (*pao kou*), peer pressure (*quanzi wenhua*) and the migrant news worker (*xinwen mingong*)
- The social milieu (*shehui fengqi*)
- Institutional factors (*tizhi yuanyin*)

The first one pays special attention to the cultural and historical indicators. The second type refers to journalists' working conditions. The third relates to the existing social environment. The forth focuses on the systematic factors with relation to the incompatibility between the party and the market.

De facto tacit rules and sophisticated society

Cultural factors serve as the most comfortable resort to which the journalists go in order to excuse themselves. The most common explanation is that 'in a sophisticated society like China, taking money is for building up connections' (F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012). Similar accounts were given in each interview. Two representative comments were put as follows:

> It is deeply embedded in the cultural tradition. I am in charge of writing the article while you are responsible for providing money. We become better friends from then on. (ibid.)

> It is kind of ruthless if you reject taking money. They give you the money only to keep a good connection with you. They give you money this time, and then you publish the article next time. Again and again, money keeps the relationship going. So you really cannot label this practice as corruption. Not that serious, it is only a cultural trait. (I-3, senior editor for national broadcasting, Beijing, 6 January 2012)

The key cultural trait the interviewees employed is the 'connection' (*guan xi*), or in similar words, 'sophisticated society'. Maintaining connections is the most important social convention in China. Codes of connection direct everybody in each aspect of social life. A vivid example can explain how to keep connections. It is rare for the Chinese to share the bill when they eat out. Normally, if A pays the bill this time, then B is expected to pay the next time. The essence of pay-by-turn is that this is the best way to keep the connection going. It is like a general common sense. A thorough examination of connection was given by Liang, Shuming (2003), a Chinese scholar, in his monograph on Chinese culture (*cf.* Chapter 1). Liang argued that Chinese society is based on ethical relationships (*lun li ben wei*), which originate from the family relationship but extend further. Family members, father and son, are a natural basic ethical relationship. All the social relationships resemble the family one. For example, teachers are usually regarded as the fathers of the students. With the expansion of society, connection extends further to include geographical ties through hometown associations, schoolmates and so forth. Perkins (in Harrison & Huntington eds., 2000) argues that, in the 19th century, it was the geographical connection that helped secure business activities, with hometown associations supplementing the lack of law enforcement by providing warranty to business transactions. Since the launch of the reform and opening up policy in 1978, connection has extended beyond kinship and geography, and has been monetized as well as enabled between strangers through the exchanges of favours. Normally, connection between strangers requires a relatively longer period of time to be consolidated, yet it will be facilitated if an intermediary who has ethical or geographical relationship with the two helps to bridge the strangers.

The essential point of ethical relationship is that it accentuates mutual obligations. For instance, the father has to raise his children, while the children are required to follow their father's words. Connections function as a system of building mutual obligations through exchanging favours. As a result, all the society's members are associated through different various kinds of connections. However, most importantly, the way to stay connected is by exchanging favours. When applied to journalism, paying money to journalists helps the sources to build connections with journalists. The sources and the journalists are originally isolated from each other. The sources then offer money to connect with the journalists. Consequently, the mutual obligation has been built up. The journalists pay off the debt with a published article. Then again the source repays, and the cycle continues. Until now, this research has argued against what a number of the interviewees had alleged, namely that money could not change how they processed the articles, for the simple reason that the fundamental rule of connection is mutual obligation. The journalists are required to pay off the debt in whatever way in order not to break the social convention.

Another cultural trait the interviewees tend to borrow is conformity. Conformity is a psychologically global concept. However, the concept is closely related to a Confucian ethos, the doctrine of the mean (*zhong yong*), making it more compelling in China. *Zhong Yong*, has long been regarded as an important guide for social interaction, which means to behave in a moderate (middle) way so as to keep harmony and balance. Generally speaking, conformity is a way of behaving *Zhong Yong*. A personal experience given by an editor-in-chief of a market driven press in Beijing perfectly reflects how conformity and *Zhong Yong* works:

> I have begun to print a slogan on journalists' cards: our journalists do not accept red-envelope-cash since 2004. But from the beginning of this year, I gave up. No more such slogans on the cards. Because I did not anticipate that even the media elites have a problem with this. All the other press will not print such a slogan. So never mind, do not be special, just be moderate. (I-6, an editor-in-chief, Beijing, 17 January 2012)

There is another key phrase which the journalists employ to excuse themselves, de facto tacit rules (*qian gui ze*). The phrase was originally coined by a journalist who later found a career in research, Wu, Si. In his startling monograph about Chinese history (2001), Wu discovered the hidden rule actually runs society which is cloaked under formal institutional rules. For example, it is common to find that local government takes part of the subsidies allocated from the central government to the peasants in China. In this case, the local officials may issue 'I owe you' (IOU) notes to the peasants. Although it is illegitimate, both the government and the peasants take this for granted. Additionally, the IOU notes are even the equivalent of legal enforcement. When it applies to explain corrupt journalism, the interviewees put it as follows:

> Taking envelope money is actually a de facto tacit rule. Everybody approves this, and you must take part in it. (I-1, vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012)

Another explanation is:

> It is only one of the many de facto tacit rules. There always exists another rule under the formal institutional one. Generally, the tacit rule is more effective. That is why the tacit rule comes into being. (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

To be specific, based on the views of the interviewees, the formal rule prohibits journalists from taking envelope money. However, the de facto tacit rule allows them to accept the envelope. Besides, the latter rule is more effective.

Running the beat, peer pressure, and the migrant news worker

As mentioned previously, beat journalists are constantly granted a transportation subsidy. In Mainland China, beat journalists are usually veterans who can handle sophisticated human relationships. Beat reporting is also known as 'running the beat', which means to manage the beat and visit the beat face-to-face on a regular base. As a vice editor-in-chief emphasises:

> A beat journalist is usually under big pressure. He or she must maintain a good relationship with the beat. Besides, he or she has to get on well with other journalists on the same beat in case they fail to report something important or write something different from the others. The top priority of a beat journalist is to build up connections. (I-1, vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012)

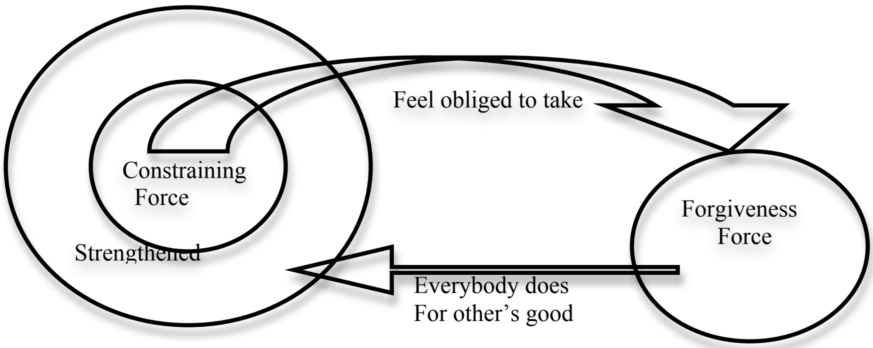
In this sense, if one refuses to take the envelope cash, he or she may hurt all parties. On the one hand, the beat may doubt 'what are you going to write about them, even if you are not labelled as an enemy, you are not sealed in the same tent' (I-2, senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012). On the other hand, all the focus groups' discussions mentioned that turning down the envelope left the other journalists in an awkward position.

This indicates that peer pressure also triggers journalistic corruption. Existing scholarship has noticed the role of peer pressure in journalistic corruption. This research further probes how peer pressure works. This research contends that journalistic peer pressure works through two interdependent mechanisms. On the one hand, journalistic peer pressure functions as a forgiveness system. On the other hand, it operates as a constraining system. A personal experience given by a beat journalist perfectly illustrates the constraining system:

> I was once invited to report on a new farming technique in a county far away. The interview was organised by the propaganda department of the district to which the county was affiliated. The people there were rather poor but they gave us 500 Yuan as the transportation subsidy. I did not take the money when I left. The story was of news value and was published. But I received several calls from both the department and the county to take the money the second day. After rejecting them again, my superior got calls from the propaganda department. They asked whether I had a problem with them. I explained that I did not want to take money from the poor. But my superior advised me to take it because if I did not, the other journalists would feel obliged to return the money. (Personal communications No. 1, on multiple days)

This case shows that the constraining force coming from the source, the peers, and sometimes the superiors confines the journalists to act under professional conventions; otherwise other journalists may get into trouble. And so, the journalists may conduct corruption. Hence, through guilt, journalists initiate the forgiveness mechanism justifying it because they are doing good for others. Additionally, a prevalent number of interviewees excused themselves by saying that all the journalists would take envelope-cash (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012; F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012). If one rejects it, he or she will be isolated, so one should just go with the tide (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012). The self-forgiveness thereby reinforces the group's constraining force. The following figure illustrates how journalistic peer pressure works.

Figure 15 How journalistic peer pressure causes corruption (made by the researcher)



Another factor that emerged from the fieldwork, a practical one, is that the journalists are underpaid and less supported by the social welfare system. Nearly half of the focus group participants complained that the media organisations would not refund the staff for their transportation expenses, plus the journalists are poorly paid. A participant working for a market-driven publication in Beijing divulged his after-tax monthly income to the focus group, which the others agreed was an average level: 'the take-home income ranges from 4,000 to 18,000 per month (roughly £400 to £1,800), however, the average is 10,000 Yuan (roughly £1,000) per month (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012). An interviewee working for a party organ in Beijing said the average income for young journalists is 6,000 (roughly £600) per month. The per capita disposal income of urban residents in Beijing for the first quarter of 2012 was 9,427 (Ren, 2012) Yuan (roughly £943), equivalent to 3,142 Yuan (roughly £314) per month. The figures show that the journalists' income is above average, contradicting the underpaid allegation. Nonetheless, the interviewees would prefer to refute this. One representative put it as follows:

> I must say that the total income has included the transportation subsidy. You have to know the largest part of the income is from piece rate/the author's remuneration. That means the more articles you write, the more payment you get. The base pay is less than 2,000 Yuan per month. How poor. Not to mention the ever-soaring housing prices, making it difficult for you to rent a studio at 2,000 in Beijing. (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012)

Another interviewee in the same focus group added:

> The more important point is that we are less secure about our future. You cannot work as a journalist forever. This is very much a job suitable for young people. When you get older, you may easily feel physically tired. As you know, in order to earn more money, you need to go to more places and interview more people to write more articles. Thus, to be a journalist is increasingly a manual labour type of work. Besides, a large number of colleagues do not keep a Beijing household (*hu kou*). So you have to save as much money as possible for your children and your elderly life. This is why we are called the migrant news workers. (ibid.)

The phrase, 'migrant news workers', was coined from 'news workers' and 'migrant workers'. The latter originally refers to the peasants who migrated to a metropolitan city to seek manual work. Used by journalists, the phrase is actually a self-mockery calling. In the focus group, the calling inspired a general nodding. The phrase usually involves two implications. First, migrant workers normally get paid on a piece rate and by the hour. Second, the migrant workers do not hold household registration (*hu kou*), so they lack social welfare protection. The reverse side to the migrant news worker is the formal journalist, implying a hierarchical employment system. Take CCTV as an example: only a limited number of CCTV personnel, who are mostly seniors, hold a government-affiliated institutional position (*shiye bianzhi*) associated with better-equipped welfare benefits and granted a Beijing household registration. They can get higher pensions and reclaim more from the national health insurance. Moreover, household registration secures their children places in public school for free. Some participants in the fieldwork had been working at a national broadcaster for the last seven years, got their names shown on air, yet they did not hold such position. As a result, not only do they have lower levels of health insurance and pensions, but, more importantly, their children cannot get equal education. If they want to send their children to the public school, they have to pay an expensive extra educational contributing surcharge (*jiaoyu zanzhu fei*). Besides, in the case of the national broadcasters, the participants revealed that they signed the contract with a subsidiary of the broadcaster instead. The journalist who was suspected of blackmail in the Da Vinci case also held a contract with this subsidiary. Ironically, a janitor who has worked there for years holds such a position and a contract with it directly, according to one interviewee (F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012).

This discriminatory employment system is widely utilised by the media organisations under a system called 'new way to the young, old way to the aged (*xinren xin banfa, laoren lao banfa*)'. Actually, all the other occupational groups, such as doctors and teachers, undertake the same employment system. Some scholars (Chen, C., 2003) name it the 'dual track system (*shuang gui zhi*)', which is the offspring of a planned economy. In the past under the planned economy system, all staff in media organisations were well benefited by social welfare system. Whilst becoming a more market-oriented economy, the public finance cannot afford a better-equipped social welfare system for a large population. Consequently, the news workers have to pay their own price.

Aside from the above, the worst case for the journalistic occupation is that an employment contract is sometimes not granted. A survey conducted in 2003 showed that 60.3 per cent of respondents did not sign a contract and 61.4 per cent were excluded from any social welfare insurance.[30]

From what has been discussed above, this research argues that the allegation of underpayment can be viewed as a sentiment redolent of an unfair employment system. Due to the insecure working status and reduced social welfare, journalists choose to save as much money as possible for retirement, perhaps triggering short-sighted or mercenary behaviour. A number of interviewees shared the same plan: 'as long as I have enough money, I will go back to my hometown and find a teaching job' (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; I-3, senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012). Some even intended to put their plan into action in their thirties. If the employment system, or the dual track system, is seen as a transitional phenomenon, then one may expect the mercenary behaviour to be phased out in the future. However, some interviewees argued that they would not hope the situation would change in the short run, as the literati never get decent payment (I-2, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012; F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012). It is suggested that the low rate of pay for writing is only a soft method of thought control (ibid.). A freelancer[31] provided telling evidence: a thousand-word article

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[30] The survey was conducted jointly by the *National Social Welfare Magazine* and the Media China website from March to April 2003. The survey report can be accessed at (http://bbs.cnhan.com/read-htm-tid-9592-ds-1-toread-1.html).

[31] '*What Does the Low Rate of Writing Imply in China*', [Online]. Available at: http://book.sina.com.cn/news/v/2012-03-13/1519295965.shtml (Accessed: 12 April 2012). (Note:

for the *Beijing Daily* gets paid at £9.82, whereas the same length article for the *New York Times* gets £1,241. That is why freelancers are scarce. Presumably, the underpaid remuneration is only a chronic approach contributing to the thought control, so the less dissident voices are heard.

The social milieu

As described above, journalists are no more corrupt than other occupational groups. As one interviewee said, ‘it is nowhere clean in China, why not let it be, it is good for everyone’ (F-5, a news website group, 15 January 2012). In other words, Weil (1995) argued that corruption is not an aberration but the very way that the system, the *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*, works, which is deeply embedded in the government itself. Actually, governmental agencies launched a number of anti-corruption campaigns and issued regulations and codes of ethics to battle corruption. Unfortunately, the efforts were in vain (Lu, 2003; Yu, 1998; Zhao, 1998). Despite the weak enforcement, Zhao noted in particular, ‘when administrative bodies are corrupt, it is hard to enforce administrative orders effectively’ (1998: 82). An illustrative example was given by the interviewees working for a news website：

> The Internet Administrative Bureau exists only for collecting dirty money. They issued the directive orders telling you not to put certain sensitive articles online. But if you pay the bureau 30,000 Yuan, you can keep it online in certain circumstances. (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012)

The research of Zhang and Lu (2008) also exposed that the press regularly pays the local department office in exchange for larger space on investigative reporting. In such cases, the bribery is laundered clean in the name of pursuing good journalism.

Institutional factors

According to Zhao (1998), the simultaneous operation of political repression and market orientation is the most important structural reason for corrupt journalism. Journalists and media officials are only evaluated on political standards. Under harsh political repression, professional norms and aspirations have no grounds to grow. In some cases, corruption can be seen as an element of passive political resistance in the practice (Zhao, 1998: 88). On the other hand, the market principle is not completely applied. Although the media rely

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the currency is originally in Yuan and Dollars, the researcher converted both at the rate obtained at GMT 19:48, 12 May 2012, 100 Yuan = £9.82, $100 = £62.05) heavily on advertising revenue, their survival does not depend on market success and vice versa. Surprisingly, few interviewees agreed with Zhao's argument. Notably, over half of the interviewees believe that the party logic and the market logic are compatible. The general mood is that the media carries too many responsibilities than it should take which opens room for corruption. They call it the 'institutional factor'. One interviewee put it as follows:

> You may find in China that, if people suffered from injustice, they will ask for help from the media instead of from the police, or the judge, or the government. In some circumstances, the media functions as the court, the living 'Bao, Qingtian',[32] Sometimes the media are adjudicating the case. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012)

Another participant in the same focus group added:

> The media are too burdened in China. I think this is partly attributed to the chaos of society. In other words, due to the imperfection of the market economy, the society as a whole is in a mess at this stage. Idealistically, companies are not afraid of the media. If a company has a problem in quality, the administrative competent department will in the first place punish it. But unfortunately in China, this is not the case. So the companies choose to bribe the media in exchange for covering up dirty hands. (ibid.)

The other participant also believed that the media are frightening even to some local governmental agencies:

> As a central party organ journalist, I was once assigned to report an environmental pollution incident in a county. The local government told me that they gave money to some journalists in order not to be exposed. There is a common saying, 'protect against fire, protect against theft, and protect against journalists'. (ibid.)

The group discussion concluded that the above cases are predominately due to the lack of administrative and judicial supervision. However, this cannot explain why the media are so powerful and frightening to companies, and even to local governmental agencies. Presumably, the power of the media stems partly from its supervisory force. Nonetheless, why do journalists complain that the media are taking too many responsibilities, since societal supervision is naturally the media's responsibility? Here it is worthwhile to look through the phrases the journalists use to describe the media. One interviewee who works

[32] The original name of Bao, Qingtian is Bao, Zhen. Qingtian is a metaphor to denote probity quality. He was a much-praised judge in the North Song Dynasty in ancient China who was clean-fingered and honest. As a result, he stands as a symbol of probity and justice.

for a party organ described the media as the 'low gravy governmental agency (*qing shui ya men*)' (ibid.). A significant number of interviewees complained that 'the media are doing the job of the government' (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012; F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012). A few interviewees based in Beijing would call a business trip to a county as 'an interview of an inferior' (*cai fang xia ji*).

From what has been described, this research argues that the Chinese media acts as an extension of the power of the party-state. This makes more sense of the enchantment of the media. The media does not stand as a third party or independent supervisory force; instead, it is involved in enforcement. Furthermore, the media plays a leading role. Sometimes, the 'media are adjudicating the case'; and sometimes, the 'media are doing the job of the government'. In this sense, the media becomes the target of bribery. In one interviewee's words, 'there exists the opportunity and the room for corruption' (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012). If looked at from the audience's standpoint, this argument might carry more weight. A famous investigative news programme broadcast on CCTV, the *Focus Interview* (*jiaodian fangtan*), is widely known as 'focus clear sky' (*jiao qing tian*). Clear sky, in Chinese *Qing Tian*, denotes disinterested officials who would bring justice to the governed. Moreover, journalists are occasionally regarded as the 'clear sky governors', in Chinese, *Qing Tian Da Lao Ye*, which refers to the top officials in ancient China. Notably, the media were born to be a part of the party-state system (*cf.* Chapter 2) and is systematically integrated into it which is regarded by Sun (2004) as the governing tactic.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted a range of corrupt behaviours in journalism. This research argues that corruption is systematically embedded in Chinese journalism. First, almost all journalists in the fieldwork admitted that practices such as taking cash from sources are pervasive in Chinese journalism. Second, both frontline journalists and the senior leaders in the media view the practices as natural.

Compared with previous research findings, the situation of journalistic corruption has changed in two ways. First, the main forms have changed. This research has found three main forms of corruption: taking red-envelope-cash, publicity power for rent, and extortion. Journalists' moonlighting and soliciting advertisements, which was reported in previous research (Yu, 1998; Zhao, 1998), have been phased out. Second, journalists seem to be more tolerant of the corrupt practices. In 1998, Yu reported that journalists held relatively critical views towards corrupt practices. Yet this research has found a rather vague view held by journalists. They tend to view corrupt behaviours as ‘understandable’ and excuse themselves by employing cultural elements. This chapter then turned to explore the roots of corruption.

Drawing upon the fieldwork data, journalists conceptualised the roots of corruption on four dimensions. First, all the interviewees attributed corruption to Chinese culture, which emphasises connection (*guan xi*) and etiquette. Additionally, taking red-envelope-cash evolved from the cultural tradition. Thus, the payment from the sources is regarded as etiquette in order to build up connections. Journalists argued that the payment did not affect their judgement about the raw material. A number of interviewees, however, admitted that accepting cash did sway their judgement. Actually, building up connections usually involves an exchange of interests. Moreover, it is also a cultural tradition that maintaining the connection requires a reciprocal exchange of interests. Just as journalists commented in the fieldwork (F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012), the sources pay cash to journalists expecting favourable reports. Meanwhile, accepting the money, journalists are under pressure to return the gratitude by providing flattering reports.

Second, some journalists mentioned that current working conditions also contributed to corruption. A vivid case provided by a beat journalist illustrated that rejecting the red-envelope-case left payer and peers in an awkward situation and further brought trouble to the journalist. Here, peer pressure works as a constraining force pushing the journalist to take the money. Peer pressure can also work as a forgiveness force in that journalists may excuse themselves when taking money from sources, for all journalists conduct the same behaviour. Furthermore, a number of journalists complained that they are underpaid. Yet their payment slip showed that they are relatively better paid compared with the average payment level in the cities. Even though they get well paid, they still need to save a large portion of their salary for the future because they are less protected by the social welfare system. This is especially the case for journalists from the mass-appeal media. A household certificate, which is closely bounded with many benefits of welfare, is not granted to them. Thus, they can only get lower pensions and redeem less from the national health insurance. Additionally, they need to pay extra fees for their children’s education. The journalists mocked themselves as ‘news migrant workers’ indicating an unstable working status. Therefore, many journalists view journalism as a transitional job, which triggers corrupt or short-sighted behaviour.

Third, corrupt behaviour is pervasive in Chinese society, and so journalists cannot be immune from the social milieu. Journalists also complained that the media constantly bribe the local propaganda offices in exchange for wider space on investigative reports. Yet this behaviour cannot be apotheosised. The bribery is the investment aiming for market returns. Just as one interviewee said, 'the payment saved an excellent story, and then you get rewards on visiting traffic' (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012). In this sense, the party control is also commercialised. The economic forces can also erode the political forces.

Fourth, the media's role in contemporary Chinese society also facilitates corruption. Journalists named this the institutional factor. The media are viewed not as an independent economic entity but as the extension of the party-state. As discussed in previous chapters, the party-state not only owns the media, even though it is symbolic, it also managed to integrate the media into the governmental bureaucracy. Each media organisation is granted an administrative level. Additionally, the party-state also promoted the media to conduct public opinion supervision (*yulun jiandu*) by investigating governmental wrongdoings. The supervision, however, is bureaucratised in that the media can only oversee the government, which stands one level below itself. To be specific, a local newspaper cannot report the malpractices of the governmental agencies at the national level. But it can report wrongdoings of prefectural government agencies. In light of this, the media's supervision helps the central government to administer the local governmental agencies. In this sense, the media's supervision became part of the governmental supervision. Sun (2004) called this the governing tactic. In such cases, to the local officials, the media becomes the representative of higher-level governments and the media becomes the target of corruption. Just as vividly embodied in journalists' own experiences, journalists are constantly offered money when they went to interview lower level officials.

This chapter has explored the corrupt practices conducted by journalists, while unavoidably overlooking the corruption of media organisations, which requires further investigation. Besides, the work probes how the journalists view corruption, and thus leaves the regular payers, such as governmental agencies and companies, unanswered in this bilateral relationship. Consequently, it would also be worthwhile to investigate these payers in the future. To be specific, future research may investigate public relations companies and international corporations based in China, who regularly pay journalists at press conferences.

This research examined journalistic norms under tight media control in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 explored corrupt journalistic behaviours. The research now investigates the changes brought forth by the so-called new media, especially by social media.

Chapter Six: The Impact of Social Media

When the *British Journalism Review* used the word 'apocalypse' (*Editorial*, 2011: 3-4) to postulate the future of traditional journalism in the age of the internet, the Chinese print media were still enjoying their 'authoritative status' (Wang, 2010; F-1, a party organ group, 8 January 2012). This indicates that different social contexts colour the consequences that the internet brings about (Curran, in Curran *et al.* eds., 2012). This chapter intends to investigate the dynamic interactions between the old journalistic norms and new internet technology in the Chinese context. It does not intend to conduct an all-encompassing investigation regarding the impact of the internet as the potentialities of the internet are still unfolding. At this initial stage, it is difficult to draw assertive conclusions. However, by focusing on issues frequently mentioned by journalistic practitioners from the fieldwork, this research aims to provide frontline observations.

Three major sections constitute this chapter. The first section focuses on the evolution of online news. Accompanying this evolution, the Chinese party-state rigorously employs multiple means to control online information flows. Lessig (1999) has identified four mechanisms which can be employed by authorities to control the internet: the law, architecture, the market, and social norms. Based on this useful categorisation, this chapter looks at these controlling mechanisms respectively. As mentioned previously, the party-state does not intend to make any laws in the journalistic domain. Instead, the authorities constantly issue governmental rules which virtually have statutory status. Thus, in the Chinese context, the law is better replaced by the rules. The constraining forces simultaneously meet counter-forces, which are discussed as well. Of all the internet applications, microblogging has had the biggest impact, and this was frequently mentioned by participants interviewed in the fieldwork. Thus, the second section puts the spotlight on its impact. After a brief introduction to microblogging in mainland China, this chapter explores the changes brought forth by the microblog. The final section intends to draw a number of cautious conclusions.

This research locates the enquiry with relation to the wider social changes. China is now 'becoming increasingly pluralist and a more fragmented authority is evolving' (Ljunggren, 2010: 462-469). To be specific,

> There is a shift in values taking place. Individual voices are emerging from the collective in events that take on their own dynamic. People want to express their views. Suddenly, someone does it for the first time on an issue that affects

> him or her in some way, and takes a step out of the collective. The relation between the individual, society and power is no longer a given. (ibid.)

The traditional media are still heavily suppressed by the party-state as explored in Chapter 4. Ordinary people who intend to express their own initiatives can hardly get access to the traditional media. Under such circumstances, the internet has emerged to fill in the gap by providing an online platform for individual voices. Yet again, the online world is scrutinised by the party-state. In exploring the impact of the internet, especially social media, on the traditional media, this chapter first introduces the evolution of online news.

Before exploring changes of Chinese journalism in the digital age, it is of comparative value to look at changes in Western journalism. A wealth of Western analysis and commentaries have laid out the claim that traditional journalism is undergoing a fundamental change, driven principally by communication technology. For example, an increasing number of people, especially the young, have turned to the internet for news instead of paying for a newspaper which leads to job cuts in the newsrooms (Curran, 2010; Downie and Schudson, 2009). As Downie and Schudson (2009) pointed out, the dominant American newspapers and influential network news divisions are giving way to web-based information. Commercial television news has also been losing its audience, its advertising revenue, and its reporting resources. Although they argue that newspapers and television news are not going to vanish in the foreseeable future, they believe that traditional journalism is in crisis. The crisis claim resonates with what most U.K. media employees worry about. From January 2008 to September 2009, 106 local newspapers closed down in Britain (cited in Curran, 2010: 465). Job cuts in the newsroom have left fewer journalists to fill more spaces. Additionally, the last few years have seen a rush from the traditional media to get online. Journalists are required to provide reports both offline and online. They have shrinking time in which to process the news. Fewer journalists are working under heavier loads within shrinking time. This has posed great concern about the quality of news (McNair, 2009).

The internet also brings opportunities for traditional media. The BBC utilised several videos from the YouTube website taken by ordinary Japanese people during tsunami reports. This is a good example of the internet supporting the mainstream media. Journalists cannot be on the spot at any time, so user-generated content can be employed as an efficient complement to traditional media.

The impact of the internet on traditional media in the Chinese context is more complicated in that the party-state occasionally intrudes into the development of the internet. This chapter begins by providing the historical context within which the enquiry is located. The following part of this chapter delineates the evolution of online news.

6.1 Online news

On 20 April 1994, mainland China connected to the world wide web (Min, 2009). The year after that, the internet opened for public access (Harwit & Clark, 2001). In less than two decades, the internet has grown immensely. Many scholars have explored the trajectory of Chinese online news (Brady, 2010; Zhao, 2008; Boas, in Zysman & Newman eds., 2006; Peng, 2005; Harwit & Clark, 2001). The research conducted by mainland Chinese scholars consists mainly of descriptive accounts that pay little attention to the impact of the controlling forces in the development of the internet. The research conducted overseas, however, tends to focus on the controlling forces, particularly the design of the internet infrastructure, but fails to provide an in-depth description regarding the impact of the rules, which may be due to a lack of first-hand information. This research intends to fill this gap by highlighting the crisscrossing of controlling forces particularly regulation and the development of online news.

The evolution of online news

At the outset, the development of the internet in mainland China was driven by academic and military causes. Since public access was granted, the use of the internet has grown at an unprecedented rate. As of 1994, there were only some 1,600 internet users in the entire mainland (Harwit & Clark, 2001: 388). By the end of 2012, the number of internet users reached 564 million, and the number of mobile internet users reached 420 million. Of all the users, 91.7 per cent had access to the internet at home, and the internet penetration rate was 42.1 per cent (*Statistical report on internet development in China*[33], 2013).

[33] 'Statistical Report on Internet Development in China', China Internet Network Information Centre, January 2013 [Online]. Available at: http://www1.cnnic.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/201302/P020130312536825920279.pdf (Accessed: 6 May 2013). The internet user in this report refers to 'Chinese residents at the age of six or above who have used internet in the past 6 months'. The mobile internet user refers to 'internet users who have used mobile phones to access and surf the internet in the past 6 months, but not limited to those surfing the internet via mobile phones only'.

To some extent, 'the Chinese government deserves praise for rapidly building the data network' and granting access to its expanding population (Harwit & Clark, 2001: 377). A contrasting example is Saudi Arabia where the internet connection was first established in 1994, but public access was delayed until 1999 allowing the authorities to perfect their internet control mechanism (Boas, in Zysman & Newman eds., 2006). In mainland China, 'the authorities promote internet services while learning how to control it' (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012). In other words, the internet is seen both as an economic accelerator and as a challenge to information control. A good case in point is the 'Connecting Every Village Project' (*cun cun tong gongcheng*). This was a systematic nationwide project initially launched in the late 1990s. In the beginning, the project was intended to transmit broadcasting signals to remote villages. As stated in the official documents, the primary aim was to propagate guidelines and policies of the party-state (*General Office of the State Council: Notice of Further Improving Radio and Television Coverage in the New Era*, 2006). Since 2004, the project was further extended to include the construction of internet infrastructure in rural areas. Connecting the rural areas to the internet is not only regarded as extending the party's propaganda reach but also linking a new market to e-commerce (*An Introduction about the Project*, no date).

As mentioned above, the internet provides a new platform to deliver the party's propaganda. This explains why the first traditional media outlet to move online was targeted at international propaganda. On 12 January 1995, the *China Scholars Abroad* magazine, an organ of the State Education Committee, began to publish its online version (Peng, 2005: 24). This innovation was motivated to 'propagate positive information about mainland China and attract Chinese overseas talent to return home' (ibid.: 25). In 1995, seven to eight print media organisations moved online, and all involved foreign propaganda purposes (ibid.: 33).

From 1997 to 1998, three major privately owned internet companies were set up: Netease, Sohu, and Sina. All three touched on news dissemination and became the main online news outlets. By April 2000, there were 273 newspapers online (Wang, 2001: 57). However, the news articles that went online were simply copies of the print versions due to the fact that the party-state does not allow news websites to produce their own content. Thus, at this stage, online news is merely a copy of traditional media, rather than a separate distinctive medium that could include content not included in print versions.

In 2000, the authorities issued a watershed governmental rule entitled, 'Interim Provisions for Online News Publication' (*hulian wangzhan congshi dengzai xinwen yewu zanxing guanli guiding*) which set up four gates to control the news going online:

- Established the *administrative body*: The State Council Information Office (SCIO)
- Established *licence control*: All internet websites which intend to provide news information must apply for a licence from the SCIO at corresponding administrative levels
- Confined *business area*: News websites can only relay or aggregate news already published in the traditional media, which means news websites cannot initiate their own news stories (*bu neng zicai*). Furthermore, news websites are not allowed to reprint news from other sources, which blocks news provided by international media organisations unless authorised. Besides, privately owned news websites have to make contracts with the traditional media to carry their news content
- Set the *entry level*: This rule categorises two types of news websites run either by traditional news organisations or by privately owned companies. Media organisations below the city level cannot set up their own news websites

Due to these restrictions, news websites merely hired editors to polish, adapt, and edit news. Online journalists are not supposed to exist in strict terms. In light of this, the space for news websites to grow was seriously squeezed, and it was inevitable that media organisations would not be keen to invest in their websites. Thus, news websites acted as extensions or even affiliations of traditional media. Interestingly, it is documented that internet companies advertised heavily in the traditional media (Peng, 2005). A vivid description of the relationship between the two at this stage is that 'the internet works for traditional media' (*hulianwang gei chuantong meiti dagong*). However, in reality, news websites employed various tactics to circumvent these barriers which are discussed in the next section.

Things began to change with an increase in internet users and a shift in the media environment. By the end of 1999, the number of internet users in mainland China reached 8.9 million (*Statistical report on internet development in China*, 2000), and by the end of 2004, the figure had soared up to 94 million (*Statistical Report on Internet Development in China*, 2005). Furthermore, an increasing number of people went online for news information. Surveys show that while traditional media consumption was dropping year on year, internet surfing time was increasing (Guo, 2007). In 2007, the average amount of time spent surfing the internet in major cities hit a striking 5.43 hours per day (ibid.). Traditional media had long been enjoying an annual increase of 33 per cent in terms of advertising revenues (Wu, 2005). However, this increasing rate began to drop in 2003, with 23 per cent in 2003, 18.2 per cent in 2004, and 10 per cent in 2005 (ibid.). In 2004, the advertising market's share of print media shrunk from 22.53 per cent to 18.2 per cent (ibid.). In contrast, the online advertising market increased 75.9 per cent in 2004 compared with that of 2003 (ibid.). In light of this, the publisher of the *Beijing Times*, a major Beijing local newspaper, called the year 2005 the 'inflection point' (*guai dian*) of print media (ibid.).

In 2005, the idea that 'the internet works for traditional media' became the very opposite. At that time, the three major privately owned news websites usually paid little or even nothing to use traditional media content. In the old comfy days, traditional media organisations were tolerant of this behaviour. However, as traditional media began to face a crisis, they united to demand market share. Over 20 newspapers signed an agreement which urged the major three to respect copyright and pay more for relaying news. The party-state conceptualised the relationship between privately owned news websites and traditional media as contractual and co-operative. However, in practice, the pricing mechanism did not work properly due to intervention from the party-state. As the party-state restrained the privately owned news websites from producing their own news content, 'it would be untenable to ask for a profit share', a journalist working for a mass-appeal newspaper commented (Personal communications No. 5, 14 January 2012). Moreover, ownership further complicates the situation. As discussed in Chapter 2, the traditional media were owned by the party-state in theory. Thus, from the perspective of ownership, it is the party-state that intended to reap a portion from the private companies based on the rule the party-state sets for itself.

Actually, the agreement had achieved limited results. There were still a great number of newspapers and magazines that keenly provided their content for free to privately owned news websites in order to extend their audience reach. Additionally, journalists even complained if the media organisation they worked for decoupled from privately owned news websites as their occupational fame would be undermined. A journalist said,

> My newspaper sued Sina for piracy and we won the case. From then on, Sina could not relay news from my newspaper. But actually, it was we who were losing out. We were going to lose younger readers who rarely read a newspaper and normally got news online. I keep personal contact with editors of Sina and allow them to relay my articles using my penname. I just want to continue my reputation through an online platform. (Personal communication No. 5, 14 January 2012)

This is a high-profile case illustrating how participants knotted together due to the intervention from the party-state. In 2005, the party-state refined the constraining rule with two changes (*Internet News Information Services Regulations*, 2005):

- Widened *business area*: The refined rule allowed traditional media organisations to set up new websites to release online stories exclusively that may not necessarily be published on their print versions.
- Tightened *control*: The refined rule required news websites to keep records of their online news content and also keep logs of their internet users for the preceding sixty days on demand.

The first change seems to have loosened control and allowed online news to emerge. Actually, the aim was to extend the reach of propaganda. A telling example is the *Dongfang* news website which was initially set up by Shanghai's local propaganda department. It was one of the first news websites which could produce online news. On various occasions, the SCIO stressed its role as propagating positive information and guiding online opinion favourable to the party-state (Peng, 2005). However, the privately owned news websites are still forbidden from producing their own news content.

The emergence of web 2.0 services further eroded the status of traditional media. Web 2.0 generally refers to a participatory web culture which allows internet users to contribute to web content (Meikle & Young, 2011). Blogs, microblogs, and social media sites are popular web 2.0 applications. From 2005 to 2007, the number of blogs in mainland China rose from 16 million to 99 million (*2005: the Beginning of Blogging in Mainland China*, 2005). As of January 2008, over 50 million Chinese people read weblogs regularly (Xiao, in Shirk, 2011: 203). Although the number is still relatively small out of 1.4 billion people, weblogs provided 'an important channel for people to voice their opinions about important events' (ibid.). More importantly, weblogs began to set the agenda for traditional media (ibid.). A good case in point is that, in 2007, freelancer Lian, Yue posted several articles on his weblog calling for people living in Xiamen to speak out against a chemical plant to be built in the city because the plant could cause disastrous environmental problems. The online message soon translated into severe public concern and serial traditional media reports. In the end, the original plan was dropped. In 2009, a newcomer, microblogging, created the biggest impact on traditional journalism and on contemporary social life as well which will be discussed in more detail later. These new web 2.0 applications are tightly caged in a virtual intranet enabled through multi-layered controlling forces, which is the focus of the next part.

The controlling forces

Bill Clinton, the former U.S. president, once optimistically surmised that controlling the internet in China is 'like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall' (cited in Brady, 2008: 125). Conversely, however, China has built the world's most sophisticated online surveillance system, which successfully blocks and filters information that is unfavourable to the party-state (Boas, in Zysman & Newman eds., 2006; Harwit & Clark, 2001). The online controlling mechanisms not only affect journalists' daily usage of the internet but also impact on their journalistic practices. This part examines the four controlling forces, the rules, the architecture, the market, and the social norms based on data gained through desk research and firsthand information provided by journalistic practitioners in the fieldwork.

The rules

As examined in the previous part, the rules, including governmental rules and regulations, has had a direct impact on the evolution of online news. Until now, the authorities have issued over 100 bylaws, rules, and regulations to control online information dissemination and online businesses (Chen, Hua, 2011). The core rule relating to online news, as discussed in the previous part, forbids privately owned news websites from producing their own news content.

According to the rules, a number of governmental bodies and party agencies have overlapping responsibilities in overseeing the internet. Generally speaking, the governmental bodies deal with technology-related issues, while the propaganda departments at corresponding levels are in charge of news content. Considering the reduction of governmental agencies in other sectors, the number of institutions overseeing the media, communication, and cultural sectors is expanding (Zhao, 2008). In early 2000, the Internet Information Management Bureau was set up. In the following year, the State Leadership Group on Informatisation was officially established and headed by the Premier. An editor working for a privately owned news website said,

> There are at least thirty bodies and agencies overseeing us. The internet is actually the most heavily guarded sphere in China. (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012)

Aside from the rules, the party-state also invests heavily in internet architecture construction, controlling its handsomely increasing online users.

Architecture

The internet architecture refers to the hardware and software underpinning the internet. It is difficult to outline all of the technological methods utilised by the party-state here, since such information is protected as state secrets. This research looks at the major technological methods.

The cornerstone of China's internet control is its system of interconnecting networks (Boas, in Zysman & Newman, 2006). The connections to the global internet have long been channelled through a small number of state sanctioned internet companies (ibid.). In this sense, it is more like a caged intranet rather than the true internet. Nearly all internet servers are maintained by state enterprises (An, 2013). An editor working for a privately owned news website provided this case,

> We once put a story online exposing under-table deals of a company which is owned by the family of a top party leader. Just after this item was shown online, the server we were using was down. Our website became inaccessible for several minutes. You may not imagine how huge this was. Our company is listed on the NASDAQ stock exchange. This led to tremendous economic loss. (I-2, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012)

China's internet control system is widely known as the Great Firewall (GFW), a term which first appeared in *Wired* magazine in 1997 (*China's Internet: A Giant Cage*, 2013). The GFW is a complex system, including a multi-layered technological design, which filters, blocks certain content, and monitors user activity. This system mainly provides the following functions:

- *Block* certain domains, such as the websites of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. It is estimated that there are over 500 thousand blocked domains (Brady, 2008:131).
- *Filter* certain pages within a website that includes content unfavourable to the party-state. For example, the BBC website can be accessed, but particular pages are out of reach showing '404 not found' or 'page not available'.
- *Key-word* filtering: the system can ban web searches for certain words such as the name of the former president, Hu, Jintao. Nowadays, the authority allows searching of sensitive words, but only information favourable to the party-state is available. In this case, the web search page will show 'according to laws, rules and regulations, some results are not shown.' For example, if searching for 'Liu, Xiaobo', a dissident and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, all the results are from official propaganda sources which condemn Liu, Xiaobo as a liar and traitor.
- *Intercept* online instant messages containing sensitive words. For example, if online chat messages or emails include sensitive words, the messages will be disrupted.

There is always a way to circumvent control. For instance, tech-savvy users use alternative proxy settings or VPN (Virtual Private Networking) to tunnel through the GFW, which is known as ‘climbing over the wall’ (*fan qiang*). However, the GFW has been updated to intercept VPN connections. Aside from the internet infrastructure, the party-state also sets norms which encourage internet users to censor themselves.

Social norms

In late 2000, the internet police was introduced. Two cartoon figures wearing police uniforms are shown on the webpage representing the online police. This creates a sense that the authority is watching you, thus eliciting self-censorship (Brady, 2008). A number of online chat-rooms offer cash rewards to encourage users to report dubious materials (*ibid.*). In fact, combined with employing the market mechanism, the party-state has successfully outsourced its censorship responsibility to internet portals. Internet companies which disregard the party’s rules are often shut down or have their business interrupted. In order to do business in mainland China, all internet portals must take censorship responsibility for the content they carry. For instance, a major commercial website, Sina.com provides a microblogging service. Thus it takes responsibility for monitoring every microblog its users write. Except for the GFW and online police, Sina also employs its own tailored monitoring software and hires over four thousand censors to detect and delete sensitive posts (*China’s Internet: A Giant Cage*, 2013).

Market

On the one hand, the market is a tool that can be utilised by the party-state to keep the internet companies in line. As mentioned above, cooperation brings in profits, whereas a divergence from the party’s may lead to failure in the Chinese market. Google is a telling example. Google had long been a target due to its reluctance to filter its search results. The party-state employed multiple means to squeeze Google’s market share. Google’s search service is unstable due to constant technological intervention. Searching banned words on Google will lead to a dead end and will suspend the search engine for about 90 seconds (ibid.). Constant intervention and hacking attacks finally resulted in its retreat from the mainland Chinese market. Meanwhile, its main rival, Baidu, a privately owned Beijing-based pro-government Chinese search engine, was delighted to take over the market share. However, these controlling forces often meet counter-forces which are explored in the following part.

The online 'cat and mouse' game

The party-state has set up multiple gates to filter online information dissemination. Nonetheless, due to the fast speed and viral circulation, the internet has facilitated the spread and penetration of certain information, which is not available through traditional media (F-2, a mass-appeal group, 9 January 2012; F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012). The internet brings new strategies to the 'cat and mouse' game which is the topic of this part.

Covert Journalists

As discussed above, privately owned news websites cannot produce their own news stories. Such newsrooms are therefore not supposed to hire journalists. However, in reality, online journalists are working in disguise. One editor working for a privately owned news website said,

> In theory, our website cannot hire journalists; we can only have editors. Basically, what editors can do is editing, rewriting the news title, and moving a news item to a higher level in the hierarchy. I feel very much restrained in this work, like a robot. But sometimes, editors also do interviews. For example, if the news is big but from a less established newspaper, we will make phone calls to interview insiders or check facts with the journalists who wrote the story. Actually, we also have our own journalists which is in rigid terms against the governmental rule. But we have to survive in this competitive market, so we do it secretly. The journalist is titled an editor when publishing articles online. (I-2, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012)

Accounts from the focus groups show that all the major privately-owned news websites hire journalists in order to initiate their own news stories (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012). A journalist working for an internet company said,

> We are basically doing the same thing that traditional media journalists do. We are assigned to a beat and invited to attend news conferences. We use almost exactly the same procedures as traditional media journalist to prepare a news article. The only difference is that we are not titled journalists, but editors, in order not to publicly offend the rule. (ibid.)

In fact, the difference is not only confined to by-lines. This covert practice is largely conditional. The privately owned news websites enclose their covert journalists in finance, sports, and entertainment reporting areas and keep current affairs untouched (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012; I-2, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012). Additionally, to keep this covert practice low-key, the number of journalists working for these internet companies is quite low. In the finance news department of a major privately owned news website, there are five full-time journalists compared with dozens of editors (I-2, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012). An editor complained, ‘even if we have devised a feasible project plan to conduct an in-depth or investigative report, it is extremely difficult to put it into practice due to our undersized staff of journalists’ (I-2, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012). As long as this covert practice does not challenge the party’s line, the party-state turns a blind eye towards it. In this sense, a mutually beneficial tacit agreement has been arrived at.

Transformational discourse

Another way to circumvent online control is not only confined to the journalistic field but also pervasively utilised by internet users. The party-state employs keyword blocking and filtering mechanisms which forbid certain words from being posted or searched. The internet users normally call these ‘sensitive words’ (*mingan ci*). They outwit the system by transforming ‘sensitive words’ into analogies, spoof jokes, metaphors, satires, synonyms, homophones, and homographs. An example of a homograph is ‘目田’, which literarily means ‘eye field’, substituting for ‘自由’ meaning freedom (King *et al*., 2013). A telling example of the use of homophones is the word ‘*he xie*’, often written as ‘河蟹’ in Chinese, meaning ‘river crab’. This is used to refer to ‘和谐’, the official doctrine of building a harmonious society (*ibid.*). The party-state promotes the doctrine of harmonious society meanwhile suppressing dissident expression. Thus, the original meaning of harmony is shaded by a negative connotation, a deliberate effort of covering dissident voices to create ostensible harmony. When online posts are blocked or filtered, internet users mock this censorship by saying ‘my post has been harmonised’ (*bei hexie*). Replacing ‘和谐’ with ‘河蟹’ further mocks the official doctrine.

These transformational discourses were originally used to evade the online blocking system and were later expanded to include spoof jokes and satires. An interesting case is the word ‘兲朝’ to replace ‘天朝’ the two of which look quite similar. The latter refers to the old feudal Chinese empire which originally denotes glorious dynasties in Chinese history. However, in modern times, particularly when used online, the term involves scornful innuendo, implying that the Chinese regime is still run like a feudal empire. Although the term ‘天朝’ has not been blocked online, internet users creatively coined the term ‘兲朝’ to replace ‘天朝’ which combines multiple undertone meanings. It is necessary to break the term down to uncover its connotation. ‘朝’ refers to the regime whereas ‘兲’ is not a real word but coined from ‘王’ and ‘八’. The term ‘王八’ is a derogatory term, meaning ‘bastard’, which is not proper to use due to its vulgarity. However, combining ‘王八’ into one symbol ‘兲’ reduces the improperiety, while strengthening the pejorative connotation. Furthermore, using ‘兲朝’ expresses one’s resentment of the regime, while adding a sense of humour to the mockery.

This smart tactic is also employed by journalists. As discussed above, the blogs posted by Lian, Yue, successfully aroused public concern about the potential environmental danger of a chemical plant. People who may have been affected thus took to street to protest against the local government. As the term ‘go on street to protest’ (*shiwei youxing*) is blocked and cannot be posted online, internet users created the phrase ‘go for a walk collectively’ (*jiti sanbu*) to spread the information online. Protest is strictly banned in reports according to propaganda directives. However, replacing ‘protest’ with the phrase ‘go for a walk collectively’ seems to free traditional media from the cage. The protest information was circulated like a virus online, and internet users are therefore knowledgeable of the underlying link between walking together and collective protest. Moreover, the information was too widely circulated online to be ignored by the traditional media. Therefore, a number of print media reported the protest by using the title ‘go for a walk collectively’ (*jiti sanbu*).[34] This tactic is also used by journalists themselves when they surf online. A journalist named himself ‘敏感瓷’ online which literally means ‘sensitive China porcelain’. The name is homonymous to ‘敏感词’ meaning ‘sensitive words’ (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012).

This practice profoundly erodes the party-state’s moral leadership and demystifies its authority. However, this practice also leads to pervasive cynicism which is discussed in the final section of this chapter. The next section looks at the impact of microblogging.

6.2 Microblogging

The word ‘microblog’ first appeared in 2005. Tumblr and Twitter were the leading figures of microblogging at its earliest stages. Generally speaking, a microblog refers to a short

[34] ‘Go for a Walk Collectively’, originally from the *Sanjin City Newspaper*, [Online]. Available at: http://news.163.com/09/0323/15/553P1GQI000125LI.html (Accessed: 12 May 2013); ‘The Story of “Go for a Walk Collectively”’, originally from the *World Environment*, [Online]. Available at: http://news.163.com/09/0323/15/553P1GQI000125LI.html (Accessed: 12 May 2013).

and simple form of blog, allowing users to share content within a word count limit. The first microblogging service in mainland China was launched in 2007. However, due to the Urumqi riot in Xinjiang in 2009, the party-state shut down most of the domestic microblogging services. Shortly after this incident, Facebook, Twitter, and similar foreign social media sites were blocked, and domestic privately owned internet companies filled in the market niche by opening their own microblogging sites. In 2009, Sina launched its microblogging site called *Weibo* in Chinese. Almost all major internet companies have launched their own microblogging sites since then.

Microblogging then expanded at a phenomenal rate. By 2012, the number of microbloggers in mainland China had rocketed to 309 million, with an increase of 23.5 per cent per year (*Statistical Report on Internet Development in China*, 2013). Microblogging sites provide services similar to Twitter, but integrate more functions. Like Twitter, users can follow others, use 'hash-tag' topics, have @user names, post, repost, and shorten URL addresses. Posts are also limited to 140 characters. However, one Chinese word normally contains two characters. Thus, '140 Chinese characters can have 3-5 times as much information as 140 characters in English' (Zhu *et al.*, 2012). Unlike Twitter, Chinese microblogging sites allow embedded images and videos, and users can comment on each other's posts (ibid.). Thus, a longer posting of over 140 words can also be posted on a microblog by transforming it into an image. Additionally, users can send instant messages, documents, and pictures over microblog messaging services. Notably, microblogging allows users to build up their private friend circles which cannot be accessed publicly. In a sense, Chinese microblogs combine certain functions of both Facebook and Twitter standing both as social media and information dissemination platforms.

Of all the microblogging services, Sina took a commanding lead, occupying 56.5 per cent of the market share based on active users and 86.6 per cent based on browsing time in 2010 (*Sina Commands 56 Per Cent of China's Microblog Market*, 2011). It was also frequently mentioned by journalists in the fieldwork. Thus, the following discussion mainly focuses on the Sina microblogging platform. Sina's leading status is largely due to its aggressive promotion. A journalist said how he was invited to open a Sina microblog account,

> Sina really invests a lot into its microblogging business. I mean not only in terms of money. All members of staff in Sina, even its human resources staff, are assigned a quota to persuade people to open accounts on the Sina microblog. They are really aggressive in pushing you towards their site. I guess

> this must be linked to their bonus. The wife of one of my colleagues works as a news editor in Sina. My colleagues and I all got invited by her to open a Sina microblog account. (Personal communications No. 8, 9 May 2013)

Another successful promotional strategy employed by the Sina microblog is inviting celebrities, open-minded officials, well-known public affairs commentators, and media workers to open accounts and highlight these accounts through the verification system. Sina has two verification types: individual and organisational. Once verified, a V badge will be shown beside the account's name. In terms of individual verified accounts, a yellow V badge and job title are shown next to an individual's account name. Sina is extremely keen to invite known people to open verified accounts, which will attract more ordinary people to follow them. However, according to Sina's introduction of the verification system, the company is highly selective about the people who can get verified accounts. Verified accounts are only open to certain occupations, 34 categories with 542 occupations at the moment, and professional elites who have certain job titles. For instance, in the media category there are 16 sub-sets including newspaper, magazine, sports media, finance media, broadcasting media, senior executives and other similar types. The newspaper set is further divided into five layers: editor-in-chief, copy editor, news editor, reporter, and others. Based on Sina's setting, verified accounts enjoy higher visibility and are easier to find and follow. Besides, Sina also provides bulletin boards listing top popular verified accounts. Notably, the verified accounts which have enormous numbers of followers are widely called 'big V' (*da V*). Two examples are Yao, Chen, a celebrity, and Li, Kaifu, a Taiwanese businessman who was a former Google senior executive. They both have over 40 million followers.

Sina's online verification system is closely linked to offline social positions held by users. Through the verification process, people who have higher social positions are highlighted and recommended. In light of this, the power relationship in the real world is translated into the cyber world. Moreover, as Sina's verification is selectively open to elites and professionals, it further combines hierarchy into the microblogging world. Furthermore, posts from verified accounts are supposed to be more credible than posts from ordinary accounts. This presents a telling illustration of what Becker (1967: 243) called the 'hierarchy of credibility', which claims that those who occupy higher social status are seen to be more credible than people at the bottom of a society. This verification system has profound implications for and impacts on journalists' online activities, which is discussed later. The next section explores the impact of microblogging on the media-source relationship.

Online media-source relationship

The most prominent impact of microblogging is that it stands as the most important repertoire of news sources. Almost all participants in the fieldwork agreed that at least half of the news comes from microblogging. A vice editor-in-chief reckoned that nowadays over 80 per cent of the news printed in his newspaper came from microblogs (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). A number of journalists complained that the traditional media are even firstly released by microblogs. One journalist said,

> I feel that traditional media are somewhat kidnapped by microblogging. As long as it was heatedly discussed on the microblogs, you must report it. But the topic may be just a rumour or of no actual news value. Even if it was merely a hyped topic on the microblogs, you have to report it. Otherwise, your superiors may think you are not covering your beat well. (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012)

The account above gained frequent nods in the focus group. A significant number of journalists further commented that the means of producing news had changed. A journalist said the trajectory of an event becoming news is 'something happened and then became a hot topic on the microblogs; subsequently traditional media followed up' (F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012). A beat journalist working for a party organ newspaper said,

> In the past, our routine work pattern was to go to news conferences organised by authorities and then write stories. So it was the authorities and journalists who set the societal agenda. But now thanks to microblogging, everyone seems to have microphones voicing their own initiatives. So it is really difficult to assert who is setting the agenda now. To a larger extent, it is ordinary people who are taking the lead. They put their voices online which are of news value. Then we carry their voices to authorities to ask for replies. In this sense, the direction has been reversed'. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 5 January 2012)

The editors from the same newspaper echoed,

> Yes, indeed. Microblogging has somewhat changed the way news is produced. In the past, news sources were primarily from journalists. They reported their beat sources to us and then we worked together to figure out reporting plans. Thus, editors were not promptly updated with news events. But after microblogging emerged, editors are better informed. Now it is editors who may learn of an event first through microblogging and then assign it to a journalist. Then journalists go to check the facts and get replies from authorities. (ibid.)

From the above quotes, the journalists seem to argue that microblogging empowers grassroots' voices and has changed journalists' reliance on the authorities as source. However, accounts from other journalists provide counter-evidence. An editor working for an internet company claimed,

> Microblogging extensively reduces the cost of disseminating information. Everybody has his own microphone. This is indeed a step forward. Especially for countries like China, microblogging brings merits to ordinary people. However, the reality is not that optimistic. In fact, it is extremely difficult for grassroots accounts to be heard. You know Qian, Mingqi who bombed the local government building due to the demolition of his house. The bombing caused several deaths including him. He actually had a microblog account and leaked his attack plan on the microblog several days before. He even tagged a number of "big V" accounts and local newspaper account hoping his case would be cared about. But sadly his posts attracted no attention. I think he could have been saved if somebody stood out and helped him. It is just in such a big country, so many things happen there. It is really by chance that your case could stand out on a microblog. (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012)

Another editor working for a market-driven newspaper added,

> My microblog account is verified as a news editor. So I always receive complaints or pleas from ordinary people. They are hoping that I will report their issues. But actually I can do nothing about this. Sometimes you are overwhelmed by such pleas. This is one of the reasons that I want to remove my job title from my microblog account. (Personal communications No. 8, 9 May 2013)

The same feeling was also shared by two of the editor's colleagues in personal communications. From what has been shown above, it is highly arguable that grassroots voices have been activated through microblogging. Microblogs provide ordinary people with a platform to voice their concerns on their own initiatives, which had been rarely enabled through traditional media due to journalistic norms or constraints. However, such voices still need to be confined within the party-state's limits. In spite of the party-state's online censorship, as described above, ordinary people are still seeking remediate help from elites to get their voices heard by the media. Even if the person in the case directly sent his plea to the media by tagging the newspaper's account, his plea is often ignored. Moreover, media workers consciously avoid receiving pleas from ordinary people by reducing their visibility online. Therefore, microblogging is far from opening up more space to empower ordinary people. Actually, a predominant number of participants in the fieldwork emphasised that journalists should be cautious about general online opinion. A journalist working for broadcast media expressed her concern about reliance on microblogs as sources,

> I think it is very much questionable to closely follow up opinions on microblogs. First of all, it is hard to tell whether it is true. Secondly, opinions gathered on microblogs tend to be sensationalised and radicalised in order to gain eyeballs. You may easily be agitated by such seditious information. (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012)

Her concern was echoed in every focus group discussion. A journalist working for a party organ newspaper added,

> China is now experiencing dramatic social changes. Different vested interest groups express their concerns on microblogs. Journalists need to be detached and objective in dealing with various pleas. Popular microblog opinions are easily led by mobs and populists. Thus it poses a higher requirement for journalists to identify valuable sources on the microblogs. Journalists have to be cautious not to be coerced by populist ideas. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012)

Notably, journalists' approach to sources on microblogs is further complicated by covert microblog propagandists. It is widely reported that the Chinese authorities hire online commentators to post favourable comments towards the party-state in an effort to sway online public opinion. The commentators are usually paid fifty cents in the Chinese currency (approximately £0.50) for each comment they post online. Thus they are named by internet users as the 'fifty cents army/party' (*wu mao dang*) (King *et al*., 2013; Shirk, in Shirk ed., 2011). It is estimated that there are 250 to 300 thousand workers for the 'fifty cents army' who monitor online opinions (King *et al*., 2013). Besides, commercial interest groups also employ online commentators for commercial purposes which are generally named as the 'water army' (*shui jun*). The difference between the 'fifty cents army' and the 'water army' is that the former requires more sophisticated communication skills whereas the latter requires fewer skills. Generally speaking, the 'fifty cents army' aims to post targeted information to subtly sway public opinion, meanwhile covering their true purposes. The job of the 'water army' is relatively easier. Many websites and microblogs have bulletin board services which rank hot topics by the numbers of clicks or reposts. The 'water army' aims to keep certain topics on top of the list by multi-clicking, reposting, or making simple comments. As the comments are usually less informative, they are dubbed 'water' which symbolises tasteless yet necessary. A journalist expressed her deep concern about online propagandists,

> The year before I wrote an article about online propagandists. I was shocked by what they could achieve. I interviewed those who are normally known as the "water army". They are quite familiar with the news production process. They created virtual hot topics to attract journalists' attention. They even tailored their posts to appeal to different media organisations. If traditional media report their topics, they will get paid. This behaviour really disturbs your judgement. Journalists are not general internet users. I think journalists should use discretion in approaching online sources. (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012)

Microblogging also facilitates news production by making it easy to locate and contact interviewees online. A journalist said,

> Microblogging has extensively shortened the time required to produce news. In the past, when preparing a breaking story, you needed to locate the interviewee which is not usually an easy job. You probably need to go to his home or workplace which may be time consuming. But now, the most efficient way to locate somebody is by searching for his or her microblog to find out whether he or she has an account. In most of the cases, the answer is yes. Then you simply send an instant message to interview them. Additionally, nearly all the specialists you need have a microblog account. Thus you can conduct all your interviews online. (I-2, a senior editor, Beijing, 6 January 2012)

The next part explores whether microblogging challenges control over traditional media and pushes traditional media forward to conduct more investigative reports.

Microblogging and control over traditional media

The Wenzhou high-speed train collision which caused 40 deaths and 191 injures is seen as a milestone in the development of microblogging. Approximately 26 million messages were posted within a week on microblogs and are believed to help break the censorship chains and boost traditional media to expose the government's wrongdoings (Wines & Lafraniere, 2011). The online discontent expressed by ordinary internet users even 'forced embarrassed officials to reverse themselves' (ibid.). This view was shared by a small number of participants in the fieldwork. An editor working for a state-run broadcaster said,

> I think microblogging has pushed traditional media to go forward, taking off the shackles. A good case in point is the "high-speed train" incident. If the public's discontent was not widely spread on microblogs, I do not think the traditional media would have put such tremendous effort into disclosing the wrongdoings. Just imagine if such an incident happened before microblogging was born, I think the traditional media would have followed the authority's line. (F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012)

An editor working for a news website echoed this saying that messages, including on-location pictures, can be instantly uploaded and virally spread on microblogs which makes it difficult to censor,

> As for traditional media, censorship works along with publication periods. One banning order once a day can easily keep traditional media silent as long as the order comes before going to print. But for microblogs, everything is different. There is no such a thing as publication period. You can post anytime. Of course, the government will delete posts. But internet users will continue posting and deletion will never end. (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012)

Conversely, studies show that deletion based on a key-word blocking system effectively prevents viral spread of information on microblogs (King *et al.*, 2013; Zhu *et al.*, 2012). However, such studies may fail to take transformational discourse into account. As discussed in previous parts, internet users may change characters, use homophones or other tactics to get around keyword blocking. Additionally, blocked words can be embedded in pictures which can escape being detected by machine blocking mechanisms. Thus, manual censorship work is further required. It is reckoned that the Sina microblogging platform currently employs more than 4 thousand censors (*China's Internet: A Giant Cage*, 2013) to read post by post and delete potentially sensitive posts (King *et al*., 2013; Zhu *et al.*, 2012). However, manual deletion cannot override millions of uploads. Furthermore, a strikingly increasing number of internet users write posts using mobiles. According to an annual survey by CNNIC, 65.5 per cent of all microbloggers, 20.2 million people, accessed microblogging on a mobile phone in 2012 (*Statistical Report on Internet Development in China*, 2013), which facilitates quick information uploading and dissemination. The time lag between post and deletion allows certain sensitive information to spread.

From the above discussion, it seems that the new technology has opened up some space for free speech and has pushed traditional media to go forward. However, over half of the participants in the fieldwork provided counter-claims. In the case of the 'Wenzhou high-speed train crash', it was not the new platform, microblogging, that facilitated information spread, but the collaboration of the traditional media. A vice editor-in-chief of a mass-appeal newspaper explained,

> In the case of the high-speed train crash, it was actually traditional media workers who banded together and cheered each other on to push the line forward. If you take a careful look at online opinions at that time, you may find that so-called public opinion is actually concentrated in two groups. One is from traditional media workers; the other is from public intellectuals. The two

> are inextricably linked with each other. I think it is not the grassroots opinion crystallised online that boosted reports on traditional media. Actually, there were not many grassroots voices leading the trend. Instead, microblogging helps a peer group to grow. Traditional media are able to stand together to encourage each other stepping forward. (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012)

Furthermore, instead of opening up more space for freedom of expression, three focus group discussions tended to disagree that microblogging facilitates control over traditional media. A journalist working for a party-organ newspaper named the new control method as 'targeted killing',

> Microblogging actually adds new surveillance methods. I have heard that some newspapers require journalists to update breaking news on microblogs. This aims to publish news as soon as possible. But this also helps propaganda departments to locate journalists immediately and respond to it as soon as possible. They then simply issue the banning order. And then there is no chance for the traditional media to report it. (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012)

Another participant working for broadcast media in the same focus group echoed,

> I deeply agree. In the past, propaganda departments were not that informative about breaking incidents. Thus we could broadcast news before they got to know. But it has been much easier for propaganda departments to monitor media activities since microblogging was introduced. Thanks to quick information dissemination on microblogs, propaganda departments thus react quickly by issuing the banning orders. (ibid.)

Additionally, as journalists' accounts on microblogging platforms are generally verified, this has further restrained their personal expression. A significant number of participants endeavoured to remove verification to free themselves. An editor working for a market-driven newspaper said,

> I got invited to join a microblog by a colleague's wife. My account was also verified by her when I first logged onto the microblog. But last year, like local propaganda department ordered all local media to list their employees' microblog accounts. Just after I heard the order, I applied to remove my verification. Many of my colleagues also de-verified at that time. I also delete my job description on my microblog'. (Personal communications No. 8, 9 May 2013)

Even if a great number of journalists removed their verification to reduce their visibility, they are still caught by close scrutiny. A journalist working for a party-organ said,

> I have already de-verified my account. Yet I still got caught by my superior once. I just posted a message saying that the food provided in a governmental canteen was not good. Later that day, I received a phone call from my superior asking me to delete my post because he thought this might cause potential trouble to our media. This is ridiculous. (F-6, a mixed group, Shanghai, 11 February 2012)

In the accounts by participants, all online expressions are under close watch regardless of whether the accounts are verified or not. The journalist quoted above added that 'even if you do not use your real name and do not get verification, you are still under the eyes of your superiors or colleagues' (ibid.). Another journalist in the same focus group commented by joking that 'keeping yourself transparent online is the only way to escape from scrutiny' (ibid.). However, another participant heckled 'what is the point of opening a microblog account and using social media' (ibid.). Actually, there are a considerable number of participants in the fieldwork who access microblogs in an effort to build up their own career fame. A representative comment is as follows,

> Honestly speaking, I feel a bit proud when I have more and more followers on my microblog. I also copy my articles to the microblog hoping younger readers will read my articles. So basically, I am using microblogging to build up my career. My microblog account got verified which helps audiences to locate me. But I need to be cautious about my online posts. You know, my superior is watching me. Propaganda officials are watching me. (Personal communications No. 9, 9 May 2013)

As discussed above, views diverge regarding the impact of microblogging in opening up more spaces for traditional media. Different media types and job titles do not make any differences as to this point. In the final section of this chapter, this research intends to make some cautious conclusions regarding the changes brought forth by the internet in the Chinese context.

6.3 Conclusion

The internet was first introduced in to China in the mid 1990s and grew at a phenomenal rate. At present, China is second to the United States in terms of the size of its internet user base. The party-state conceptualises the internet in three dimensions: first, as a booster to the economy; second, as a threat to information control; and third, as a new platform to deliver party propaganda. Therefore, the party-state employs multiple controlling mechanisms to direct the development of the internet in its favour.

The controlling mechanisms have been explored based on a useful categorisation of four aspects: the rules, architecture, social norms, and the market. Most of the existing scholarship focuses on the architecture of the Chinese internet which has meant that other controlling forces have been overlooked. This research highlights the controlling forces such as the rules and regulations in an effort to fill in this vacuum. The Chinese authorities have issued over one hundred rules, regulations, and policies in total regarding the internet. The stipulation that has had the biggest impact on journalistic practices is the prohibition of privately owned news websites producing their own news content. Thus, these websites can only relay news from the established traditional media which extensively restrains the potential of the internet to unfold. In terms of the internet architecture, the Chinese authorities have made extreme efforts, including blocking key-words, GFW filtering, and channelling through portals, to build a virtual intranet which cages internet users in a authority-friendly online world.

However, as a Chinese saying goes, suppression and resistance always go hand in hand (*nali you yapo, nali jiuyou fankang*), and internet users, including journalistic practitioners, employ tactics to circumvent control. In practice, privately owned news websites produce their news stories by working ‘undercover’. Such websites hire journalists under the guise of editors. Besides, they mainly work on entertainment, sports, and finance beats which are regarded as not relating to current affairs. The party-state turns a blind eye to the undercover journalists, as long as the party’s legitimacy has not been challenged.

Another tactic that frequently emerged in the fieldwork was transforming expressions to avoid keyword blocking. The main tactics include using homophones, homographs, and synonyms to replace blocked words, which are further evolved to include spoof jokes, and satires to express discontent online. For example, the coined phrase, ‘天朝’, literally meaning ‘bastard regime’, refers to the Chinese regime and has gained tremendous popularity online. These coded languages, neologisms, and satires exactly show an element of what Scott has called, the ‘hidden transcript’ (1990: xii). In analysing discourse employed by subordinate groups in Malaysia, Scott created the phrase ‘hidden transcript’. According to Scott, in a power-laden environment, ‘every subordinate group creates a “hidden transcript” that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant’ (ibid.). Using hidden transcripts is actually a form of resistance behaviour towards domination. Using hidden transcripts in public brings profound psychological gains for individuals. Scott pointed out recovered dignity, self-relaxation, and self-satisfaction as the main psychological gains (1990: 212-213). In the Chinese context, using transformational discourse online also brings a sense of self-gratification. The underlying feeling is that the 'little' individual has the power to mock the 'giant' establishment. In the fieldwork, journalists quoting homophones often induced smiles or tacit consent among peers. However, this practice also induces pervasive cynicism. A vice editor-in-chief expressed his annoyance that he usually felt bored with loads of such online expressions and even bored with expressions on microblogs (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). According to him, such expressions changed nothing except inducing a laugh. 'Powerless' is a key word in his online surfing experience. This research argues that transformational discourse subverts the moral authority of the party-state to a certain extent. Meanwhile, cynicism among journalistic practitioners grows on by the pervasive usage of transformation discourse.

Among all the new applications of Web 2.0, microblogging has had the biggest impact on traditional media practices in mainland China. The verification system employed by microblogging especially the Sina microblog has constructed a hierarchical society online. According to accounts from journalists, microblogs have changed the traditional way of approaching sources as at least half of sources are obtained from microblogs nowadays. A number of journalists proclaimed that this change in the media-source relationship has empowered ordinary people by allowing more grassroots voices to speak. Yet the grassroots voices need to meet two requirements to be heard. First, the voices need to be sanctioned by the authorities. After seeing the sources online, editors first sent the sources to beat journalists to ask for confirmation from the authorities (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012). In the fieldwork, journalists tend to share the same attitude towards online information: it is not suggested to simply use the online information, for there is too much fraudulent or fake information online (ibid.; F-2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012). A number of journalists argued that the working mechanism has changed. Sources are now coming more from the microblogs than coming directly from the authorities. Yet in order to become news, the sources still need to be checked by the authorities. Second, if the grassroots voices cannot get noticed by the authorities, they resort to unconventional measures, such as riots or demolition as in the case provided by journalists in the focus group (F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012). Otherwise, grassroots voices may also seek help from the elites, in the microblogs, big Vs. The grassroots voices need to be remediated by elites' voices to be heard by the media.

Thus, this research argues that the source power is still largely in the hands of the elite group. The change is that the elite group has expanded. In the past, the source power was confined to the political elite group, namely, the officials. The microblog has brought other social elites, such as businessmen, actors, and writers into the spotlight. To some extent, they have become the new opinion leaders (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2005). Their opinions, however, are still confined to the party's realm considering the systematic online censorship mechanisms. Moreover, the mutual interests easily push the new elites to ally with the political establishment. Borrowing from Bourdieu's field toolkit (2005; 2012), the microblog can be seen as a contested field with multiple forces competing for symbolic power employing different strategies. However, this field is still a structured power-laden field with ordinary people being less visible then elite groups. Political power is very much dominating the field either by exerting censorship to suppress or utilising propaganda, such as the online 'fifty cents army', to promote certain symbolic power. Economic power also plays a role in this field, such as by using the 'water army' to highlight symbols.

As is widely claimed, public opinion which crystallises on microblogs forces traditional media outlets forward by taking off censorship shackles. Journalists' views diverge here. Different media types and work titles do not make any difference at this point. A small number of journalists agreed with this claim. However, counter-claims argue that it is the opinions of the elite group crystallised on microblogs instead of a crystallisation of grassroots opinions. Furthermore, journalists and intellectuals are grouping together over the microblogging platform that helps collective ideas to grow. Additionally, a great number of journalists commented that the speed of online information dissemination also facilitates targeted censorship as the party-state can easily locate any journalist by microblog posts. An increasing number of journalists have therefore removed their account verification in order to reduce visibility. Nevertheless, this effort conflicts with the dream of building a stronger career reputation online. Exposing identity online extends journalists' fame to the online world and attracts online audiences, but it also increases the possibility of being suppressed. Caught in this dilemma, journalists tend to exert self-censorship which is actually a retreat.

From what has been discussed above, one phenomenon is worth future examination: the association of different groups enabled by microblogging. As indicated by state corporatism theory (Unger & Chan, 1993), authoritarian regimes do not allow different professional groups to associate in an effort to fragment elite groups. The accounts from journalists show that microblogging serves as a platform to let a virtual journalistic community to grow. A vice editor-in-chief also suggested that he mainly followed media intellectuals on microblogs (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). By following their posts, he learned new overseas information and began to reflect on the ethics of practising journalism. Although the evidence is still not strong enough to assert that an online journalistic community is emerging, it is worth noting for future research.

After reporting the findings chapter by chapter, this research now turns to highlight a number of key findings and concludes by discussing the key factors driving contemporary Chinese journalism.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The aim of this research has been to examine the changing journalistic culture in the contemporary Chinese context. It adopts three commonly employed perspectives, the political economy of communication, the sociology of journalism, and the cultural studies of journalism, to understand some of the key ethos guiding present day Chinese journalism. This thesis has reviewed the relevant scholarship within this area and discovered an entanglement of political, economic, cultural, and technological factors influencing journalistic practices.

To conclude this research, the final chapter is composed of two parts. The first part outlines the contributions of this research to the understanding of the journalistic culture. The second part discusses two specific themes that underpin the enquiry of this research. The first theme centres on professionalism. Here, the meaning and application of professionalism in Chinese journalism are summarised. As outlined in the introduction, the second theme, an essential enquiry of this thesis, considers the role of Chinese traditional culture in shaping journalistic culture. Here, the discussion is open on to what extent culture plays a decisive role and how culture interacts with political, economic, and technological factors.

The contribution of this research

As outlined in the introduction, the main chapters of this research were structured around three aspects: the norms of practising journalism under media control, the problem of journalistic corruption, and the changes in journalism in the age of social media. Herein, the findings are highlighted in the same order.

In terms of media control, most of the studies have touched on the methods of control (Brady, 2008; Hassid, 2008; Zhao, 2008). This research goes one step further by providing a detailed description regarding how ideological control works in newsrooms. This research has shown that the banning orders, which are issued to the media on a daily basis, are the primary filter (Herman & Chomsky, 1988) of news. Furthermore, this research has discovered that pre-publication censorship systematically exists, which counters the prevalent claim that thought control has been too effective to set up any pre-publication system (Brady, 2008; Hassid, 2008; Zhao, 2008; Link, 2002). Furthermore, the majority of studies argue that it is self-censorship that keeps the media in line (Zhao, 2008; de Burgh,

2003) and it stops there. This research has provided further insights into how self-censorship has been transferred to all staff through the news production chain. They work as gatekeepers dodging political risks at different positions in the chain.

Moreover, the research has provided more insights into factors that induce self-censorship. The uncertainty about permissible boundaries does exist and induces self-censorship as has been argued by Hassid (2008). Yet it is not a lack of written rules and media laws as advanced by Hassid (2008) but the cultural tradition of the 'rule of man' that results in uncertainty. Moreover, this research further claims that the lack of job security and the payment structure all contribute to self-censorship. Particularly, this research diverges from previous studies by claiming the active role of journalists in sustaining the control system instead of viewing them as victims.

In terms of journalistic corruption, this research has uncovered more insights into the most prevalent forms of corruption: taking red-envelope-cash. This research has described the process of this transaction. More importantly, this research has revealed further insights into the roots of corruption through empowering the journalists to explain corrupt practices. They conceptualise the reasons behind journalistic corruption in four dimensions: cultural influences, the influences of working conditions, the influences from wider society, and the institutional factor. All the journalists in the fieldwork emphasised that corruption grows out of Chinese culture, which stresses connection and etiquette. Thus, this research has enriched the knowledge of factors inducing corrupt journalism, which locates the reason in the contradiction between the party's control and the market imperative (Chen, L., 2007; Zhao, 1998).

This research has provided fresh insight into the potential changes brought forth by new technology on the interactions between the party-state and the media. This research has shed more light on the impact of the law and regulations, which is lacking in the existing scholarship. This research has illustrated that the law and regulations have largely confined the potentialities of the internet. Furthermore, a number of studies have reported that internet users express their voices employing what this research calls transformational discourse, such as by using synonyms and homographs, to circumvent online censorship (King *et al*., 2013; Zhu, 2012; Shirk, in Shirk ed., 2011). This research develops from here arguing that this practice can be seen as passive resistance. Yet such practice brings forth pervasive cynicism among journalists. Thus, the resistance, in a way, strengthens the party's control. Moreover, this research has provided an up-to-date analysis regarding media-source relations in the digital age. The research argues that source power is still in the hands of an elite group. Additionally, contrary to the general view that the internet would democratise journalistic practices, this research has found that self-censorship still pervades the online world.

To conclude, this research argues that self-censorship and corruption, which are systematically embedded in Chinese journalism, are key aspects of journalistic culture with Chinese characteristics. Thus, Chinese journalism is far from nearing a profession, which is delineated as follows.

Professional operation instead of professionalism

As discussed previously, professionalism is more than welcome in Chinese journalism both by journalistic practitioners and by scholars. Drawing upon the fieldwork data, professionalism (*zhuan ye*) is frequently referred to in Chinese newsrooms. Yet the professionalism with Chinese characteristics is anything other than Western journalistic professionalism. In the following discussion, this research uses its Chinese name, '*zhuan ye*', in order to distinguish the two meanings.

An editor-in-chief frequently stressed that beat journalists should be more '*zhuan ye*' (I-6, an editor-in-chief, Beijing, 17 January 2012). In doing so, he expected the journalists to dig deeper in their reporting areas and to provide exclusive and in-depth reports. A vice editor-in-chief also stressed that editors should be more '*zhuan ye*' in assigning tasks and assembling articles on newsdesk meetings every day (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). A number of journalists said that taking red-envelope-cash would not affect their professional news judgement (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012). Herein, '*zhuan ye*' is normally used as an adjective rather than a noun.

This research argues that the 'ism' part of Western professionalism has been removed in the Chinese context. '*Zhuan ye*' or professionalism only refers to operational standards and practical skills. Just as a vice editor-in-chief succinctly pointed out, '"*zhuan ye*" refers to a set of normative operational standards on which the journalistic practices are evaluated' (I-1, a vice editor-in-chief, Beijing, 5 January 2012). Viewing taking red-envelope-cash as not necessarily against '*zhuan ye*', he confined '*zhuan ye*' merely to practical skills (ibid.). In light of this, '*zhuan ye*' held by journalists cannot thwart political intrusion not to mention journalists who endeavoured to justify the intrusion. Moreover, '*zhuan ye*' cannot work as an ideology policing the practitioners in the journalism domain as embodied in the corrupt behaviour. Furthermore, lacking an ideological basis, '*zhuan ye*' cannot be used for self-interest. In the fieldwork, journalists constantly complained about their payment situation, but they never referred to '*zhuan ye*' in bargaining for a higher rate of pay. To conclude, '*zhuan ye*' in the Chinese context refers to professional operation rather than what is known as professionalism in the Western context. In this sense, journalism in contemporary China is a craft.

Actually, many believed that the 'ism' part of professionalism, or in other words, ideology-based professionalism, could never grow in China due to its unique cultural elements (Rui, 2010; Lee, in de Burgh ed., 2005). To give just one example, journalists view themselves as intellectuals or the literati (Wu, 2009b; Lu & Pan, 2002). They hold an elitist view regarding ordinary people, viewing them as the masses. Thus, the role of media is to educate and enlighten rather than to inform (Ma, in Curran & Park eds., 1999; Cheek, 1989). Serving the public is expediently replaced by educating the populace. This chapter now turns to the core enquiry underpinning this research, the role of culture in shaping journalism.

The role of culture

In the fieldwork, the journalists argued that Chinese culture plays a decisive role in shaping contemporary journalistic culture. To be specific, the 'rule of man' (*ren zhi*) cultivates self-censorship. Moreover, connection and etiquette induce corrupt behaviour. One editor said, 'corruption cannot be eradicated in that it grows out of the culture' (I-5, an editor-in-chief, Beijing, 11 January 2012). In the case of self-censorship, it seems that the 'rule of man' is a long tradition and leads to self-censorship. In the case of journalistic corruption, however, if the journalists' accounts are taken for granted, one would expect that journalistic corruption is a chronic problem and exists throughout history. Yet as discussed in Chapter 2, journalists achieved a high level of journalistic ethics in the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, journalistic corruption became a noted problem at the beginning of 1980s when media commercialisation started (Zhao, 1998). In addition, as everybody breathes the same cultural atmosphere, then one would expect that this would induce corruption in all newsrooms in China. This is, however, not the case. Almost all focus group discussions mentioned that the journalists working for the *Caixin-China Economics & Finance* magazine do not commit corruption (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012; F-

2, a mass-appeal group, Beijing, 9 January 2012; F-3, a mixed group, Beijing, 13 January 2012; F-4, a national broadcasting group, Beijing, 14 January 2012; F-5, a news website group, Beijing, 15 January 2012). It is suggested therefore, that elements of culture may have different influences in different aspects of journalism and it is necessary to invite more explorations to explain journalistic corruption.

In examining corruption, Chen, L. (2007) reflected that he had located corruption in Chinese culture in previous research. After comparing with Korean journalism, he changed his conclusion. Korean society is also highly influenced by Confucianism, which emphasises connection and interpersonal relationships. Korean journalists accepted cash from sources in the late 1980s (ibid). Similarly, Korean journalists also excused themselves by referring to Confucian elements: connection and etiquette (ibid.). Nowadays, self-regulation helps to police journalists, and the behaviour of taking cash from sources has been phased out. Thus, Chen, L. argued that culture does not play a decisive role in journalistic corruption.

Resonating with the argument of Chen, L., this research had originally attributed corruption to culture based on journalists' own accounts. Yet with more desk research, the researcher has found that similar patterns of corruption had pervaded Western journalism and they also exist in various parts of the world in the present day. For example, the working conditions of American journalists in the latter 19th century are very similar to that of the Chinese journalist today. At that time, American journalists were underpaid and were either paid with 'a fixed weekly salary or payment by space (by the amount of copy actually printed)' (Baldasty 1992: 88). The latter payment is similar to the author's remuneration payment, with both involving economic consideration. Besides, the American advertisers at that time regularly bribed reporters in exchange for favourable reports (Baldasty, 1992: 80). Many publishers also welcomed advertisements disguised as news (ibid.). In the present day, envelope journalism is a common problem for many developing countries (Schudson, 2011). Taking cash wrapped in envelopes from sources is also found in Ethiopian journalism (Lodamo & Skjerdal, 2009) and Philippine journalism (Shafer, 1990). In both cases, journalists referred to culture as the factor inducing corruption. The above discussion shows that different cultures have induced the same pattern of corruption and journalists all attributed corruption to culture.

Additionally, in the case of Chinese culture, there are also cultural elements that help combat corruption. As discussed in Chapter 2, the traditional literati viewed themselves as the elite class and represented the social consciousness. Self-regarded as intellectuals or the literati, journalists are also embodiments of social consciousness. One senior journalist said of journalistic corruption: 'the social consciousness has rotted away' (Personal communications No. 2, on multiple days). Here, this research argues that culture does not play a decisive role in Chinese journalistic corruption but that certain elements of culture have been selected by journalists as a convenient reason to excuse themselves. Thus, it is necessary to explore the whole picture of reasons behind pervasive corrupt practices.

Returning to the fieldwork data, journalists referred to corruption as the de facto tacit rule (*qian guize*). Sociologists (Ji, 2012; Whyte & Parish, 1984) explained that a tacit rule emerges when the formal rule is lacking. In sociological terms, it is named as the informal relation (*fei zhengshi guanxi*), being the opposite of the formal relation (*zhengshi guanxi*) that is shaped by bureaucracy. The informal relation works to supplement the formal relation (ibid.). If the formal relation is unstable or incomplete, the informal relation thus emerges. Parish (1973) has found that the Chinese bureaucracy was relatively stable before the Cultural Revolution. Yet the Cultural Revolution virtually broke down the bureaucratic system. Thus, ordinary people could not rely only on the bureaucratically formed relation, in other words, the formal relation. They turned to rely on informal relations, such as kinship, classmate-ship, and so forth. After the Cultural Revolution, the bureaucracy experienced rebuilding and was followed by the economic reforms. Since then the benefits and resources have begun to be allocated by the bureaucratic system. But the available resources were relatively scarce in the early stages of economic reform (Whyte & Parish, 1984), and ordinary people approached the officials who controlled the resources through informal relations in order to get privilege access to resources. To a certain extent, connections served as a coordinating mechanism that function outside of the market and the political system (Walder, 1986).

Sociological studies are insightful in analysing Chinese journalistic corruption. After accepting money from sources, journalists and sources have set up informal relations. The formal relation is hard to establish between the two in that journalists possess an advantageous position. Just as journalists said in the fieldwork, journalism holds the publicity power (F-1, a party organ group, Beijing, 8 January 2012), and this power has been kept in scarce supply in China. The party-state monopolises the media and prohibits private capital from investing into it. Although media titles are proliferating, the daily propaganda directives consume a large portion of airtime and newspaper pages. Thus, the reporting space is limited. Through the informal relation, the sources are thus able to access scarce publicity power, which was monopolised by the party-state. In this sense, the source spectrum has been widened. Actually, it was a foreign company that started paying journalists who came to the press conference in the early 1980s (Chen, L., 2007; Zhao, 1998). In the old frame of party journalism, foreign companies find it extremely difficult to attract the spotlight. By providing money to journalists, the non-party agents can get access to the media.

Furthermore, the profits of media are seriously affected by party policies and interventions. As discussed previously, media's businesses are confined geographically. For example, the newspapers based in Beijing are not allowed to merge with newspapers based in Tianjin. Besides, media are arbitrarily ordered by propaganda officials to buy unprofitable businesses. Moreover, the propaganda reports are normally boring which may affect media's sales. Additionally, private investment into media is forbidden. These all hit media's profits. Thus, the media are under economic pressure to keep operating expenses low and tight with staff. The pervasive corruption, in a way, has subsidised the media by providing financial support to media staff. In this sense, corruption is supplementary to the media's financial resources. This explains why red-envelope-cash is generally regarded as a part of a journalist's income.

As discussed previously, journalistic corruption is not only confined to China. Sociological research also finds that relying on the informal relation to obtain resources is a worldwide practice (Ji, 2012). However, it is particularly prominent in China. This research argues that Chinese culture fuels the growth of the informal relation but political factors play a key role. In the Chinese context, cultural factors such as connection (*guan xi*), particularistic relations, gift exchanging, and banqueting create an environment in which the line between acceptable social interactions and corruption is blurred and easily crossed (Wedeman, 2012). Pervasive corruption may push journalists to ally with the ruling class in impeding transparency and democracy (Zhao, 2008). The financial rewards through corruption may also defer journalists' aspirations towards journalistic independence. In light of this, corruption strengthens media control.

Some of the findings of this research accord with the existing theories discussed in Chapter 1 and others do not. A number of key scholars on Chinese media control claim that there is no formal and systematic pre-publication censorship in China (Brady, 2008; Hassid, 2008; Zhao, 2008; Link, 2002). Hassid (2008) further argues that there is no need to launch pre-publication censorship organs, since political education and pervasive indoctrination activities can keep the media in line. This evidence has emerged from the fieldwork showing that pre-publication censorship exists systematically in the form of ‘submission for review’. Furthermore, Link (2002) and Hassid (2008) attribute self-censorship to uncertainty and vagueness in media control methods and punishment. Yet based on journalists’ own accounts, self-censorship is conducted primarily according to the knowledge of banning orders, which clearly define taboo topics. Contrary to the general view that journalists are victims of censorship, this research finds that journalists endeavour to justify censorship and media control. Journalists argue that censorship or propaganda is indispensible in processing cross-national information, which is similar to the contested argument of Ellul (1965). That is, the inability to process international information creates the need for propaganda.

The survey findings discussed in Chapter 1 have reported that journalists were rather satisfied with their job conditions in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Yet this research has found that journalists tend to view their jobs as transitional ones. They do not have long-term career goals and intend to leave journalism in their thirties or early forties. Furthermore, echoing the survey findings, journalistic corruption pervades Chinese journalism. Zhao (1998) attributes corruption to the contradiction between political imperatives and commercial incentives simultaneously operated by the media. This research further adds a cultural dimension and employs a sociological view in analysing the roots of corruption.

In conclusion, this research argues for a dynamic view in assessing the role of culture in shaping journalism. As discussed previously, elements of culture do not always play a leading role. In the case of self-censorship, the cultural tradition of the ‘rule of man’ does play a key role. In terms of journalistic corruption, culture facilitates corrupt behaviour, but political forces play the dominant role.

Further research may develop from here in exploring the future of journalistic corruption as well as self-censorship. It is hard to tell whether corruption and self-censorship are going to be a long-term journalistic pattern in the Chinese context. As pointed out above, this enquiry is largely dependent on Chinese politics and can be translated into the fundamental question of whether China can successfully sustain its political system. China has proved itself to be more capable of adjusting the authoritarian system to meet new social changes (Ljunggren, 2010) than many had predicted. Thus, Chinese authoritarianism is rather adaptive. Its future direction can be expressed by the old cliché that only time will tell.

Appendices

Appendix I: Individual interview list

Code	Time	Place	Job description
I-1	5 January 2012	Beijing	A vice editor-in-chief of a mass-appeal newspaper in Beijing
I-2	6 January 2012	Beijing	A senior editor in finance news desk of a news website based in Beijing
I-3	6 January 2012	Beijing	A senior editor in economic and finance channel of a national broadcasting
I-4	9 January 2012	Beijing	A senior political journalist of a mass-appeal newspaper in Beijing
I-5	11 January 2012	Beijing	An editor-in-chief of a news magazine
I-6	17 January 2012	Beijing	An editor-in-chief of a mass-appeal newspaper in Beijing

Appendix II: Focus group interview list

Code	Time	Place	Number of participants	Composition
F-1	8 January 2012	Beijing	5	A party organ group, the participants work for a national party organ press
F-2	9 January 2012	Beijing	6	A mass-appeal group, the participants are from a mass-appeal newspaper in Beijing
F-3	13 January 2012	Beijing	3	A mixed group, the participants are from the state-run news agency, a leading national newspaper based in Beijing, and a leading national weekly newspaper based in Guangzhou
F-4	14 January 2012	Beijing	4	A national broadcasting group, the participants are from a national broadcasting
F-5	15 January 2012	Beijing	6	A news website group, the participants are working for news websites
F-6	11 February 2012	Shanghai	4	A mixed group, the participants are based in Shanghai, working for TV, Radio, a news website and a newspaper.

Appendix III: Personal contact list

Code	Time	Contact method	Job description
Personal communications No.1	On multiple days	Face-to-face, online, Skype video call	A senior journalist working for a party organ based in Beijing
Personal communications No. 2	On multiple days	Face-to-face and online	A senior journalist working for a mass-appeal newspaper based in Beijing
Personal communications No. 3	On multiple days	Face-to-face, online, Skype video call	A journalist working for a mass-appeal newspaper based in Beijing
Personal communications No. 4	On multiple days	Face-to-face	A vice editor-in-chief of a mass-appeal newspaper based in Beijing
Personal communication No. 5	14 January 2012	Face-to-face	A journalist working for a mass-appeal newspaper based in Beijing
Personal communications No. 6	15 January 2012	Face-to-face	A journalist working for a party organ based in Beijing
Personal communications No. 7	On multiple days	Online	A journalist working for a party-organ newspaper based in Shanghai
Personal communications No. 8	9 May 2013	Email	A senior editor working for a mass-appeal newspaper in Beijing

Personal communications No. 9	9 May 2013	Email	A senior journalist working for a mass-appeal newspaper in Beijing
Personal communications No. 10	24 March 2013	Online	A vice editor-in-chief working for a mass-appeal newspaper in Beijing

Appendix IV: Consent form

Interview consent form

Project title: Practising journalism in contemporary mainland China: media control, journalistic corruption, and the social media

Researcher: Xu, Di

Data protection statement

The data is collected as part of a research project regarding journalistic culture in contemporary mainland China for a PhD thesis in the Department of Theatre Film and Television of the University of Glasgow. The information that you supply will only be accessed by authorised persons of the University of Glasgow and will only be used for research purpose.

Consent to being interviewed

Name: Date:

I hereby give consent to the information discussed in the interview being used in Xu, Di's research: Yes/No

I would like to keep my name anonymous: Yes/No

I would like to keep the media organisation that I work for confidential: Yes/No

Signature: Date:

If you have any concerns regarding this project then you may contact my supervisors:

Professor Philip Schlesinger
Centre for Cultural Policy Research
University of Glasgow
Glasgow G12 8QQ
Philip.Schlesinger@glasgow.ac.uk

Professor Raymond Boyle
Centre for Cultural Policy Research
University of Glasgow
Glasgow G12 8QQ
Raymond.Boyle@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix V: Registration form

1. Your sex:

Male

Female

N/A

2. Your age:

17 and under

18-20

21-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60 and above

3. The highest degree that you have had:

High school and under

College

Undergraduate

Master

PhD

Others: please indicate

4. The type of the media that you work for:

Broadcasting

Party organ press

Mass-appeal press

Special interests press

News website

Others: please indicate

5. Your political affiliation:

Member of the Chinese Communist Party

Member of the Democratic Parties

Not enrolled in any political parties

Others: please indicate

6. The working place you based in:

Beijing

Shanghai

7. Please indicate your job title:

8. Your contact information:

Name:

Email:

Tel:

Appendix VI: Interview guide

Name:

Job title:

Organisation:

Date:

Place:

Introduction of the project regarding the aims of the research, anonymity, and consent.

Warm up phase:

1. Interviewee's background

2. Interviewee's incentive to enter into journalism

3. Job description

First phase:

1. The usage of '*zhuan ye*' in daily news practice

2. What attributes are often attached to '*zhuan ye*'?

Second phase:

1. The kinds of orders from the party-state in daily practice. In what forms?

2. How to react to the orders?

3. Explain the factors that have triggered the self-censorship.

Third phase:

1. Explain the situations that involving transaction in news practice. In what forms?

2. How to define journalistic corruption?

3. Explain the reasons behind the practices that have mentioned.

Fourth phase:

1. The usage of the new media in your daily practice. In what ways?

2. Has the new media brought changes to the traditional media? In what ways?

2. Has the news media helped changing the boundary of permissible reporting?

Ending phase:

1. Summary of what has been discussed.

2. Anything that the interviewees intend to bring up.

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