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CENSORSHIP IN THE CHINESE MEDIA:
SICHUAN EARTHQUAKE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies contemporary media censorship in the People's Republic of China, with particular attention paid to the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake. Some critics of journalism have said that the Sichuan earthquake, in addition to destroying lives and bringing down thousands of schools and buildings, has also loosened China's strict censorship controls. This study then aims to see if that assumption is correct by analyzing coverage in the mainstream and unconventional media (i.e.: citizen journalists) as well as first-hand accounts of journalists working in China. Presented in this study are three interviews conducted in Beijing in the summer of 2010, a little more than two years after the earthquake. To support such research, this study also profiles the Central Propaganda Department, the "Great Firewall of China" and the dissidents (both Chinese and foreign) who have worked toward a freer press in China.

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Introduction

“Journalism can never be silent: That is its greatest virtue and its greatest fault. It must speak, and speak immediately, while the echoes of wonder, the claims of triumph and the signs of horror are still in the air.”

—Henry Anatole Grunwald¹

As the walls of self-contained societies fall and are replaced by countries reliant on transnational trade, China has emerged as a dominant economic player of the globalization era. But with that power comes increased world media attention, ready and willing to scrutinize its every move. In addition, China finds itself in uncharted waters with regard to internal press freedom and how to manage its domestic and foreign journalists, many of whom demand fewer media restrictions than what China currently offers. “[Council on Foreign Relations] Senior Fellow Elizabeth C. Economy [said] the Chinese government is in a state of ‘schizophrenia’ about media policy as it ‘goes back and forth, testing the line, knowing they need press freedom--and the information it provides--but worried about opening the door to the type of freedoms that could lead to the regime's downfall.’”²

But how does the Chinese government control its media, both within its borders and abroad? Most media critics accuse the country of censorship, a word considered dirty among Western journalists. But what is censorship? Who enforces it? And if there is censorship, how do the foreign and domestic journalists find ways around it?

¹ Media Bistro: 15 Quotes to Inspire Journalists

² Freedom of Expression, p. 50-51

China is a country long known for censoring its internal affairs, but as the Beijing Olympics approached and in the wake of the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake, both foreign and domestic journalists experienced unprecedented press freedom. And so the world began to wonder: is China moving toward a more free press? And if not, what has changed? Interviewed for the purpose of this thesis, three Chinese journalists—two who write for foreign publications in China and one who writes for an official Chinese publication—share their views of the past and current media controls put in place by the Chinese government, their personal accounts of working within the Chinese media, and where they see the country's media policy going in the upcoming years.

Chapter 1

What is Censorship?

“All through its 400 years history, the media has been the first hostage to be taken, either by occupying forces or by military dictators when overthrowing governments. As a rule, the press has been faced with the choices of gagging or closure, and many a respectable newspaper was simply taken over by or submitted to becoming the mouthpiece of the new rulers.”

—Mette Newth³

Media ethics has never been a black and white issue; there have always been shades of gray. Fortunately, with the invention of the Internet, new laws to ensure fair media practices and increased pressure from the public and editors alike, journalists are held to a higher standard to report the truth, and nothing but the truth, than those seen by their mentors or predecessors. But as journalists strive to achieve a higher moral ground when reporting on newsworthy events, some governments, such as China’s, are making it significantly more difficult for these journalists to achieve that goal.

Arguably the dirtiest word among Western journalists, the term “censorship” lends itself to many ways of curbing free expression, but perhaps none so well as government control of the media. Censorship of the media, achieved through different means (outright ban of materials deemed sensitive in nature, manipulation of information or propaganda, omission and downright lies) and channels (word-of-mouth, the Internet and broadcast and

³ The Beacon for Freedom of Expression of Bibliotheca Alexandrina, p. 3

print news organizations), has evolved throughout the ages since the beginning of organized government.

Censorship has been used to explain questionable governmental actions, such as a declaration of war on another nation. It has also been used during times of war to manipulate public opinion, increase support, and encourage sympathizers. Governments have used it to hide sensitive material that might embarrass a country and its leaders, as well as to keep the peace in places of political, religious, or social turmoil. Other countries use censorship simply to gain and keep the power over their citizens—better to keep the citizens in the dark so they don't know the truth and start a revolution.

China learned most of its censorship tactics from its communist neighbor, the former Soviet Union. Everything within the Soviet Union's borders—from radio and television to newspapers and magazines—was under strict control of the government. The Soviet Union passed its propaganda messages through its various media channels, including the government newspaper, *Izvestia*, the official news agency, *TASS*, and the party's own official mouthpiece, *Pravda*, a newspaper similar to China's *People's Daily*. Through these channels, thousands of journalists worked tirelessly to further Joseph Stalin's political agenda.

The former Soviet Union was perhaps most well known for its doctoring of photographs. For example, any photograph that did not glorify Stalin was retouched or discarded, forever gone from history. Other photographs were edited to Stalin's requirement—essentially change the appearance of historical events—and in some extreme cases, to remove individuals from the picture entirely.⁴

⁴ Censorship Under Stalin's Regime



This man, a commissar or Communist Party official, once was a trusted adviser of Stalin. But, he became Stalin's political enemy and his image was removed from public record*

*Censorship Under Stalin's Regime

How China Censors

The Propaganda Department

“The choice now confronting the Chinese Communist Party leadership is an unpleasant one: More freedom, or more repression? Both alternatives pose hazards to the party’s monopoly on power.”

—Ashley Esarey⁵

In China, censorship is common throughout the government-controlled Chinese media. But unlike other countries that attempt to cover their censorship tracks from their citizens, China does little, if anything, to hide the fact that it censors its media. And unfortunately, its position on and practices of media censorship haven’t changed in the past years, despite some who believed the president of the People’s Republic of China, Hu Jintao, would relax some of the more conservative media controls put in place by his predecessor, Mao Zedong.⁶ It is important to note that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is not the same thing as the Communist Party. The Communist Party is one entity of the Republic, in addition to the State Council. Unlike the State Council, however, the Communist Party is the supreme authority in the PRC, as guaranteed by the PRC’s constitution.⁷ No other party is permitted in China unless it receives the leadership of the ruling Communist Party.

There are several major government agencies involved with media control, including the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT); the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP); and the Central Propaganda Department

⁵ Freedom of Expression, p. 51

⁶ Freedom of Expression, p. 51

⁷ Constitution of the People’s Republic of China

(CPD). The SARFT, an organization that works primarily with television, radio and film, was formed in 1986 and falls under the State Council. The GAPP concerns itself with regulating state-owned news, print, and Internet publications. The and most influential and controlling entity, however, is the CPD.⁸ Founded in 1924, the CPD is “a revolutionary organization seeking not only power but to transform society.” The actions necessary for such a transformation—“unit[ing] the masses through the party’s message and help[ing] to create a utopia on earth”⁹—may be deemed radical, however, and therefore must be presented to the public in a “persuasive manner to motivate [such] action[s].”¹⁰ Such ways include the *Xinhua* news agency, China’s counterpart to the *Reuters* or *The Associated Press* newswire.

Founded in 1931, *Xinhua* became known as “the tongue and throat”¹¹ of the state and currently reports directly to the CPD.¹² It employs 10,000 people, transmits its information in six languages and has more than 100 offices around the world.¹³ With such a powerful presence, it comes as no surprise that the CPD manages its propaganda effectively. In addition to meeting with chief editors on a rolling basis, the CPD also sends out memos to newspapers about what information they should focus on or what points they should stress.¹⁴ For example, in 2008, a “working instructions” bulletin from the CPD was passed around on Chinese blogs that included directions for covering the assassination of Pakistani then-President Benazir Bhutto. “Only report on the objective occurrences and reactions from various parties, do not associate the event with Pakistan’s internal struggles, or with Pakistani

⁸ Freedom of Expression, p. 52

⁹ Called Up: How China Censors Its Burgeoning Media, p. 271

¹⁰ Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia, p. 87

¹¹ Called Up: How China Censors Its Burgeoning Media, p. 271

¹² Reporting the News from China, p. 2

¹³ Reporting the News from China, p. 19

¹⁴ Don't Force Us to Lie: the Struggle of Chinese Journalists in the Reform Era, p. 6

terrorist forces, thus avoiding attracting fire onto ourselves and getting involved in Pakistan’s internal problems,” it said.¹⁵ Also in 2008, when Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd visited students at Peking University, his criticisms regarding Tibetan human rights were removed from the local coverage of the event.¹⁶ Perhaps the purpose of *Xinhua* is best described in a document given to Chinese journalists in the 1970s:

“News work is an important medium of communication between the party and the masses, [an] important means of propagating the general and specific policies of the party, of making the masses understand quickly, [and] of turning [the policies] into material strength. Thus, the good management of the proletarian news media is an extremely important fighting task of the party.”¹⁷



Example of Chinese Media Distribution*

*Picture Taken by Becky Perlow on August 8, 2008 in Beijing, China

In addition to managing its domestic journalists, the CPD also controls the foreign correspondents covering events in China. According to Article 14 of the “Regulations Concerning Foreign Journalists,” “Foreign journalists and permanent offices of foreign news agencies shall conduct journalistic activities within the scope of business as registered or within the mutually agreed plan for news coverage. Foreign journalists and permanent offices of foreign news agencies shall observe journalistic ethics and shall not distort the facts, fabricate rumors or carry out

¹⁵ The Blogging Revolution, p. 179-180

¹⁶ The Blogging Revolution, p. 208

¹⁷ Reporting the News from China, p. 5

news coverage by foul means. Foreign journalists and permanent offices of foreign news agencies shall not engage in activities which are incompatible with their status or tasks, or which endanger China's national security, unity or community and public interests."¹⁸ The CPD censors foreign journalists in a more underhanded, indirect way, though, by ultimately preventing these journalists from covering their stories. "Travel approval can take days, weeks or possibly years to obtain, placing journalists in the position of either being too late to cover timely topics in other provinces or traveling without permission."¹⁹ The government can also incarcerate, harass or seize foreign reporters notes, recordings or photos if they are found to be investigating sensitive material. What's more, the CPD indirectly censors the reporters' sources when it intimidates the sources foreign journalists want to interview by threatening, beating or even sending those sources to jail.²⁰

In China, editors at the newspaper or the CPD itself will smother stories that might be considered sensitive in nature. This is because sensitive stories (whether they be political, economical or social) might upset China's stability and cause the masses to question the PRC's legitimacy to govern. According to Former Party Secretary General Hu Yaobang, "socialist journalism should promote socialism by ensuring the masses have no cause to doubt the superiority of China's socialist society over the bourgeois Western societies and therefore the superiority of socialism over capitalism."²¹ And sometimes, it's not even the stories themselves that are so closely guarded by the CPD.

During the 1960s and '70s, journalists worked to ensure that "each piece of political propaganda was given the correct amount of prominence, and that stories about the country's

¹⁸ *Owning the Olympics Narratives of the New China*, p. 215

¹⁹ *Owning the Olympics Narratives of the New China*, p. 215

²⁰ *Owning the Olympics Narratives of the New China*, p. 216

²¹ *Political and Social Change in China Since 1978*, p. 62

leaders were put in the right position on the [newspaper] page, and accompanied by photographs of the appropriate size, to reflect each leader's relative seniority in the hierarchy."²² In addition to layout design, photographs were also monitored closely to ensure compliance with CPD rules. Li Zhengsheng, a photographer during the Cultural Revolution, regularly corrected photos that had a slightly blurry or somewhat hidden poster of Mao in the background of the picture. Though he considered himself gifted with retouching, he still "recognized how often the result was visually illogical."²³ The CPD considers its instructions clear, though. In 1996, Chinese President, General Secretary of the Communist Party and Chairman of the Military Commission Jiang Zemin discussed his expectations for the Chinese media while visiting the offices of *The People's Daily*:

1. *"The Press must be guided by the Party's basic theory, basic line and basic ideology and keep politics, ideology and action in conformity with the Party Central Committee.*
2. *"The Press must firmly keep to the standpoint of the Party, adhere to principle, and take clear-cut stand on what to promote and what to oppose on cardinal issues of right and wrong.*
3. *"The Press must adhere to the party's guidance with stress on propaganda by positive examples, sing the praises of people's great achievements and conduct the corrects supervision of public opinion that should help the party and state to improve work and the style of leadership, solve problems, enhance unity and safeguard stability.*

²² China Getting Rich First: a Modern Social History, p. 125

²³ Red-color News Soldier, p. 62

4. *“The Press must...hold patriotism, collectivism and socialism on high, and use best things to arm, direct and mould the people.”*²⁴

Many newspapers do not have a choice regarding compliance with CPD orders, as many of them are directly under control of the CPD. If they do not adhere to the guidelines set forth, the editors can be removed from the publication or the publication itself can be shut down. Even worse, once an editor is branded as “troublesome,” no other publication would consider hiring that editor for fear of falling even more under the CPD’s radar. The CPD also funds many of the newspapers in China, adding incentive for editors to cooperate: According to a 1988 CASEE Institute of Journalism conference, “state subsidies to newspapers at the provincial level and above totaled nearly 5.3 billion Yuan (\$1.4 billion) annually.”²⁵

Not all newspapers comply with the standards set forth by the CPD, though. One editor for the cultural section of a newspaper said, “There is no real problem uniting readers’ and leaders’ interest, but you have to pay attention to things like readability.”²⁶ Some might consider this “readability” to mean interesting, provocative topics, such as “news of infectious diseases, Party corruption, protests, and disasters,”²⁷ but these topics would be deemed too sensitive to cover. When editors and newspapers are found to have published sensitive material, “work teams” are assigned to the respective newspaper offices to question and examine the parties involved.²⁸ In such instances, several actions may be taken, including “dismissals or demotions, libel, fines, closing [of] news outlets, [and in some cases,] even imprisonment.”²⁹ Following the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, a party document was passed around to any news publications that covered the event, stating that “one percent of all

²⁴ China's Opening Society: the Non-state Sector and Governance, p. 123-124

²⁵ Voices of China: the Interplay of Politics and Journalism, p. 51

²⁶ Voices of China: the Interplay of Politics and Journalism, p. 46

²⁷ Owning the Olympics Narratives of the New China, p. 214

²⁸ Voices of China: the Interplay of Politics and Journalism, p. 52

²⁹ Freedom of Expression, p. 53-55

staff members were to be punished,” through dismissals from the publication or dismissal from the Party itself. Party officials hoped this one percent (which, for example, meant three of 300 employees would be subject to punishment at an official paper, *China Daily*) would serve as an example for others and deter future rebellions.³⁰ According to one Chinese journalist, the punishment affects more than the individual. “If you’re fired, you lose your housing, your privileges, [and] everything,” he said.³¹

The Chinese government obviously controls its own news publications, but the level of control depends on the publication itself and the content covered. For example, because the English newspaper, *China Daily*, reaches an international audience (as well as a greater number of foreign business travelers visiting China), the CPD must ensure that all information presented in the publication puts China in a positive light.³² TV news is also subject to CPD control: When foreigners stay at Chinese hotels, the TVs they watch are closed circuit TVs (which differ from traditional TVs where the signal is openly transmitted and not tampered with). According to the General Office of the State Council, this “is regarded as a Chinese window on the world and an effective means of propaganda and is taken seriously as a way to promote China’s international image.”³³

A recent media censorship in China that is widely known to the general public concerns the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) virus in 2003. The World Health Organization (WHO) first learned about the virus in Vietnam, but it was believed to have originated in southern China or Hong Kong and was transferred through a businessman traveling to Vietnam who soon died.³⁴ With the exception of Hong Kong, China downplayed

³⁰ Reporting the News from China, p. 54

³¹ Don't Force Us to Lie: the Struggle of Chinese Journalists in the Reform Era, p. 5

³² Owning the Olympics Narratives of the New China, p. 150

³³ China's Window on the World: TV News, Social Knowledge, and International Spectacles, p. 42

³⁴ Transparency in Global Change: the Vanguard of the Open Society, p. 274

the disease as a simple flu that would go away on its own. As history showed, however, the virus did not disappear, but rather extended past China's borders, reaching all the way to Canada.³⁵ Doctors were instructed not to speak with the media³⁶ and to “maintain a policy of ‘nei jin wai song,’ [or to] ‘keep a tight grip internally while appearing relaxed on the surface,’”³⁷ despite the fact that the number of victims continued to grow. For example, Guangdong was heavily affected by the virus, as seen during a February 11 press conference, where Guangdong officials “reported 305 recorded cases and five deaths [had resulted] from atypical pneumonia.” In addition to the government declaring it had quarantined the disease, the head of Guangdong's health bureau Huang Qingdao explained the reason for coverage constraints, stating that “atypical pneumonia isn't a disease we're legally required to report, so we didn't feel it was necessary to make it public,” adding that “now, because it had had a big social impact we have decided to make it public.”³⁸ By March 26, though, 31 people had died and the infected SARS numbers jumped to 792 documented cases.³⁹

Writer Lynn T. White understands the Chinese position perhaps better than most:

“Rulers in China have an odd belief: that natural disasters, such as earthquakes or new diseases, reflect on their legitimacy. Guangdong cadres repressed news of early cases of SARS out of fear that knowledge of this mysterious illness would disturb the populace and sow “disorder” (luan). Their delay caused real disorder. Nosy, impolite news reporters might have published the data, from the unwashed masses, that would have helped doctors constrain the disease early. Elite superstitions about chaos throttled them. More trust of

³⁵ Transparency in Global Change: the Vanguard of the Open Society, p. 275

³⁶ The China Virus, p. 13

³⁷ The China Virus, p. 14

³⁸ The China Virus, p. 13

³⁹ The China Virus, p. 14

lowlier citizens could have avoided gigantic costs.”⁴⁰ Eventually though, China was forced to come clean in April 2003, after Chinese magazine *Caijing*, “the first national publication to report on SARS,”⁴¹ discovered a difference between information published by the PRC and the WHO. “*Caijing* gambled successfully that the CCP could not continue to suppress news on the epidemic once it got on the Internet, and it decided to prepare the cover story ‘The Beijing Files,’ claims communication Professor Joseph Chan from Chinese University of Hong Kong.”⁴² Unable to hide the virus, which had affected 26 of 31 Chinese provinces, any longer, China attempted to cover its tracks quickly by firing the minister of health.⁴³ It later became known that between Nov. 1, 2002, and August 7, 2003, 8422 cases of SARS were documented, with 916 deaths related to the disease.⁴⁴

There has been much debate regarding why China choose to censor the media during the SARS scandal. President of the Mackenzie Institute John Thompson suggests that China’s main reason for hiding the SARS virus was simply embarrassment. “[The explanation] lies with the traditional Asian concept of ‘face’ and the traditional secretiveness of ‘progressive’ governments,” said Thompson. “China is desperate for recognition, tourism, trade and international status. Having an outbreak of a deadly disease threatens all of these and makes Beijing feel embarrassed that such a thing could happen there.”⁴⁵ Paul Thiers offers another perspective by suggesting that SARS occurred as a new leadership was trying to stabilize and legitimize its power. “This could be a political platform, recognizing that industrialization, technology, and global market integration create risks—and that a government that fails to manage those risks, fails its own people and loses the confidence of

⁴⁰ Transparency in Global Change: the Vanguard of the Open Society, p. 275

⁴¹ *Caijing*: About Us

⁴² China, p. 216

⁴³ Transparency in Global Change: the Vanguard of the Open Society, p. 276

⁴⁴ WHO | Summary Table of SARS Cases by Country, 1 November 2002 - 7 August 2003

⁴⁵ Did China Hide the Truth on SARS?

the global community,” Thiers said in 2003. “Since these are specifically the bureaucratic failures of the SARS crisis, the long-term response will be a crucial test of the new political leadership.”⁴⁶

A few years later, China was again forced to relax its censorship on the media as the 2008 Beijing Olympics approached. Many countries and organizations, including the International Olympic Committee (IOC), were concerned with how China would regulate both domestic and foreign journalists, but most fears were quieted following a Dec. 1, 2006, announcement. In the statement, China assured the IOC journalists would temporarily be allowed to investigate and cover what they wanted to, beginning Jan. 1, 2007, and extending until Oct. 17, 2008.⁴⁷ They could only do this, however, if they carried an Olympic Identity and Accreditation card and all respective sources agreed to be interviewed. Regardless of new regulations, however, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Liu Jianchao warned journalists that “authorities would still have the authority to intervene, ‘especially during emergencies, protests and other incidents that suddenly arise,’ [which] reveal[ed] the degree to which the government is fearful of spontaneity and free access to cover the events.”⁴⁸

Actions speak louder than words though. Despite a bold move when it permitted Reporters Without Borders—an organization that fights for press freedom around the world—to enter China for the first time in history,⁴⁹ the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China (FCCC) found “that 40 percent of foreign correspondents working in China ha[d] experienced some form of interference, such as source intimidating, detention, and even violence since the rules took effect.”⁵⁰ “While attempting to report on toys with possible

⁴⁶ Risk Society Comes to China: SARS, Transparency and Public Accountability, p. 241-242

⁴⁷ Owing the Olympics Narratives of the New China, p. 210

⁴⁸ Owing the Olympics Narratives of the New China, p. 217

⁴⁹ Owing the Olympics Narratives of the New China, p. 218

⁵⁰ Owing the Olympics Narratives of the New China, p. 219

lead contamination, *New York Times* reporter David Barboza, his translator, and his photographer were detained by the factory's private security officers, necessitating hours of negotiations before their release. A BBC crew was arrested in Hunan province for investigating a rumored student death in a protest over increased public transportation fares."⁵¹ Other journalists have experienced similar problems. "When traveling around the country and officials say reporters are not allowed on their turf, we can now say 'Yes, we are, and here's the regulation,'" said Jocelyn Ford, 2007-2009 Chair of Media Freedoms Committee in a Congressional roundtable, of reporting the news in China. "Sometimes it works. Sometimes they say, 'Oh, okay, we can't disturb you.' Sometimes, if reporters threaten to call the Foreign Ministry to report local authorities are harassing them in violation of the rules, the locals will back down. Other times they say 'We don't care,' or cite a local regulation restricting reporting which usually they can't present on paper."⁵² Ford went on to explain that, "The Olympics appear to have been a catalyst for the Chinese Government to overhaul its approach to information control. Instead of restraining foreign correspondents as they did under the old rules, they now try to control our sources. The intimidation has shifted from stopping correspondents from conducting interviews, to stopping Chinese citizens from speaking to us. The end result is we are still not able to report freely."⁵³ Foreign journalists, however, obviously had it easier than domestic correspondents did. According to a Center to Protect Journalists (CPJ) report, many are concerned that "once the closing ceremonies [were] held and international attention fade[d], Chinese journalists

⁵¹ *Owning the Olympics Narratives of the New China*, p. 221

⁵² *Reporting the News in China: Firsthand Accounts and Current Trends*, p. 5

⁵³ *Reporting the News in China: Firsthand Accounts and Current Trends*, p. 5

will I bear the brunt of official retribution for reporting any news that the government deem[ed] unfavorable.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Owing the Olympics Narratives of the New China, p. 219

The Great Firewall

“We temporarily have access to a tool that could bring conviviality and understanding to our lives and might help revitalize the public sphere. The same tool, improperly controlled and wielded, could become an instrument of tyranny.”

—Howard Rheingold⁵⁵

As of 2008, there are 457 million Internet users in China,⁵⁶ up from nearly 112 million in 2005.⁵⁷ With such a strong online presence, many believe China will no longer be able to control the flow of information and will ultimately cause the fall of Communism. For example, “regarding China’s attempt to control the Internet, [former] President Bill Clinton delacred, ‘Good luck! That’s sort of like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall.... In the knowledge economy, economic innovation and political empowerment, whether anyone likes it or not, will inevitable go hand in hand.’” Former U.S. President George W. Bush felt similarly, as he stated that “When the Internet takes hold in China, freedom’s genie is out of the bottle.”⁵⁸ Some might argue that the Internet still has a ways to go before it “takes hold” of the Chinese population, particularly because 500 million Internet users are still only 38 percent of its population.⁵⁹ However, as the Internet and even text messages break down the traditional ways of communications within China, more and more citizens are using these technologies to take active roles in discussion about their country.

⁵⁵ China's Opening Society: the Non-state Sector and Governance, p. 132

⁵⁶ China Internet Users by Numbers Feb 2011

⁵⁷ Internet Users in China as of 2008 by the World Bank, World Development Indicators

⁵⁸ The Perils and Promise of Global Transparency: Why the Information Revolution May Not Lead to Security, Democracy, or Peace, p. 93-94

⁵⁹ Tough Road Ahead for China Census

With the invention of blogs and forums, the average citizen has, for the first time in history, the chance to voice his individual opinions about anything ranging from his favorite food to how to raise a child. Many bloggers of Generation Y are more concerned with material things—“on their wish lists, a Nintendo Wii comes far ahead of democracy. Free pirated films, television shows, and music are their primary concern.”⁶⁰ There are some in China who write about more significant topics, though, and these people have been labeled “citizen journalists.” As regular citizens, they have the ability to cover events from the “bottom-up” by “offering their first hand reports, digital photographs, camcorder video footage, mobile telephone snapshot[s] or audio clips.”⁶¹ But most importantly, the majority of Chinese citizens put their faith and trust in this “citizen journalist” approach more than government-run, traditional news outlets.⁶² This might be because Chinese “blogs were far more likely to carry criticism than Chinese Newspapers,” according to a 2008 Middlebury College study.⁶³ Unfortunately, the minute these posts are deemed sensitive in nature, with particular attention to political coverage, many of them are removed from their host websites. For example, “posts were removed from the Tianya Miscellaneous Chat forum in relation to the ‘Weng’an Mass Incident,’ where citizens accused local government officials of covering up the death of a young girl.”⁶⁴ Compare this to Chinese diplomat Yang Xiokun’s comments in 2006, which stated that “[China doesn’t] have software blocking Internet sites. I’m not sure why people say these things. We do not have restrictions at all.”⁶⁵ Xiokun’s statement is only partially true, as an Internet webhost said on October 25, 2007 “We allow critical posts, which are not posted by those with evil intentions, even ones

⁶⁰ The Blogging Revolution, p. 181

⁶¹ Web Journalism a New Form of Citizenship?, p. 261-262

⁶² Web Journalism a New Form of Citizenship?, p. 19

⁶³ The Blogging Revolution, p. 181

⁶⁴ Web Journalism a New Form of Citizenship?, p. 277

⁶⁵ The Blogging Revolution, p. 173

which are ‘playing the edge ball.’ So long as there is no serious political problem, we would like to keep the forum as it is. And that is why the forum is thriving.”⁶⁶ Rena Bivens and Chen Li argue that even if there is censorship with regard to political posts on blogs, the fact that even a sliver of expression might exist on blogs should still be considered a success, especially considering the strict control over *any* political data in China.⁶⁷

Sill, China spends countless *yuan* (Chinese currency) policing its Internet users, reportedly employing more than 50,000 “Internet police” who monitor content on such sites as blogs and forums.⁶⁸ In addition to physical police scanning the web for inappropriate content, the Beijing police in 2007 “utilized animated cartoon cops to pop up on a user’s browser, biking, driving and walking across screens every 30 minutes to warn netizens to avoid ‘illegal Internet content’ and ‘bad websites.’”⁶⁹ The government also sets up proxy servers that censor sites deemed inappropriate by the government, as well as requires “internet cafes...to use software that restricts access to particular websites and to keep records of their users and the sites they have visited.”⁷⁰ In addition, the Chinese government forces “Internet users [to] register with the police one month after opening an account” and encourages citizens to tattle on “subversive” content.⁷¹ Perhaps this is because “authoritarian regimes depend on communications to reinforce their political and coercive powers [because] they lack the political legitimacy enjoyed by democratic governments.”⁷² And if China controls the communication, it controls the information passed along those lines of communication, ensuring that all information concerning the government

⁶⁶ Web Journalism a New Form of Citizenship?, p. 268

⁶⁷ Web Journalism a New Form of Citizenship?, p. 276

⁶⁸ The Perils and Promise of Global Transparency: Why the Information Revolution May Not Lead to Security, Democracy, or Peace, p. 113

⁶⁹ The Blogging Revolution, p. 181

⁷⁰ China's Opening Society: the Non-state Sector and Governance, p. 129-130

⁷¹ The Blogging Revolution, p. 177

⁷² China's Opening Society: the Non-state Sector and Governance, p. 121

is positive. One member of an Internet organization that censors certain websites even told Radio Free Asia's Mandarin service, "We'd rather wrongly close 100 websites than let a single website post illegal information."⁷³ Singapore's first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew went even further with this idea of censorship when he once said that "'only the top 3 to 4 percent of a society' is able to handle the chaos and plurality of information offered by the Internet."⁷⁴ Perhaps what he really meant was that anything more than 4 percent of the population might result in a true understanding of governmental affairs and ultimately result in an uprising.

It's no wonder China is scared about the effect the Internet may have on the country's ability to control its people. As Howard Rheingold once said in 1993, "The Internet... if properly understood and defended by enough citizens, does have democratizing potential in the same way that alphabets and printing presses had democratizing potential."⁷⁵ To put it another way, "in less than a decade, the Internet reached 50 million users worldwide; it took the telephone 74 years, radio 38 [years], and television 13 years to reach comparable levels of distribution."⁷⁶ However, some have argued that the Internet, rather than loosening the government's control over the people, has only strengthened it. Fons Tuinstra, in a 2006 Neiman Reports, explains this idea further: "For the first time in China's history the central government has a popular and relatively easy means of eavesdropping on what is happening and being said in their country."⁷⁷

China continues to censor its Internet users, and specifically its millions of bloggers, as their use of terms, "such as 'democracy,' 'political reform' or 'freedom of speech' has

⁷³ The Blogging Revolution, p. 183

⁷⁴ China's Opening Society: the Non-state Sector and Governance, p. 129

⁷⁵ China's Opening Society: the Non-state Sector and Governance, p. 126

⁷⁶ China's Opening Society: the Non-state Sector and Governance, p. 128

⁷⁷ Puzzling Contradictions of China's Internet Journalism, p. 51

increased exponentially over the last five years.”⁷⁸ The country also creates laws that “lack specificity,” which enables it to “exercise political expediency.”⁷⁹ In addition, China instituted new censorship software in 2009 called “Green Dam Youth Escort.” It was set to be installed on all computers manufactured and sold in China and was meant to censor pornography. It was discovered, though, that the software had faults and ultimately opened many computer owners up to be victims of viruses or hackers. Following the public resentment, China reversed its decision about the installation of said software.⁸⁰

It’s important to note that the Chinese government is not exclusively at fault for Internet censorship. American companies, including Yahoo! and Google, have been found conspiring with China during the technology boom. For example, Yahoo! turned over information to the Chinese government about a journalist who had posted a CPD document concerning illegal media topics. In 2005, the journalist, Shi Tao, was jailed for 10 years. Google also censors its search-engine results, a fact that Iowa U.S. Representative James A. Leach was not happy with. “So if this Congress wants to learn how to censor,” Leach once said to Google, “we’d go to you—the company that should symbolize the greatest freedom of information in the history of man.”⁸¹ To Google’s credit, though, it does re-direct Chinese netizens to its Hong Kong-based search engine, which is free from keyword censors.⁸² “The broader problem is that American business executives have little training in how to deal with ethics in a corrupt and totalitarian global business environment,’ wrote Peter Navarro, a business professor at UC Irvine.”⁸³ That’s where the “Global Online Freedom Act” came in.

⁷⁸ Reporting the News in China: Firsthand Accounts and Current Trends, p. 29

⁷⁹ China's Opening Society: the Non-state Sector and Governance, p. 131

⁸⁰ Reporting the News in China: Firsthand Accounts and Current Trends, p. 29

⁸¹ The Blogging Revolution, p. 195

⁸² China Getting Rich First: a Modern Social History, p. 144-145

⁸³ The Blogging Revolution, p. 196

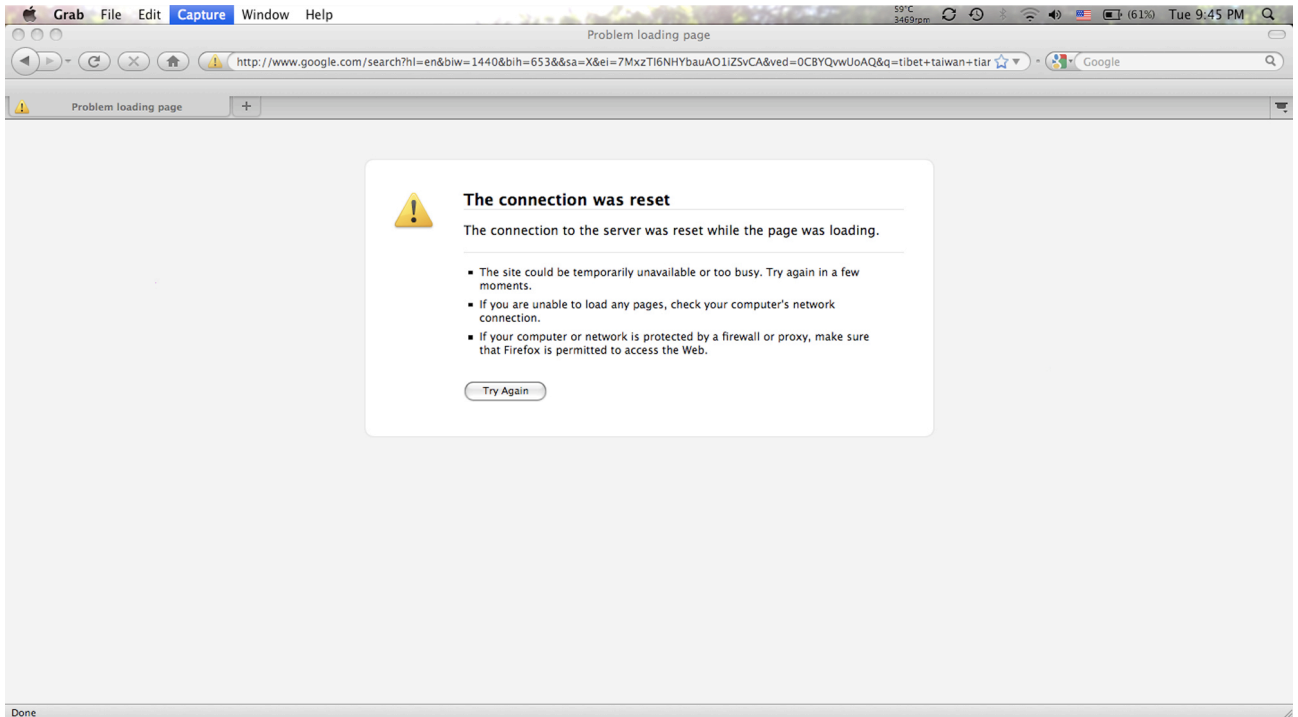
Frustrated with American corporations in China, a group of U.S. senators drew up the “Global Online Freedom Act,” a bill that banned American companies from censoring content or sharing user information. The European Union mirrored the U.S. move a few years later in 2008.⁸⁴ Even Chinese search engine Sohu.com told its users that “topics which damage the reputation of the state are forbidden,” and that “if you are a Chinese national and willingly choose to break these laws, Sohu.com is legally obliged to report you to the Public Security Bureau.” Perhaps this act of censorship would be more understanding if it was simply a Chinese company involved; Sohu’s partners, however, include U.S.-based firms Goldman Sachs, Intel Corporation and the Dow Jones.⁸⁵

As more and more business travelers go to China, more and more news of the Chinese government’s Internet censorship is distributed around the globe, hurting China’s international reputation. In an effort to change that, China grants its visitors with a fake version of the Chinese Internet who are then led to believe “The Great Firewall” does not exist. According to James Fallows, who interviewed engineers at two technology firms in China, “the government bodies in charge of censoring the Internet [had] told them to get ready to unblock access from a list of specific Internet Protocol (IP) address—certain Internet cafes, access jacks in hotel rooms and conference centers where foreigners are expected to work or stay during the Olympic Games.” So suddenly, searches for off-limit terms like “Tiananmen” or “Falun Gong” return with actual results—at least for the time these travelers are in China, anyway.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ The Blogging Revolution, p. 195-196

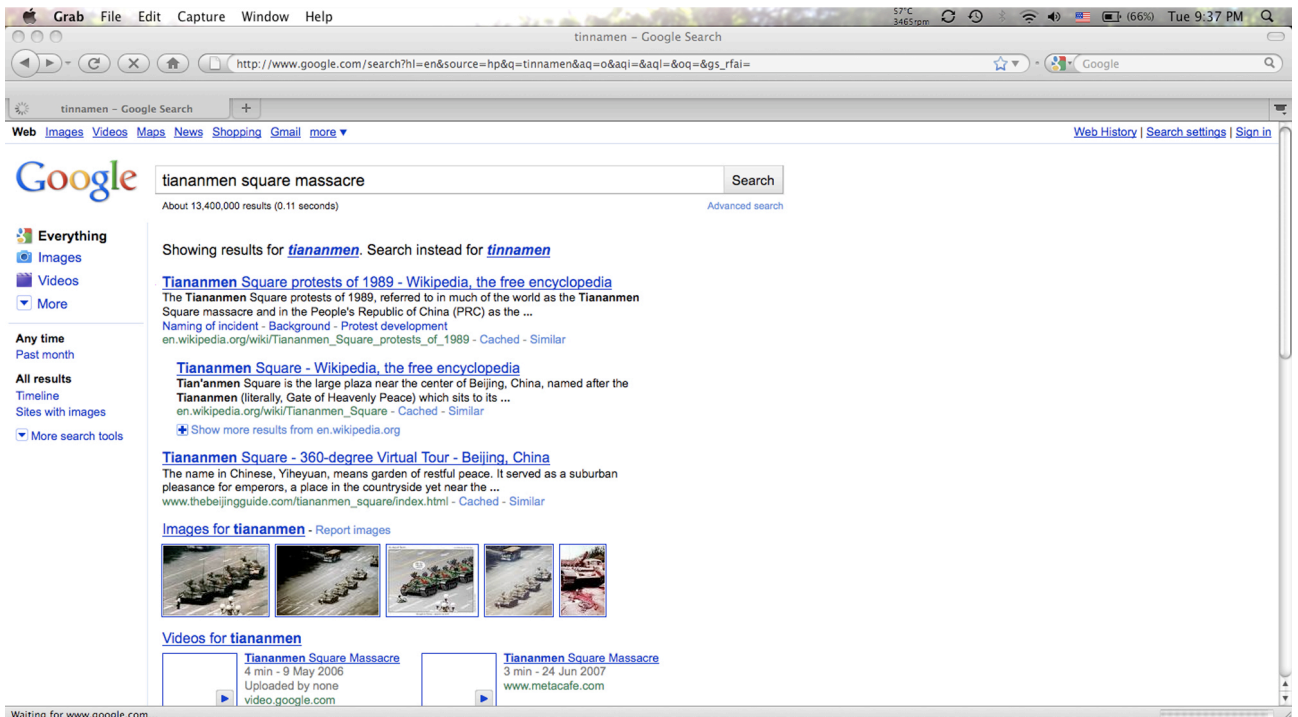
⁸⁵ The Blogging Revolution, p. 197

⁸⁶ Reporting the News in China: Firsthand Accounts and Current Trends, p. 38



*Example of internet censorship. Search typed into Google.com was "Tibet, Taiwan, Tiananmen," otherwise known as the forbidden "Three T's."**

**Computer image of Becky Perlow's Computer, taken at 9:37 a.m. on August 24, 2010 at a Chinese Hostel that caters to foreign travelers*



Example of fake freedom on China's Internet. Search typed into Google.com was "Tiananmen Square Massacre."

**Computer image of Becky Perlow's Computer, taken at 9:37 a.m. on August 24, 2010 at a Chinese Hostel that caters to foreign travelers*

Though foreign travelers may not always be aware of Chinese censorship, many Chinese citizens are. When Zhao Ziyang, the former general secretary of the Communist Party of China from 1987-1989, who was famous for his public disapproval of the Tiananmen Square massacre, died in 2005, the Chinese government pulled the plug on the coverage. Chinese citizens, however, still managed to know what was happening. Some personal accounts of the day Ziyang died—after 15 years of house arrest—included:

1. *“I live in Guangzhou, and that night I wasn’t able to access two Hong Kong stations, so I realized immediately that something major had happened.”*
2. *“...today... my grandmother said ‘Zhao Ziyang died, why isn’t the news or the papers reporting it?’ I was curious, so I went searching on the Internet but found I couldn’t open many Websites, which made me think something was strange.”*
3. *“This morning, I couldn’t connect to any overseas websites, and I realized that something had happened.”*
4. *“Putting aside Zhao’s merits and faults for the time being, we have already completely lost the right to speak, and to hear about him! What kind of world is this?”⁸⁷*

But most importantly, Chinese netizens have simply learned to live in their current environment, because they realize that one false post could not only affect them—it could hurt the entire blog or forum site when it is pulled from the Internet by the government censors.⁸⁸ Surprisingly, some citizens don’t even think Internet censorship is wrong—

⁸⁷ China's Opening Society: the Non-state Sector and Governance, p. 126

⁸⁸ China, p. 208

according to a 2008 Pew Internet and American Project study, almost 80 percent of Chinese citizens support governmental Internet censorship.⁸⁹ And it's understandable why some Chinese bloggers have elected to censor their own words, because as the Committee to Protect Journalists said in 2008, "unlike those journalists who have the relative protection of large media organizations, 'when the knock comes on the door they are alone and vulnerable.'"⁹⁰ For those willing to push the envelope, they can "evade keyword filtering by inserting symbols between words in a search term, or writing in an oblique way. Sometimes they directly challenge the administrator of the bulletin board not to delete their posts."⁹¹

Only time will tell how the Internet will shape the future of China, but perhaps journalist Philip J. Cunningham, a veteran reporter in China, says it best: "China's press is freer than ever while paradoxically it remains as under control as ever. One way to illustrate this is an expanding balloon marked by a design that gets bigger as the balloon gets bigger."⁹² At the end of the day, though, the Internet can take democratic process only so far because without changing the actual authoritarian establishments, it's still just words.⁹³

⁸⁹ The Blogging Revolution, p. 183

⁹⁰ Web Journalism a New Form of Citizenship?, p. 18

⁹¹ Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives, p. 103

⁹² Puzzling Contradictions of China's Internet Journalism, p. 51

⁹³ Web Journalism a New Form of Citizenship?, p. 267

Self-Censorship

“While publishing and other media may still be considered ideologically sensitive, some enterprising Chinese publishers know that a pragmatic brand of self-censorship (knowing how far to push the envelope), coupled with major media initiatives, proliferating media and morphing communication technology, may very well set them free for a short march to commercial growth and press liberalization.”

—China, Opposing Viewpoints⁹⁴

In China, it’s important to note that there is not an individual person sitting up in a corner office, spending eight hours a day censoring information. “How could there be?” argues John David. “Shifting news copy on a world scale is a mammoth, 24-hour operation. No single person could hear everything in Chinese, let alone the other languages of transmission.”⁹⁵ This thinking then lends itself to another common example of Chinese censorship: the press’ *own* censorship, otherwise known as *self-censorship*. In China, this idea of self-censorship begins at the classroom level, where journalism teachers “need to keep officially unacceptable ideas out of written documents and any other venues of public discourse, such as the mass media, conferences, and even private conversation in the presence of party officials.”⁹⁶ In addition, a journalism course syllabus in China would likely include the following (or something similar): “All students are required to have a solid understanding of Marxist principles and theories related to news media; to be very familiar with the Party’s and state’s policies on news and information dissemination; [and] using

⁹⁴ China, p. 217

⁹⁵ Reporting the News from China, p. 26

⁹⁶ Journalism Education in Countries with Limited Media Freedom, p. 21

Marxist methods.”⁹⁷ In 2007, for example, a former editor of the *People’s Daily* lectured journalism students that “the role of reporters in a country such as China was to ‘guide public opinion because the general population wasn’t educated enough to understand events.’”⁹⁸ Taken further, “censorship is embedded in the entire process of producing a news story, from the assignment and writing of it to the editing and layout.”⁹⁹ This idea then breeds a generation of journalists who never include pertinent information for the public. According to Judy Polumbaum, Chinese journalists have reportedly repressed information because they expected these stories would not be published. “I was worried that the story wouldn’t get through and I would expend a lot of effort for naught, so I didn’t go to report it,” said one journalist to Polumbaum, after he received a call that allegedly stated one student had killed another student at a nearby university.¹⁰⁰

But who can blame him? Chinese history has proven that those who speak out against the government, even if told to do so by the government itself, usually regret doing so. During Mao Zedong’s Hundred Flowers movement from 1956-1957, citizens were encouraged to share their opinions about the Communist Party, made famous in the saying “Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend.” Sadly, the journalists who *did* criticize the Party for its extreme use of propaganda were quickly “labeled rightists” and fired from their jobs.¹⁰¹ Decades later, the memories of the movement still hung heavy in the air during the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, tainting editors’ opinions at the *Xinhua* news agency. On June 4, 1989, *Xinhua* received a call from a Beijing doctor who told the agency two pertinent things about the soldiers and victims of the protests.

⁹⁷ Journalism Education in Countries with Limited Media Freedom, p. 20

⁹⁸ The Blogging Revolution, p. 187

⁹⁹ Don’t Force Us to Lie: the Struggle of Chinese Journalists in the Reform Era, p. 5

¹⁰⁰ Voices of China: the Interplay of Politics and Journalism, p. 55-56

¹⁰¹ Voices of China: the Interplay of Politics and Journalism, p. 36

“First, he had found clear evidence of amphetamines in the blood of wounded soldiers he had treated that day. The soldiers said they had been ‘inoculated’ before being ordered in to clear Tiananmen Square, where, they were told, there had been a virus outbreak. Second, he thought that the injuries he was seeing among civilian casualties had been caused by dum-dum bullets, which are banned by the Geneva Convention on weapons that cause ‘unnecessary wounding.’” Despite protest, the editors decided to not run the doctor’s reports, in addition to many other Tiananmen Square stories.¹⁰²

At the end of the day, though, it is a blend of government- and self-censorship that blends together to work effectively. This is seen through the eyes of John David, who was teaching a reporting course to journalists in China:

“Shortly after completing our course with its recommendation to be both persistent and fair in fact finding, one of the students heard he was to be posted to Zimbabwe as a correspondent for *Xinhua*. An instructor who had worked as a journalist several times in that southern African country offered to pass on tips and some press contacts to the young man, who was going overseas for the first time. He seemed doubtful when presented with the contacts list; *Xinhua*’s journalists rarely, at that time at least, made contact with their fellow correspondents from other countries. But he did not hesitate when dealing with one question: ‘What would you do,’ he was asked by his former tutor, ‘if you found evidence that Zimbabwean soldiers had carried out tribal killings?’ His reply: ‘Nothing.’ Why not? ‘Because my government is friendly with the Zimbabwean government and I would not try to do anything which might upset that.’”¹⁰³

¹⁰² Reporting the News from China, p. 46

¹⁰³ Reporting the News from China, p. 24

For other Chinese journalists, though, self-censorship is a matter of perspective. In 1991, for example, there was significant flooding throughout much of China due to heavy rain. Many journalists wrote positive articles about the government's involvement in helping its people, as seen in a statement by the chief of the *People's Daily*, "Under the leadership of the Party, China succeeded in combating the flood, showing the superiority of socialism." One journalist, however, returned home and explained that what other journalists had written was not the case. "That what not what I saw, that was not what I found to be true. So I didn't write a single word," she said, adding that "We may not be able to say what we want to say, but we can *not* say what we don't want to say."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Don't Force Us to Lie: the Struggle of Chinese Journalists in the Reform Era, p. 54

The Dissidents

“When citizens can evade government controls, they can collect and disseminate information in ways that give them political power. Domestically, shame-throwers can become powerful enough to bring down authoritarian governments, particularly if they expose large gaps between government rhetoric and reality.”

—Kristen M. Lord¹⁰⁵

Unlike countries in the West where media are oriented toward a free press, China’s media are heavily influenced by governmental control, leaving some critics to speculate about Chinese journalists’ objectivity (or lack thereof). However, some individuals, labeled as “dissidents” by the Party, refuse to adhere to party guidelines, instead choosing to follow their own set of journalistic principles—even if it means harassment, jail or death. In some cases, these dissidents are found at the classroom level. A Chinese journalism professor once described a student who included the term “massacre” in the student’s assignment. “Be careful. Don’t you realize all I have to do is underline that one word, hand it over to school authorities and your career is over?” he asked the student. The student did not heed the professor’s advice, though, as was evident when the student handed in another assignment including the term “democracy movement,” which should have been referred to as “counter-revolutionary turmoil.”¹⁰⁶ In another case, visiting journalism professor Michael J. Jordan once described what it felt like teaching Western journalistic principles to Chinese students in Hong Kong. “If democracy is in China’s future, then a driving force will surely be younger

¹⁰⁵ The Perils and Promise of Global Transparency: Why the Information Revolution May Not Lead to Security, Democracy, or Peace, p. 94

¹⁰⁶ Reporting the News from China, p. 58

Chinese who have tasted such freedoms,” he said. “I sensed that by cajoling my 22-to 26-year-old students toward what Western journalists naturally do—challenge authority, probe deeply to find out why a situation is the way it is, and enable readers to make better informed decisions—I was in my own modest way training China’s future democrats.”¹⁰⁷

Kelly Haggart argues that history shows journalists who want any real power must “work gradually and from within” newspaper organizations, but most importantly, occupy executive positions.¹⁰⁸ *People’s Daily* editor Hu Jiwei believed that “a truly socialist press owed its first loyalty to the people,”¹⁰⁹ and under his leadership, the newspaper “published some of the best investigative journalism China had ever seen,” including “an expose on the sinking of the Bohai oil rig [that] led to the resignation of the Minister of Petroleum.” Deputy Editor-in-chief Wang Ruoshui also worked for the *People’s Daily* and wrote articles criticizing Mao. Their shared belief that the paper should be for the *people*, and not the government, eventually landed them in hot water with the Party, and they, along with others who followed in their footsteps, were forced to resign.¹¹⁰ While some editors will “fight the man,” others will simply try to work within the status quo. One Chinese “business editor emphasizes that *baodao de quanli*—‘the right to report’—is more important than the right to criticize. ‘If you criticize, the government will feel more threatened and try even harder to control you. But right now freedom of reportage is more relaxed. People already know who’s bad and who’s good,’” he said.¹¹¹

Perhaps that’s why some journalists began practicing *baogao wenxue*, or “literary reportage.” “Literary reportage,”—where the article is fictional but is based on a factual, true

¹⁰⁷ Moving Across the Border: Teaching Journalism in Hong Kong, p. 79

¹⁰⁸ Reporting the News from China, p. 52

¹⁰⁹ Voices of China: the Interplay of Politics and Journalism, p. 41

¹¹⁰ Don’t Force Us to Lie: the Struggle of Chinese Journalists in the Reform Era, p. 2-3

¹¹¹ Don’t Force Us to Lie: the Struggle of Chinese Journalists in the Reform Era, p. 68

story—was rebuffed by many, but one *Hainan Reportage* journalist justified why it could be useful: “Many officials just don’t have the time to read long articles. Sometimes opinions are buried deep inside long articles and officials don’t discover them.”¹¹² Other individuals have chosen to work outside the government media network, in publications like the *South China Morning Post* or *Caijing Magazine*. The coverage of the 2007 slavery scandal in Shangxi, which involved the forced labor of men and children, is a prime example of the auspicious opportunities that await those journalists willing to live up their watchdog ideals.¹¹³ Still other journalists took matters into their hands, like Li Zhengsheng, a photographer during Mao’s reign. Li said he wanted to “show the world what really happened during the Cultural Revolution—how it was a movement in which people were turned against other people in order to survive; how all were victims; those beaten and killed as well as those inflicted needless suffering on others.” Jonathan Spence, a Yale University history professor, went even further when he explained the importance of Li’s photos: “As an official photographer for a state-controlled newspaper, Li was to some extent doing no more than obeying orders in framing his photos; but as a young man with an acute eye, he was achieving something far more complex: he was tracking human tragedies and personal foibles with a precision that was to create an enduring legacy, not only for his contemporaries but for the generations of his countrymen then unborn. And as Westerners confront the multiplicity of his images, they too can come to understand something of the agonizing paradoxes that lay at the centre of this protracted human disaster.”¹¹⁴

For those journalists who were afraid to venture out on their own, they found safety within their newspaper organizations, banding together and ultimately holding a more

¹¹² Don't Force Us to Lie: the Struggle of Chinese Journalists in the Reform Era, p. 9-10

¹¹³ Reporting the News in China: Firsthand Accounts and Current Trends, p. 29

¹¹⁴ Red-color News Soldier, p. 61-62

forceful presence in the eyes of the government. During the Tiananmen Square protests, about three-fifths of *People's Daily* 1600 employees and approximately 100 *China Daily* staff members marched alongside the students. Meanwhile, other journalists chose to stay behind and write about the protests, including those with *China Women's News* and *Science and Technology Daily*. But like Hu Jiwei in the early 1980s, those who participated in the Tiananmen protests paid a price. "The editorial leadership of the *People's Daily* was replaced and virtually a whole tier of middle level editors demoted; all news units were ordered to review and reevaluate what they had printed or broadcasted during the student movement; newspapers were subjected to an inspection and re-registration process; several newspapers were forced to shut down; and numerous editors and reporters were arrested."¹¹⁵ Others were placed under house arrest or forced to work from the desks.¹¹⁶ According to one senior Chinese journalist following the Tiananmen Square massacre, "To me, one great consolation is that never before in Chinese history have the people felt such an acute need for a free press. Never before has it become so painfully clear that a free press is essential if they are to enjoy a reasonable measure of democracy."¹¹⁷

Sometimes, though, it's about finding a balance between what the government would and would not find appropriate to publish. *World Economic Herald* journalist Qin Benli described the balance as "hitting line balls"—"if a ping pong ball lands on the white line, it's in—[but] just barely." But just because the *Herald* skirted by with regard to censorship did not mean the editors at the paper were not immune from government surveillance. "Every time the *Herald* published an article that pushed the line a little bit, we would have to write self-criticisms. We wrote them so often that they were like receipts for introducing new

¹¹⁵ *Voices of China: the Interplay of Politics and Journalism*, p. 38

¹¹⁶ *Reporting the News from China*, p. 48

¹¹⁷ *Reporting the News from China*, p. 58

ideas,” the *Herald’s* Beijing Bureau Chief once said.¹¹⁸ Journalist Luo Changping agreed, as he stated, “There are two skills a Chinese journalist needs to know. One is the basics of journalism. The other is how to write an apology letter.”¹¹⁹

With the invention of new technology, there are others still who argue that, the power no longer lies in the positions of powers or the newspapers themselves; nowadays, it also lies with the individual, and the individual’s ability to manipulate technology effectively. In 2007, Vice Minister for the Information Office of the State Council of China Wang Guoqing told the *London Times* that “the Internet and mobile phones had made China’s traditional rules on secrecy redundant.” “It has been repeatedly proved that information blocking is like walking into a dead end,’ he said. Governments before the Internet believed they could block 90 percent of negative news, he argued, but the Internet age proved that managing and controlling information, rather than covering it up, was the only way forward.”¹²⁰ Still, some journalists have decided to fight against this controlling nature. Danwei.org, a Hong Kong-based website known for pushing the envelope regarding sensitive issues, has been blocked on many Chinese computers.¹²¹ Well-known

citizen journalist Zhou Shuguang, known to the public as “Zola,” also gained a loyal following in 2007 after publishing photos, videos, articles, and investigatory interviews on his blog about a Chinese couple in Chongqing who were being



forced out of their home by the government to develop the land.¹²²

The “Nail House” in Chongqing*

*Nail House in Chongqing Demolished

¹¹⁸ Don't Force Us to Lie: the Struggle of Chinese Journalists in the Reform Era, p. 15-17

¹¹⁹ Called Up: How China Censors Its Burgeoning Media, p. 271

¹²⁰ The Blogging Revolution, p. 183

¹²¹ The Blogging Revolution, p. 186

¹²² Web Journalism a New Form of Citizenship?, p. 279

The house, also referred to as the “nail house,” was labeled as such because it “seem[ed] to be nailed to the ground by its owners’ stubbornness.” The “nail houses” owners were one of only 280 homeowners who refused to leave,¹²³ and from a governmental point of view, Zola’s blog began to draw too much attention. After Zola’s website fell victim to censorship and as he became an alleged victim of physical assault, he eventually stopped writing and told his followers that “the task of saving yourselves is in your own hands now.”¹²⁴ Ironically, “government rhetoric demands a clean government and curbing corruption. Even if this is, to a large extent, lip service, it makes up for gaps and gray areas that journalists can use as ‘opportunities for free interpretation.’”¹²⁵ However, in the case of Shi Tao or Wei Wenhua (a citizen journalist who was beaten to death by authorities for taking pictures with his mobile phone¹²⁶ of an aggressive skirmish between citizens and local government officials),¹²⁷ it’s clear these “opportunities” can still land the dissidents in hot water. For some though, there is safety in numbers.

Xiamen, a coastal city in southeast China, banded together in 2007 after its citizens learned that a lethal chemical plant was going to be built in their beloved town. Called “the cell phone campaign,” their efforts began after the government censored papers and blogs publishing information about the plant. Xiamen citizens then took to their cell phones and passed around messages concerning the potential lethality of the plant. “Once this extremely poisonous chemical is produced, it means an atomic bomb will have been placed in Xiamen,” said one text message from that time period that was forwarded more than 1 million times, adding that, “The people of Xiamen will have to live with leukemia and deformed babies.

¹²³ The Coolest Nail House in History

¹²⁴ Web Journalism a New Form of Citizenship?, p. 280

¹²⁵ Journalism Education in Countries with Limited Media Freedom, p. 5

¹²⁶ Web Journalism a New Form of Citizenship?, p. 280

¹²⁷ Chinese Man Killed After Filming Protest

We want our lives and health!” In addition, citizens referred to their dissent as “harmonious collective walking” or “coordinated shopping,” in the actual text messages, as an effort to slip past censorship authorities.¹²⁸ Similarly, bloggers have begun to use terms like “river crab” or “I’ve been harmonized,” when they want their readers to know their websites have been subjected to censorship, but not the government to know.¹²⁹

In addition to native dissidents, there are also foreign organizations that have worked toward a freer press in China. The *Voice of America (VOA)*, a radio broadcast network known for its honest, consistent reporting, became a staple of many Chinese homes during the Tiananmen Square massacre and the Hainan Island incident (where a U.S. airplane and a Chinese airplane collided in the air). While some Chinese followers of VOA were unhappy with the Hainan coverage (“I was a VOA listener but not anymore. Your report [on the collision] is very biased and I feel regret and angry. I have to concede that the Chinese Government Party is corrupted, but you Americans are by no means decent either, especially the U.S. government.”), others felt the reporting was fair and balanced (“I am glad that the VOA is objective and comprehensive in reporting the air collision accident... You do not blame China for everything. I hope you will continue with your objective and fair reports. We students in Guangzhou are indignant about this, and the anti-American sentiment is on the rise”).¹³⁰ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also objected to media censorship, and include the renowned Human Rights Watch, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and Reporters Without Borders. In addition to challenging governments, these

¹²⁸ Web Journalism a New Form of Citizenship?, p. 281

¹²⁹ The Blogging Revolution, p. 200

¹³⁰ News and Views Got Inside China During the Airplane Crisis, p. 88-89

NGOs also post information on the Internet that others can access and that can help Chinese natives with tactics on how to battle their governments.¹³¹

¹³¹ The Perils and Promise of Global Transparency: Why the Information Revolution May Not Lead to Security, Democracy, or Peace, p. 96

Chapter 2

The Sichuan Earthquake: May 12, 2008

The Facts

“I have never experienced anything like this before. Some of the places we went to, every step we took, we were possibly stepping on a dead body.”

—Zhang Qian, a Chinese anchorwoman¹³²

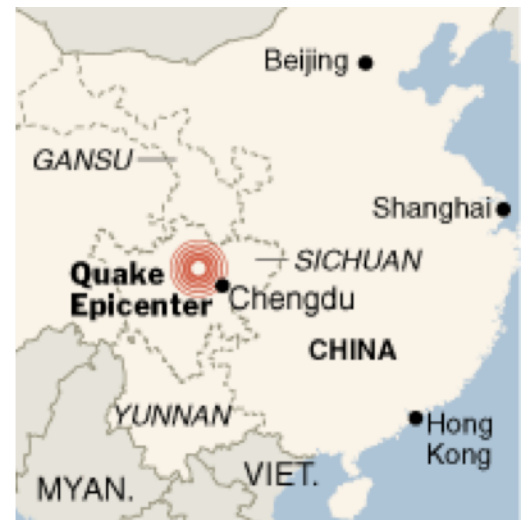
In the afternoon of May 12, 2008, at approximately 2:28 p.m., an earthquake struck the Sichuan province of China, measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale. The China Seismological Bureau, a governmental organization in charge of studying earthquakes, originally measured the quake at 7.6 on the Richter scale, then jumped the measure to 7.8, and finally to 8.0. According to a Chinese

government website, the reason for the Richter

scale discrepancy was because “specialists carried out ‘real-time and detailed measurements of the quake according to international practices.’”¹³³ Second only to the 8.3 magnitude

Tangshan earthquake of 1976 (which Chinese authorities reportedly said killed 240,000),¹³⁴

the Sichuan quake reportedly killed more than 70,000 people, and “another 17,921 are listed



Sichuan Earthquake Epicenter*

*http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/news/science/topics/earthquakes/sichuan_province_china/index.html

¹³² Quake Broadcasts Opened a Window; Though China Saw New Freedoms in Its TV Coverage, Officials Loosening of Control May Be Fleeting

¹³³ Magnitude of SW China Earthquake Revised to 8.0

¹³⁴ On This Day in 1976: Chinese Earthquake Kills Hundreds of Thousands

as missing but are presumed to be dead. According to the official media, 7,000 classrooms and dormitory rooms collapsed during the quake,” leading to the deaths of 5,335 children.¹³⁵ As the *Los Angeles Times* reported almost a month after the earthquake, “In the first weeks after the quake, the main narrative was the heroic efforts of rescue workers, the plight of trapped victims and the shock to a nation. The positive story line helped unify the people and helped humanize China’s image abroad when it was struggling to recover from criticisms of its crackdown in Tibet and surrounding regions.”¹³⁶ There has been some speculation surrounding the earthquake, however; for example, the true numbers of child lives lost, with regard to “previous estimates[,] placed the number of students who died in the collapse of school buildings...as high as 10,000.”¹³⁷

¹³⁵ China Reports Student Toll for Quake

¹³⁶ China Tightens Media Limits Loosened in Quake

¹³⁷ China Releases Official Toll of Students in Sichuan Quake

The Coverage

“Never before have we shown a person go from living to death on live Chinese television.”

—Zhang Kaipei, deputy Director of Sichuan Television’s Channel 4.¹³⁸

The 2008 Sichuan earthquake was, in many people’s eyes, a step in the direction of greater press freedom within China. It was the first time in recent history that journalists—both domestic and foreign—disregarded governmental bans prohibiting them from flocking to the epicenter to report on the situation.¹³⁹ What’s even more surprising is the fact that the government did little (if anything) to stop the journalists once they arrived. Reasons for the relaxed governmental rules differ depending on the person asked, but Alexa Harney, a *Financial Times* correspondent in southern China, explained her point of view to *National Public Radio (NPR)* a few days after the earthquake. “One of the bloggers I spoke to said that he felt that this was a natural disaster where different rules applied,” she said, adding that “clearly, it’s in the government[‘s] interest to show the scale of disaster and to show just how hard it’s working to rescue the survivors.”¹⁴⁰ Another belief is that China’s officials simply had their hands full trying to restore order and rescue trapped citizens,¹⁴¹ but regardless of whether that was the case, many journalists decided to take advantage of the relaxed media measures.

Perhaps most intriguing about this devastating natural disaster was the citizen journalist's role in it, because as Joyce Y.M. Nip says, “It seems fair to say that the value of

¹³⁸ *The Blogging Revolution*, p. 175

¹³⁹ *Reporting the News in China: Firsthand Accounts and Current Trends*, p. 11

¹⁴⁰ *Quake Coverage: Is China's Grip on Media Looser*

¹⁴¹ *China: Government and Party Mobilize over Quake*

citizen journalism is the greatest when and where the professional media fail.”¹⁴² In the case of the Sichuan earthquake, many Chinese and foreign reporters were physically unable to reach the epicenter of the earthquake due to the destruction of roads; citizen journalists were therefore “the first to report the earthquake...providing eyewitness reports and expressions of personal emotion—grief, anger and sympathy.”¹⁴³ Because of this, Chinese blog websites reached out to the users and encouraged them to post first-hand accounts. “By [5 p.m.] on May 13, 170 blogger videos had been collected. By [4:40 p.m.] on May 31, the number had grown to 1,070. Together they had been watched 6,588,986 times. Many were watched more than 100,000 times each. Text blogs written by authors based in the affected Sichuan province were also collected on one page, which showed more than 485,000 by May 28, 2008.”¹⁴⁴ One Chinese blogger, known as “Little Orchid” online, submitted content based on what he had learned from his family: “In town: Massive collapse of buildings in Xinjian Primary School, the Chinese medical hospital, the row of old houses in the lower section of Jianshe Road, the whole building of the Internet café on the upper section of Xujia Road, [and] half of the street on Kuiguang Road. The School of Light Industries also has some collapsed buildings. It had been raining. Most people did not sleep at home, and were gathering in the streets.”¹⁴⁵ It is important to note, however, that “in terms of accessing official information, citizen journalists could not match professionals, [as] such information would be decisive in showing a comprehensive view of the disaster, which required the total number of casualties and damages, the progress of rescues, the condition of

¹⁴² Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives, p. 102

¹⁴³ Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives, p. 9

¹⁴⁴ Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives, p. 97

¹⁴⁵ Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives, p. 99

communication and electricity facilities, the supply of drinking water, the safety of nuclear and chemical plants, and so on.”¹⁴⁶

From a more conventional news organization perspective, the *Chicago Tribune* reported the Party television stations were portraying the Sichuan region as serene: “Chinese state television showed footage of office workers with their laptops at an outdoor café, while others lounged around the flower beds, appearing to enjoy a rare break on a spring day.” But this false sense of security was clearly not the case, as seen in the same *Tribune* article published on May 13, 2008, which reported that chemical plants had collapsed, office buildings and schools had been destroyed, people were trapped under buildings with limbs poking out from beneath rubble, and that the “quake was so powerful...it was felt thousands of miles away, from Beijing to Bangkok.”¹⁴⁷ An excerpt from the *Los Angeles Times* also shared a similar sentiment of devastation in the May 23, 2008, issue:

“From the moment the young man was discovered pinned under a mountain of concrete to the instant he died, TV reporter Zhang Qian fed live footage to viewers.

Zhang witnessed the immobile man, whose face was pressed to the ground, pledge to live on for his loved ones. She watched as he cheered for the rescuers and, about five hours later, as he took his last breath.”

The *Los Angeles Times* went on to explain the significance of this broadcast: “Such media access might not be unusual in a country with free press, but in communist China, where the state has a strong hand in controlling what people see and read, this view of life and death during an epic national disaster is practically unheard of.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives, p. 100

¹⁴⁷ Quake Ravages China

¹⁴⁸ Quake Broadcasts Opened a Window; Though China Saw New Freedoms in Its TV Coverage, Officials Loosening of Control May Be Fleeting

As the days passed and both citizen and conventional news organizations continued to report on the situation, it became clear to the government that the news was no longer working in its favor. On May 15, The Oxford Analytica Daily Brief Service published an article about China's freer press: "[China] will allow this openness to continue only as long as the public perception is that the government is not to blame for the severity of the earthquake's consequences, and that officials are doing all they can to deal with the problem."¹⁴⁹ Ironically, this brief came only a week and a half before China clamped down on the media as more and more articles started to swirl about two main problems that were causing some citizens to be uneasy.

The first problem pertained to whether the government knew the earthquake was coming, and if the Party had hid the quake from the country. One blogger, "Airconditioner Virus" commented, "If earthquakes cannot be forecast, what is the point of spending so much money on the Seismological Bureau?"¹⁵⁰ This sentiment was most likely shared by many citizens, as another blogger posted similar content: "I do not believe the country's seismological department really was not able to forecast the earthquake. Yes, even the most advanced countries cannot forecast earthquakes precisely. But the focus of this sentence should not be on the 'cannot,' but rather on 'precisely.' I do not expect them to forecast precisely as to what minute, which hour, and on which date... [H]ow could such a massive earthquake not give any sign beforehand?"¹⁵¹ There is evidence to suggest that there were signs regarding the Sichuan earthquake, however. For example, "well-known seismologists[,] such as geophysicist Geng Qingguo[,] had in late April sent emergency notes to the National

¹⁴⁹ China: Government and Party Mobilize over Quake

¹⁵⁰ Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives, p. 100

¹⁵¹ Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives, p. 101

Earthquake Bureau warning of impending killer quakes in the Sichuan region.”¹⁵² Regardless of fact or fiction, though, Premier Wen Jiabao was quoted in the *Chicago Tribune* that “the disaster was more serious than predicted [and that] the rescue sites [were] very complex.”¹⁵³

The second problem concerned the poor construction of schools that eventually led them to collapse during the earthquake, killing thousands of children. A reporter for the *New Statesman* described the aptly named “tofu schools,” while visiting one of the schools: “The bricks were so soft they crumbled in my hand. The steel rebar was thin. Concrete locks were almost hollow. This was what the people here call a ‘tofu dregs building’ - as weak as old bean curd.”¹⁵⁴ By the day after the earthquake hit, the “tofu schools” were already receiving coverage. On May 13, 2008, The UK-based *Financial Times* reported that “at least eight schools were reported to have collapsed, burying hundreds of children under rubble,”¹⁵⁵ but that number continued to grow exponentially. By the end of the month, parents were protesting around the quake-affected areas, calling upon national and local officials to investigate the construction of the schools. Particular attention was paid to “areas where schools were the only structure to fail catastrophically,”¹⁵⁶ such as in Dujiangyan, where “previous regulations allowed a budget of \$350 per square meter to build government offices, but only \$64 per meter for schools.”¹⁵⁷ It was therefore a common-held belief that contractors had slipped money into the pockets of local officials, allowing them to build the schools more cheaply and saving everyone money in the long run. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, hundreds of parents protested in Hanwang (a town north of Chengdu that was devastatingly destroyed during the quake) after losing their children in the earthquake due to

¹⁵² China's Reforms Buried Under Rubble, p. 31

¹⁵³ Quake Ravages China

¹⁵⁴ Anger of the Earthquake Parents

¹⁵⁵ Children Buried in Schools as Tolls Near 10,000

¹⁵⁶ Beijing Orders Media to Rein in Quake Coverage

¹⁵⁷ Mobilizing Motherhood (and Fatherhood): Civic Empowerment in the Quake Zones of China

shoddy school buildings, demanding that the person in charge of school construction be delivered to them. In response, governmental officials promised the people responsible would be held accountable.¹⁵⁸ *The Wall Street Journal* also reported that, according to *The Associated Press*, “police...hailed away more than 100 parents of children killed in a school during the quake who were protesting in front of a courthouse.”¹⁵⁹ In Deyang, a town northeast of Chengdu, Sichuan province’s capital, another group of 30 parents demanded that local officials be held accountable, according to the London-based *New Statesman*. “The parents want[ed] to confront retired party officials who, in 1992, allowed an unlicensed builder to construct classrooms which collapsed in less than a minute, leaving no chance for escape,” especially since “Other, older buildings withstood the quake.”¹⁶⁰ This sentiment was felt in other areas as well, as according to the *New Statesman*, “outside Jiandi Middle School...one banner read “a natural disaster is irreversible, but a man-made disaster is inexcusable.”¹⁶¹

Following dozens more protests around the affected area, the Chinese government systematically began to tighten its press control. The *Financial Times* explained it was because the “coverage of the school collapses, claims of shoddy construction and parent protests ha[d] begun to detract from favorable views of the government response,” as opposed to initial reports from the quake zone where there “ha[d] been praise for the official rescue effort, positively received at home and abroad, and the selfless service of model ‘frontline’ party cadres, soldiers, relief workers and civilian volunteers.”¹⁶² *The Wall Street Journal* proposed that “the anger appear[ed] to be fueled, in part, by the disclosure that

¹⁵⁸ In China, Push for Answers Yields New Openness; Emboldened Public May Be One Legacy of Earthquake

¹⁵⁹ Beijing Limits Protests, Media Access in Quake Zone; Rally on Deaths of Children Halted; a 'Matter of Time'

¹⁶⁰ Anger of the Earthquake Parents

¹⁶¹ Anger of the Earthquake Parents

¹⁶² Beijing Orders Media to Rein in Quake Coverage

family-planning officials were offering to give annual sums of about \$144 per parent as partial compensation for their loss, which many felt was too low.”¹⁶³ The *Financial Times* also reported that “a parent in Dujiangyan said that officials had said ‘not to make trouble’ and to quietly accept cash compensation of Rmb 12,000 (\$1,836 as of April 2011) per child with the promise of a further Rmb 20,000 (\$3,061 as of April 2011) to come later.”¹⁶⁴ It’s no wonder the parents were upset, because what government in their right mind can put a price on the loss of a child?

Regardless of reasoning, it became clear that the Chinese authorities were beginning to interfere with the media. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, during the week of June 18, 2008, “police forbade a *Wall Street Journal* reporter from entering neighborhoods around four collapsed schools, and directed him to leave three such towns, including Xianger.”¹⁶⁵ According to a *Financial Times* article on July 2, 2008, “police...harassed and followed journalists trying to interview parents in the town of Mianzhu who openly discussed their grievances at first but later asked to be left alone after meetings with local government officials.”¹⁶⁶ In another example of a more stringent censorship, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Huang Qi, a dissident who criticized the tofu schools, had been “charged with possession of state secrets,” which, as the article aptly suggests, is “a vague and often arbitrary accusation against people who veer from the party line.”¹⁶⁷ Some have questioned the authenticity of such charges however, like when one of Huang Qi’s supporters said “‘How can discussions with grieving parents be described as state secrets?’¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Beijing Limits Protests, Media Access in Quake Zone; Rally on Deaths of Children Halted; a 'Matter of Time'

¹⁶⁴ China Tries to Muzzle Quake Victim Parents

¹⁶⁵ China Stifles Parents Complaints About Collapsed Schools; Limits on Travel, Media Come Amid Promise of Answers.

¹⁶⁶ China Tries to Muzzle Quake Victim Parents

¹⁶⁷ Critic of Flimsy China Schools Reportedly Held; Zeng Hongling Wrote Online Essays After the Sichuan Earthquake.

Beijing Appears to Be Stepping Up on a Media Crackdown

¹⁶⁸ China Tries to Muzzle Quake Victim Parents

Chapter 3

Personal Experiences

*“Interns should expect to write entertaining community articles, “fluff” stories if you will, and **not** sensitive stories or political pieces.”*

—Becky Perlow’s Final Critique of Internship at China Daily Hong Kong

In the spring of 2008, I journeyed from my sheltered college town in State College, Pa., home of The Pennsylvania State University, and traveled east to Hong Kong for a semester at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. I admit that I was not exposed to significant censorship in the media whilst in Hong Kong, a special administrative region that arguably balances a freer press than what Mainland China sees. However, while visiting Beijing with my parents in March 2008, I experienced my first bout of true Chinese censorship. While staying in our hotel in Beijing, my mother and I were watching the news when the anchor began to discuss the recent Tibet riots. In the time it took you to snap your fingers, the screen had gone black and the sound had been silenced. “What was that?” my mother and I asked each other in unison. After spending another two weeks traveling through China, the “blackout” became normal, and we began to understand that it was simply the Chinese government censoring sensitive topics in the media.

Two years later, in the summer of 2010, I traveled back to Hong Kong to intern with the *China Daily Hong Kong*, another bureau of the Mainland paper. The following is an excerpt from an internship critique I wrote, a component that was necessary for completion of my internship that summer:

*I met an acquaintance who had worked at China Daily's Beijing office and hated his experience there. He explained he wanted to write about human rights and the issues surrounding Tibet, but was ultimately not allowed to do so. But what kind of person (especially as an intern) walks into a government-controlled media organization and dictates what he thinks the paper should be publishing? Interns should expect to write entertaining community articles, "fluff" stories if you will, and **not** sensitive stories or political pieces.*

What's interesting about *China Daily Hong Kong* is that it must find a balance between following Party guidelines, while still maintaining a free press for the Hong Kong residents (both local and foreign) who demand it. Therefore, I was surprised when one of my articles that I *never* would have expected to be published, was published. The article was about foreign domestic workers and the abuse they face. An excerpt from the article follows:

Hong Kong is home to hundreds of thousands of foreign domestic helpers. Many have their rights violated almost daily. According to a survey by Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor, more than 25 percent of domestic helpers have experienced violations of their contracts by their employers or their placement agencies. Often the violations include salary payments below the minimum of HK\$3,580 per month, compelling helpers to work during rest days and public holidays, failing to provide suitable accommodation, taking the passport or identity card of the helper, and withholding food. At least 25 percent say they have been verbally or physically abused, including a significant amount of sexual abuse.¹⁶⁹

While at the newspaper, I also had the opportunity to casually speak with an editor at the newspaper and discuss the idea of censorship in the Chinese media. Though I shamefully did not have a notepad or a voice recorder with me (again, it was a casual, impromptu discussion), I do remember him distinctly saying that he did not feel there was censorship in

¹⁶⁹ Strangers in a Strange Land

the media. Concerned, I quickly emailed my thesis adviser, Dr. Zhong Bu. An excerpt follows:

*“I just spoke with Zhou Li about interviewing him regarding censorship of the Chinese media (in general) and the Sichuan earthquake (in specific). Though we only talked for a few minutes, he said he didn't think there was too much information on the subject. I also spoke with his assistant, Shirley, who was covering the earthquake when it happened. She said she was never censored as to what she could write. It concerns me...what if there wasn't censorship of the media during the earthquake? I have found information and articles that have said there **was** censorship, so why would they say otherwise?”¹⁷⁰*

Dr. Zhong Bu's response comforted me slightly:

“My quick answer is including what Zhou and Shirley said in your thesis. With different training or working in different media systems, journalists may view censorship differently. It is interesting to see who feel they were censored. In fact some Chinese journalists may not want to openly discuss this as it could be an official taboo, thus hurting their careers... In sum, a comparison of different views on this may be more interesting.”¹⁷¹

Taking Dr. Zhong's advice, I headed north to Beijing in August of 2010 and conducted three interviews with members of the Chinese press: “John Smith”, an editorial consultant for a Beijing magazine (a state-owned news publication); Steven Jiang, a producer at *CNN* in China (non-governmental news organization); and Ken McManus, a subeditor for the *South China Morning Post* (a Hong-Kong based, non-governmental newspaper).

For this study, “John Smith” was granted his anonymity one week prior to this thesis being published. I had contacted “Smith” via email for a copy of his CV/Resume. He

¹⁷⁰ Personal Correspondence from Becky Perlow to Bu Zhong, August 2, 5:44 a.m.

¹⁷¹ Personal Correspondence from Bu Zhong to Becky Perlow, August 2, 6:35 a.m.

responded quickly, however, did not include his resume. Instead, he quickly discussed recent events in China that were affecting both dissidents and journalists (at the point this thesis will be published, the 2011 Middle East protests are taking place). Concerned that some of his words might be “taken out of context,” and that both his physical safety as a foreigner and his future job opportunities might be at stake, he asked me to remove his name from my thesis entirely. Included in his email was the following:

“I know this is completely hypocritical of me -- I am, after all, asking you to censor something in your paper -- but I wouldn't make this request if I didn't think it necessary since I don't want to have "visa troubles" when applying next year. Times here seem to have changed quite a bit since we talked last, but I do plan on staying a bit longer.”

For this reason, I have decided to grant him anonymity and call him “John Smith” throughout this thesis. Though general, “Smith’s” biography that follows is accurate, and his interview remains in its original. It is important to note however, that “Smith” works for an official Chinese publication, and in addition to him asking me to remove his name from said thesis, “Smith’s” answers in the interview are arguably more guarded than Jiang or McManus (who work for foreign publications) for obvious reasons.

Brief Work Biographies

- “John Smith” graduated with a degree in journalism from the Pennsylvania State University, where he gained experience at The Daily Collegian (a independently published newspaper by Pennsylvania State University students). Following graduation, “Smith” interned at an official Chinese newspaper in Beijing, preparing him for his current role as editorial consultant at a Beijing magazine, which he has held for almost two years.
- Steven Jiang graduated from Northwestern University in 1999 with cum laude status and dual degrees in journalism and international studies. Jiang went on to work as a field producer for CNN with special coverage of China and North Korea, from 1999-2004. Following that, he worked as a Hong Kong correspondent for Channel NewsAsia for two years, and, in January 2007, became a freelance journalist until 2009. In August of 2009, Jiang became a producer at CBS news, where he packages stories for China and Southeast Asian countries until August 2010. Jiang is currently a producer for CNN in China. ¹⁷²
- Ken McManus is an American journalist with 35 years of newspaper experience. His U.S.-based experience includes *Newsday*, *The Orlando Sentinel* and the now-defunct *Rocky Mountain News*, mostly in sports. Starting in 1993 he began work as a night city editor with *The Paducah Sun* in Kentucky, where he stayed for 12 years. While there, he held two one-year contracts with *China Daily* -- one in Beijing and the other

¹⁷² <http://www.linkedin.com/in/sjreporter>

in Hong Kong. In 2005, he traveled back to work with *China* as a senior editor and writing coach in the National Department. In April 2007, McManus transferred to Hong Kong to join the *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, a newspaper known for its fair and balanced reporting, as a copy editor. He is currently a content editor in the *SCMP's* China Department. He moved back to Beijing in October 2008 for the *SCMP* and stayed for two and a half years before transferring back to Hong Kong in April 2011.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Personal Correspondence from Ken McManus to Becky Perlow, April 8, 2011; CV/Resume of Ken McManus

The Interviews

As journalists in China, “Smith”, Jiang and McManus must deal with the issue of censorship in very different ways. “Smith”, who works for an official Chinese magazine, says his experience with government censorship and propaganda is not quite so black and white:

(“Smith”) *“The person above me is the one who gets [the] ‘Maybe we shouldn’t do this, maybe we shouldn’t do that.’ And then it gets passed down. At [my magazine], I’d say we are largely kept in the dark, maybe for our safety or something like that... There’s [also] this whole concept of losing face in China, [and] how anything gets don’t in this country, because of that cultural factor, is beyond me.*

As far as international reporting is, I just don’t know. I’ve just never tried to do it, whereas the Chinese staff, it’s basically, they know what’d going to get them in trouble, so its maybe censorship by omission, you know? It’s not that they change anything; it’s just [that] they work around it.

“At the beginning of each [magazine] issue, we have a section that’s sort of like ‘Here’s somebody who did something really great, here’s somebody who also did something that’s kind of cool but not as good as the first guy, and here’s somebody who got executed for doing something really bad.’ And I think that’s a way of making an example. I’m not totally sure, that’s just a trend that I’ve sort of noticed every now and then. [The person was executed] for corruption. [The government] ha[s] taken a very solid stance against corrupt officials stealing money and screwing over the little people to keep everybody happy, because if they didn’t do anything, who knows what could happen.”

Jiang and McManus, who work for news organizations outside of direct governmental censorship, have experienced China's control differently:

(Jiang) *“There are different levels of censorship depending on the sensitivity of the topics or the government's certain policy on things...”*

“[The Chinese government] still had very strict rules on what kinds of stories they would want people to cover, but their censorship is mainly placed on domestic media. For foreign news crews or for foreign news bureaus, the way they interfere with you is by blocking access, but not giving you permission to interview people, or by just basically interfering with your news gathering in the field with cops, security forces, blocking you from getting somewhere, trying to confiscate your materials, or detain you for questioning...”

“When I was here with CNN, I got detained quite a few times. Probably not on a... I wouldn't say a monthly basis, but once a month wouldn't surprise me if I remember correctly. But people who had been [working] here longer told me even back then it was already an improvement from their weekly or daily detention.”

(McManus) *“[There's a] difference between domestic media and foreign media. In the case of foreign media, they can harass...but they can't really do anything....”*

“My boss...was in the process of applying for a visa for me to come [to Beijing in March 2008]...and this is where the retaliation comes in. Although the central government, the Hong Kong/Macau affairs officer, which reads us every day, does not have any say in what we write, there are occasionally [times] when you have to file for a visa for somebody to come from Hong Kong. THEY REMEMBER THIS. And at that time, we had just had the riots in Tibet. They didn't like the way we covered it...[and] I didn't actually get the visa until after the Olympics were over...But that tells you something about how they operate.”

Though the three journalists have not all shared similar experiences in censorship, they all feel that censorship itself has fundamentally changed the way the Chinese people view the media.

(“Smith”) *“I think essentially, it does come down to [the fact that the Chinese people] know how very little they play into politics. Their opinion. Their voice. And after you have that mentality for 50, 60 years, it’s sort of like, ‘What’s the point?’*

“And I mean, a lot of people that I talk to today just don’t believe anything that they read in publications, or they assume it’s the exact opposite, especially like the Chinese ones. A lot of me foreign friends read China Daily and are like, ‘Oh, I can’t believe that propaganda,’ and I’ll say, ‘Well, which one?’ because it IS just blatant propaganda...

“I don’t think that blatant propaganda is good for any country, but it certainly helps them get things done.”

(Jiang) *“During the years of Chairman Mao, you know people learned how to read ‘between the lines. You know, it’s like the joke...[about] the People’s Daily [that] the only thing accurate was the date. Not even the weather forecast was right. But people learned how to read between the lines...they could sort of tell political maneuvering in terms of the order of the leaders names appearing in the article, or the absence of a leader and the visit. But now of course with the Internet, they don’t have to do that anymore. They can actually ‘Google it’ or use a proxy software to find out what other people are talking about [or] the topic that they want to find out, even though the Chinese media may not be reporting on it or the Chinese media is reporting on it in a very much government-controlled way.”*

(McManus) *“I’m very much of the opinion that journalism, or journalists and news coverage in China, would be much different if there were no restrictions. You might have that revolution if people knew everything that journalists knew and would like to tell, because the journalists themselves know this stuff. They’re not stupid. But they also know that the restrictions exist as a matter of image and a matter of self-preservation in the case of the party. Because rule No. 1 of the party is ‘Maintain power at all costs.’ There is no rule No. 2.”*

In addition, they have all experienced how the invention of technology—with specific attention paid to the Internet, blogs and the citizen journalist—has shaped China’s new media. “Smith” himself has a blog, but makes it clear that he does not cover sensitive issues.

(“Smith”) *“I do [have a blog]. It’s very non-political. I have a disclaimer on there and everything. It’s basically: ‘Dear Diary, I did this today. Here’s some pictures.’ [It’s] to keep people back home and my parents satisfied that I’m not in prison or something.”*

(Jiang) *“The government openly admits they censor websites. You know, for the benefit of the population, the children, and whatnot...”*

“[But] I think a lot of people are actually very much aware of what’s going on, not only around China but also around the world...Thanks to the Internet largely, that really has opened a whole new window—a whole new world—to a lot of people, because for the first time ever, you don’t have to read the official newspaper, or state-run newspaper, or watch state-run television...”

“I think [reporters] have [also] become bolder in a way in terms of some of the information they have got that may or may not be able to cover. And so a lot of them would

actually tweet information or tips or sources that they have received but somehow they cannot report themselves because of censorship or they want other people to report on these stories because they think it's worthwhile...

“They are more willing to push the envelope because sometimes if they cannot report or publish what they have found, they will tweet it, they will micro-blog it, they will blog it. Micro-blogging is basically a generic tweet because people don't use Twitter here (it's blocked) so they use the Chinese versions of Twitter.”

(McManus) *“China has become sort of a democracy through the Internet. Everything you find out, until the government finds it and deletes it. People find out about news, people find out about what really happened, people express their opinion on the Internet. And when you have 420 million Internet users, they're a force. They are a force. And that's how the public manages to exert a certain amount of pressure...*

“I'm not a big fan of civilian journalism simply because you have a gullible public that will believe anything. And part of it has to do with the fact that we as professional journalists do a certain amount of screening, as to what we believe the public needs to know.

As the Olympics drew closer, Chinese media organizations began to see looser guidelines put forth by the Party, in part because of promises by the government to the IOC. Some of the journalists, however, still faced harassment or detainment, even after the Olympics.

(“Smith”) *“I think the Olympics definitely had a lot to do with China being a lot more opened now. I think the door is just going to continue to SLOWLY be opened over time.*

Friends have told me we're allowed to cover things today that we weren't allowed to a year ago."

(Jiang) *"When you go to a more remote area, the local officials tend to be more—or at least they claim to be—more oblivious of the rules, governing newsgathering by foreign reporters. So they just always make up things claiming 'You have to have permission, otherwise you have to get out of there.' Or they sort of act like local emperors...they would deploy thugs to beat you up or things like that..."*

"The more remote a place is, the less influence the central government has on that place, so that place is basically its own sort of chiefdom, or a little empire. So whoever is in charge of that location could be really quite free to do whatever he wants, including dealing with reporters and media. It happens in terms of sort of physical assault or harassment. [It happens] a lot more in the interim or in places that are more inaccessible, more remote, more backward, if you will. "

(McManus) *"I think after the Olympics, it went back to the way it was before, basically. I think the media openness that existed in the run up to the Olympics was done because of the agreement between the [Chinese] government and the IOC, and that once the games were over and everybody went home, pretty much, that went with it."*

With regard to the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake, all three journalists share very different opinions on why, for the first time in recent history, the media were free to cover the event as they saw fit (at least for the first two weeks), how it changed the Chinese press, and whether the earthquake changed China's press freedom. Unlike Jiang and McManus, "Smith" did not have direct experience with the quake coverage, but still shared his view.

(“Smith”) *“It probably was an accident. They were just too busy with their crisis management at the time, and things got through.”*

(Jiang) *“I guess because it was a natural disaster, in a way, it’s always less sensitive, at least during the initial stage, to cover a natural disaster than a man-made disaster or a political kind of turmoil kind of things...”*

“With a natural disaster of this kind of magnitude, everyone was in shock still, literally. All of the infrastructure was destroyed, which include the propaganda infrastructure. So in a way, the officials were still trying to get everything back to normal; in a sense, [they] were just too busy dealing with the immediate task at hand...It was a life and death situation in the initial few days—trying to really continue these rescue missions 24-seven. So that was one of the main reasons the initial media environment was so friendly. And two, it was a natural disaster, and the government was doing all it could to help people. From the government’s perspective, they realized it was a positive story...something foreign media and domestic media alike would over. And they were nothing in the way, they thought, that they needed to hide...”

“It’s unfortunate, as a media outlet you want to explore different angles instead of reporting the same things. So at a certain stage of any continuous coverage, you will start asking questions that probably the governmental authorities don’t like...”

[So as] the infrastructure was returning and you know, slowly but gradually got rebuilt, officials came back, the propaganda department came back, and more instructions/orders from Beijing as well...So when the government become more organized, one of the things they, of course, wanted to look into was how to control the media coverage.

[In addition,] as the story continued, people started to ask more questions in terms of building quality, in terms of, basically, 'why this happened,' instead of 'what happened...'

"Because of the initial lack of control, a lot of Chinese reporters, maybe for the first time, saw what they could accomplish as reporters, in terms of reporting news as it happened, without any censorship, without being told what to do or what not to do. Because the initial hours or days or weeks of coverage by the Chinese media was actually very, very good. A lot of people mentioned that in different publications in the West, and it was true because they were fast, they were thorough, and they were every much on top of the developments every day, every hour. Even though gradually you see the grip by the government, but still, they really showed how professional they could be given the opportunity and they were not just singing the praises of the government. They were actually reporting all sorts of different stories from the magnitude and the devastation, to the need of the victims, to the rescue missions, to the miracles, to the quality of the school buildings, to the problems with the rebuilding efforts. So yeah...basically, [they] sort of showed themselves, showed what they could accomplish, what they could achieve themselves, and something they may not [have] known before."

(McManus) *"Because [the Sichuan earthquake] was still three months before the Olympics, the propaganda authorities were walking a tight rope with what they had promised the IOC and what they would normally do in this situation. At the outset, it was amazing at how open both domestic and foreign media were allowed to report. That last maybe two weeks because stories were coming out about...[the] 'tofu schools..."*

"The phrase that is commonly used is 'for the sake of social harmony, social security.' What they mean is: the rule No. 1 of the Communist party in China is 'hang on to

power, at all costs.’ And that’s what this is. If you tell the truth about how any people died, about how many schools collapsed, and so on and so forth, there will be an uprising.”

There is one thing that all three men agree on: whether the Sichuan Earthquake opened a window for more press freedom in China, it will still take a while for China’s press freedom to be considered an acceptable Western standard of press freedom.

(“Smith”) *“It has to be gradual. Probably the best comparison for China was [by] one of my Chinese colleagues, [who] said about democracy, ‘What happened at Tiananmen was terrible, but we’ll get there eventually. If we have to wait 50 years... you know, for you Americans, that’s a long time, but China is 5000 years old. We can wait.’”¹⁷⁴*

(Jiang) *“The Communist Party’s monopoly and powers has always been based on two things: their philosophy has always been in firm control of the military, and the media. There are the two things they will never, ever give up willingly. Military is obvious, and the media is also pretty obvious, so you know, you control what people know about what’s going on. So if the news is always positive about how great, glorious and correct the government is, then presumably, they would want to keep them in power, [or] the same kind of people in power...”*

“Maybe 20, 30 years from now, people can look at the Sichuan earthquake with a different perspective, more objectively, in a more balanced way. Because a lot of times, the bottom line is whoever is in power tries to make sure that nothing happens to jeopardize his power. Because being a dictatorship—or whatever you call it—when you are not elected, your legitimacy comes from, amongst other things, the media that’s under your control...”

¹⁷⁴ “Smith, John”. Personal interview. 8 Aug. 2010.

*“[But] I think it’s an evolution. It will evolve, especially with domestic media because I think a lot of times foreign reporters here—sure we have privileges that the domestic media don’t have and we probably have a good more liberties and freedoms to do a lot of things—but in the end, the domestic media has more impact. They are the ones people read, that people watch, that people click.”*¹⁷⁵

(McManus) *“I think that as long as the Communist party is in charge, I think you’re going to see pretty much what you see now...”*¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Jiang, Steven. Personal interview. 7 Aug. 2010.

¹⁷⁶ McManus, Ken. Personal interview. 8 Aug. 2010.

Conclusion

As organizations around the world, including Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists, work to further an agenda of a freer media in the dictator country, China itself struggles with how to balance what the government wants (control) and what the people need (honesty). Through the use of propaganda, the Chinese government manages to control its relationship with its people, but some citizens have simply refused to swallow these spoon-fed manipulations of truth. These “dissidents” are now considered outcasts of society, but they are taking very important steps to empowering the people of China, and most importantly, taking the very first steps to empowering the individual through the use of new technology, such as the Internet.

In the wake of the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake specifically, China’s press—both foreign and domestic—experienced unparalleled freedom in the immediate aftermath of the natural disaster, and for a few weeks following it. Some have said that the looser media controls, a direct result of the earthquake, have forever changed the way China will conduct its press censorship. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Yuen-Ying Chan, the journalism school dean at Shantou University in Guangdong, called the earthquake historic. “Life has been transformed,” Chan said. “It’s like the Vietnam War, which for the first time brought battle live into people’s living rooms. They’ll rein it in, but you can never go completely back.”¹⁷⁷ Since the earthquake, there has reportedly been less governmental interference with journalists, but some journalists attribute this to the extension of the IOC rules that were put in place for the Olympics.

¹⁷⁷ China Tightens Media Limits Loosened in Quake

Others, however, have reserved judgment with regard to future press freedom in China. David Bandurki, A Hong Kong University research with the China Media Project, explained to the *Los Angeles Times*: “If you compare the handling of this disaster to past handling of disasters, this is remarkable, but that does not necessarily signal a fundamental shift in the control of the media,” he said.¹⁷⁸ His ruling comes as no surprise, especially when the 2010 Reporters without Borders rankings (a index of press freedom from around the globe) are taken into account. According to the rankings, Mainland China was rated as one of the lowest on the totem pole, 171 out of 178, as a country with strict rules on press freedom.¹⁷⁹

For the first time in the lives of many young Chinese journalists, though, they tasted true press freedom: dreaming up an interesting, sensitive-in-nature angle like the tofu schools, following up on said angle, interviewing victims and party officials, and finally publishing the article in the mainstream media. And although the door might have closed following the Sichuan earthquake and the articles that arose from the tofu houses and other conflicts, it’s clear that a window has been opened for the youthful reporters who will not soon forget the feeling of such freedoms. But the government would be wise to see that such press freedom does not necessarily mean the end of the Chinese government as they know it, because as Bandurki said in the *Los Angeles Times* article, “Hopefully the leadership will make note of the fact that the benefits of an open media far outweigh the negatives. What they seem to lose in control they gain in legitimacy and trust.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Quake Broadcasts Opened a Window; Though China Saw New Freedoms in Its TV Coverage, Officials Loosening of Control May Be Fleeting

¹⁷⁹ Press Freedom Index 2010

¹⁸⁰ Quake Broadcasts Opened a Window; Though China Saw New Freedoms in Its TV Coverage, Officials Loosening of Control May Be Fleeting

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Work Experience

State College Magazine

State College, Pa. (USA)

Intern

January 2011-May-2011

- Wrote 2,000+ word feature articles focusing on the Centre County (Pa.) region, as well as short service pieces
- Generated new and creative story ideas for short and feature-length stories
- Provided the magazine with quality photographs for corresponding articles

The China Daily (Hong Kong)

Hong Kong, SAR

Intern feature reporter

May 2010 -- August 2010

- Wrote 1,800+ word feature articles about issues affecting Hong Kong residents
- Attended weekly meetings with upper level management
- Conducted interviews with locals and foreigners
- Worked side by side with the copyediting department to understand the role it plays in the newspaper industry

Onward State

State College, Pa.

(USA) Feature Reporter

September 2010-December 2010

- Brainstormed ideas with editors to create articles fit for an online news publication
- Wrote 1,000+ biweekly feature articles about issues and trends affecting State College residents
- Covered local borough council meetings and other spot stories

Valley Magazine

State College, Pa. (USA)

Writer

September 2010-December 2010

- Brainstormed ideas with editors to create articles for a print magazine
- Researched and interviewed extensively for college-focused article published in fall 2010

Leadership

President,

University Park, Pa (USA)

The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life

December 2006-December 2007

- Supervised more than 50 social, educational, religious and community service oriented activities per semester
- Oversaw more than 200 student members
- Established connections between Hillel and other student organizations on the University Park campus
- Supervised and conducted biweekly general board meetings and weekly executive board meetings

Study Abroad

Exchange Program in Hong Kong

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

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- Studied the Chinese language through oral skills and writing practice
- Taught *English as a Second Language* to local Hong Kong students once a week
- Studied hospitality management courses with Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students
- Explored the option and opportunities associated with working abroad in the hospitality industry
- Participated with the local Jewish Community Center to experience Judaism in a new and different culture
- Traveled to Southeast Asian countries to explore and learn about religious, social and economic issues affecting third-world countries

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