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All the News That's (Un-)Fit to Print:

Propaganda Institutions, News and Media Supervision in China

Zusammenfassung: Während Chinas Reform- und Öffnungspolitik weitreichende ökonomische Umstrukturierungen im Mediensektor ausgelöst und den Spielraum für unzensierte Berichterstattung erweitert hat, bleiben die Grundprinzipien der politischen Medienaufsicht unverändert. Dieser erweiterte Artikel analysiert das Zusammenspiel der zahlreichen für die Medienaufsicht und Zensur zuständigen Führer, Partei- und Staatsbehörden in Bezug auf historisches Erbe und Leitprinzipien, Aufgaben, Struktur und Finanzierung, Arbeitsweisen und Rechtsnormen. Er umreißt die Entwicklung seit 1949, mit dem Hauptgewicht auf Veränderungen der Medienpolitik in der Ära der Parteiführer Jiang Zemin und Hu Jintao 1990-2012. Trotz einiger organisatorischer Umstellungen und wiederholter Zuständigkeitsänderungen verbleiben die bürokratischen Verfahren zur Durchsetzung der Parteipolitik in den Medien weitgehend im Rahmen leninistischer Arrangements aus den 1950er Jahren. Den Herausforderungen der technologischen Revolution in der Massenkommunikation ist durch neue Methoden bei der Filterung und Blockierung sensibler Berichte begegnet worden. Obwohl rechtsstaatliche Prinzipien auch auf die Medien ausgedehnt worden sind, bleiben sie schwächer als in anderen Bereichen des öffentlichen Lebens. Die Bestimmungen schreiben zahlreiche Genehmigungserfordernisse vor. Sie betonen die Medienpflichten und schweigen sich über die Medienrechte weitgehend aus. Am Beispiel der 2004-2006 in der Jugendverbandszeitschrift *Gefrierpunkt* durchgeführten Reorganisationen beleuchtet der Artikel die Spannungen der aktuellen Medienpolitik, die Konflikte zwischen ihren multiplen Akteuren und die ungelösten Widersprüche zwischen kommerziellen und politischen Interessen.

Schlagworte: Propaganda, Parteiführer, Medienaufsicht, Medienrecht, Zensur, Presse, Radio, Fernsehen, Film, Internet

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Abstract: China's policies of reform and opening-up have triggered far-reaching economic transformations in the media sector, and the leeway for uncensored reporting has widened. The principles of political supervision, however, remain essentially unchanged. This enlarged article analyzes the interplay of leaders, government and Party organs responsible for media supervision and censorship in terms of heritage and guiding principles, mission, structure and financing, procedures and legal norms. It sketches developments since 1949, with the main emphasis on changes in media policies during the era of Party leaders Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao 1990-2012. Despite some organizational reshuffling and recurrent jurisdictional adjustments, the basic bureaucratic set-up for enforcing media compliance with Party policies stays in line with the Leninist arrangements of the 1950s. The challenges for effective control posed by the technological revolution in mass communication have been met by new innovations in the monitoring and filtering of sensitive reports. Although principles of rule by law have also spread to the media, they lag behind some other spheres of Chinese public life. Regulations stipulate a host of licensing requirements. They stress media duties and remain largely silent on media rights. On the background of reorganizations in the magazine *Freezing Point* of the Youth League effected during 2004-2006, the article highlights the tensions of current media policies, the conflicts between multiple actors and the unresolved contradictions between commercial and political interests.

Key words: Propaganda, Party leaders, media supervision, media law, censorship, press, radio, television, film, internet

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1. Introduction

China's accession to the WTO has once again accelerated the economic restructuring of the country's old and new media. Measures such as the gradual separation of TV production and broadcasting units or the permission for limited private and foreign investments in the media sector all strengthen the sweeping process of commercialization under way since the 1980s. In its course, the media's clearly political mandate of former times has become eroded by market-driven behavior with attention to publicity, sales and program ratings, cost-effectiveness, advertising and other income-generating schemes. The proliferation of new economic actors, the ramification of bureaucratic agencies and the learning from Western experiences, the creation of a host of new non-governmental organizations, the internet and various forms of electronic publishing have also spurred the diversification of the media. Chinese newspapers and journals, movies and TV programs are a world apart from the dull fare meted out to audiences before the reform period.

But while the outward signs of new liberties for Chinese society are all too evident, the less visible means for ensuring media compliance in the political realm endure. Organizational arrangements and the long-established procedures for media control have shown a great power of resistance against all attempts to relax or even abolish censorship. Such attempts have been repeatedly made, most notably during the spells of political liberalization in the 1980s, when freedom of the press became a catchword among intellectuals and even among some Party circles. All relevant initiatives have provoked a political backlash, however. The latest and most thorough one was triggered by the Tiananmen events of 1989 and has been lasting for two decades by now. It has reaffirmed some principles of Party control that had softened before. At the same time, by paradoxically promoting both nationalism and globalization, politics have introduced new elements into the picture.

This has created an even more complex situation in Chinese media policies. For commercialization and marketization as the main challengers of Party supremacy in media work continue and with them a continuing probing of the proper direction in media work. Under conditions of globalization, the political motives for tight media supervision have become enmeshed with economic motives and the desire to prevail in the global competition for markets, investments and ideas. After WTO accession opened parts of the Chinese cultural industry such as publications retailing, audio-visual recording, cinema ownership, or radio, film and TV program production for foreign investment, fear of Americanization or take-over by the Murdoch group has turned into a powerful motif for maintaining control of the media. It obviously struggles with the desire to attract foreign capital and to turn China herself into a player on the global media market. Supervision of the Chinese media sector therefore comes in different garbs. While it can don museum pieces from the socialist fashions of yore, it can also drape itself in the outfit of the cyber-age and in money-making smartness.

But will the effort to establish a mixed system of closure and opening-up succeed? Has control become weakened or strengthened? And how does it define its ultimate objectives? Does the Party stay in command, or is it challenged and superseded by new actors? These simple questions do not lend themselves to easy answers. Instead, they lead to a number of queries in regard to the constituent elements of the picture. What devices are employed by the party-state to ensure its dominance in an era of world-wide mobility and technological revolution that tends to obliterate national boundaries? Do the former methods of control stay intact, or have they been adapted to the new situation? What is the organizational set-up for exerting control and implementing the Party's propaganda assignments, and how is it affected by far-reaching changes in property rights, budgetary dispositions and modes of financing for the media? Have there been any discernible reforms in the propaganda apparatus during the last twenty years? How has it been influenced by the repeated streamlining and administrative changes of government, and how has it reacted to the ongoing calls for an independent press? Do the old ways of unrestrained Party intervention and rule by personal fiat continue, or has rule by law become extended to the media, too? And what kind of law is it, what does it regulate and what does it not?

The Chinese propaganda system comprises a conglomeration of organizations responsible for media work, educational mass campaigns, publishing, translation and cultural activities. Although it is submitted to strict Party discipline, it is not an anonymous machine. Like other leading bodies it is manned by cadres, who are subject to generational change and bring their peculiar life experiences along with them. This raises the question as to their specific characteristics. Is there a particular mold and career pattern of the Chinese propaganda leader? How are the leaders and their successors trained and recruited? What is their political outlook, and what guiding principles do they profess or apply, both at the formal and informal level?

This study attempts to answer the questions as good as both published and unpublished information available to date permits. It presents an analysis of new developments in Chinese media policies, with special emphasis on organizational and legal, procedural and personnel arrangements for media supervision. Like everything else in Chinese politics since the reform period, this is an issue with an economic side to it. Indeed, it is economic reforms and the market that drive many of the changes under discussion here. Their impact thus constitutes an important and

inseparable part of the topic. Nevertheless, this is neither an attempt at content analysis of the media nor is it primarily an economic analysis as taken up in other studies (Zha Jianying 1995, Wang Peixian 2001, Fischer 2001 and 2003, contributions in Hemelryk Donald 2002, Lee Chin-chuan 2000 and 2003, Kops and Ollig 2007). Since the Chinese leadership is determined to exclude pivotal media activities from the province of market forces, the accent is rather on the political aspects of Party and government intervention. Politics is ultimately concerned with power, which in this context means the power to establish or to close media and publishing units, to promote, restrain or completely withhold information, to mold relevant mechanisms in fields like ideology and education, employment, recruitment and career, administration and law, property relations and economic incentives, or technological provisions.

The mechanisms mentioned above are instruments in the service of larger goals that constitute the setting of media policy. This involves objectives like assuring China's continuing economic growth and strengthening its position both on the world market and in world politics, while upholding the nation's political system and its independence from outside interference – issues that are in the mind of all actors but that cannot be pursued in depth here. Nor will the study focus on content analysis of discourses in the media, a field unto itself with extensions to a wide area of topics.

While studies of Chinese press content and specific campaigns have been innumerable and available for a long time, attention has shifted to the internet in recent years. The relevant studies of discursive content, netizen behavior and virtual censorship (Qiu 2000, Harwit and Clarke 2001, Zhang Junhua 2001, Chase and Mulvenon 2002, Hung Chin-fu 2003, Hughes and Wacker 2003, Giese 2005, Hartford 2005, Lagerkvist 2005, Yang Guobin 2009, contributions in Hemelryk Donald 2002 and Lee Chin-chuan 2003) have reported important findings in areas like e-government, rural problems, social security, life styles, value orientations, regional or national identities. However, in view of the volatility of the medium, the fast change of records, policies and technological capabilities, they are forever treading behind developments. Moreover, the sheer mass of internet information precludes comprehensive examination.

These are unresolved problems of analysis. Because the discourses do not only reflect the respective issues discussed but also the impact of media policy, the problems of assessment are doubly regretful. There certainly is a gap between policy promulgation and implementation, and random checking shows it to be particularly large in the internet. But it is hard to generalize from here. Many broad-ranging theories on the efficacy of internet supervision and the medium's long-term effects remain hypothetical. Just like the assessments of market impact for the media at large, they usually vary between trust in its revolutionary potential, hope for its promotion of gradual change to a civil society and disillusionment with commercialization and entertainment as new devices for prolonging Party supremacy (Zhao Yuezhi 2000, Kalathil and Boas 2001, Hemelryk Donald 2002, Yang Guobin 2003, Bai Ruoyun 2005, Giese 2005). Directly or indirectly, the study at hand will refer to these arguments. Of course, it will not be able to pass a final judgment, since this would require the benefit of hindsight from future developments and a longer time range. The shorter period analyzed here has seen repeated changes. Media policies have been characterized as being in a state of permanent flux (Lee Chin-chuan 2003), with the variety of messages in the Chinese public sphere displaying the signs of "a confusing and patternless cacophony" (Lynch 1999).

This analysis of the propaganda system will show that there are determined efforts by the Party to restore its version of harmony. Although it will sketch earlier policies in rough outline, most attention is paid to the recent phase since the 1990s. Readers interested in fuller treatment of early media reforms in the 1980s are referred to the straightforward historical account in Chang Won Ho 1989 and Zhang Xiaogang 1993 or the deeper analysis in Zhao Yuezhi 1998 and Lynch 1999. Coverage extends until 2012 and thus follows up new developments not included in this literature.

Media are defined here in a rather broad sense, and the discussion deals with both their old and new forms, i.e. newspapers and journals, radio, TV, internet news and publications. Sometimes this designation will be replaced by the word 'press', which then is taken to signify all media. The context will make it clear, when only their printed forms are meant. Book publishing, film and information on modern storage devices are included in the discussion, too, even though most definitions would have them fall outside the domain of the media. Because modern technological developments blur the lines between the different areas of publishing and news dissemination, there are good reasons for thus enlarging the scope of inquiry. A further reason is provided by Chinese administrative practices, which place all of the areas mentioned above in the jurisdiction of the same Party and government departments, with similar procedures applying to them. The larger background of policies for the cultural industry and general issues of media strategies in other domains such as entertainment, education and mass campaigns, academic, economic or administrative information are repeatedly touched on, but the main focus is on the heart of political propaganda: steering, disseminating and controlling current political news and commentary. This is a sensitive and secretive topic, as it invariably involves a discussion of censorship practices that governments usually are not eager to publicize. Some glimpses of them are available in first-hand accounts and memoirs of Chinese participants (Liu Binyan 1990, Wu Guogang 1994, Hsiao Ching-chang and Cheek 1995, Wu Xuecan 2002, Hu Jiwei 2002, He Qinglian 2004). However, the majority of them are confined to specific work environments or situations.

The old and new procedures for censorship and control of the media that are discussed in this study are still formidable. They have attracted the attention of journalists and human rights groups abroad, which regularly produce a barrage of critical articles and accusations. But with a few notable exceptions (Open Net Initiative, Reporters Without Borders 2003 and 2007, Battistella 2005), many murky details are only roughly sketched in most of the literature. Moreover, in its righteous engagement the genre is often preoccupied with enagement and tends to miss other aspects of the picture. Nor is the situation on the scholarly side satisfactorily. Many detailed studies on the inner workings of Chinese government have been produced over the years in policy arenas such as finance and economic administration, foreign relations or education. The propaganda apparatus, however, has received relatively scant attention. This is regrettable, since it performs crucial functions for China's political system and is one of the largest bureaucracies in the country.

Works during the Cold War period regularly commented on the topic within the framework of totalitarianism, but they offered many generalizations and little information on the political process. Interesting enough, some recent knowledgeable Chinese émigré work replicates the totalitarianism perspective (Su Shaozhi 1994). A few works of the 1970s complemented it by reference to issues of modernization, national integration and mass mobilization during the Mao era (Liu 1971, Chu 1977). In comparison to present times, this looks like a different world. Most current work on media policies focuses on the basic conflict between the market and the state. It has brought much improvement and profited immensely from the new openness in China. Leading studies such as Lee Chin-chuan 1994 and 2003, Zhao Yuezhi 1998, 2000 and 2008, Lynch 1999 and Esarey 2005 provide excellent analysis of policy output resting not only on documentary study but on field work in the country. Individual cases of participant observation in internet cafés, chat rooms and bulletin board systems have been possible (Qiu 2000; Qiu and Zhou Liuning 2005). And media studies from China herself have made worthy contributions. Although still treading cautiously, they have moved far beyond mere parroting of the political line (Lin Hui 2004, Tian Zhongchu 2005, Zhao Shilin 2006). The SARS crisis of 2003/04 and the outrage over its initial cover-up in particular have triggered interesting Chinese work on emergency news reporting – after that topic was cleared by the propaganda apparatus. However, with few exceptions the newly available literature supplies little information on the mechanisms by which political decisions in media work are reached and enforced. Even the most recent and comprehensive account of the topic in Shambaugh 2007 comes to the conclusion that “the propaganda system remains a bureaucratic ‘black box’... and more case studies on different sectors of the Chinese media are needed.”¹

This study starts with a brief outline of Chinese as compared to Western press history and the heritage of norms and experiences it bequeathed to the country. It blends into a discussion of the basic principles and the ideological foundation of Chinese media work, a topic involving both the scrutiny of the Marxist classics still cited in China and the study of the discourse on their interpretation and reinterpretation. The analysis then focuses on the evolution of the various Party and government organs active in propaganda work, their rights and duties, division of labor, internal structure and external reach, endowment with financial and manpower resources. The section also introduces their major subsidiary units and the information products published by them. A following chapter presents the leading personnel at the helm of these organizations, with special consideration for the educational background, career paths and defining political experiences of the group. It also examines the networking among propaganda organs and the unpublicized composition of major leading bodies. The study then proceeds to a discussion of administrative and political measures for balancing the conflicting demands of media compliance and media profitability. The catchwords here are personnel management and disciplinary measures, editorial set-ups or patterns of incorporation for non-governmental organizations. Special attention is paid to new ownership forms in the media and the new adaptations of supervision triggered by them. The extent of censorship, the precise procedures for enforcing it, the attempts to hold on to old methods and the transition to new ones are other focal points.

The political and administrative measures are accompanied by a major effort at building up a body of media law, which is documented afterwards in regard to both its main areas of codification and its conspicuous omissions. The treatment can build on a number of earlier studies from China (Wei Yongzheng 2002 and 2006, Guo Yali et al. 2006) and the West (Polunbaum 1994a and 1994b, Fu and Cullen 1996). Analysis then moves on to a final section that offers new insights into the inside story of the political journal Freezing Point, its temporary closure and eventual reopening. This is one of the most revealing recent cases of censorship in China. It documents and crystallizes the controversies surrounding many of the media policies under discussion and provides evidence of their practical application.

¹ Shambaugh 2007: 58

2. Heritage and Principles

The guidelines for Chinese media policies are based as much on openly stated principles as on China's historical experience. Although its impact on present policies is interwoven with outside influences, it still plays a large part in shaping fears and hopes, expectations and standards for judging right or wrong. This can be readily observed in the field of press policy whose ideological principles have derived from Marxism. As such they have transplanted the historical experience of a foreign culture to China. It includes such foreign building blocks as the prominence of the mercantile class and the rift between secular and spiritual powers in the Middle Ages, the loss of ideological unity during the religious wars at the beginning of the modern period, the emancipation of independent thought during the enlightenment and the emergence of bourgeois society thereafter – elements that shaped Western press history just as much as developments in other fields. As shown in the seminal work of Jürgen Habermas, these social and ideational developments produced regular merchant correspondence as the ancestor of the Western press. In the following centuries they fostered the formation of public opinion and enlightened reasoning beyond the realm of the court gazette. This shattered the hitherto prevalent censorship rules of autocratic regimes, furthered the emergence of pluralism, gave birth to political parties and finally promoted a professional, national press that provided information services and manufactured public opinion. Later phases of Western media development saw the rise and decline of an agitational Party press. They finally coalesced into the present situation of a fragmented public sphere where new technologies are extending the reach of the media and independent, critical journalism of reasoning individuals struggles with the public relation campaigns of bureaucracies, parties and organized interest groups - or the commercial instinct of media catering to advertisement, consumption, mass entertainment and sensationalism.²

These stages span more than four-hundred years of Western social and political development. They find only few parallels in Chinese history, where political absolutism and an all-pervasive, unified state ideology survived until the end of the empire in the early 20th century. The notoriously weak position of merchants, the absence of a larger middle class, and the role of most intellectuals as paternalistic representatives of state interest are further characteristics that set the Chinese case apart from the Western model. After the end of the monarchy, the tender beginnings of press freedom were quickly strangled in the repeated convulsions of war and revolution. The press as a controlled state organ continued to be a medium for receiving rather than expressing opinions. The heavy weight of this heritage can be felt even today, as many elements in the present picture of government-controlled mass communication can be interpreted as a continuation of past patterns. They see an enduring configuration of motives and roles for the main actors who employ similar means as in the past, albeit for different ends. This is suggested by a brief glance at Chinese media history until the reform period.³

Steeped in the Confucian view of government on an educational mission, all imperial governments conceived information as education, too. Court gazettes started as hand-copied imperial edicts for the use of provincial mandarins and later developed into commercially distributed bulletins printed for the benefit of a larger public. They mixed official announcements with a strong dose of moralizing by the emperor and his servants who acted as the representatives of a unified secular and spiritual power. And so did official historical writings and documentary collections that constituted one of the main pillars of received literature and always clung to the authorized viewpoint. They were canonized by a bureaucracy of government historians who effectively turned interpretation of the past into an instrument for rule of the present. The belles lettres were not spared from this insistence on common morals and ideology instilled from above as they were screened for immoral topics. Different religious traditions were condoned but closely monitored for any evidence of political involvement and anti-governmental activities. Even private scholarly writings fell victim to the censoring of unorthodox views considered to be dangerous by the government. Essentially, these were measures against dissent within the political elite of Confucian scholar-officials, since mass illiteracy confined political communication for the large majority of the population to the spreading of news and opinions by word of the mouth. While the effectiveness of control of literati publications was imperfect and censorship never comprehensive, the suppressive tendencies were particularly prominent during the last, conservative dynasty of Manchu conquerors, who were forever watchful of anti-Manchurian activities and eager to establish their orthodox Confucian credentials.

Typically enough, a modern but largely apolitical press appeared after 1870 as an alien product in Shanghai and other foreign concessions of coastal China, where it catered to the needs and tastes of a slowly emerging middle class. A political press followed with noticeable delay around 1895. It originated among Chinese reformers and

² Habermas 1962. See also: Carey 1993

³ The following passages on Chinese press history are based on: Zhang Jinglu 1954-1959; Chow Tse-tsung 1960; Lin Yutang 1968; Ting Lee-Hsia Hsu 1974; Mohr 1976; Cheek 1987; Guo Zhenzhi 1991; Judge 1996; MacKinnon 1997; Fang Hanqi 1999; Mittler 2004.

revolutionaries, was soon largely confined to Chinese émigré and student circles in Japan and forbidden to circulate within China. This did not prevent it from influencing events in China and having its fair share in the republican revolution of 1911. Nevertheless, censorship intensified again with the advent of the Yuan Shikai military dictatorship in 1912. The latter sparked a succession of warlord governments with similar inclinations to prohibit critical press reports. Not all of them were effectual, however, and political infighting among the ruling group opened opportunities for expressing independent thought. The major exception in the Chinese history of state-controlled journalism occurred during the celebrated May Fourth movement of 1919 and the contemporaneous New Culture movement that preceded and followed it in the period from 1915 to 1923. As a novelty in Chinese history, a free and lively press with an broad range of different political viewpoints emerged, and the number of periodicals exploded until it reached the unprecedented figure of more than 1,100 in the year 1921.

Although May Fourth has remained a powerful symbol for the appeal of political liberties in modern China and the wish to break with the past, it finally gave way to nationalism and social revolution, forces that proved to be stronger than liberalism during the last one-hundred years of the country's history. After 1923, the May Fourth wave quickly subsided and the number of periodicals slumped. Even after it grew again, the earlier quality of journalism during the May Fourth era was not reattained. The press either relapsed into entertainment, social gossip and economic news or was taken over by revolutionary agitators from the communist or nationalist parties, who advocated their particular brand of revolution. All too often they slipped into sloganeering and battled with the censors of the various military cliques ruling the country. There is no better personification of this trend than Mao Zedong, who worked as a teacher and journalist before becoming a Party cadre. Like many others he deemed the country's emancipation from foreign dominance, internal oppression and economic backwardness more important than the attainment of civil liberties. Freedom of the press came to be regarded as a means in political struggle rather than as an end in its own right.

The situation hardly improved after the coming to power of the nationalist Guomindang government in 1927, which soon established increasingly watchful – albeit often ineffectual – censorship organs. Like many other promises of the new regime, the freedoms of speech and press became subordinated to the war against the Communist Party that was driven underground by Chiang Kaishek's coup in April of the same year. Later on, the war against Japan provided the government with further reasons for insisting on unity in thought and speech of the nation. During the whole Guomindang period, newspapers and the new medium of the radio station either acted as spokesmen of the ruling party or had to confine themselves to largely apolitical topics. Small niches for dissident journalism existed in Hongkong and foreign concessions like Shanghai, and some brave contributors to inland publications practiced the age-old art of expressing criticism by veiled historical allusions to current events. After the establishment of an anti-Japanese united front between the Guomindang and the Communist Party in 1937, a communist newspaper was even allowed an uneasy existence in the war-time capital Chongqing. But ultimately all these exceptions were unable to change the overall picture of media control by a government that had shed its revolutionary origins and increasingly identified with traditional patterns of rule. When civil war between the Guomindang and the Communists broke out again in 1946, censorship became successively tighter.

Because of shared historical experiences and a common descent from Leninist party organization, the press policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have resembled those of the Guomindang. Only the organizational rigor and zeal for propaganda, the modern form of education in an age of mass communication, were greater. Party newspapers in the insurgent communist base areas acted as spokesmen of the ruling Party leadership and certainly did not practice political pluralism. After the final victory of the Party and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, a monopoly of the state news agency for the dissemination of political news became quickly established. Newspapers in private ownership were forbidden in 1952, and in the wake of a failed liberalization during the aborted Hundred Flowers movement of 1957 the last publications in minority-party ownership were confiscated. All media were turned into propaganda organs of Communist Party committees, some of them acting as the organs of government institutions or official mass organizations.

With the uniformity of published opinion assured, attention shifted to problems of extension. Reaching mass audiences for purposes of political mobilization was the main motive for the great enlargement of primarily local newspapers, the further extension of the radio network with thousands of wired rediffusion stations in the countryside and the establishment of television services during the Great Leap Forward of 1958 to 1960. Its failure and the following economic crisis drew the media into the orbit of a contraction that involved all sectors of the country's economic and social life. One third of the newspapers, radio and TV stations and nearly half of the journals closed down again in the early 1960s. The nadir was reached during the decade of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, when purges of local and regional Party committees quickly embroiled the editorial offices of their subordinate press organs and the omnipresence of a centrally directed propaganda machinery reduced the number of media still further.

The economic reforms initiated after Mao Zedong's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution have changed all that. Spurred by political changes, administrative adjustments and technological breakthroughs such as the advent of

the internet, cable or satellite TV, the number of media has risen to heights never seen before. Their non-political content has become markedly diversified, too. But the confines for the core of the propaganda mission, news reporting and political commentary, remain tight.

The ideological guidelines and general principles of press work in China have been repeatedly called into question by advocates of political liberalization. Nevertheless, they stay intact, preserving basic tenets that hark back to Marx' pronouncements on the freedom of the press (*Speech at the First Trial of the Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 7 February 1849), Lenin's 1902 and 1905 articles on *What Is to Be Done?* and *Party Organization and Party Literature*, plus a long list of later explications by Soviet and Chinese communist leaders, among them speeches by Mao Zedong in 1942, 1948 and 1957 (*Talk at the Forum on Changing the Format of Liberation Daily*, 31 March 1942; *Talk to the Editorial Staff of the Shanxi-Suiyuan Daily*, 2 April 1948; *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Within the People*, 27 February 1957), as well as by Liu Shaoqi in 1948 (*A Talk to the North China Press Corps*, 2 October 1948). These include the definition of the press and other media as "the mouthpiece" and "tool" of the Party, as "the collective propagandist, agitator and organizer", with the duty to propagate the Party line, to educate, inspire and guide the populace in the grand enterprise of communist revolution and socialist construction.

After the founding of socialist states the media's mission was underscored by the nowadays still valid principle that "positive reports come first". Sometimes this ubiquitous slogan from propaganda guidelines and training courses for journalists is accompanied by the rider according to which "negative reports come second", but more often this second point is left out for convenience. The "public watchdog and omnipresent eye" used to be another lavishly used epithet for the press. Taken from Karl Marx' condemnation of Prussian censorship rules and coined as a metaphor for press supervision of the government, it was twisted and frequently came to be used in defense of tight censorship rules in a particular context, i.e. the duty of Party journalists to collect sensitive political news that circulate only internally within the leadership. Although the slogan has retreated to a less prominent place in recent years, the implied informant function has been by no means abolished, and the filing of internal reports continues to rank high among journalists' duties – whether for supervising lower-level government cadres or for gauging political currents among the population. Media thus fulfill the double function of public, educational communication from the top down and internal, matter-of-fact communication from the bottom up.⁴

Whereas the critical role of the press vis-à-vis the former Guomindang government was stressed in communist Party literature before 1949, it evaporated after the founding of the People's Republic. Instead, the rather inefficient Guomindang control of political news became replaced by a much more efficient supervision of the press under the new leadership, with a Party and state monopoly of news dissemination, as well as strict censorship, report and secrecy rules, as its main pillars. The operating principles were graphically explained by Lu Dingyi, the erstwhile director of the Party's Propaganda Department, in an internal speech of September 1957 at the 20th anniversary meeting of Xinhua News Agency, in which he urged all Chinese reporters and editors to decide on political grounds which news to rush and which to delay, which to accept and which to suppress.⁵ Truthful reporting is thus honored in principle but subordinated to a grasp of basic truths and political needs as judged by the Party leadership – or, as a report on a 2001 work conference on press censorship has it in a variation of the well-known dictum of the end justifying the means: "We must uphold the principle of truth, but truth must be subordinate to social impact".⁶

In line with these guidelines, freedom of the press as practiced in Western countries and the role of the media as an independent power have been consistently renounced. Instead, newspapers are conceived as organs of the various Party organizations and their "sharp weapon". For decades, these principles have been repeated over and over again – mostly in generalized form, as more precise instructions were treated as internal documents or simply transmitted by way of leadership speeches and oral directives.⁷ They have served to justify tight Party control of all media and to submit all journalists to periodic ideological instruction. They have never been abandoned, not even by reformist Party leader Hu Yaobang, who, while pleading for a more lively style of press reports, endorsed them in an often-cited speech of 1985 (*On the Party's Journalism Work*, 8 February 1985). This document is revealing for the continuing limits set. Although Hu Yaobang stressed veracity, timeliness, knowledge and interest as key demands on journalism, he once again made publicity and timing subject to political considerations. It was already a concession that according to him 80 percent of press coverage should be devoted to achievement reports and 20 percent to the exposure of problems. And he stressed that no criticism by name was allowed without express

⁴ Wang Qingtong 1991; Huang Ruhua 1998; Wang Chunhai and Wang Jianping 2002.

⁵ Renmin Ribao, 22 September 1957.

⁶ ZCN 2002

⁷ Liu 1971; Klaschka 1991; Latham 2000; Tian Zhongchu 2005

authorization - for this would bring to the person “disgrace in the whole country or even in the whole world.” Even though Hu conceded that divergent opinions on specific issues should be tolerated in the press, he still argued: “The political orientation and basic policies of the CCP Central Committee and the State Council represent the people’s interest. Thus, everybody will naturally and necessarily hold the same opinions on these basic issues, and it would be unnatural to obstinately express ‘different’ voices.” Period.

In spite of these continuing constraints, Chinese reforms policies produced a dramatic growth of the media. After the Tiananmen movement of 1989 economic reforms continued, but political reforms came to a standstill. This setting brought about an increasing dependence of the media on income from advertisement. The mushrooming of TV stations and channels, the rise of the internet and the upsurge of a popular tabloid press reduced the role of the more traditional Party newspapers still further. However, all initiatives for introducing some genuine rights of the press and for enshrining them in new laws on the press, on radio, film and television that had been under way since 1984 ceased after Tiananmen. Instead, political retrenchment fostered a drive against “bourgeois liberalization of the press” in the 1990s. It has been buttressed by the constant admonishment to safeguard political and social stability, the catchall argument of the post-Tiananmen period for ruling out political reforms.⁸

Contemporary explanations for the reluctance to proceed with the long overdue media legislation offer revealing insights into the Chinese political ambience which is socialist and deeply traditional at the same time. Fixed rights of the press were felt to impede the Party’s cherished ability to react unimpeded according to circumstances, i.e. to use not legal norms but the social and political impact of each case as the primary yardstick for allowing or prohibiting specific information. Other arguments pointed out that the principle of informational equality before the law would collide with the need to provide different information for different groups of the population, that it would raise unreasonable demands and hinder the practice of giving reporters privileged access to press conferences and interviews according to the political rank of their responsible institution. This mirrors the hierarchy and strict subordination rules of government institutions and Party committees that have customarily treated media offices as their bureaucratic offshoots.⁹

Only advocacy for accepted public causes, newly acquired legal rights or consumer protection have been invoked as corrective counterweights against the predominant conservatism in the Party’s concept of press work. Moreover, Chinese reformers have grasped at some remaining reformist clues from Party documents and any evidence of encouragement from leading politicians. The appeal to “criticize and reveal wrong statements or actions that run counter to the people’s interests and to actively and correctly exercise supervision by public opinion”, as it was formulated by the Party’s Propaganda Department and the All-China Journalists Association in the *Professional Code of Ethics for Chinese Journalists* of 1991/1997, has thus been repeatedly quoted. Its key notion of “supervision by public opinion” was originally coined by Chinese academics and media specialists in the mid-1980s, when they linked this notion with the long-held ideals of criticism and self-criticism in Party life. “Supervision by public opinion” has been quoted by all Party congress reports since 1987 and later by the new *Regulations on Internal Party Supervision* of February 2004. This is a remarkable development, since the new slogan co-exists uneasily with a competitor from the statutes of the Propaganda Department and an all-time favorite of the Party in regard to its role in press work: “guidance of public opinion”.

Party literature presents “supervision by public opinion” and “guidance of public opinion” as two complementary principles. Carrying the reasoning behind these concepts to its logical end, it implies that the guided journalists supervise their Party guides. The irony is that the words chosen represent an inverse reflection of reality, for the supposed guides have the power to order while the supposed supervisors enjoy only the right to persuade. All Chinese commentaries thus stress that supervision by public opinion has to be conducted under the leadership of the Party and that Western ideas of the press as a “Fourth Estate” are to be rejected. This leads to the demand that all exercises of supervision by public opinion with direct criticisms of particular persons or political bodies should be approved beforehand by the Party committee concerned. In an abstract sense, the main criterion for approval by the Party is whether the criticism aims at strengthening rather than weakening the socialist system. In practice and in each specific case, this turns the power of interpretation into the gist of the matter.¹⁰

There are similar cases of wordcraft, which at heart signal ongoing attempts to transform realities by changing first formulations, then ideas and finally actions. An example is the term “mouthpiece of the Party and the masses” that

⁸ Cheek 1990; Wright 1990; Lull 1991; Zhang Xiaogang 1993; Dittmer 1994; Polumbaum 1994b; Zhao Yuezhi 1998; Lynch 1999; Hu Jiwei 2002

⁹ Chen Lidan 2004; Wei Yongzheng 2006: 24-25

¹⁰ ACJA 1991; Renmin ribao, 17 February 2004; Wei Yongzheng 2006: 69-83; Jiang Yusheng 2006.

appeared in a newspaper dedication by former Premier Zhu Rongji. Although it was eagerly taken up by many articles, it vies with the still more prevalent conventional usage that accords a mouthpiece only to the Party and not to the people or the masses. Following the shock of the 2003 SARS epidemic, even the notion of a “citizen’s right of information” was introduced in Chinese public discourse, and allusions to it showed up in the Premier Wen Jiabao’s government report of 2004. But the system of government spokesmen that has been instituted at all levels ever since and that is supposed to embody this right of information concentrates on transmitting only emergency reports, administrative, project and planning information, while leaving the political sphere out of consideration. In the same vein, new *Regulations on the Disclosure of Government Information* of 2007 limit the information supplied quite narrowly to administrative matters or speak only vaguely of government duties to “publicize information... that affects the direct interests of citizens, legal persons or other organizations, or that requires the wide-spread knowledge or participation of society...”. Once again, the formulation leaves everything to interpretation, the final word remaining with the Party and government. In view of such difficulties in clearly defining a “right of information” and a similar “right of reasonable doubt”, these terms have been dropped again from the drafts of legal documents.¹¹

On a fundamental level these and analogous discourses lead back to the contest over different concepts of human rights on the political level. China has come a long way in no longer condemning human rights as a bourgeois concept but embracing them as the common heritage of mankind. Moreover, all constitutions of the People’s Republic have affirmed the freedoms of speech and press. A number of new government White Books on Human Rights that have been published in various years since 1991 contain references to them and answer the question as to their extent mainly with statistics on media growth. The question, however, is only partially one of quantity, as the statistics beg the qualitative aspects of the problem. And in this respect serious differences in perceptions persist.

The Chinese government thus habitually points out that human rights developments are inseparable from the history, social system, cultural tradition and economic level of various countries. According to the argument, each country therefore keeps the right to decide on its own human rights concept and implementation independently. As demonstrated by China’s eight White Books on Human Rights issued until now, for the Chinese leadership collective rights take precedent over individual ones, with social and economic rights given pride of place and political rights of the individual taking a back seat. This shows a core of traditional Chinese attitudes and Marxist convictions that endure. In regard to the freedom of the press, the government’s point of view is reflected not only in the response with statistics but also in the minor position accorded to the freedoms of speech and press in the texts. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the last two editions of the government’s White Books in 2003 and 2004 have for the first time introduced qualitative arguments in defense of the Chinese record. They have augmented the usual numbers on media growth with references to new media legislation, the establishment of the system of local government spokesmen and press conferences. Because it indicates recognition of a larger problem, this is a positive sign.¹²

China’s Party leader Hu Jintao has been careful to avoid any decisive stand in media policy. Typical pronouncements of him on the basic principles of press work and information policies date from the National Work Conference on Propaganda and Ideology in January 2008. They repeat the set of established media policies and do not mark any new departure. Within the context of inner-Party debate, they occupy the middle ground. Typically enough, the Party’s current guidelines on reforms in the cultural sector try to separate the commercial and political aspects of media work. Economic reforms in terms of profitability, diversification and marketing of the media continue to receive support. They have breached many former restrictions and are legitimized by use of the term “cultural industry”, a new catchword that started to appear in the late 1990s and became standard fare with its official endorsement by the 2002 Party congress. At the same time, however, Party leadership in all matters of news reporting is upheld. It is fortified by the principle of “cultural security”, another catchword in the battle of words that has been variously used to signal the will to prevent the entry of outside capital into the propaganda sphere, to present the Party as the indispensable defender of national identity and interest, to insist on the leading role of Party ideology, or to stress the “building of a spiritual civilization” of China in which traditional and communist values blend imperceptibly.¹³

¹¹ CPGPRC 2004b, 2007; People’s Daily Online 2005c; Zhao Shilin 2006: 140, 145

¹² CPGPRC 1991; CPGPRC 1995; CPGPRC 2000; CPGPRC 2003; CPGPRC 2004a

¹³ Jiang Zemin 2002; Zhongguo gongchandang 2005; Yang Jianxin 2006; Xinhua 2007e; Renmin ribao, 22 January 2008, 24 January 2008

3. Organizations

The bureaucratic edifice for enforcing supervision of the Chinese media reflects the complicated political set-up of the country with its multitude of intricately nested organizations that are vertically structured as well as horizontally layered. These display the Leninist arrangement of dual rule by both Party and government organs, which has been phased out in many other spheres of Chinese economic life but stays very much alive in the media sector. Absolute leadership of the Party continues to be the paramount principle, even if in practice it can become refracted by bureaucratic rivalries and the existence of multiple actors and different views within the Party or the government.

At the apex of the supervisory apparatus is the Central Leading Group for Propaganda and Ideological Work, an informal caucus of the top Party and government leaders in charge of various bureaucracies in the propaganda sphere. Central Leading Groups are nowhere mentioned in the Party constitution, and their composition and meetings are not publicized. But every once in a while the existence of the Central Leading Group for Propaganda and Ideological Work and the name of its leader are mentioned during propaganda events. It can be surmised that the old rules from the time of the set-up of other Leading Groups in 1958 still apply. These established them as subordinate organs of the Politburo and the CC Secretariat to which they reported. Just as in the case of the other leading organs and departments of the Central Committee, the appointment of their members is likely to be handled by way of nomination by the Politburo Standing Committee.

There seems to have already existed a Leading Group for Culture and Education since 1958, although the precise details of its establishment and its composition are not clear. It was abolished in the Cultural Revolution and replaced by two new leading groups, one for propaganda under Yao Wenyan, Mao Zedong's chief propagandist of the Cultural Revolution later to be purged as a member of the "Gang of Four", and another one for organization and propaganda under Kang Sheng, Mao Zedong's top security advisor and another key figure of the Cultural Revolution. In 1980 a new Central Leading Group for Propaganda and Education was created. Headed by the then chief ideologue of the Party, Hu Qiaomu, it served as a bastion of conservative forces during the 1980s. The present Central Leading Group for Propaganda and Ideological Work was founded in 1988 during the Zhao Ziyang era, when the educational sector acquired greater independence from propaganda work and was largely separated from it. Until November 2012 headed by Li Changchun, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee and one of the nine highest Party leaders, it hammers out the general line in propaganda work and acts as a coordinating mechanism at the highest level. Its small secretariat handles liaison and courier services which ensure that its decisions are transmitted to all relevant departments.¹⁴

The Group meets approximately once per month. There are parallel lower-level bodies in some provinces, but apparently no complete vertical organization underneath the national level exists. The composition of the Group indicates the Party's concept of the propaganda system in the wider sense. Vice-heads are Liu Yunshan, the director of the Propaganda Department; Chen Zhili, the State Councilor coordinating the education, science, culture, media and sports portfolios within the State Council; and Chen Kuiyuan, the President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Three of the other nine ordinary members are vice-directors of the Propaganda Department responsible for radio, film and television (until 2011 Wang Taihua, since then Cai Fuchao), for foreign propaganda (until 2008 Cai Wu, since then Wang Chen) and the campaign for the construction of spiritual civilization (Ji Bingxuan); the remaining six are the Minister of Culture (until 2008 Sun Jiazheng, since then Cai Wu), the director of the Party organ *People's Daily* (until 2008 Wang Chen), the former director of Xinhua News Agency (until 2008 Tian Congming, since then Li Congjun), the director of the General Administration of Press and Publication (Liu Binjie), the standing vice-director and political commissar of the army's General Political Department (until 2009 Liu Yongzhi) and a vice-director of both the Central Committee's General Office and Secrecy Committee, who is responsible for communication and internet affairs (Zhao Shengxuan).

The duties of the Party's permanent watchdog over media work are shouldered by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee (CC), whose director usually holds a seat on the Politburo and the CC Secretariat and concomitantly acts as deputy head of the Central Leading Group. The Propaganda Department of the Central Committee is one of the core organizations of Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) and has been almost continuously existing since its establishment in 1924. Its domineering leader after the founding of the People's Republic was Lu Dingyi, who headed the department already since 1945 and was dismissed for alleged revisionism at the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. From the following year to 1977 the Propaganda Department was first put under a Military Control Commission and then completely disbanded. During that decade propaganda work was overseen by the two central leading groups led by Yao Wenyan and Kang Sheng. After the reestablishment of the department in

¹⁴ Hsiao Ching-chang and Cheek 1995; Lu Ning 2001: 45-46; Tian Zhongchu 2005: 59-60; Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan 2003; Shambaugh: 31-34

1977 it was headed by such prominent leaders as the later General-Secretary Hu Yaobang (during 1978 to 1980), Liu Shaoqi's former secretary Deng Liqun (during 1982 to 1985) and Zhao Ziyang's close follower Zhu Houze (during 1985 to 1987). From 2002 to 2012 the directorship was held by Politburo member Liu Yunshan, who already acted as vice-director since 1993 and who is one of the pillars of the present Party leadership. In late 2012 he was followed by Liu Qibao.¹⁵

In contrast to the Central Leading Group, the Propaganda Department is a full-blown organization and treated like a government ministry with independent accounting and own allocations from the state budget. Besides these regular allocations for running expenses and ordinary activities, it can draw on a Special Fund for Propaganda and Cultural Development that was created in 1994. Moreover, it disburses special revenues from an Investment Fee for Cultural Activities. Since 1997 this 3 percent income fee is levied from all entertainment places and units with advertisement revenues, in order to finance the expenses of the Party's campaign for the construction of spiritual civilization. During the last decade, the latter one has been the department's major public activity besides its regular duties.¹⁶

As shown in chart 1, the Central Propaganda Department has more than a dozen sub-departments. These have an estimated 350 administrative staff members at central level, plus roughly 43,000 staff in more than 3,200 parallel organizations at provincial level (including autonomous regions and centrally administered cities), city level (including prefectures and autonomous districts) and county level (including county-level cities and urban districts). The establishment of these parallel organizations is a prescribed must and not left to the discretion of lower levels. As one of the principal organs of the Party needed for mass campaigns, information, education and membership work, the Department also has extensions at the grass-roots level. If full-time propaganda personnel of towns, townships and urban street committees is added, the total number of staff in the system thus would be twice as large. Half-time staff, voluntary propagandists and the numerous propaganda committees installed in various institutions and mass organizations outside the regular system of propaganda departments would swell the numbers still further.

In terms of manpower, this is the fourth largest subsystem within the Party organization, right behind the discipline control commissions, the general offices and the organization departments. As such it did not escape the repeated streamlining of both government and Party organs, the last one of which started in 1998 at central level and has since been extended to all lower levels. It is noteworthy that the Propaganda Department could largely defend its domain and continues to duplicate much work that is performed by government organs. In 2006 it even seems to have acquired a new sub-department that is responsible for internet control. This can only be justified by reference to the principle of Party oversight and leadership, which is dear to the Party in more than one sense.

Authority over decisions on personnel is one of the essential powers of the Central Propaganda Department. Since 1980 it makes appointments to positions on its own nomenclature list which it handles in consultation and cooperation with the CCP CC Organization Department. The list nowadays includes the top leadership of the following government or Party organs: the General Administration of Press and Publications; the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television; Xinhua News Agency; the Ministry of Culture; the editorial office of the central Party organ *People's Daily*; the Academy of Social Sciences. In contrast to these organs and institutions, the Central Propaganda Department can only propose or comment on the appointment or dismissal of the directors of provincial propaganda departments, with the final say reserved for provincial Party committees. The same pattern of proposal and comment for the directorship of the next subordinate level is replicated further down the line.¹⁷

The nomenclature power of the Central Propaganda Department also extends to some subordinate units of the above mentioned central administrations such as the newspapers *Guangming Daily*, *Economic Daily* and *China Daily*, China Central TV Station, Central People's Broadcasting Station, Radio China International, the People's Press etc. It may further involve other units of the propaganda and culture system such as the Central Editions and Translations Bureau responsible for publishing Marxist-Leninist classics and Party literature; the Central Foreign Languages Bureau (alias China International Publishing Office or China International Publishing Group) with its seven subordinate publishing houses, five specialized journals for foreign readerships and three large-scale booksellers; the newly formed China Publishing Group with 25 subordinate publishers, journals, distributors, printers and other units; the Central Office for Foreign Propaganda (alias State Council Information Office); the State Cultural Relics Bureau; the National Library; central museums; the All-China Journalists Association; and the

¹⁵ Renmin ribao, 31 October 2003; Zhongyang xuanchuanbu 2003; Zhongyang xuanchuanbu 2006; Shambaugh 2007: 34.

¹⁶ Caizhengbu 1997a, 2000, 2007; Cao Pu 2007

¹⁷ Burns 1988; Chan 2004; Zhongguo gongchandang; Neimenggu xuanchuanbu 1996

Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Circles with twelve associations for writers, painters, musicians and other artists. All of these receive guidance for their various policies. Some of them are listed as both Party and state organs

The different positions handled by the central and lower-level propaganda departments are finely graded by rank and degree of control, i.e. joint management with the organization department for top positions, appointments or dismissals handled exclusively by the propaganda department for middle-level positions, nominations reported to the propaganda department for approval, cases reported for consultation and lower positions simply filed for notification. Arrangements at central and lower-levels may vary slightly, and the over-all trend has been to delegate the appointments to minor positions to subordinate administrations. But elections to major positions in cultural associations are always treated in the same way: they are only valid after a declaration of consent by the propaganda department in charge. Moreover, the officeholders often come from the propaganda department and other bureaucracies themselves.

Via these organizational channels or by means of the system of lower-level propaganda departments, the propaganda apparatus can extend its reach to all media within China. The Central Propaganda Department convenes annual conferences of propaganda department directors from all provinces and a few major cities, in order to convey its directives and discuss problems of general interest. Local cases are usually left to the discretion of lower-level departments, which are assigned duties in alignment with territorial and sectoral jurisdictions for the same or the following administrative level.

In contrast, the Central Propaganda Department's powers are curtailed by a structure of central-regional power-sharing and double jurisdiction that puts local propaganda organs under both horizontal leadership of the local Party committee and vertical guidance of their superior propaganda department. While this grants the superior propaganda department directive powers on technical matters and questions of policy, it gives preference to the local level in terms of decisions on organization and personnel. The lower-level propaganda departments thus wield nomenclatura power over their own propaganda and cultural units such as regional or local Xinhua branches, radio and TV stations, departments of cultural affairs, regional academies of social sciences, newspapers and journals, publishers, state-run bookstores, regional or local branches of cultural associations, which in turn have to accept the relevant policies of superior organs in their proper system.

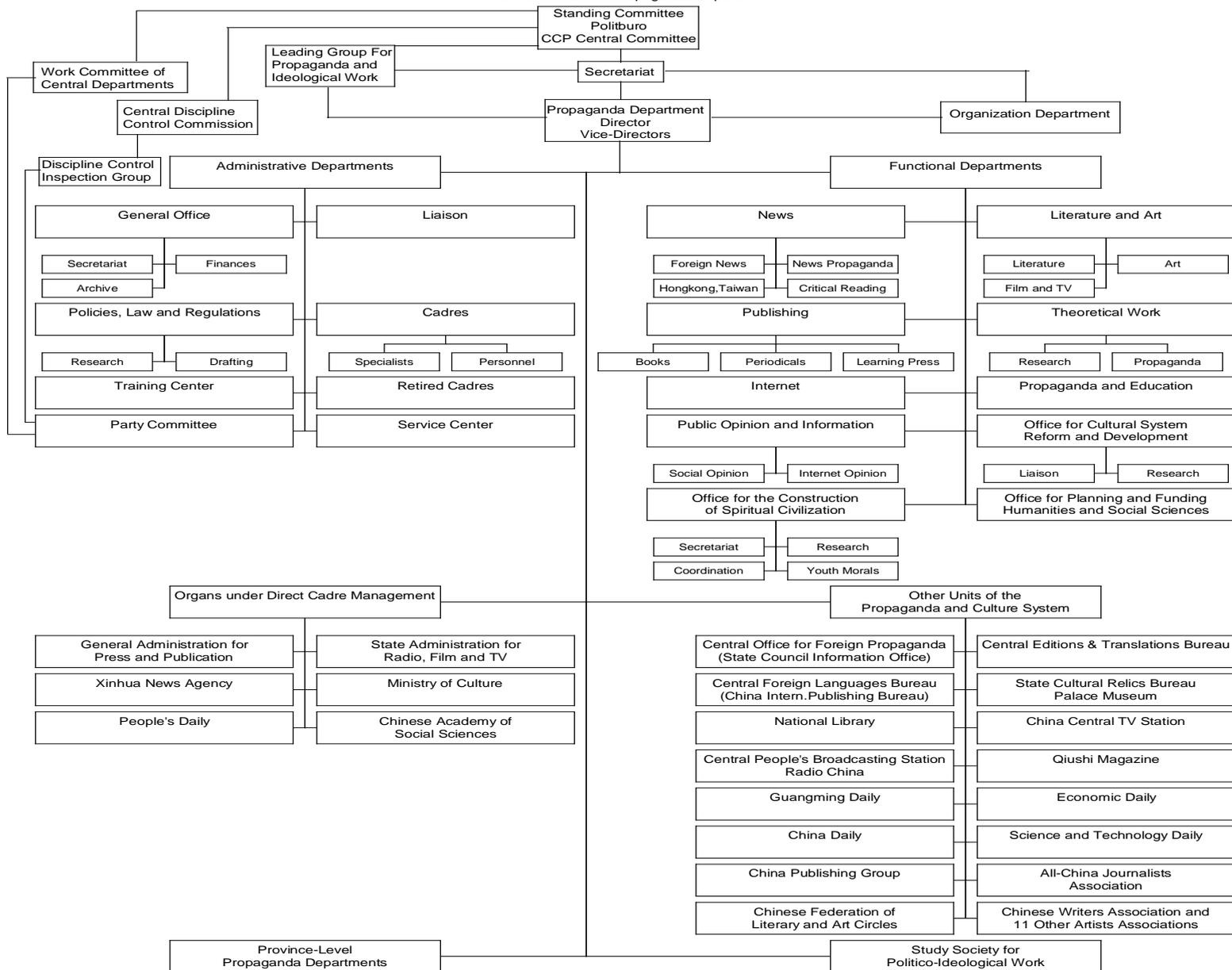
This complicated arrangement can create bureaucratic deadlock, if there are contests on political questions or conflicts of economic interest as they typically arise, when circulation and income from advertisement are involved. However, the Central Propaganda Department can intervene at any time and try to reach out to the local level directly, should it deem this necessary. It can invoke the Party seniority of its leadership or pressure local Party committees. This requires some efforts but can be accomplished with sufficient support in the Politburo and the Central Committee Secretariat, in which the director of the Propaganda Department holds a seat. The Secretariat in turn can order the Central Committee's Organization Department, which wields powers of demotion, dismissal or transfer over all members of provincial Party committees. In a similar vein, provincial Party committees have positions in city and prefectural Party committees under their cadre management, while these handle the county level.

The Propaganda Department's responsibilities for the whole propaganda and cultural sector include drafting of theoretical guidelines, direction of regular political schooling within the Party, supervision of foreign news and propaganda, control of book and journal publishing, film production, radio and TV broadcasting, guidance of literary and art activities and the various associations set up for writers, artists and journalists, planning of monthly lead stories and key propaganda topics for the year, as well as the monitoring of public opinion in the country by the scanning of newspapers, internet sites and internal reports.

Since 1996 the Department hosts the Office of the Directory Committee for the Construction of Spiritual Civilization, which coordinates 35 government bureaucracies, Party organs and mass organizations in conducting campaigns for political and moral education. These are designed to counter the pervasive loss of ideological orientation and cover almost any social problem with attitudinal and motivational content such as hygiene, AIDS or drug abuse, jobs for pensioners and reemployment for the idle, work safety, product piracy, corruption, civil servant conduct, treatment of infant girls, public order, crime awareness, hooliganism etc. etc. The largest efforts are spent on molding political education in schools, spreading scientific knowledge and popularizing new laws of immediate importance for the population. Although there always is a strong ideological ingredient in this type of work, it makes a valuable contribution to Chinese society in a number of fields.¹⁸

¹⁸ Lewis 2002. See also the website of the Committee for the Construction of Spiritual Civilization at: <http://www.godpp.gov.cn>

Chart 1: CCP CC Propaganda Department



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A further activity of the Propaganda Department is guidance of research work in the social sciences and the humanities. It has, for example, directed the editing and writing process of an authoritative encyclopedia on the economic and social history of the People's Republic in 150 volumes. By and large, guidance of academic and artistic activities has become relaxed and is supported by indirect means such as research funding, submittance of research plans, organization of exhibitions, sponsoring, featuring and commendations. Leadership over school books and political schooling for both teachers and students, evening schools, translation activities, central museums, libraries and cultural relics work seems likewise to have been progressively thinned out during recent years. Guidance for health propaganda and sports, as well as appointments to leading positions in universities and schools, which formerly belonged to the prerogatives of the Central Propaganda Department, had already been removed from its jurisdiction in 1988. Local propaganda departments still hung on to vestiges of these functions until the early 2000s. Overall direction of reforms in the media sector and internet supervision, however, have become two major new sectors of activities of the Central Propaganda Department.¹⁹

¹⁹ Liu 1971; Zhongyang xuanchuanbu 2002; Jiao Guobiao 2004; Zhongyang xuanchuanbu 2006.

Senior cadres of the Propaganda Department often also hold leadership positions in other cultural organizations or control organs for the media. One of the deputy directors of the Propaganda Department, for example, concurrently acted as director of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (Wang Taihua), another one as director of the State Council Information Office (Cai Wu). A former one (Li Congjun) leads Xinhua News Agency since 2008.

Supervising the supervisors, the Propaganda Department usually acts as a gray eminence behind the scenes. Even though during recent years it has preferred to translate its Leninist designation into the innocent English term „Publicity Department“, it is notable for shunning publicity and publishing one of the least informative websites of China’s leadership organs with no names, no organizational structure, no statutes and no communication addresses given.²⁰ It thus can reach out without being reachable. Typically enough, the organigram in chart 1 above has to be pieced together from dispersed information published for other purposes. This is different from the various government agencies implementing the Propaganda Department’s guidelines and functioning as its extensions, even if their personnel can hold views that can diverge widely from those of their mandators. In order to facilitate their administrative routine work, advertise their income-earning activities and connect with an ever more diversified clientele of economic actors, the various government bureaucracies and their affiliates post sometimes quite elaborate information on the internet. This is in accord with China’s Government Online Project, initiated in 1999 for promoting transparency, responsiveness and efficiency in administration.²¹ E-government has been quite successfully implemented under the government platform www.gov.cn and less so under the CCP site <http://cpc.people.com.cn>. It is complemented by a determined and impressive effort to raise the scope and quality of Chinese statistics, a long-term effort pursued since the 1980s.

Two organizations act as the direct supervisors of the media: the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) and the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). Both have only incomplete networks of parallel institutions at provincial, city and county levels, more in the case of SARFT, less in the case of GAPP. This is a result of the fact that nearly all counties have their own radio and television stations, whereas the number of counties with their own newspapers was never high and has shrunk to merely 3 percent of all counties. This situation has prompted various attempts at combining the media organs at lower levels, where they are virtually one with the local radio and TV stations. Amalgamation of GAPP and SARFT city or county branches and local departments of culture started already in 1993. After 2000 a number of provinces, cities and counties even combined their three departments of culture, press and publication, radio and television into one. The most notable case in point is Guangdong province. In other instances, the department of culture has been merged with either the provincial and local GAPP or SARFT bureau. Shanghai which set up a City Administration of Culture, Radio, Film and Television in 2004 serves as an example for such an arrangement, while Beijing City has kept all three bureaucracies separate. Today, only 25 percent of the prefectural cities have a separate GAPP bureau; at county level the percentage is even less. At central level, GAPP and SARFT are bound to merge into one body in 2013.

These diverse set-ups are a result of the repeated streamlining of both the Party and state bureaucracies, which gave lower levels the right to devise their own organizational arrangements in some specifically designated areas. Streamlining already began in 1982 and continued in three further waves in 1988, 1993 and 1998. It aims at a cutback of costs and personnel and always involves a redefinition of duties with a reduction of bureaucratic structures and overlap. In this way, and by reducing the size of the remaining institutions, the central state organs have shrunk by altogether 20 percent in 1993 and again by 50 percent in 1998. These were also the targets for provincial and county levels. But streamlining at lower levels was uneven and blunted by different degrees of later rebounding.²² There may also be a reincrease of personnel with the coming merger of central GAPP and SARFT.

The figures given above are also the rough margins for GAPP and SARFT. GAPP suffered a 55 percent reduction of staff at central level in 1998. But the supervision of the Chinese publications jungle, as well as the combat against product piracy, pornographic and illegal publications, have been considered important and demanding enough to raise the number of personnel in 2001 again by 20 percent to its present level of 175 at central level. Nevertheless, the repeated streamlining put pressure on the bureaucracy and made it necessary to develop new methods for performing its prescribed functions. Today, the GAPP system from central to county level may have some 26,000 administrative staff on its payrolls, whereas the equivalent estimate for the SARFT system would run up to a figure of 30,000, service personnel and specialists in subordinate institutions excluded. Because there are no independent broadcasting and publishing activities in towns and townships, no further bureaucratic extensions exist at this lowest

²⁰ Zhongguo gongchandang

²¹ On the Government Online Project see: Zhang Junhua 2002; Lagerkvist 2005; Hartford 2005

²² Yu Ligong 1992; Renmin Ribao, 25 February 1999; Xingzheng renshi guanli 2000; Wang Zhongyu 2003

level of state administration. In many cases, GAPP bureaus have special squads for raids against illegal and pornographic publications. In other instances, these special groups are attached to the local propaganda departments.

The history of the government's media organs has been complicated. GAPP was established in 1949 and soon became integrated into the Ministry of Culture, where its forerunner, the State Publications Bureau, concentrated on the administration of copyrights and the organization of the book publishing industry. Between 1975 and 1986 there were repeated reorganizations, with GAPP precursors either separating from or reintegrating into the Ministry of Culture. GAPP's jurisdiction was broadened in 1987 to include all publishers of newspapers and journals. Today, it is also responsible for audio-visual materials including publications, music, games and movies on Video, CD, DVD or other modern storage devices, provided these are not destined for TV broadcasting. In that case, the responsibility would pass on to SARFT. Finally, the administration also holds jurisdiction over internet publishing, as well as the import and export of publications.

GAPP performs regular monitoring of book publishing, newspapers, journals and internet websites with publishing content; only newspapers, journals and books published by organs under the Central Committee's direct leadership such as the *People's Daily* are outside its purview. Jurisdictional haggling may arise, if GAPP indictments cover lower-level newspapers with Party-organ character that function as mouthpieces of Party committees. Moreover, the administration investigates and prosecutes all illegal publishers, import and export units. With its mandates for drafting regulations on publishing or for planning the number, the composition and the regional distribution of all publishing units, printing and copying houses, distributors and bookstores it also wields powerful instruments for exerting both political and market control. The present organizational structure of GAPP as an independent administration under the State Council is condensed in chart 2 below, which also shows the subordinate companies and institutions, 10 of them on their own sub-budgets within the amalgamated GAPP budget. In 2007 GAPP directorship passed to its former deputy director Liu Binjie.²³

From 382 newspapers and 295 journals in 1950, and a low of just 62 central and provincial dailies and journals during the Cultural Revolution in 1969, Chinese periodicals grew to 1,116 in 1978 and to the vast number of nearly 9,950 magazines and more than 1,900 newspapers in 2011, among them 217 central, 825 provincial, 869 city and 17 county dailies. This creates an entirely new quality of problems in management and control. GAPP has been actively involved in recurrent crackdowns and reorganizations of this widely expanded publishing scene. Earlier ones occurred in 1988 and 1990, when publications in support of the democracy movements were closed, or in 1997, when 413 periodicals, the majority of which focused on the social sciences, ceased publication. The latest one of 2003/04 involved a major round-up of 677 newspapers and journals, shut down for either political problems or unprofitable operations. Other victims of the latest contraction included most county newspapers, as well as periodicals of industrial or research associations on the provincial or sub-provincial level.²⁴

Earlier retrenchments also extended to internal papers and journals. Only some of these materials contain sensitive reports. The majority usually does not cover secret information in the strict sense. They rather convey news that are distributed for guidance and coordination within various government organizations, institutions, associations or enterprises; often the motive to bypass the tax office or cumbersome formalities for regular publications is involved, too. By greatly expanding the liberties of lower-level units, the economic reforms brought about a large growth of internal publications. 318 internal journals and a further 573 designated as "only for domestic distribution" were on the postal delivery list during the mid-1980s, and an unknown number of others were distributed locally. But by 1995 the number of internal journals had reached the staggering figure of 10,915. Some 6,500 internal newspapers still had to be added to the list – more than three times the number of the openly sold dailies. New GAPP rules from 1998 led to the closure of one third of these internal papers and journals. The rest were converted into "Internal Materials" and obliged to register with regular renewal. Additional rules delegated implementation of the conversion process to the provinces that also acquired jurisdiction over print shops and book stores.²⁵

Furthermore, GAPP used its prerogatives to promote the establishment of newspaper or publishing groups. More than 300 other newspapers and journals had thus been reorganized and brought under different umbrella organizations by 2003. The drive resembles industrial policies pursued in other areas of Chinese economic reforms, where the aim since the late 1990s has been to establish large and internationally competitive conglomerates. For the

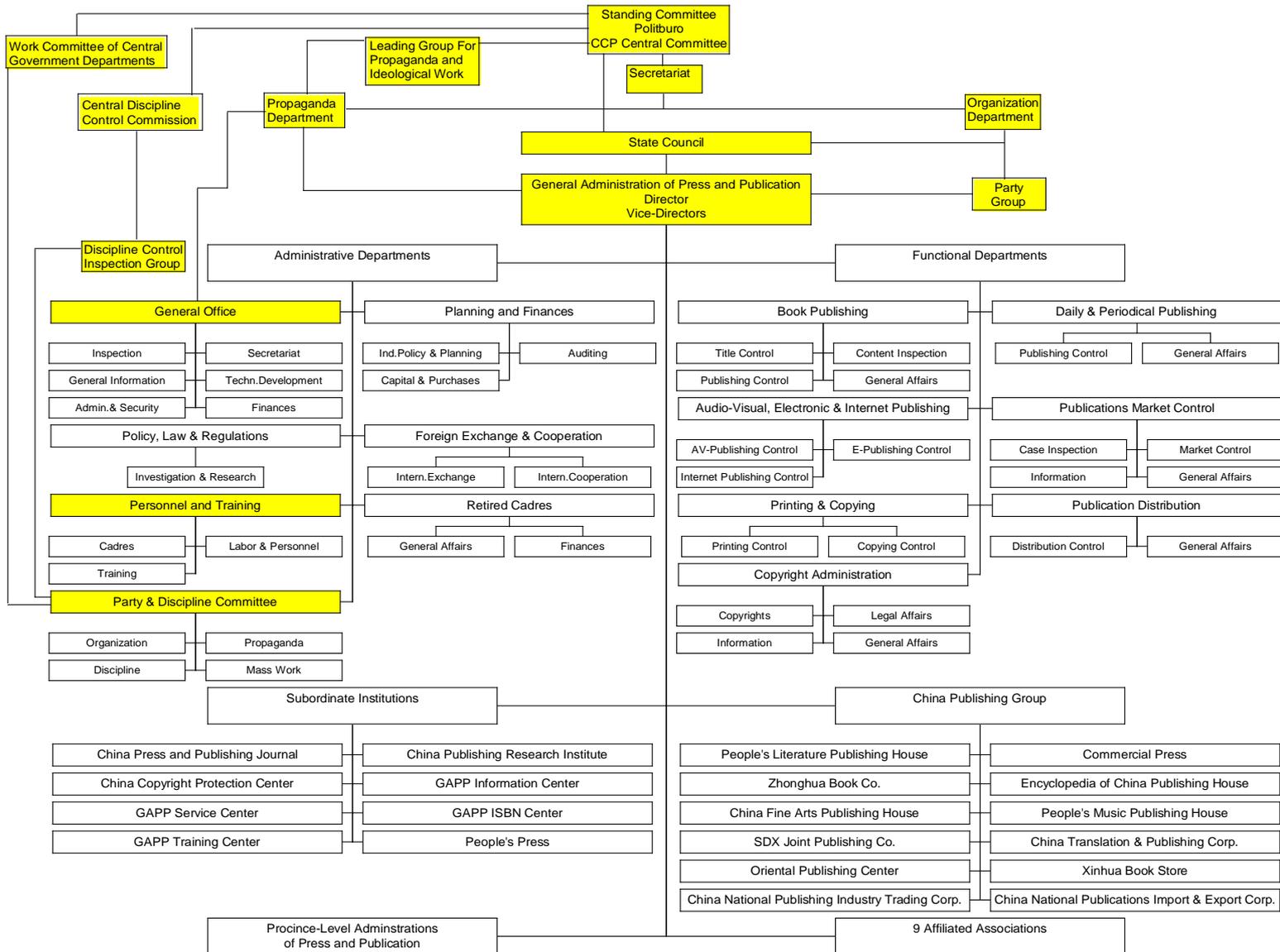
²³ GAPP. See also the 2006 report of the National Audit Office of the PRC: www.audit.gov.cn/n1057/n1072/n1282/28458.html (accessed 20 February 2008)

²⁴ Renmin ribao, 28 November 2003; Esarey 2005: 44-53; ZCN 2012

²⁵ Rudolph 1984; 1986 postal distribution list; Hsiao Ching-chang and Cheek 1995; GAPP 1998; Wei Yongzheng 2002: 222-223

Chinese press this process had already started in Guangzhou in 1996, where the first newspaper group around a leading Party daily was formed. With more than one group established in the provincial capitals and large prefectural cities, and with inter-provincial alliances getting permitted, this has created competition between different bureaucratic cartels. It also allows the subsidizing of unpopular Party dailies with income from subsidiary tabloids and weekend editions having a large print-run and substantial advertisement revenues – even though that method may be fraught with internal tensions within the newspaper group.

Chart 2: General Administration of Press and Publication



colored boxes signify key areas of Party control
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In spite of hard efforts for remedying the situation, the Party dailies have never reattained their former circulation, stature and influence before the reform period. Papers published by various bureaucracies, trade organizations or the various traditional mass organizations for distinct social groups have likewise declined. They have become eclipsed by a popular press catering to consumer tastes, entertainment and sensationalist reporting of local issues. An example of the new arrangements is offered by the *Southern Daily Newspaper Group* in Guangzhou (Canton). Besides the traditional Party organ *Nanfang Ribao* (*Southern Daily*), it includes the tabloid *Nanfang Dushi Bao*

(*Southern Metropolitan Daily*), the weekly *Nanfang Zhoumo* (*Southern Weekend*) targeted at an intellectual readership, the *Nanfang Tiyu* (*Southern Sports*) and the *21 Shiji Jingji Baodao* (*21st Century Economic Report*). Its main competitor is the *Guangzhou Daily* Newspaper Group formed around the country's most successful Party organ with the highest sales and advertisement income.²⁶

Similar developments show up in book publishing. Here, the most important newly formed unit is the China Publishing Group, a large-scale conglomerate including altogether 12 publishers, booksellers and marketing units, plus a still larger number of affiliated publishing houses, bookstores, print shops or news reporting units. Founded in 2002 as a state-run institution, in 2004 the group was turned into a state-owned company with the mission to modernize operations, diversify capital structure and assume responsibility for profits and losses. Still, it continues to function under the political leadership of the Central Propaganda Department, the trade administration of GAPP and the financial supervision of the Ministry of Finance, with the State Council acting as capital holder. As of 2007, 25 similar publishing groups had been organized as companies on the provincial level. Only the People's Press retained its status as a state institution.²⁷

Similar to GAPP, its sister organization SARFT exercises control of a distinct media segment. Like most other bureaucracies the administration suffered a large cut-back of administrative personnel in 1998, when it was halved from 446 to 223 administrative positions at central level. This has happened even though TV and radio coverage of more than 95 percent of the population, with a daily average of roughly three TV viewer hours, let these media far surpass the influence of the traditional print products. The spread of radio by wire rediffusion stations in the villages during the 1950s, the slow growth of privately owned radio sets until the early 1980s and the phenomenal increase of households with TV ownership in the 1990s were the major landmarks in this history of constant expansion. As of today, nearly every Chinese household has its own color TV.²⁸

The precursor of SARFT was the Central Radio Administration founded in 1949, which since the beginning of TV transmissions in 1958 also held jurisdiction over the television sector. It has long been functioning under the dual leadership of both the State Council and the Central Committee. Testifying to the significance of radio and television, the administration was steered by a Military Control Commission during the Cultural Revolution from 1967 to 1972 and later came under the direct leadership of the Propaganda Department. Afterwards it reverted to the position of an administration under dual government and Party leadership, enjoying elevated status as a ministry between 1982 and 1997. Its special position is also documented by the fact that it is one of the only four media organs that are headed by a member of the Central Committee and thus enjoy ministerial rank (the other three being GAPP, Xinhua News Agency, and the Party organ *People's Daily*).

Since 1986 SARFT also acquired jurisdiction over the Chinese film industry, which until that time was under the control of the Ministry of Culture's Film Bureau. The number of state-run feature film studios under state auspices grew from 3 in 1949 and 12 in 1978 to the present number of 32 national or provincial units. The latter ones had only become permitted after 1984. To these units must be added 31 film-studios under mixed ownership and 36 movie theater chains with associated units. Self-financing of the industry was introduced in 1984, and since 1991 mixed financing by either a national film development fund, private companies, state-run enterprises or overseas sources has replaced the formerly uniform state funding. Even though SARFT continues to set quotas for production, distribution and film content. The diversified arrangements reflect a problematic situation of the Chinese film industry, which has suffered from dwindling state subsidies, universal TV coverage, product piracy on DVD and an ensuing decline of production during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The popularity and the increasing imports of Hollywood blockbuster movies, as stipulated in China's WTO commitments, have added to the difficulties. They make it hard to respect the SARFT regulation according to which two thirds of movie theater showings should be reserved to domestic films.²⁹

In contrast to the shifting situation in the film sector, SARFT controls all radio and TV broadcasting units from the county to the national level. From modest beginnings with 39 radio and 11 wire stations in 1949 these had grown to 93 radio stations, 32 TV stations and more than 2,500 county wire stations at the start of the reform period in 1978. Just as in the case of the print media, the reforms brought about a large increase of entertainment programs coupled with advertisement, especially in regional and local broadcasts.³⁰ From 1983 to 1996 local stations with independent

²⁶ Polumbaum 1994a; Zhao Yuezhi 2000; He Qinglian 2004; Lin Hui 2004; Guowuyuan 2006; Guojia tongjiju 2007

²⁷ Guowuyuan 2004; CNPUBG; Xinhua 2007a

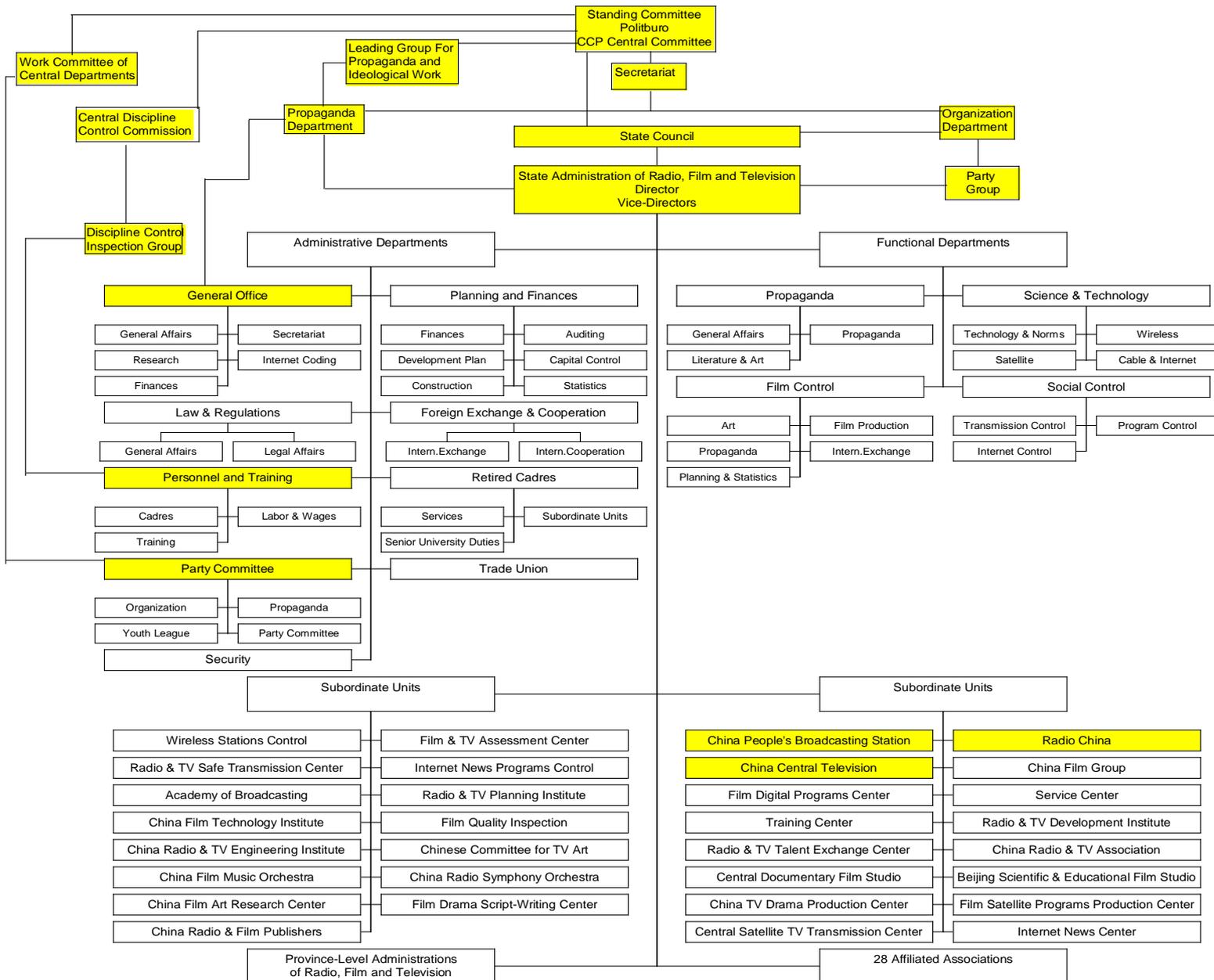
²⁸ Womack 1986; Li Xiaoping 1991

²⁹ Chu Yingchi 2002; Zhang Junhua 2005: 32-35.

³⁰ Bai Ruoyun 2005

programs expanded greatly, as the government pursued a policy of decentralization, with authority over radio and television given to the four levels of center, province, city and county. After recentralization, the closure of independent broadcasters at prefectural and county level and the merger of wireless and cable stations in 1996, there were still nearly 267 radio stations, 296 TV stations and nearly 2,000 wire broadcasting units one decade later. However, in reaction to many irregularities, a lack of control, as well as an unbridled spread of TV commercials and imported programs in lower-level broadcasts, the remaining stations below the provincial level have been largely forced to abandon their own programs and to become merely distributors of central and provincial content. While municipal stations can still maintain one channel of their own, county stations are only allowed to insert some local content during a few half-hour time slots.³¹ This has reduced the four-tiered system of radio and TV stations devised in 1983 to a presently largely three- or even two-tiered one. At the same time, it has given SARFT more power than GAPP, which has to cope with far greater entrenched local interests.

Chart 3: State Administration of Radio, Film and Television



colored boxes signify key areas of Party control
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³¹ Shue 1981; Lynch 1999: 31-33, 176-183; Lin Hui 2004; Guo Zhenzhi 2007; Guojia tongjiju 2007; SARFT.

In 1998 SARFT had to cede authority over radio and TV transmission networks, including both wireless and cable installations, to the newly created Ministry of Information Industry (MII). But the administration still exerts direct leadership over an empire. It is only incompletely sketched in chart 3 above and comprises China's three national radio and TV stations (the central TV station CCTV, Central People's Broadcasting Station, and Radio China International with broadcasts for foreign audiences), nearly 40 other subordinate film studios, companies, or institutions, plus 28 affiliated associations. 23 of the subordinate institutions operate on their own budget within the amalgamated SARFT budget. If the film sector is not taken into consideration, the revenues of radio and television depended to less than 15 percent on appropriations from the state and more than 50 percent on income from advertising during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Advertising in radio and television in turn made up 29 percent of all combined advertising income for radio, television, newspapers and periodicals in 1983 and has ever since increased to 56 percent in 2004. To a large degree, SARFT and its subordinate stations thus have become dependent on advertising, with the rest of the revenues mainly coming from other sources of commercial income such as royalties, rents and leases, co-productions, technical services or ticket sales. In view of the declared will of the government to terminate direct financing in the foreseeable future, this situation will become even more conspicuous.³²

Taking its clues from reform plans of the Party and similar to GAPP, SARFT has tried to forge a huge industrial and commercial conglomerate with more than 20,000 employees out of its subordinate units. But because of the divergent interests involved in this embryonic enterprise, the China Radio, TV and Film Broadcasting Group, this plan from 2001 did not really become a running proposition. It seems to have been given up in 2004. The fact that approximately 95 percent of all TV income hails from advertisement and that CCTV with its meanwhile 17 channels is dwarfing all partners seems to create the biggest obstacles. The overwhelming dominance of CCTV is such that a split-up of the station into two companies has been proposed. Another point of contention is the question whether movie production and broadcasting should stay combined within the TV station or become separated.³³

This issue also involves the regional media groups around radio and television stations, the establishment of which proceeded smoother. The first one of these cartels was the Wuxi Radio and Television Group established in 1999, which found numerous imitators in the following years. Some of them were organized as province-level institutions, a solution that effectively created a new administrative tier between the provincial SARFT administration and the individual radio or TV station. However, on the order of the Party, all broadcasters had to separate from the newly formed conglomerates in 2005, in order to prevent their political mandate from becoming diluted by commercial interests.

While new solutions for bundling the commercial interests of SARFT and sharing the huge advertisement income of CCTV are still being sought, the agency's administrative control functions continue unabated. Similar to GAPP practices, they include the regular monitoring of radio, TV and film content, the formulation of annual plans for the volume, distribution and structure of film production, the drawing up of regulations for the licensing of the relevant media segment, the handling of import and export agreements and international cooperation. Until recently SARFT was led by Central Committee member Wang Taihua, who was also a vice-director of the Central Propaganda Department.³⁴ In 2011 he was replaced by Cai Fuchao, a former reporter and editor with *Beijing Daily* and a member of the Party committee of Beijing Municipality.

Supervision of the traditional media is founded on a division of labor between well-established institutions. Control of the burgeoning internet, however, has become entangled in a haggling over competing jurisdictions. These involve conflicts both on the horizontal and the vertical line, as not only different administrations but also different echelons compete over resources. While technological progress would enable the integration of radio, TV and internet uses, the struggle over revenue erects high barriers - in China as elsewhere in the world. And while institutions and companies are always eager to swallow up their subordinate lower-level units, they strongly resist mergers with their superior level.

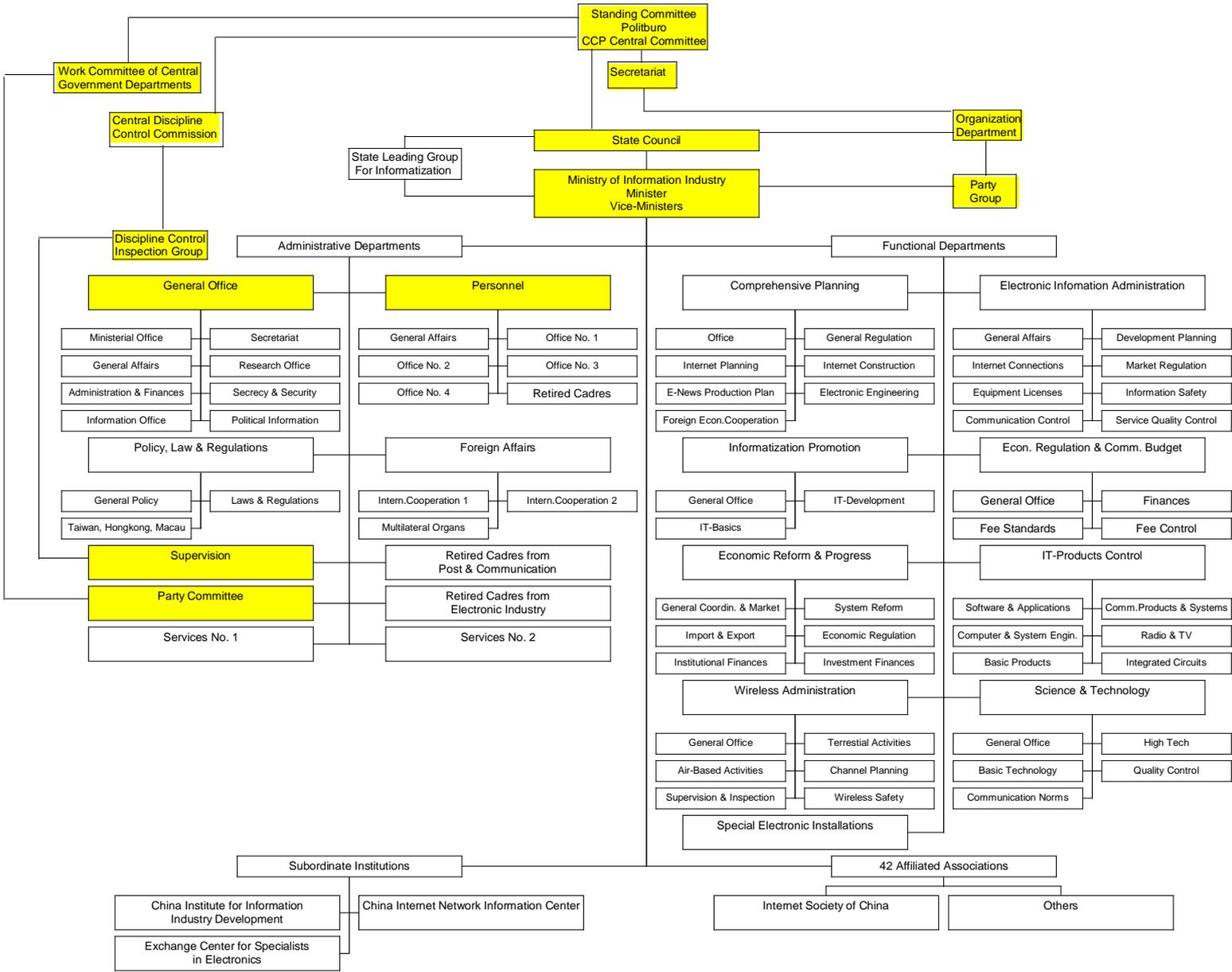
³² 2006 report of the National Audit Office of the PRC; see also Caizhengbu 1997b; Wang Peixian 2001; www.istis.sh.cn/list/list.asp?id=2380.

³³ Mediaally 2007

³⁴ SARFT; SARFT d. See also the 2006 report of the National Audit Office of the PRC: www.audit.gov.cn/n1057/n1072/n1282/28458.html (accessed 20 February 2008)

Such conflicts are taking place in face of a veritable explosion of internet use in China during recent years. Since the sending of the first Chinese email in 1987 and the first link up to the internet in 1993, the number of Chinese internet users mushroomed from 0.62 million in 1997 to more than 564 million at the end of 2012. Recent statistics have them an average of 19 hours per week online. In the regular Chinese surveys on internet use, news reading as the primary interest in web surfing has been overtaken by entertainment and recreational uses. Nearly 60 percent of the users are in the age brackets up to 30, and 40 percent are either students or highly educated professionals. In view of the high numbers, strong economic interests from the provider side are involved, too. There is a heavy concentration of both supply and demand in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong: in these three administrative units from 60 percent (Guangdong) to 70 percent (Beijing) of the population have access to the internet, and here the majority of all Chinese domains and websites are located.³⁵

Chart 4: Ministry of Information Industry



colored boxes signify key areas of Party control
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³⁵ On early Chinese internet activities see: Qiu 2000. All figures for 2011 and 2012 from CNNIC 2011, 2012

A major player is the Ministry of Information Industry (MII), which was created in 1998 by a merger of the formerly independent Ministry of Electronic Industry and the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication. Both ministries were noted for their intense rivalries in the build-up of telecommunications during the late 1980s and early 1990s.³⁶ In 2008 the ministry also assumed the duties of the former State Council Office for Informatization and was renamed Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT). Continuing rivalries between the MII and SARFT hamper the integration of telecommunication, radio and television networks even today. The MII had 320 administrative cadres on its list, 430 less than the combined figure for its two predecessor ministries. Because the economic reforms abolished direct central control of subordinate production and construction units and reduced the former industrial branch ministries to regulatory and supervisory functions, streamlining has had a particularly large impact here. The ministry's subordinate extensions are strong at provincial and municipal level but weak at county level, where they are often combined with the local commissions for development and reform, the successors of the erstwhile planning commission. Altogether, the system probably counts some 13,000 administrative staff, plus a considerably larger number of specialists in subordinate institutions.

Apart from its control of radio and TV transmission networks, the MII regulates and controls all internet access and content providers via its Department for Electronic Information Administration. Moreover, it has issued regulations on internet publishing together with GAPP. But in marked difference to GAPP, the ministry, led by Central Committee member Wang Xudong from 2003 to 2008, by Central Committee member Li Yizhong from 2008-2010 and by Miao Wei since 2010, does not belong to the propaganda and culture system in the strict sense and thus is under no leadership of the Propaganda Department. Instead it is led by the State Leading Group For Informatization. This coordinating group was founded in 1996 in order to promote e-government, further informational networking and establish joint IT-standards. Originally chaired by former premier Zhu Rongji, it today is under a vice-premier, who directs a network of 13 central government, Party and army departments.

Chart 4 above indicates the predominantly technical and economic nature of MII's activities. These include the drafting and enforcement of legal regulations, industrial policies and economic plans for the information and communication sector, the issuing of technical standards for both hardware and software, the promotion of relevant research and development, the licensing of telecom, satellite and information networks, the promulgation of fee schedules etc. Nevertheless, the ministry's work always carries implications for the more heavily politicized efforts of the propaganda apparatus. Among the many subordinate organs of the ministry that are incompletely listed in the graph, 59 are running on their own budget within the amalgamated MII budget. One of the important ones is the China Internet Network Information Center which, apart from keeping statistics on internet development in China, handles the registration of all domains, internet keywords, IP addresses and autonomous system numbers in the country.³⁷

The MII also licenses the meanwhile ten backbone network operators that are authorized to link up to the worldwide net and that have sprung from initiatives of the Chinese Academy of Science, the Ministry of Education and the former Ministries of Post and Telecommunication or Electronic Industry: China Telecom (ChinaNet), China NetCom (CNC), China Science and Technology Network (CSTNET), China UniCom (UNINET), China Mobile (CMNET), China Education and Research Network (CERNET), China Great Wall Communications (CGWNET), China Satellite Communication Corp. (CSNET), China International Electronic Commerce Center (CIECC) and China Tietong Online. However, this still leaves the supervision of internet broadcasts with SARFT. GAPP in turn approves and oversees all publication and information sites on the internet.³⁸

To make matters still more complicated, the State Council Information Office (SCIO) claims planning and guidance rights over internet activities, too. This office was founded in 1991 in order to improve China's negative image abroad after the 1989 Tiananmen events. Before 1991 foreign propaganda was a direct domain of the Propaganda Department. Although the Information Office presents itself as a unit of the State Council, it is also a Party organ known under the name Central Foreign Propaganda Office.³⁹ Cai Wu, its director from 2005-2008, was concurrently

³⁶ Lynch 1999: 35-40, 165-175. For the background of telecommunication history see: Lee 1997.

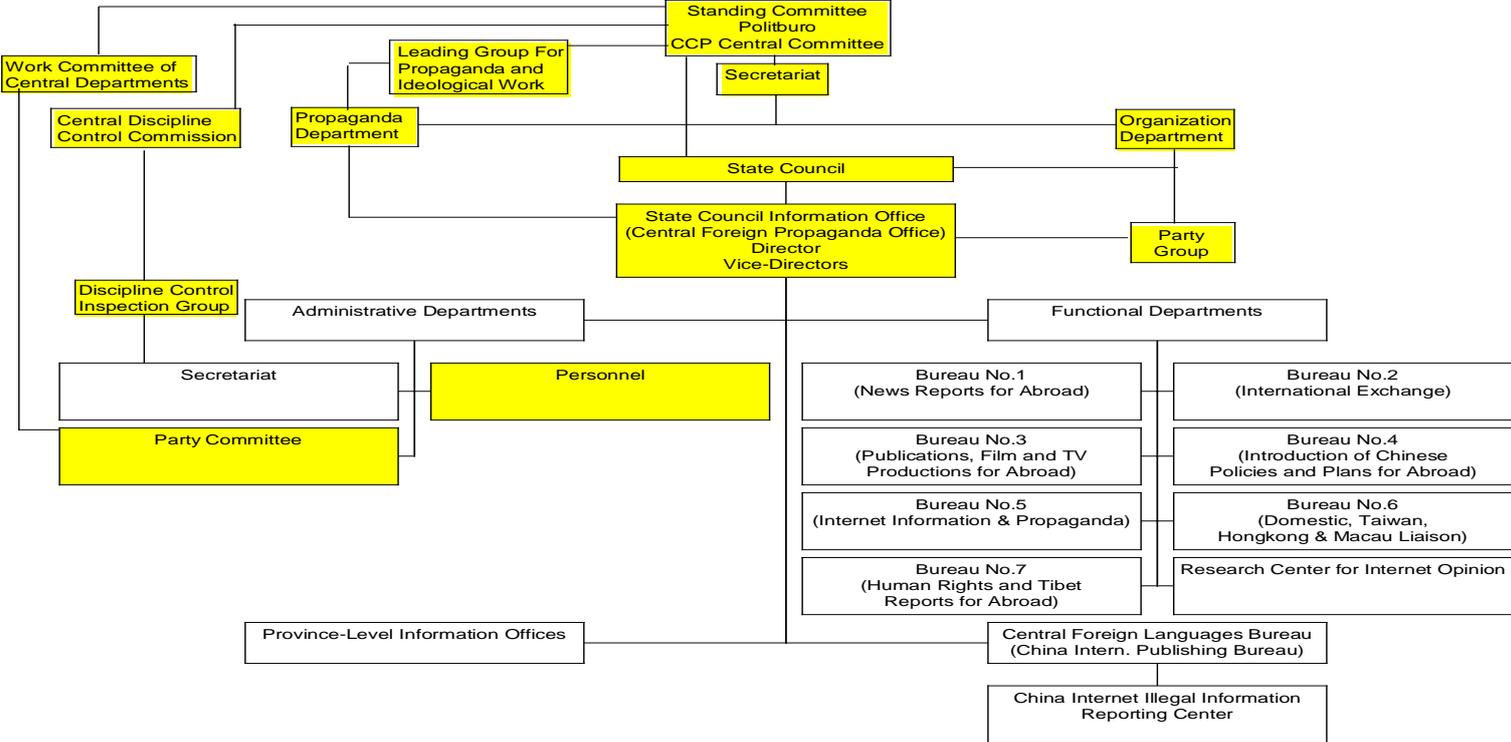
³⁷ CNNIC 2006. See also the 2006 report of the National Audit Office of the PRC: www.audit.gov.cn/n1057/n1072/n1282/28458.html (accessed 20 February 2008)

³⁸ MII; GAPP. On Chinese internet networks, service and content providers during the period 1987-2000 see: Harwit and Clark 2001.

³⁹ Zhu Muzhi 2007

a vice-director of the Propaganda Department and has been promoted to Central Committee (CC) member status in 2007. Similar arrangements have been found for Cai Mingzhao, his successor since 2009. This confers power and influence. Nevertheless, the office is subordinate to the Propaganda Department whose director also sits on the Politburo and the CC Secretariat and thus occupies a senior position with guidance power in many respects. In some provinces and cities the leading positions of the regional information office even are on the nomenclatura of the regional propaganda department, or the office has been reconverted into a section of the propaganda department during the streamlining since 1998.

Chart 5: State Council Information Office (Central Foreign Propaganda Office)



colored boxes signify key areas of Party control
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The SCIO mainly coordinates and implements China’s foreign propaganda in a great number of radio and press outlets such as *Beijing Review*, *China Today*, *China Daily*, Radio China International and others. It also sponsors activities such as holding press conferences, issuing government White Books, promoting Chinese exhibitions and selling publications abroad, advertising in foreign newspapers, organizing press visits etc.⁴⁰ But the *Administrative Rules for Internet News and Information Services* from 2005 and their provisional predecessors from 2000 turn it and its provincial counterparts also into the major organ for the supervision of political news or information on the internet and the authorization of relevant providers. Furthermore, the rules from 2005 grant the SCIO planning rights in regard to the volume, composition and regional distribution of internet news and information services within China. After the more or less unbridled spread of internet information during the 1990s and early 2000s, this has finally transplanted the powers of GAPP vis-à-vis the print-media and of SARFT vis-à-vis radio, film and television to parallel arrangements for the internet sector.

The State Council Information Office exerts internet control via its Bureau No.5 or the newly set up Research Center for Internet Opinion. This sub-unit analyzes blogs, internet forums and other internet materials that reveal the personal views of users, condensing them to a daily report for the Central Committee.⁴¹ Similar units are being

⁴⁰ Shambaugh 2007: 47-50

⁴¹ Xinhua 2005b; Reporters Without Borders 2007. On internet control during the earlier period see: Harwit and Clark 2001.

established by the Information Offices of big cities. While these activities limit themselves to the canvassing of news and opinions, the China Internet Illegal Information Reporting Center focuses on control and censorship. Formally, the Reporting Center is an organ of the Internet Society of China, which is affiliated with the MII. In reality, however, the Central Foreign Languages Bureau provides leadership and support. This bureau in turn is subordinate to the State Council Information Office.

Besides enforcing restrictive rules and monitoring the internet, proactive promotion of official government and Party websites is an equally important field of SCIO activity.⁴² Some of the websites are directed at the Chinese public exclusively and thus compete with the web portals of such major Chinese internet companies as *Sina*, *NetEase* or *Sohu*. In contrast to these private content providers, which draw mostly from newspapers and operate on the cut-and-paste-and-rearrange principle, they often generate their own news and present it in better organized form. Most of them have also shorter foreign-language editions for conveying official Chinese viewpoints abroad.

With their own news services *Zhongguo Wang* (published since 1997 at China.com.cn and meanwhile extended to nine foreign-language editions) and *Zhongguo Taiwan Wang* (published since 1999 at www.chinataiwan.org in Chinese and English editions), SCIO and its subordinate Central Foreign Languages Bureau were among the forerunners in this rush on the new medium. Only *Zhongguo Ribao Wang*, i.e. the internet edition of the official *China Daily* (published since 1995 in English and Chinese at chinadaily.com.cn), *Yangshi Guoji Wang*, i.e. the international website of the central TV station CCTV (published since 1996 under www.cctv.com and presently also appearing in English, Spanish and French editions), or *Renmin Wang*, i.e. the *People's Daily* extensive internet presentation (published since 1997 at www.people.com.cn with presently six simultaneous foreign-language editions), made an earlier debut. The other official news services that are promoted as key central websites are Xinhua News Agency's *Xinhua Wang* (published since 1997 at www.xinhuanet.com with presently five simultaneous foreign-language editions); China Radio International's *Guoji Zaixian-Wang* (published since 1997 at <http://gb.cri.cn>, also with presently five simultaneous foreign-language editions); Central People's Broadcasting Station's *Zhongguo Guangbo Wang* (published since 1998 at wwwn.cnr.cn, also with an English edition); the *Guangming Daily's* *Guangming Wang* (published since 1998 at www.gmw.cn); the Communist Youth League's *Zhong Qing Wang* (published since 1999 at www.youth.cn); and the China Economic News' *Zhongguo Jingji Wang* (published since 2003 at www.ce.cn and also available in English and German editions).

All these official websites have been repeatedly revamped according to the latest technological specifications and media fashions. Some of them like *Renmin Wang* or *Xinhua Wang* publish thousands of news items daily. Emulating the commercial sites, many of them also offer chat rooms, blog services and internet fora, among them the *People's Daily's* extensively used *Qiangguo Luntan* (Strong Country Forum).⁴³ While the commercial sites usual focus on entertainment, sports and games, education, technology and health, or topics as love, fashions and food, travel, cars and stocks, *Qiangguo Luntan* animates users to comment current state and Party agenda, offers a channel for addressing complaints to the premier or lets the Propaganda Department solicit replies to questions such as "What do you feel are the hot topics and difficulties in present society that need answers?", "Have you thought about these problems? What are your opinions?" and "Can you cite some typical example or case illustrating these problems?"

The huge internet presence of central Party and government organs is complemented at provincial and municipal level where a similar network of officially designated key websites exists. Most of them are maintained by the official press; nearly all major newspapers have built up their own internet edition. Whenever viable, the internet sections of the press have been reorganized as separate, subordinate units since 2004, with the clear mission to turn in profits.⁴⁴

However, all of these activities of GAPP, SARFT, SCIO and Xinhua have not prevented the Propaganda Department to become active in internet affairs itself. During recent years it set up its own apparatus for the monitoring of internet reports within its two sub-departments of internet affairs or public opinion and information. While the first one issues regular directives on prohibited or required content, the latter one is responsible for scanning public opinion and preparing daily reports for the leadership.⁴⁵ And the list of regulators and controllers carries on. Empowered by rules on internet security protection from 1996 and 1997, the Ministry of Public Security

⁴² State Council Information Office 2004

⁴³ See the *Qiangguo luntan* website at: <http://bbs.people.com.cn>. Comp. also Hung Chin-fu 2003, Yang Guobin 2003

⁴⁴ <http://baom.sina.com.cn/3/2007/0329/1212.html>

⁴⁵ Reporters Without Borders 2007

thus also conducts scanning and filtering of internet content within its own special unit. It is, as some Chinese reports proudly point out, on 24 hour internet alert and prosecutes illegal behavior contravening state secrecy laws. A discussion of bureaucratic intricacies in the regulation of the increasingly popular internet blogs brought out the fact that in addition to the organs mentioned above there are still further players in the supervisory thicket: the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of State Security, the State Administration of Industry and Commerce, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the State Secrecy Bureau and the State Secret Code Regulatory Commission. Altogether, the record of supervisory organs for the internet comprises 14 different agencies. The inclusion of formally non-governmental bodies such as various mass organizations and associations active in internet policing would swell the list still further. In 2011, the leadership made an attempt to reign in this ramification of agencies active in internet supervision and established a new State Internet Information Office under SCIO director Wang Chen. Whether this new organization will replace existing institutions or just add yet one more to them remains to be seen.⁴⁶

The last propaganda institution introduced here is Xinhua News Agency. In contrast to the other organs, it is an institution that, with the exception of rules for foreign news agencies in China, has no normative power and does not issue any own regulations. Nevertheless, as one of the oldest and best-established government organs in the media sector it is an indispensable and powerful player in the implementation of propaganda policies. Founded in 1931 as Red China News Agency in the communist base-areas of Jiangxi province and rebaptized to its present name in 1937 at the beginning of Sino-Japanese War and a new Communist-Guomindang alliance, it has evolved into a giant state institution for the collection, processing and distribution of current news and information. Holding monopoly status in the formulation and dissemination of political news for the Chinese press, it has branch offices in all the provinces and 20 major cities of China, in 5 regional headquarters (Hongkong for Asia-Pacific, Mexico for Latin-America, Nairobi for Africa, Cairo for Near East, Brussels for Europe) and in more than 100 countries worldwide. There are ca. 13,000 employees on its rosters - more than twice as many as for the Associated Press, the largest American and international competitor.

Xinhua's international department disseminates news in seven foreign languages besides Chinese (English, French, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese, Japanese), and since 1997 the agency maintains an extensive, repeatedly revamped internet presence. More than 11,000 daily news reports are produced, the ones for foreign target groups being not always identical with those for the domestic clients. Major Xinhua subsidiaries besides the regular administrative and editorial departments shown in chart 6 above include an advertising company, an audio-visual outlet, a publishing press, a printing shop, a real estate company and others. These are established as either subordinate institutions on state-run budgets or subordinate enterprises with a greater degree of financial and organizational independence. Altogether, there were 40 units under Xinhua running their own budgets within the amalgamated Xinhua budget in 2005.⁴⁷

Xinhua is a state agency under the State Council. At the same time it is also listed as one of the five media organs under the direct leadership of the Party's Central Committee, a position shared by the Party's central organ *People's Daily*, the national newspaper *Guangming Daily*, the Party's theoretical journal *Qiushi* and the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television.⁴⁸ Its director from 2000 to 2008 has been Tian Congming. He was a member of the Central Committee from 2002 until the 17th Party Congress of 2007 and enjoys ministerial rank. In the preceding decade he served first as vice-minister and later as director of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television. In 2008 he stepped down from the helm of Xinhua and retired to his new and probably last appointment as chairman of the All-China Journalists Association. Li Congjun, another vice director of the Central Propaganda Department, became his successor at the helm of Xinhua.

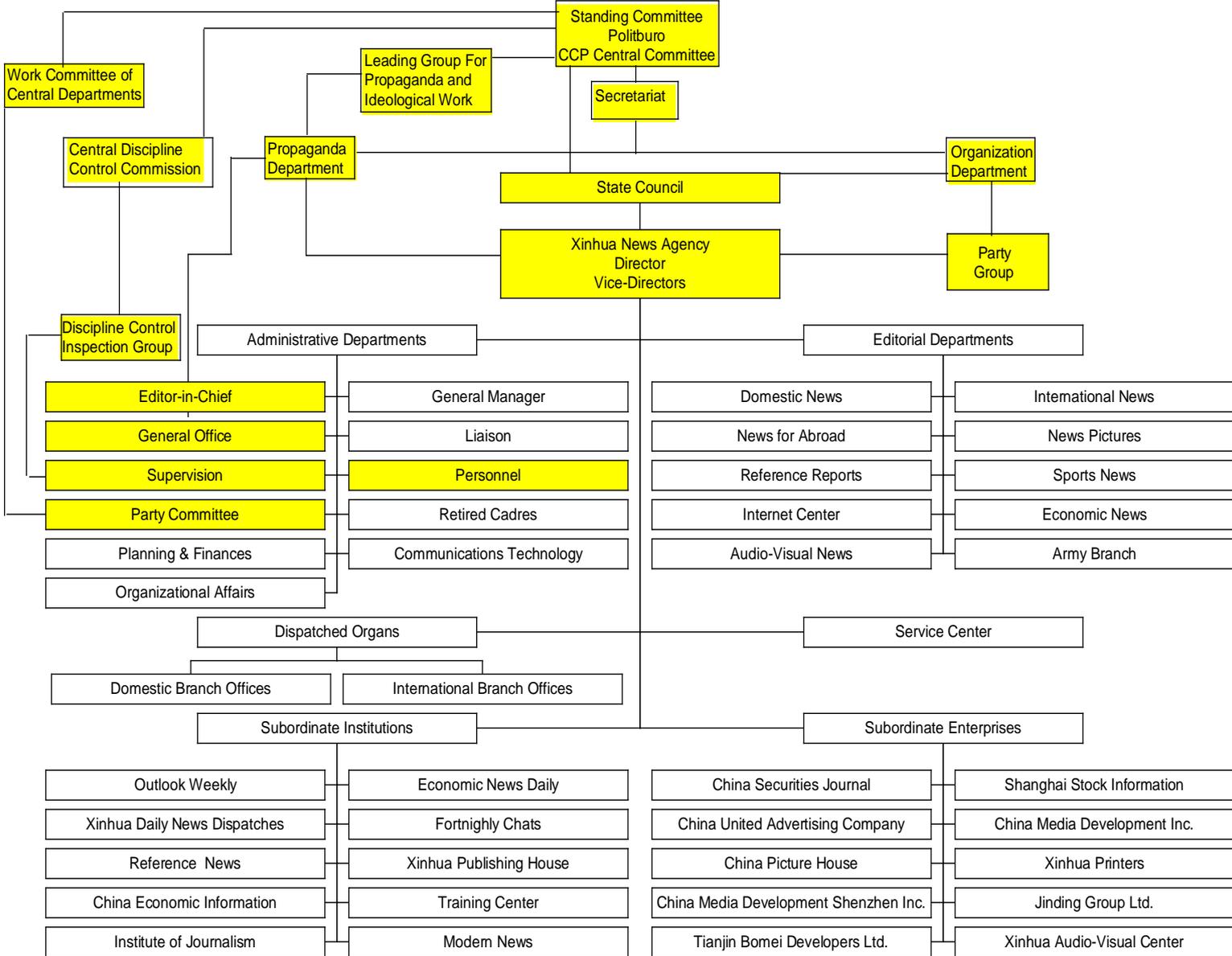
Apart from regularly feeding the press with its standardized news reports, Xinhua also publishes more than 20 different journals and newspapers, among them the English-language *China Daily*, the political journals *Liaowang (Outlook Weekly)* and *Banyuetan (Fortnightly Chats)*, the leading economic newspaper *Jingji cankao bao (Economic Reference News)* and the two dailies *Zhongguo zhengquan bao (China Securities Journal)* and *Shanghai zhengquan bao (Shanghai Stock Information)* appointed as China's official outlets for stock-market information. In addition, Xinhua runs an extensive internet service and issues annually more than 400 books on current affairs.

⁴⁶ MII; MPS; Xinhua 2005b, 2011; *Jingji cankao bao*, 4 January 2007

⁴⁷ http://203.192.6.89/xhs/2005-09/29/content_5257636.htm (accessed 20 February 2008); Chang 1989: 61-91; He Qinglian 2004; Battistella 2005; Xinhua. See also the 2005 report of the National Audit Office of the PRC: www.audit.gov.cn/n1057/n1072/n1282/28458.html (accessed 20 February 2008)

⁴⁸ *Zhongguo gongchandang*

Chart 6: Xinhua News Agency



colored boxes signify key areas of Party control
 © Scharping 2012

Another major field of activities is the writing and dissemination of internal reference reports on the political situation in China that are circulated for a restricted readership of political leaders. Among them are three periodicals that are finely graded according to degree of news filtering, speed of reporting and restriction of access: the short *Guonei dongtai qingyang* (*Proofs on Domestic Trends*) issued twice a day for a small circle of top national and provincial leaders, the more voluminous *Neibu cankao* (*Internal Reference*) issued twice a week for cadres down to the prefectural or division level and the weekly *Neican xuanbian* (*Selections from Internal Reference*) for cadres down to the county or regimental level. Less exclusive is the daily *Cankao xiaoxi* (*Reference News*) with world news and selections from the international press. Founded in 1931, it used to be an internal publication.⁴⁹ Since 1985 it has been released for general consumption to become the Chinese newspaper with the largest print-run, roughly 3 million copies per day. These different arrangements demonstrate that despite the revolution in news technology that tends to level authority, rank remains a key element in the picture.

⁴⁹ Rudolph 1984

4. Leaders

Although the Central Leading Group for Propaganda and Ideological Work as the highest body for deliberating and coordinating media work remains shadowy, its composition can be reconstructed. The members preside over the major propaganda bureaucracies already covered; some other organizations from the propaganda system are represented, too. All 13 members of the Leading Group during the larger part of the Hu Jintao era are presented on the top three rows of the photo roster below. Also included are four newly appointed leaders of propaganda institutions, who are bound to replace their predecessors in the Leading Group or have already done so, the Minister of Information Industry and his successor, plus the six further vice-directors of the Central Propaganda Department. The latter ones are presented on the last row of the roster together with their spheres of responsibility. They were all born after the founding of the People's Republic and joined the Party after the Cultural Revolution. Ji Bingxuan, who rose through the Party bureaucracy of Henan and Jilin provinces after 1978, served first as a vice-director of SARFT and then as another vice-director of the Central Propaganda Department since 2001, also has to be counted among the group of junior leaders. He steered the Office of the inter-departmental Directory Committee for the Construction of Spiritual Civilization and was transferred to the position of Party Secretary of Jiangxi Province in late 2007. A further junior leader is the Central Committee General Office's vice-director Zhao Shengxuan, who also acts as vice-head of the Secrecy Bureau. Before taking up these duties he worked as staff member for the Central Translation Office, editor of the press organ of the Women's Federation and vice-head of the CC General Office's Research Section.⁵⁰

All of these leaders belong to the propaganda leadership in the wider sense. Some occupy concurrent positions in Party leadership organs (Li Changchun as Politburo Standing Committee member, Liu Yunshan as member of the Politburo and Central Committee Secretariat), foreign-related organs (Liu Yunshan and Cai Wu as members of the Leading Group for Foreign Affairs), legislative organs (Li Congjun as member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and of the NPC's Committee on Education, Science, Culture and Health, which is also responsible for deliberating media legislation), professional or trade organizations (Sun Jiazheng as chairman of the Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Circles; Tian Congming as chairman of the All-China Journalists Association; Wang Chen as chairman of the Association of Chinese Newspaper Publishers). Just as in the case of State Councilor Chen Zhili, Academy President Chen Kuiyuan, General Liu Yongzhi or Ji Bingxuan of the mentioned inter-departmental committee, they link the propaganda system with other important spheres of public life. This set-up is strengthened by the practice of appointing vice-directors of the Central Propaganda Department as directors of some of the state bureaucracies responsible for media supervision. It is replicated by a similar interweaving of positions at the lower echelons. The resulting network of official and personal connections with its subtle nuances of hierarchy cannot but be termed a work of bureaucratic art.

Until the 18th Party congress in November 2012 the propaganda apparatus was led by a group of senior leaders who were mostly born in the 1940s, belonged to a rather homogenous age group and shared a number of distinct characteristics. Foremost among these is the origin of the vast majority of them in the hinterland provinces of China or in other less flourishing areas of the country. This sets them apart from many rising stars in the prosperous coastal areas. Jilin, Inner Mongolia, Anhui, Jiangxi and Henan are among their native regions, and many come from the Northwest. Only Chen Zhili, Sun Jiazheng and some of the junior group come from coastal China. Most spent their formative childhood years during the heyday of Soviet-style socialism in the 1950s, a golden age of progress and advancement for the majority of those urban Chinese who were not branded as class enemies – but also a period of continuing poverty and deprivation in the villages. As Tian Congming, a bright spark from poor peasant background, recalls in his memoirs, minuscule grain rations and hunger were the order of the day in the villages, especially after the Great Leap Forward. Health provision was nearly totally lacking and schooling beyond elementary level almost sensational.

All of the group were later exposed to the Cultural Revolution, which they witnessed as youth in their teens or early twenties. The junior members of the group were elementary school students at that time, but the senior ones must have gained deeper experiences. Many of them graduated from university or specialized schools, either just before the outbreak of the Red Guard movement (like Li Changchun, Chen Zhili, Chen Kuiyuan and Wang Xudong) or when the first makeshift diplomas were handed out again by largely paralyzed institutions in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Their usual programs of enrolment were either various disciplines of engineering or the heavily politicized teachers' training that customarily supplies both future teachers and propaganda cadres. Some of the

⁵⁰ Information in this sub-chapter has been pieced together from a great variety of sources such as biographical dictionaries and databanks, dispersed articles and reminiscences in the Chinese press and background literature on PRC history, too voluminous to document here.

group as Liu Binjie, Wang Chen, Cai Wu and Li Congjun belong to the cohorts who were recompensated for their lost academic chances by belated university enrolment after the end of the Cultural Revolution.

Central Leading Group for Propaganda and Ideological Work During the Hu Jintao Era



Li Changchun (68)
Politburo St Com
Head, Leading Group



Liu Yunshan (66)
Politburo
Dir, Prop Dept



Chen Zhili (71)
Central Com
former State Councillor



Chen Kuiyuan (72)
Central Com
Pres, Acad Soc Sci



Wang Taihua (67)
Central Com
former Dir, SARFT



Ji Bingxuan (61)
Central Com
Dir, Off Spir Civil



Cai Wu (63)
Central Com
former Dir, SCIO



Sun Jiazheng (68)
former Central Com
former Min of Culture



Wang Chen (62)
Central Com
former Dir, *People's Daily*



Tian Congming (69)
former Central Com
former Dir, Xinhua



Liu Binjie (64)
Central Com
Dir, GAPP



Liu Yongzhi (68)
Central Com
former Vice-Dir, PLO GPD



Zhao Shengxuan (59)
Vice-Dir, CC GO

Other Senior Leaders and Successors in Propaganda Institutions



Liu Qibao (59)
Central Com
new dir, Prop Dept



Li Congjun (64)
Central Com
new Dir, Xinhua



Cai Fuchao (61)
Central Com
new Dir, SARFT



Cai Mingzhao (57)
Central Com
new Dir, SCIO



Wang Xudong (66)
Central Com
former min of MII



Miao Wei (57)
Central Com
new min of MIIT

Junior Leaders of the Central Propaganda Department



Luo Shugang

Vice-Dir, Prop Dpt
Theory, Public Opinion



Li Dongsheng (58)

Vice-Dir, Prop Dpt
News, Publishing



Ouyang Jian (55)

Vice-Dir, Prop Dpt
Literature and Art, Education



Gao Junliang

Vice-Dir, Prop Dpt
General Office, Personnel



Zhai Weihua

Vice-Dir, Prop Dpt
Spiritual Civilization



Sun Zhijun (57)

Vice-Dir, Prop Dpt

All of the group testify to the great efforts of the Party to elevate the educational level and achieve a professionalization of leading cadres. Li Congjun and Cai Wu can present the highest academic credentials. An accomplished master of brushwork and editor of albums with paintings in the traditional Chinese style, the former one belonged to the first group of doctoral degree holders after the Cultural Revolution and wrote a thesis on the golden age of Chinese literature during the Tang dynasty (618-907). Cai Wu in turn specialized in work on the international communist movement at Beijing University. In 1996 he earned a doctorate of law with a perceptive study on the role of nationality conflicts in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Only Liu Yunshan, who spent many years of the Cultural Revolution in Inner Mongolia's most embattled area of cruel purges and nationality conflicts, has no formal university degree. He made up for it by enrolment in a distance learning course of the Central Party School.

It is conspicuous that most persons in charge of the various propaganda bureaucracies shouldered their first work assignments around 1968, when the Red Guard movement abated. With the exception of Li Changchun, Chen Zhili, Chen Kuiyuan, Sun Jiazheng and Tian Congming, who entered the Party already shortly before the Cultural Revolution, Wang Chen, who is the lone Party member recruited at the height of the mass movement, or Ji Bingxuan, who joined in 1980, most became Party members in the early 1970s after the fall of Lin Biao. This was a period of relative relaxation, when the long paralyzed Party resumed recruitment and the ailing Zhou Enlai began to reoccupy China's political scene with Mao Zedong's tacit toleration. Admittance to Party ranks at that time speaks for a low profile during the earlier peak of the Cultural Revolution and definitely no rebel status. Personal feelings shine through in the case of Wang Chen. In 1980, when he had returned from the Shaanxi countryside to Beijing as a young newspaper reporter, he co-authored a well-known piece of reportage about the ordeal of Yu Luo, the son of a "rightist" engineer and a youthful critic of the Cultural Revolution, who was executed in 1970 for having entrusted scathing comments on the political conventions of the times to his diary.

Most of the persons under discussion were lucky enough to be allocated to urban work-places right after school or at least to be spared long periods of rustication as sent-down youth. If they were sent to the countryside, they worked on the average two years in army farms or people's communes. Most of these were located in their home provinces. Wang Chen was sent to the most far-away place: he belonged to those 26,000 youth from Beijing who in 1969 were resettled with much fanfare in Yan'an prefecture, Shaanxi province, the sacred place of the revolution and center of China's communist base areas from 1937 to 1947. But even he had already begun to work in a county propaganda office 20 months later. This required exemplary behavior and a recommendation of the grass-roots unit during the period of rustication.

The most remarkable feat was accomplished by Chen Kuiyuan, who entered the Party in 1965 and managed to hang on to his various positions as political cadre in Inner Mongolia's Hulunbuir League without interruption from 1964 to 1989. Under the prevailing circumstances, this required an extreme degree of versatility, as the leaders of the area fell victim to the succession of sharply deviating political campaigns. It also demanded loud professions of anti-

Soviet struggle in that remote corner of China at the Sino-Soviet-Mongolian border, where the maintenance of the Chinese-Soviet railroad link was a sensitive affair at the height of the Sino-Soviet conflict. The only setback in Chen's career was a brief demotion from December 1975 to January 1977, when he was transferred from the league headquarters in Hailar to the prairie lands of New Barga West Banner, probably as a result of support for Deng Xiaoping who fell into disgrace during the same period of time. During his long tenure in Hulunbuir League Chen cannot have escaped the big issue of spontaneous Chinese migration to the area and the ensuing land reclamation campaigns, which effectively ruined the grassland of the Mongol herders, provoked large-scale desertification and embittered Mongol-Chinese relations once more.

The other person with an unbroken record of advancement through all the echelons of leadership is General Liu Yongzhi, the standing vice-director of the army's General Political Department, which acts not only as the superior authority for political commissars down to the regiment level but also manages special sub-systems for film and television, press and book publishing, literature and art work within the army. Liu Yongzhi enlisted in 1960, entered the Party already in 1963 and was promoted within the army almost every third year. During the Cultural Revolution he served as political commissar in the army. His career mirrors the special situation of the army organization, which was spared much of the mass movement.

The non-agricultural work assignments that most of the group members obtained during the early 1970s required professional performance combined with lip service to ultra-leftist slogans of the ongoing Cultural Revolution. Most of the later leaders took up positions in schools, industrial enterprises or economic departments. Jobs as technician in an automobile switch factory (Li Changchun), foreman and propagandist in a copper processing plant (Liu Binjie), staff of a big mining enterprise (Cai Wu) or middle school teacher (Liu Yunshan, Wang Taihua and Ji Bingxuan) were their first positions in this period, which did not know personal choice in matters of work. Some also started to work as lower-level political cadres (Chen Kuiyuan, Sun Jiazheng, Wang Chen).

The anti-Confucius campaign of 1973/74, which at that time was also labeled China's Second Cultural Revolution, saw most of them already in office and obliged to take sides. In the renewed strikes, mass demonstrations and clashes between leftists and conservatives within the Party they must have sided with law and order, for otherwise their later ascent would be unexplainable. Around 1975 some of the group began to serve in the propaganda apparatus. Wang Chen worked as an inland correspondent for the national newspaper *Guangming Daily*, and so did Tian Congming and Liu Yunshan who took up work as agricultural correspondents for Xinhua News Agency in small towns of Inner Mongolia. Both hail from families of Chinese immigrants to Inner Mongolia and became acquainted with each other. Chen Kuiyuan was another colleague of Liu Yunshan in Inner Mongolia between 1989 and 1991; the two men served as standing committee members of the region's Party committee during the crucial post-Tiananmen period from 1989 to 1991.

At the All-China Journalists Association, Beijing, November 2007



Li Changchun



Liu Yunshan (right) and Tian Congming (left)

Two special cases are Chen Zhili and Wang Xudong. As a young graduate from an engineering school the latter one was recruited into one of the secret research institutes of the army during the wild times of July 1967, when the Cultural Revolution was on the verge of civil war, Red Guards clashed with troops, and Mao Zedong narrowly escaped from an army mutiny in Wuhan. Wang Xudong's institute in Tianjin was privileged to be largely exempted from Cultural Revolution activities. Wang succeeded in driving away shouting Red Guard crowds by pointing to special directives of Mao and Zhou Enlai that protected defense industries and related research from the mass movement. With the exception of a one year's interval during which he was sent to a people's commune for manual labor, he continued in that institute for 14 years and, after the usual steps of Youth League and Party membership with functions, eventually rose to become its head. An authority on advanced battery technology, he is unique in having

spent his whole career within the Tianjin-Hebei-Beijing area, since 1983 in high Party and state offices outside academia. Many of these traits are similar to Chen Zhili, the other natural scientist among the group. With a two-year interval of rustication on an army farm during the late 1960s, she worked from 1964 to 1984 at the Shanghai Silicate Institute of the Academy of Sciences, before she successively became a member of the Shanghai Party Committee, China's Minister of Education in 1998 and finally a State Councilor in 2003. Chen Zhili is the only person among the group who spent two years as a visiting scholar abroad (at Pennsylvania State University, USA).

The other people under discussion also climbed up the ladder of success and made their way to leading positions of the provincial Party and state bureaucracy during the Deng Xiaoping-Hu Yaobang era in the 1980s. The organization department must have spotted them, and local Party organizations must have recommended them for advancement, when new faces were sought to rejuvenate the aging Party leadership. With stints in Liaoning and Henan, Anhui and Inner Mongolia, Gansu, Sichuan and Tibet, their governorships and Party secretary positions were again concentrated in the same type of regions as mentioned before. As the Party Secretary of Tibet between 1992 and 2000, Chen Kuiyuan earned the reputation of a hardliner with particularly stringent measures against the unruly Buddhist clergy. The other member of the group with Tibet experiences is Tian Congming. He served a brief spell of work in the region together with China's Party leader Hu Jintao, who headed the Party Committee of Tibet before Chen Kuiyuan from 1988 to 1991. Tian Congming stayed in Tibet as Hu's deputy between 1988 and 1990, a period of riots and martial law and the most difficult time for the region since the uprising of 1959. Among other duties, he looked after the out-transfer of Han-Chinese cadres from Tibet to the inland provinces and helped to crush the Tibetan independence movement. With many dead and wounded demonstrators and Chinese riot police in action, the situation was far worse than during the less violent Inner Mongolian student movement of 1981, when Tian Congming was likewise instrumental in quelling the protests against Han-Chinese immigration and dominance in official positions.

Nevertheless, his defense of Chinese interest did not prevent him from experiencing a dent in his later career. Due to his earlier position as personal assistant and confidant of Zhou Hui, the former Party Secretary of Inner Mongolia who in turn was a close follower of the then reformist Party chief Hu Yaobang, he was probably denied further advancement to Central Committee status in the 1990s. Liu Yunshan, who most likely was recommended by Tian Congming and promoted to Central Committee candidate status under Hu Yaobang, first received much attention as the then youngest one among the members and candidates of the Central Committee. Afterwards he seems to have been caught by a similar process of reverse networking: during 1987 to 1992 he lost his status of candidate of the Central Committee, probably as a consequence of Hu Yaobang's fall after the wave of the 1986 student demonstrations.

At the National Symposium of Propaganda Department Directors, Beijing, June 2007

Director Liu Yunshan with Vice-Directors Wang Taihua (right) and Ji Bingxuan (left) of the Central Propaganda Department



Most of the top propaganda leaders took up assignments in the central Party and government organs in the 1990s. A number of them served as deputy leaders of their departments or as leaders of other propaganda institutions (Liu Yunshan, Ji Bingxuan, Wang Chen, Sun Jiazheng, Tian Congming, Liu Binjie, Li Congjun, Li Dongsheng, Cai Mingzhao). They thus have been carefully groomed and watched before ascending to their present positions. Many of them attended courses in the Central Party School; positions in the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League have been frequent, too (Liu Yunshan, Cai Wu, Ji Bingxuan, Sun Jiazheng, Liu Binjie). In the latter case, allegiance to Hu Jintao, a former chairman of the Communist Youth League, can be assumed. Some of the group entered the Central Committee as candidates or full members already during the Hu Yaobang era (Li Changchun,

Liu Yunshan, Sun Jiazheng); others followed in the Jiang Zemin epoch (Chen Zhili, Chen Kuiyuan, Wang Taihua, Wang Xudong), Hu Jintao period (Tian Congming, Cai Wu, Ji Bingxuan, Wang Chen, Liu Yongzhi, Liu Binjie, Liu Qibao, Li Congren, Li Yizhong, Cai Mingzhao) or at the 18th Party Congress in 2012 when Xi Jinping took over (Cai Fuchao, Miao Wei). All of them ascended to their highest rank since 2002, when Hu Jintao took over from his predecessor Jiang Zemin.

Politburo Standing Committee member Li Changchun and Politburo member Liu Yunshan obviously enjoy the greatest seniority. The latter one also represents an element of continuity, as he continues his rise under China's new Party chief Xi Jinping. He now has relinquished his position at the head of the Central Propaganda Department and become one of the most powerful Chinese politicians: since November 2012 he is as one of the seven members of the highest Party organ, the Standing Committee of the Politburo. Concurrently he is the senior member of the Party Secretariat, the new head of the Central Leading Group for Propaganda and Ideological Work, a vice-director of the Committee for Regular Positions in Central Organs, plus head or vice-head of three new central leadership groups for mass work, Party construction and reform planning. Between 1993 and 2002 he had already acted as deputy to Jiang Zemin's propaganda chief Ding Guan'gen. The latter, a former engineer, is reputed to have been one of the most conservative heads in the life of the Propaganda Department. None of the leading propaganda leaders experienced "helicopter" advancement with immediate ascent to top positions in the Politburo. The majority of them are rather organization people, who patiently worked their way up through the Party hierarchy. Typically enough for the post-Mao period, some have been coopted from the science and engineering fields. In contrast, persons with academic backgrounds in the arts and humanities are rather the exception.

Direct and personal associations of the present propaganda leaders with the earlier reformist Party leaders Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang are mostly weak. But then during the Tiananmen movement of June 1989 no one of them was in the position of first provincial secretary, who had to take a decision and whose behavior in the months of crisis was gauged. Nevertheless, a rejection of the liberalism of the 1980s may be surmised as a primary qualification for advancement in the 1990s. Indirect patronage by the conservative Party elders who engineered the downfall of the Party's former general-secretaries can be detected. Orthodox Party schooling with a strong dose of organizational discipline and work ethic, plus a belief in science harnessed to statist and economic thinking, thus seems to be the dominant mindset. Exposure to the poverty of hinterland and minority regions, first-hand experience with the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution or situations of ethnic strife in Inner Mongolia and Tibet are likely to contribute to the group's determination and pronounced authoritarianism. During his tenure in Tibet, Chen Kuiyuan composed poetry, styling himself as a brave and stern official in the tradition of Chinese mandarins who battled with marauding tribes and pacified the Chinese frontier thirteen centuries before.

On balance, these career paths point to tough and seasoned Party men, a no-nonsense type of leader. Hard work, endurance and a dogged will to make up for lost chances of life are typical characteristics of the cohorts to whom the majority of the group belongs. Political survival during the violent swings of the Cultural Revolution and the twists and turns of Party politics in the reform period required a high degree of adaptability, obedience and self-denial in following the Party line. People who demand it from themselves tend to demand it from others. There is no argument and no pitfall unknown to those who made it through, and no love is lost for mass movements, strikes, big-character posters and street violence. It is easily imaginable that they are interpreted as the product of "free debate" as practiced between the factions of the Cultural Revolution. It would come as no surprise if many persons discussed here would harbor a degree of resentment against the bright lights and the free-wheeling style of the young generation in Shanghai and other coastal boom places. Typically enough, with the one and only exception of Chen Zhili, there is no stray bird among the group who took off to prolonged study in Europe or the United States during earlier phases of his career. Overseas contacts are more or less limited to book-learning or the hand-shaking, smiling and negotiating type. Foreign culture and ideals seem to be largely alien to the group, many of whom display a strong sense of conservative values mixed with Party ideology. China continues to be seen by them as a backward country requiring strong leadership, a one-party regime and a centralized propaganda approach. Her weaknesses are not perceived as home-made but rather as the product of past victimization by hostile foreign powers. There is little inclination to question historiographical stereotypes, and patriotism is always ready to blend into nationalism. The Western political system is not only capitalist but does not tally with China's national circumstances, so runs the argument, and without the imperialist encroachments on China the nation would have been at the forefront of world development. Everything must be subordinated to the wish to make this happen now.

Due to the meanwhile rather stringent retirement policies, many of the present senior leaders of the propaganda apparatus had to step down at the 18th Party congress in 2012. This is a major achievement of the Party, which has learned from the failure of socialist states unable to manage succession problems. Following the present team will be successors, who were born in the late 1940s and in the 1950s after the founding of the People's Republic, went to school during the Cultural Revolution and joined the Party in the 1970s or after the end of the Mao era. Some highly cultured people can be spotted among them, and some (like Wang Chen, Cai Fuchao or Li Dongsheng) start to come from special university programs for journalism. Peasant-born Liu Qibao, the upcoming successor of Liu Yunshan

as director of the Propaganda Department, member of the Politburo and the CC Secretariat, may inject a new element into the picture. After studying teacher's training and economics, he formerly served as personal secretary of the late Wan Li, a prominent Party leader with reformist inclinations. Later on he became involved in Youth League work, served as Deputy General Secretary of the State Council and Party secretary of Guangxi Autonomous Region and Sichuan province. Only a few other successors are known as yet. But if the scanty biographical data on Cai Fuchao, Cai Mingzhao and Miao Wei offer any indications for the profile of the still larger group of other future leaders in the propaganda apparatus, the share of well-educated persons from the coastal areas will grow again.

The ultimate views and decisions of the successor group are uncertain. Recruitment, training and cadre management practices of the Party will try their best to ensure continuity. Besides the usual interchangeability of positions within the propaganda system, it has more and more become an established practice to serve as a provincial Party secretary and to act in a deputy position of one of the main propaganda bureaucracies before assuming leadership. Some leaders also switch minister positions between different agencies. Attendance of demanding courses at the Central Party School for at least three months every five years is likewise turning into the norm. And promotion procedures within the state and Party organs become regularized, with a prescribed set of political, administrative and specialist qualifications, taxing evaluation formalities, requirements on educational level, work experience and office rotation. Even if sufficient loopholes for favoritism or domineering the process by decisions of upper levels remain, the thrust of these measures is clear. They plainly aim at countering the manifold signs of attrition by establishing a tight meritocratic regime.

Within this system there is room for gradual change by the transformative power of age, education and experience, internal and external influences. A sweeping break with present policies, however, could only be decided by China's top leadership outside the propaganda apparatus. The profile of leaders introduced here has certainly reinforced the difficult assignment given to them: keeping China on the track of economic development without fundamental political reform, ensuring obedience and Party supremacy by the control of thought, values and information, preventing a collapse of the state and its political system by internal erosion as it happened in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, smoothing the nation's foreign relations and presenting a favorable picture abroad.

5. Political, Administrative and Economic Measures

There are a host of formal and informal avenues for enforcing compliance with the wishes of the supervisory bodies and politicians. Foremost among them is Party leadership of government organs in the propaganda and information sector, which is embodied in manifold ways. Even if today belief in the Party's ideology has become seriously eroded and internal cohesiveness is much less than it used to be, the all-pervasiveness of Party organs in government institutions still continues to function as a powerful lever. It means appointment of senior personnel by the Central Committee's Propaganda Department in conjunction with the Central Committee's Organization Department, operational guidance of work by the Propaganda Department, internal direction of all government organs by centrally appointed Party groups of four to five members who are meshed with the top departmental leadership of ministers and their deputies, plus frequent political schooling with monthly study days, criticisms and self-criticisms and other activities organized by regular Party committees for the ordinary Party members. These always make up the great majority of staff members. Political schooling serves to internalize norms of behavior and expression on political topics by constant study and discussion of prescribed Party documents. The regular Party committees of the Party organs answer to the Work Committee of Central (Party) Departments; for government organs the Work Committee of Central Government Departments assumes responsibility. In 1988 these two superior bodies were changed from Party committees elected from below into work committees appointed from above by the Politburo.

The Party's grip is further tightened by the practice of interlocking control through the state's Ministry of Supervision and the Party Central Committee's Discipline Control Commission. This is realized by embedding centrally appointed Discipline Control Groups in all central state organs and institutions. The groups are always led by a cadre of the Central Committee's Discipline Control Commission who needs confirmation by the Central Committee's Organization Department. In reality, the central and regional structures of the government's ministry and the Party's commission are one – another case of an organ functioning under two different designations. In order to combat bureaucratic corruption and local favoritism during investigations, since 2004 the control groups do not include representatives of the organs under control any more. They are responsible for punishing both ordinary, economic and political breaches of regulations, with penalties ranging from extended self-criticism and negative marks in the dossiers to temporary suspension of wages, demotion, dismissal or criminal punishment. Party members have to face admonishment, severe admonishment, dismissal from Party functions or expulsion from the Party on top of that. This can effectively ruin careers.

Last but not least, the organigrams and information presented above testify to the amplitude of a drive that has brought the important ones among the newly emerging non-governmental organizations of China - and by

implication also the media published by them - under the tutelage of government organs. Regulations from 1998 rule out the registration of multiple organizations within one sector and thus prevent competition among organizations with similar goals. Furthermore, they require sizable capital funds, registration with both the Ministry of Civil Affairs and a sponsoring state organ responsible for the enforcement of well-behavior, plus regular check-ups and submission of work reports for annual registration renewal. All activities are circumscribed by the originally stated objectives, and new projects need the express consent of both supervising organs.⁵¹

Altogether, the various entrepreneurial associations, professional groups, research or study organizations affiliated with GAPP, SARFT or MII as non-governmental bodies add up to the astonishing number of more than 80 entities. Traditional Leninist mass organizations such as the Federation of Literary and Art Workers and the various artists' associations that are directly subordinated to the Propaganda Department and have been in existence since the early 1950s make the list swell to nearly 100 organizations. While the newly founded non-governmental organizations with their journals must be basically self-supportive, the long-established mass organizations enjoy de-facto governmental status, are internally led by Party groups, have their leading cadres on state payroll and receive subsidies for their publications.

Ownership arrangements provide another avenue for enforcing and strengthening media control. All media continue to function as units under state ownership and are assigned to specific state or Party organs, thus implying again their external supervision by higher leadership organs besides their internal control by Party committees. Since the vast majority of press, radio and television staff carries Party membership cards and is subject to Party discipline, and all personnel bureaus responsible for the hiring, firing, promotion or demotion of employees in state institutions are customarily led by Party cadres, the principles of state ownership and Party leadership carry additional clout, i.e. implicit threat and reward. All-out conversion of most traditional media units into companies and clear-cut permission for private media ownership have been repeatedly demanded, but they have been consistently rejected by the Propaganda Department. Although private investments have been continuously increasing, these have to assume the form of bank loans, bonds, minority shares or long-term purchases of advertisement space.

This unswerving stance in the political realm contrasts with a obvious commitment to disentangle Party, state and business interest in the commercial sphere. Typically, it has been implemented faster in the press, lagged behind in radio, film and TV and proceeded erratically in the internet. The slow pace gives reason to speculate that internal resistance against marketization has been just as strong as pushing for all-out privatization.

Marketization of the media had already begun in the 1980s, when advertisements, profit-making and entry of a multitude of new papers and journals were sanctioned. In 1992 all newspapers, apart from the Party organs, were ordered to forsake their financing by the state and achieve financial independence in the foreseeable future. After the high tide of media mergers and reorganizations into media groups during 1996 to 2002, a renewed campaign for extending economic reforms to the cultural scene started in July 2003 with a directive urging experiments with new ownership and management forms in the media. Moreover, in a sweeping decision of February 2004, the Propaganda Department ordered the ceasing of all government and Party subsidies for the press, the abandonment of all fee collections from the press and the merger of different publishers into large publishing groups. As a further measure it decreed that all government and Party personnel in office had to quit concurrent positions in the press, including directorships, editorships or duties in the advertising and marketing sections. The long-held and prevalent practice of forced subscriptions of state units to Party newspapers was reduced though not completely abolished. Also, the measures did not discard the right of the supervisory Party and government bodies to appoint or dismiss leading personnel and to give guidance in matters of publication content.⁵²

The pace of economic reform accelerated with the important Party and government directive of December 2005 concerning *Some Views on Deepening the Reform of the Cultural System* that transferred the pattern of earlier reforms in industry, as well as in the Party and state administrations, to the cultural sector. It consolidated the trial reforms that had already started in mid-2003 and ended an intermediate stage in which media were considered to be government institutions run like businesses. Units such as Party newspapers, political news publications, TV and radio stations, leading museums and galleries, libraries and national art companies, the People's Press or key internet content providers were ordered to retain their status as state institutions enjoying public subsidies. Although their former system of permanent state sector employment was abolished in favor of specified, temporary work contracts with variable income components, their personnel continues to enjoy some dwindling preferential benefits. Later explanations specifically insisted on the government status of the news sector, distinguishing it from other

⁵¹ MCA 1998

⁵² Zhao Yuezhi 1998: 39-45, 176; Zhao Yuezhi 2000; Fischer 2001; Xinhua, 27 May 2003; Zhongguo gongchandang 2003; Renmin ribao, 10 April 2004

media segments and excluding it from any fundamental change in the ownership system. However, all cultural units outside those listed above were urged to become registered companies operating on a commercial basis, with contractual employment and remuneration linked to acquisition and performance. This also pertained to the business sections of the media in marketing, advertising, printing and transportation. As of May 2007, 60 percent of the newly formed newspaper groups and 72 percent of the media groups had implemented the directive. The greater part of the TV drama producers, the film industry and the movie theaters were becoming non-state enterprises, too. This matches a policy to separate production and broadcasting entities in the radio and television sector. While private companies are allowed in regard to production, broadcasting remains the domain of the state.⁵³

In a CCTV pilot project similar changes had already begun two years before. They involved the discharge of 1,600 redundant staff, as well as labor leasing models for the remaining large number of TV personnel without regular positions. Yet via nested ownership arrangements, their final boss continues to be the same: the newly formed labor leasing company is a subsidiary unit ultimately answering to SARFT. Diversification of capital has likewise not changed the ultimate sources of political leadership. In 2006 a publishing house and a media corporation in Shanghai became China's first shareholding companies within the publishing sector. But although they succeeded in mobilizing large amounts of private investments, various state enterprises still hold majority shares of altogether 51 percent, the prescribed minimum stake for the state. The internal arrangements provide for a unified representation of the majority shareholders by the Shanghai Propaganda Department, which appoints the chairman of the board.⁵⁴ This is a deviation from the usual pattern, according to which the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commissions that were newly formed at all levels in 2003 play this role.

The emerging organizational patterns are still in an experimental stage and show some variety. In all cases Party groups or committees are appointed for the newly formed media groups around leading Party newspapers, publishing houses, film or broadcasting units. They in turn may establish an editorial committee for the whole group. This resembles the procedures in Party or government institutions. The China Radio, TV and Film Broadcasting Group thus openly declares on its website to follow the instructions of its Party group, which decides on business strategy, propaganda duties, matters of personnel, as well as capital transfers.⁵⁵ In the case of newspaper groups, the editorial committee is likely to be set up inside the leading Party daily. It may also handle editorial policies for the other papers, with a clear division of labor and graded propaganda duties for the less politicized publications. Alternatively, the latter ones may maintain their own political editors. In a legal sense, media groups may be organized as either institutions or companies – a hotly contested issue. Since 2005 the trend is clearly in favor of companies, and no new radio and television groups organized as institutions have been approved by SARFT.⁵⁶ In reality, however, the lines between institutions and companies are blurred. In a sense, many new organisms are both. The conglomerates then may effectively amount to a new layer of administration between individual media units and superior state and Party organs.

This is illustrated by the hybrid organism of the Henan Daily Newspaper Group. It is led by an appointed Party committee whose members are identical with the members of the board. Its Party secretary is ex-officio chairman of the board and director of the company. The mother company in total state-ownership owns various subsidiary and independently registered companies and encourages them to mobilize private capital. In such a case, the mother company continues to hold majority shares, while private investors may hold minority shares. Besides publishing houses, advertisement, marketing or transportation units, this includes even non-Party papers within the Henan Daily Newspaper Group – seemingly the exception until now.⁵⁷ However, even if media units are turned into companies, these are bound to have regular Party committees. China's *Company Law* prescribes their establishment in all limited or share-holding companies, so that each of the newly formed media companies falls under the sway of the Party, too, no matter what the origin of its registered capital. The regular Party committees may restrict themselves to routine activities for the membership – but they may equally claim a share in decision-making should this be considered suitable by the leadership.

Leadership arrangements for media retaining their unmitigated status as state or Party institutions are more straightforward. Depending on their individual status and importance, their directors and editors-in-chief are appointed by the central or the regional propaganda departments directly. When the Beijing Radio and TV Group

⁵³ Zhongguo gongchandang 2005; Xinhua 2006b; Xinhua 2007e; Zhang Shaochun 2006

⁵⁴ People's Daily Online 2005a; Gao Shusheng 2006

⁵⁵ SARFT d

⁵⁶ Mediaally 2007

⁵⁷ Lu Guoxian 2006

was turned from an institution into a company in 2005, key units with a political mission such as Beijing TV Station and Beijing Peoples's Radio Station were thus carved out of the new enterprise and remained state institutions. Echoing the demands of the relevant Party and government guidelines, they promised "no change in Party control over the media, no change in Party control over cadres and no change in the correct guidance for public opinion".⁵⁸

Editors-in-chief of Party or state media are responsible for overseeing the in-house pre-censoring of normal reports, which pass through three to six hands before their final release. In case of commissioned guideline reports and commentaries in the national media, the arrangements may become even more complicated by including several Party and government leaders with relevant jurisdictions in the chain of command. Contrary to historical precedents from other countries with censoring practices, pre-censoring of the Chinese press and other media thus is not vested in a special organ but is carried out by personal fiat of individual politicians or internally within the press itself. While this leaves scope for different implementation and interpretation, it also creates ample room for factional bickering and burdens the persons in charge with all responsibilities, should a superior organ find fault in their decisions later on.⁵⁹

Pre-censoring is unnecessary, if only the full and unaltered text of Xinhua reports is relayed. Xinhua reports are transmitted in two categories: lead stories and commentaries for mandatory reprinting or ordinary reports for optional use. Liaison staff from the Propaganda Department may be dispatched to ensure the conformity of Xinhua reports with the Party line. A specific monopoly of Xinhua reports exists in regard to information on Party and government policies, important leadership meetings and activities, leadership talks on both domestic and foreign affairs, appointments, dismissals and deaths of important leaders. These time-honored but still valid rules from 1949 and 1950 were reaffirmed in a still valid directive of the Propaganda Department from 1987.⁶⁰ They are paralleled by the requirement that all local TV stations have to transmit the first channel of CCTV.

These practices make the headlines and first pages of many papers or the news broadcasts of radio and TV stations look and sound alike. Some relaxation is noticeable, though. The stilted, repetitive and largely empty report requirements on leadership meetings and activities with their detailed rules on format, size, placement and hierarchy have been eased since relevant Politburo recommendations were issued in March 2003. Compulsory news for the tabloid press have been even more reduced. Official exhortations demanding a livelier style of press reports have multiplied and shown some effect. One example are live reports and telephone interviews that have made an uneasy appearance. Since 2001, for instance, Xinhua has begun to telecast parts of the annual sessions of the National People's Congress. And Chinese media like *China Daily* and *Beijing Review* that are geared for foreign consumption are beginning to cultivate a Western journalistic style with piercing interviews and open debate. But still a large degree of uniformity of published opinion throughout China persists, particularly in regard to political issues.

The variety of information has been further limited by the past ban against marketing media outside their assigned areas of circulation, which correspond with the jurisdiction of the Party or state unit disseminating them. The increasing trend of commercialization makes this ban crumble. A joint directive of the Propaganda Department, GAPP and SARFT from 2002 explicitly encouraged interregional mergers and alliances in newspaper publishing, radio and television, and the topic remains high on the agenda. Although local protectionism continues to create obstacles and implementation of the policy change is lagging, some first interregional publishing and newspaper alliances have been realized. However, state control of wireless and cable transmissions let the territorial monopolies largely survive for radio and TV broadcasts. Until today only persons or units with satellite receivers are able to watch the domestic TV programs of other provinces. Satellite TV has been designed to serve the poor and remote areas of the country, but clearly it also performs the function of raising the income of hinterland TV stations by carrying their advertisement to the rich coastal areas.⁶¹

To the chagrin of Chinese journalists, no clearly defined written rules exist for circumscribing the privileges of the Propaganda Department. Judging from the bits and pieces of information available on official and dissident websites, it regularly issues guidelines for political study courses and convenes fortnightly or monthly symposia for lecturing responsible cadres in the media on current policy, conventionally known as "meetings for hearing how the wind blows". These serve to instill uniform interpretations for a large group of subordinate units and persons that, from the Propaganda Department's point of view, are forever in danger of drifting apart. A constant source of irritation

⁵⁸ SARFT e

⁵⁹ Liu Binyan 1990: 84-87; Wu Guogang 1994; Chang Won Ho 1989: 92-111; Wu Xuecan 2002

⁶⁰ Wei Yongzheng 2002: 199

⁶¹ GAPP 2002; Chan 2003: 161-169; Lin Hui 2004

are the department's lists of banned authors or publications. These are augmented by lists of banned or mandatory news, topics, commentary and interpretations for media reporting, which are communicated and updated on a weekly basis.

The taboos can be excruciatingly vague (No reports detrimental to the minds and health of youth! No false reports! No incorrect viewpoints!) but also as precise as to prohibit specific names or formulations to appear in the press (No use of the expression "blocking"! No report on the corruption case in Hunan! No excessive publicity for the [Tibetan-exile movie] „The Cup“ !). New instructions have ruled out unauthorized reports on controversial events or figures from Chinese history, news on judicial corruption, detailed discussions of the Cultural Revolution and the earlier Campaign Against Right-Wing Deviation, or statements that might complicate Chinese foreign policy such as glorification of Chinese weapons, racist remarks, nationalistic outbreaks against Japan or the United States, comments on the domestic politics of foreign countries and public debate on the Korean question. Vice versa, they have prescribed precise formulations and specific press campaigns in support of new Party decisions, certain domestic agenda or China's current posture in international affairs.⁶²

Particularly many taboos stay in force in regard to the political sphere. These include: criticism of high officials, reports on leadership debates and decision-making processes, dissidents, strikes, riots and political incidents in China, independent commentary on domestic and foreign affairs, negative results of China's accession to the WTO, unauthorized reports on Tibet and the Tibet railroad line, topics likely to undermine the relations with national minorities, news on the victims of former campaigns, reports on unpaid wages, price hikes etc. etc. Other still valid rules prohibit news on violence and immoral acts. Or they demand a careful selection of reports on negative phenomena which should be geared to inspire confidence in the remedial action of the government or the Party.⁶³ All the various bans are defended with the need to safeguard social stability, to prevent negative chain reactions at home or adverse comments abroad. Their motives may be understandable in some cases, but often the sanctions simply serve to fend off possible claims or pressures on the authorities.

Nevertheless, recent years have seen a gradual relaxation in some regards. In reaction to the SARS epidemic and relevant recommendations of the Politburo, the former bans of reports on diseases, industrial accidents, natural catastrophes or ordinary corruption cases have been lifted to a certain degree. Even though specific details with numbers of injured or dead persons still remain sensitive issues, the diversity and frankness of relevant media coverage has definitely increased. Xinhua News Agency nowadays even prides itself for aiming at "being the first to report major disasters and emergencies in China or in any other part of the world." Moreover, a number of journalists have taken up the pen to pursue critical and investigative reporting, a topic ranking high in surveys on readership preferences. But it remains to be seen whether critical journalism in unison with new laws and regulations can overcome the reluctance of many authorities to report incidents that imply acknowledging a neglect of duties, that are perceived as a stumbling block to careers or that spoil the investment climate. The wide-spread fear of mass panic in case of emergencies, the deep-rooted habit to treat the news on them as work secrets and the innumerable cover-ups in the past add a note of caution. And so do procedures that prohibit reporting by media from places outside their base area or that delay press reports until precise instructions and formulations are transmitted by the departments concerned. Even though such bans are often ignored, the journalists violating the rules must bear the full risk to their career.⁶⁴

Another nuisance is the post-censoring of media reports that is practiced by the Critical Reading Group and has spread to similar routines of regional organs. The group under the Central Propaganda Department's News Division was established in 1994 in reaction to the loss of control in the preceding years, when the large growth of newspapers and periodicals precluded comprehensive censorship by active office-holders. Comprehensive censorship by the propaganda departments was possible during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, when the small number of publications, the greater uniformity of society, the ubiquity of state-ownership and the rigid political climate created the necessary conditions. As a matter of fact, a "Group for Newspaper and Journal Censorship" existed within the Central Propaganda Department that examined all central and provincial dailies, altogether 163 in 1957 versus 1010 in 2004.⁶⁵

⁶² Zhongyang xuanchuanbu 2002; South China Morning Post, 16 January, 24 February 2007

⁶³ For a specimen of such exhortations see Schoenhals 1992: 53-54

⁶⁴ http://xinhuanet.com/english/2007-08/27/content_6610698.htm (accessed 20 February 2008); Tian Zhongchu 2005; Zhao Shilin 2006; People's Daily Online 2005b; Brendebach 2005; The Guardian, 24 May 2010

⁶⁵ Zhongguo chuban nianjian 2000, 2006.

But with the advent of the reform period, the financial resources needed to cope with the flood of new publications exceeded the budget by far. The solution has been to have only few active office-holders leading the new Critical Reading Group and to contract retired cadres from the propaganda apparatus for the regular reading of assigned publications or the watching of TV programs. The Group nowadays produces an internal bulletin of reading notes which circulates among higher Party echelons and singles out individual news reports, articles and publications for either praise or blame. Judging from the numbering on an available copy, it is issued twice a day.⁶⁶

An unwritten rule of the game is double-checking. There is consistent adherence to this principle, because similar systems of control that overlap with the activities of the Propaganda Department are employed by the supervisory government organs. Like the Propaganda Department, GAPP has outsourced a large part of press and book censorship to retired cadres with relevant experience, who are paid and under contract. In some cases its provincial and municipal branches have formed special offices or committees for examining press reports. An example is Changzhou City in Jiangsu, which has established a group of 10 permanent examiners for screening the 6 local papers.⁶⁷ Propaganda work within the army is proceeding according to the same principles, and SCIO is urging internet companies to follow in line. Nevertheless, the censoring activities are uneven and suffer from the lack of a set budget and a firm organization. This situation has caught the attention of GAPP, which began drafting new rules for regularized censorship routines in 2007.

One year before, the zeal of the censors had also reached the large group of “Internal Materials” that started to be submitted to the same kind of regular examination as the openly available publications.⁶⁸ A campaign against unregistered “Internal Materials” with incriminating content had already been waged in 2002. Drives for confiscating and destroying illegal audio-visual materials and printed matter give bite to the prohibitions. Although primarily aimed at pornographic materials or product piracy, they also cover publications with offensive political content. Reports on the campaign of winter 1990/91 convey a sense of the daunting dimensions of such operations. They note that 7 million printed publications and 50,000 video-tapes were seized and burned, and more than 3,000 publishers and nearly the same number of book and audio-video shops were closed, within the brief span of a few months. Nevertheless, circumvention is such that the exercises have to be repeated periodically.⁶⁹

GAPP rules for books, audio-visual materials and electronic publications give an inkling of future trends in combating the gaps in institutional censorship. They prescribe prior approval of annual publication plans, pre-censoring of manuscripts for political and specialist content and additional post-censoring after print. Both pre-censoring and post-censoring is the responsibility of the publishers. They must appoint at least two independent referees for examining submitted manuscripts, and they are urged to establish Critical Reading Groups for judging books in print. Provincial GAPP administrations receive half-yearly examination reports from the publishers and conduct annual investigations of their own. Moreover, they can intervene at any time of their liking. Regulations also demand special dossiers for projects on important or sensitive topics. These include all publications on Party affairs and leaders, Party history and the Cultural Revolution, current political and social developments or controversial topics, military and strategic issues, ethnic and religious problems, as well as books on the former Soviet Union and East European states, Hongkong, Macao and Taiwan, handbooks with organizational information, or translations of foreign books. All such projects must be approved by both GAPP and the Propaganda Department in advance.

A modernized system of post-censoring was laid down in the joint *Opinions on Establishing a Warning System for Breaches of Discipline by Newspapers and Journals* with accompanying *Implementation Measures* of the Propaganda Department and GAPP from May 2000. It announced the establishment of a warning system with written notices Propaganda Department, GAPP and the local propaganda department. Within 10 days, the recipients of the notice are required to submit a written self-criticism with proposals of punishment for the responsible journalists and editors. Three warnings within one year lead to an automatic suspension of a periodical and the dismissal of the persons concerned, still further transgressions to the definite closure of a publication.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ He Qinglian 2004: 17-19; Qing Xu 2006; Zhongxuanbu xinwenju 2006; Tian Zhongchu 2005:59-60, 207-208

⁶⁷ Jiangsu chuban nianjian 2003, pp. 131-133.

⁶⁸ Zhongguo xinwen chuban bao, 30 July 2007, 29 January 2008; www.jxcbj.gov.cn/default.aspx?newsid=1323 (accessed 25 February 2008)

⁶⁹ Lynch 1999: 202-205

⁷⁰ Zhongyang xuanchuanbu 2000; Wei Yongzheng 2006: 281

The existence of post-censoring puts the persons in charge of pre-censoring in constant jeopardy. Media coverage picked out by the Critical Reading Group for criticism has led to the reorganization, suspension or closure of a number of journals. Comments on stalled political reforms or unwelcome reports on SARS, corruption and other social problems triggered these actions. The most important case was the large-scale change of personnel in the Canton weekly *Southern Weekend* in 2001 and 2003, which reduced this most successful show-piece of investigative journalism to a shadow of its former self. Triggered by unwelcome reports on crime and SARS, the incidents demonstrated how press publications not specifically designated as Party organs continue to be subject to censorship and how the Central Propaganda Department was able to reach down to the local level. The majority of censorship cases, though, seem to involve pornography and religious propaganda from Falungong or similar sects.

In many instances, interventions by the Propaganda Department against politically sensitive articles or TV footage provoked the disciplining, firing or jailing of editors. Sentences have ranged from around three to four years in prison for passing on email-addresses to dissident organizations overseas or posting offensive messages on internet fora to more than ten years for alleged disclosure of state secrets.⁷¹ Telephone calls are often sufficient to initiate these sanctions. These offer the added advantage of leaving no traces of infringement that can be disputed later on. Protection against them is only provided, if even more influential Party circles support the agenda of critical journalists or are interested in the additional income generated by bold reporting. Sometimes, respect for outspoken elders has served as a shield, too. On the other hand, some local Party committees are also on the record for harassing and prosecuting muckraking journalists, even if these have stayed within acceptable political limits.⁷²

Only the internet continues to enjoy a number of privileges. It is the single news medium where private ownership of companies is permitted and where Party and state information services have arrived with a noticeable time lag. Although private internet news and information services have to fulfill a growing number of legal obligations and are subject to licensing, they are under no direct requirement to join propaganda campaigns guided by the Propaganda Department. And no nomenclatura arrangements exist that grant Party and government organs a right to appoint or dismiss leading personnel.

Nevertheless, the state has waged a protracted war against the free flow of information, private commentary and internet polling. The techniques for the elimination of unwanted content have become ever more refined and specific. They include both the filtering of particular keywords and the blocking of blacklisted sites, a majority of which are Tibetan, Taiwanese or Falun Gong, report international news or belong to Chinese dissident groups outside the mainland. Also, monitoring of internet forums, chat rooms, and bulletin board systems is becoming routinized. The net result has been described as “the most extensive, technologically sophisticated, and broad-reaching system of internet filtering in the world”.⁷³ But even though the thrust of these measures is clear, and dissident movements utilizing the internet have been successfully thwarted so far, internet policing regularly runs into the problem of how to handle filtering and blocking when there is constant juggling of sensitive websites and keywords. Websites and internet forums thus still remain the most open source of news in China, and a certain leeway for internet company discretion remains.

This is exactly the reason why the attempts to reinforce state control from outside by internal control from within are gaining momentum. Chinese national networks and BBS operators acted as the vanguard of such activities. Already in the late 1990s, their individual company regulations contained differently worded prohibitions to disseminate counterrevolutionary, anti-governmental or pornographic content or to deviate from the stated scope of BBS services. The Internet Society of China (ISC), which was set up in 2001, systemized these endeavors. This association under MII leadership has more than 200 member units on its rosters, among them a large number of state and private enterprises, various national or regional associations, public institutions and universities that are active in internet publishing. One year after the establishment of the ISC, it obliged all members to sign a *Public Pledge of Self-Regulation and Professional Ethics for China Internet Industry*. The document lays down a promise “not to produce, publish or disseminate information that impairs state security, damages public order or contravenes laws and regulations or that spreads superstitions or pornographic contents”. It commits the signatories to undertake supervision of all information posted on their websites and “to remove damaging information in a timely manner”. Further paragraphs contain the pledge “not to link up to websites with damaging content” and “to control and supervise access to domestic and foreign websites”.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Reporters Without Borders 2003

⁷² He Qinglian 2004

⁷³ Zittrain and Edelman 2002; Chase and Mulvenon 2002; Reporters Without Borders 2003; ONI

⁷⁴ Qiu 2000: 12; ISC 2002b

In 2006 the pledge was emulated by a joint declaration of more than 40 Beijing-based internet companies, which promised to establish procedures for self-regulation and to cooperate closely with the government. The list of signatories includes leading internet portals and search engines such as *Sina*, *Sohu*, *Baidu*, *NetEase* or *TOM*. According to their agreement, a council of 150 members, 70 among them from normal internet users, will meet in certain intervals and elect 10 evaluators on a rotational basis. These persons will then make regular assessments of internet content, with consequences for violations of norms ranging from publicized criticisms to penalty payments and criminal law suits.⁷⁵ Other cities outside from Beijing followed up with similar vows. From the government's side, these arrangements aim at replicating the internal censoring practices of the traditional media – for this is precisely what internal regulations for the internet demand. From the internet companies' side, there is hope that self-regulation will preserve more liberties than direct state intervention.

The path of self-regulation has been pursued further by the establishment of a China Internet Illegal Information Reporting Center. This institution is promoted by the ISC and urges private users to report information on spam, viruses or internet sites with prohibited content. It follows up the cases and settles them either by effecting the voluntary removal of the prohibited content or initiating legal procedures. The center is advertised as a civic organization, but at the same time it is also subordinated to the State Council Information Office's Foreign Languages Bureau.⁷⁶ While these initiatives and similar ones by other organizations seem to have scored some success, bulletin board systems and blogs with their anonymous and sometimes embarrassing commentary on current events are the hardest nut to crack. An attempt to force China's more than 20 million bloggers and 1,200 blogging companies into real-name registration of users ran into the opposition of the industry. In May 2007, the Ministry of Information Industry withdrew pertinent draft regulations and opted in favor of gradual change by way of persuasion. A draft pledge for self-regulation of blog service providers is circulating. Its tightly phrased clauses resemble a legal document. They promote real-name registration of users and require all bloggers to sign a declaration of compliance with state regulations.⁷⁷ Just as other administrative and political measures, self-regulation thus is invariably tied to the codification of norms and the construction of a system of media law.

6. Legal Developments

While the Party organs still act according to past patterns of rule via personal ad-hoc orders, internal instructions and informal channels, the government administrations have progressed to a greater degree of rule by law. This is shown by the following rough statistics on the various types of legal norms in late 2012, which at the same time also indicate some persisting problems. The specific media norms thus come mostly as regulations, rules or measures issued at departmental level (a total of ca. 680, among them ca. 530 valid ones and ca. 100 important ones), plus innumerable normative opinions, circulars, decisions or interpretations of various Party and state organs. More than 2200 provincial regulations, rules or measures (most of them valid ones) must still be added to these numbers. Only few regulations were drafted by the State Council (14, among them 11 valid ones) and none ratified as laws by the People's Congress. The overwhelming majority of all these norms were promulgated since 1990 and only a handful in the 1980s. The specific media norms available from 1949 to 1979 amount to a mere 6, relevant speeches and personal directives by Party leaders not included.⁷⁸ Among the general laws that contain pertinent stipulations for the media, the *Advertisement Law* of 1994, the *Copyright Law* of 1990 and 2001 and the *Law on Administrative Licenses* of 2003 have laid down the most important over-arching formal requirements.

Even though three drafts of a press law had already been produced by 1989, and the law was listed under the agenda of the People's Congress until 1998, legislation never materialized. Former Premier Li Peng, who chaired the National People's Congress from 1998 to 2003, passed the draft work on to GAPP and effectively shelved the project. Under his chair the official line was that a press law and a publication law needed further study and would be passed "once the conditions are ripe". His successor Wu Bangguo, concurrently a key member of the Politburo's

⁷⁵ Xinhua 2006

⁷⁶ CIIIRC

⁷⁷ Xinhua 2007b; Leow 2007; ISC 2007

⁷⁸ The statistics hail from extensive use of Chinese legal search engines, among them Beijing University's database on all Chinese laws, regulations and departmental norms at <http://www.lawyee.net/Act/Act.asp>.

Standing Committee, has gone even further by letting the head of the NPC Legislation Committee rule out such legislation during the term of the present leadership up to 2012. Such stalling has not deterred a number of NPC delegates to press for a faster pace. Until 2006, relevant motions have been on the table of the NPC sessions almost every year. But the long-lasting dissent on the proposed law's main thrust – protection or restriction of journalistic freedoms – continues to prevent any progress.⁷⁹

This situation and the lack of higher-level legislation in media law impairs judicability, compatibility and predictability in the application of the existent regulations, as changes of rules are easy to effect and inter-departmental contradictions exist. Nevertheless, there is tangible progress in comparison to the Mao era: for the first time standardized procedures are available for public scrutiny – even if these detail many media obligations and offer few clues for media rights. The norms mostly pertain to the maintenance of state security and public order; permission requirements for special types of information; distribution and copyright; administration of the media industry in terms of registration, operation, supervision, ownership and fees. Some personal rights as to privacy, business secrets or reputation are covered, too. Although in principle these testify to a growing and positive awareness of individual rights, they have also been invoked for deterring investigative journalism in staged libel cases.

But the principal problem is that there are no norms defining and specifying the rights of journalists in obtaining and disseminating information or opinions. Because of this reason the freedoms of speech and of the press contained in the Chinese constitution remain abstract and cannot be sued for – according to the prevailing constitutional interpretation in China.⁸⁰ Although rule by law has also spread to the media, it lags behind the standards reached in some other spheres of Chinese public life. A reading of the literature⁸¹ and of regulations posted on the websites of the relevant administrations produces the following picture.

Since 1986 an elaborate system of licensing has been introduced. In the case of GAPP, it added up to 125 different types of licenses issued in the years up to 2003 for diverse activities. After a streamlining of bureaucratic procedures in 2004, this figure fell to the still impressive number of 45 licenses.⁸² By regulating market entry and exit the licensing system is a very potent weapon for enforcing compliance with Party wishes. The presently valid regulations of GAPP and SARFT prescribe business licenses for all publishing houses, printers, distributors, film and TV drama producers, which are enhanced by the requirement that only incorporated units with a minimum amount of registered capital can engage in such activities. On the GAPP side, newly established book and journal publishers must all have a recognized sponsoring state unit, accept supervisory rights of the state and their formal registering as state-owned institutions. In contrast to former times, however, the publishers have become separate legal persons and do not simply operate as government or Party departments any more. All reporters must hold GAPP press cards, undergo an annual check-up of their activities and a quinquennial card renewal by the administration. New local radio and TV stations can only be established on dual approval by the local government and the vertical line of SARFT departments right up to the central level. The relevant licenses specify name, program character and broadcasting volume. Licensing by SARFT also involves extra procedures for individual program approval. No private or collective unit is entitled to receive approval, and all must accept the right of the supervising agency to carry out investigations, mete out hefty fines, suspend or close stations and revoke licenses.

The list of tabooed content has successively grown. To some degree it has also become specified. GAPP censorship rules for papers, periodicals and books from late 1988 simply demanded support for the socialist system and the principle of Party leadership, plus “compliance with the line, the strategies and the policies of the Party”, as well as “truthful, comprehensive, objective and fair” reporting. But after the Tiananmen events an elaborate structure of legal deterrence has been built up. All content must stay within the confines of the *State Security Law* of 1993 whose article 4 threatens persecution for activities that can be interpreted as “plotting the overthrow of the government, splitting the country or overturning the socialist system; ...stealing, spying out, buying or illegally providing state secrets; ... or other actions violating state security”.

These very broad injunctions still have not been deemed sufficient enough, and new regulations for the media sector enlarge on them. The *Administrative Regulations For Radio and TV* and the *Administrative Measures for Security Protection in Computer Information Networks and the Internet* from 1997, as well as the *Administrative Measures*

⁷⁹ Polumbaum 1994b; Bai Jie 2003

⁸⁰ Wei Yongzheng 2006: 20-25

⁸¹ Fu and Cullen 1996; Wei Yongzheng 2002; Wei Yongzheng and Li Danlin 2005; Guo Yali et al. 2006; Wei Yongzheng 2006

⁸² GAPP 2004

for *Publications of the Internal Material Type* from 1998, thus add programs “violating national unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity; impairing the security, reputation or interest of the Chinese state; inciting ethnic splits and damaging ethnic solidarity; ...spreading pornography, superstition and violence” to the list of banned content. The *Administrative Regulations For Film* from 2001, the *Administrative Regulations for Publishing* from the same year and the *Provisional Administrative Rules for Sino-Foreign Joint Ventures in the Production and Distribution of Radio and Television Programs* from 2004 go still further and augment the list with bans against “propagating false doctrines and superstitions; disturbing public order and damaging social stability; ... violating public morals or the glorious cultural traditions of the nation”.

Together with prohibition of faked or bought news, or reports that violate rights of personal privacy and business secrets, the *Provisional Rules on Handling Penalties for Breaches of Propaganda Discipline by Personnel of Radio and TV Transmission Organs* and identical rules for extra punishment of Party members from 2002 warn additionally against “statements or actions in contravention of China’s foreign policy or not conforming to our foreign policy formulations...; illegal reports on ethnic splits or terrorist actions by religious extremists abroad...; slighting legal religious creeds, organizations, leaders, personnel or rites...; illegal permissions for foreign media to air religious programs in China...; illegal reports on mass incidents...; illegal and biased reports on conferences and discussions that touch on sensitive issues...; illegal reports on floods, diseases, earthquakes or nuclear accidents”. The *Administrative Measures for Internet News and Information Services* from 2005 supplement injunctions against “spreading rumors...; spreading terrorism...; inciting illegal meetings, associations, demonstrations, rallies or mass disturbances of public order; ... acting under the name of illegal civic organizations”. A reference to the need to guard unspecified state secrets is finally also contained in the *Regulations on the Disclosure of Government Information* of 2007, which establish the duty of government organs to publicize administrative information for public use such as office addresses and names of office holders, valid rules and regulations, development plans, statistical figures, fee schedules, land use schemes etc.⁸³

Particularly tight permission requirements pertain to reports on or publications of leading politicians, those in office, as well as those enjoying prominence in the past. A battery of special regulations issued between 1990 and 1997 stipulate both their personal consent and the approval of two to three, in the case of provincial publishers three to four, authorities, i.e. the provincial GAPP department, the provincial propaganda department, the GAPP headquarters and sometimes even the Central Propaganda Department in Beijing. They make it mandatory to publish relevant material only through six especially appointed central Party publishing houses or through the official Party presses of the provinces. After the spate of biographical literature with their often damaging revelations published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, memoirs of relatives, friends and associates, as well as photos and pictures, are meanwhile covered, too. All newly published texts are prohibited to deviate from the official Central Committee resolutions on Party history from 1945 (on the early period from the Party’s founding in 1921 to the end of World War II) and 1981 (on the history of the People’s Republic until Mao Zedong’s death and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976). In view of lagging implementation and many circumventions, these rules have been reiterated many times.⁸⁴

Some of the various bans may be understandable attempts to prevent the outbreak of civic or ethnic strife in China. But the common denominator of most other ones is their exclusive stress on Party and state interest, as well as their persisting vagueness, which turns application into a matter of interpretation and expediency rather than into calculable procedure based on factual findings. This creates a regime in which the obsession with permanent security for the state produces permanent insecurity for media staff. At the same time it constructs the warped, sanitized image of a country without problems, without conflicts, without defeats – an upbeat world full of optimism, vitality and determination. Only a little spice of life’s darker sides is added every once in a while, in order to ensure greater credibility. But mostly it is silence that surrounds the negative events - the huge famine of 1959 to 1961 following the ill-fated Great Leap Forward representing the most infamous instance of former non-reporting.

As demonstrated by the SARS epidemic of March 2003, such a posture, and specifically the prohibition of disease and emergency reports contained in many former regulations and still in the rules on propaganda discipline from the preceding year, can have deadly consequences for the population.⁸⁵ It is in recognition of this fact that Chinese reporting on diseases and emergency cases such as natural catastrophes, large-scale accidents or health risks has become more open. The newly promulgated *Emergency Response Law* of 2007 came down in favor of a right to

⁸³ CPGPRC 1997, 2007; GAPP 1988; GAPP 1998; GAPP 2001a; GAPP 2001b; SARFT 2001; SARFT 2002; SARFT 2004b; CNNIC 2000; Xinhua 2005b

⁸⁴ Zhongyang xuanchuanbu 1990, 1993; GAPP 1995, 1997

⁸⁵ On Chinese reporting of the SARS epidemic see: Esarey 2005: 66-81; Zhao Shilin 2006: 256-264

information for the population and a duty to report for the government; an original draft paragraph threatening hefty fines for unauthorized emergency reports was deleted after prolonged debate and protest from concerned journalists.⁸⁶

The greater openness in regard to diseases of the body, however, does not apply to that sphere which some Chinese Party leaders would still term “the diseases of the mind”. Regulations for movies and the radio and TV sector as the prime transmitters of such maladies are particularly strict. In contrast to the print and internet media, they introduce pre-censoring by external organs. All movie producers must submit a standard copy of their film for SARFT approval before final release. TV drama producers are further graded into larger units with the financial, technical and personnel resources to engage in the simultaneous production of more than one drama and smaller units whose resources suffice for only one production at a time. While the former can apply for long-term operating licenses valid for three years, the latter can only request provisional licenses for the duration of their present project. The granting of licenses is contingent on verification of the stated resources, in the case of provisional licenses it also involves the submission of the screenplay. Special permissions are required, if publications or film productions touch on political issues.⁸⁷

The internet has posed particularly large problems for implementing government policies. No fixed rules for the new medium existed during its formative years, and even today specific stipulations such as police registration of all users have proven exceedingly hard to enforce. Normative restrictions started only in 1994 with *Regulations on the Safety of Computer Information Systems* that laid down the duty of all users to register with the public security authorities. Temporary regulations on managing international connections followed in 1996. These established a government monopoly for licensing gateways that link up to internet. The enforcement of state security rules has been another focal point. They were first specified for the internet in the Ministry of Public Security’s *Administrative Measures for Security Protection in Computer Information Networks and the Internet* of December 1997, which made all units and persons using the internet responsible for curbing banned content. Furthermore, they reiterated the principle of user registration and required all local branches of the ministry to establish special organs for keeping user records and enforcing the bans.⁸⁸ The presently valid GAPP and MII *Provisional Rules for the Administration of Internet Publishing* from 2002, SARFT *Administrative Procedures For Internet Information Sites* from 2004, State Council Information Office and MII *Administrative Rules for Internet News and Information Services* from 2005 repeat and enlarge the standardized catalog of injunctions in these and other regulations on internet, film and publishing activities from earlier years.

The administrative set-up for the licensing and monitoring of content providers, websites and internet forums has followed in line. It started to become established in November 2000. Since then relevant regulations require all internet information services to display registration numbers and to keep records of the content posted on their bulletin boards, including the time of posting and the source’s IP address. In a similar vein, access providers are forced to record each customer’s time on the internet, his or her account number, IP address and phone number. Internet cafés have to ask for identification of their clients, and many units expressly forbid the use of pseudonyms in internet forums and chat rooms. Bulletin board systems and chat rooms requiring participants to register their name and ID card number have become the norm. All of these records must be kept for 60 days. While not each and every one of the regulations is constantly enforced, all operators bear the risks of intermittent check-ups.⁸⁹

A further step was taken in September 2005, when *Rules on the Administration of Internet News Information Services* were issued by the SCIO and MII that tightened earlier provisional regulations of the two authorities dating from November 2000. Ever since new registration requirements explicitly require all providers of current political news via websites, bulletin board systems (BBS) or other forms of internet transmission to relay only official news reports, sign relevant agreements with the officially appointed news organs and refrain from editing their own news reports. This can furnish the legal grounds to prohibit blogs, online fora and databases with electronic messages that display unofficial news. Moreover, the crucial legal definition of “current political news and information” was broadened to include “reports and comments on political, economic, military, foreign affairs and other social or public affairs, as well as reports and comments on sudden social incidents”. It is the inclusion of the category “comment” which can make the sphere of regulated content in the areas listed above almost limitless.

⁸⁶ Tian Zhongchu 2005; Zhao Shilin 2006; Xinhua 2007c; Xinhua 2007d

⁸⁷ SARFT 2001; SARFT a; SARFT b; SARFT c

⁸⁸ Ministry of Public Security 1997

⁸⁹ Ministry of Information Industry 2001; Giese 2000; Hughes and Wacker 2003; Giese 2005; Qiu and Zhou Liuning 2005

The rules also contain licensing requirements that permit only units with legal status and sponsorship of an official news organizations to engage in such activities; foreign investment is banned, and any other cooperation with foreign enterprises subject to a security check. The SCIO retains the right to refuse registration, if it is not in accord with its dispositions as to the total number, structure and distribution of internet news services. The rules further stipulate that content providers must establish their own responsibility system for checking news content, immediately delete objectionable information, accept public supervision, keep records of all published information for at least 60 days and provide them to the relevant departments on demand. Hefty fines ranging up to 30,000 Yuan are threatened for any violation of these rules.⁹⁰

Finally, foreign media have been targeted as an object of sustained control efforts. A rule of long standing stipulates that foreign news have to come exclusively from Xinhua or the three central media (CCTV, Central People's Broadcasting Station and China Radio International). In September 2006 Xinhua pushed through new *Measures for Administering the Release of News and Information by Foreign News Agencies in China* that give it the right to grant or withhold operating licenses for foreign media in China and to censor their reports released in the country. Since Chinese media were once again reminded to use exclusively Xinhua news, the measures force all foreign competitors to distribute their news through the Chinese agency. Foreign news agencies must work through a Chinese organ appointed by Xinhua, and so have their Chinese customers. They are forbidden to stage promotion activities in China, and their Chinese clients are not allowed to issue translations of the foreign agency dispatches. In view of the fact that the *Regulations on Reporting Activities in China by Foreign Journalists During the Beijing Olympic Games and the Preparatory Period* of December 2006 lifted the application requirements for interviewing by foreign journalists in China, these rules are also a proviso for preventing the spread of unwelcome news through the backdoor.⁹¹

Similar precautions were taken in the entertainment sector. After the craze for Western TV drama productions of the 1980s, still valid decrees from 1990 and 1994 limited the broadcasting of such productions to a maximum of 20 percent of all broadcasting time and 15 percent of prime time. This contrasts with foreign content shares that in some areas of the country amounted to more than 70 percent during the mid-1980s. At the same time special arrangements for some provinces were cancelled, and all film imports became centralized. In the late 1990s, further decrees required all imported foreign TV productions to display a Chinese approval number. Regulations of 2001 and 2004 tightened earlier rules from 1993 that banned the sale of equipment for receiving foreign satellite TV without permission and limited it to international hotels and foreign-related institutions – a restriction that is often breached, though, despite recurrent campaigns for seizing illegal satellite dishes. With the exception of cautious experimentation with tamed, self-censored foreign satellite and cable TV in Guangdong province since 2002, all of these regulations stay in force. In 2005 they were bolstered by a joint directive of the Propaganda Department and five government agencies that stressed “cultural security” and restricted the issuing of import licenses for cultural products exclusively to GAPP, SARFT and the Ministry of Culture.⁹²

There are parallel safeguards for foreign enterprises and joint ventures in the cultural sector that have been permitted after China's accession to the WTO. The commitments entered by China are careful to underline the country's right to examine media content and to demand compliance with its administrative regulations. GAPP regulations from 2003 for foreign retailers of books, newspapers and magazines thus stipulate that all products sold must originate from approved Chinese publishers. SARFT rules for sino-foreign film co-productions from 2004 prescribe film examination by both provincial and central SARFT authorities. Rules for joint ventures in the production of radio and television programs dating from the same year contain the same proviso. Furthermore, they limit these enterprises to features, entertainment and movies but expressly bar joint production of political news. Chinese majority capital is insisted on. An interpretative circular from 2005 erected further barriers and documented the conflict between economic interest and political considerations once more. It stressed that the aim of such joint ventures is the upgrading of Chinese radio and TV production and its promotion on the international market. However, echoing the famous call of an imperial viceroy from 1898 in favor of “Chinese learning for the fundamental principles and Western learning for practical application”, it asserted that “while introducing mature operational concepts and methods from the foreign program production market, we shall keep good control of the contents of all the produced goods.” Instead of Chinese radio and TV stations only separate radio and TV production units are allowed to enter a joint venture, and no leasing of Chinese radio and TV channels is allowed. Foreign

⁹⁰ ISC 2002a; Xinhua 2005b

⁹¹ Xinhua 2006c; Xinhua 2006d

⁹² Yu Xu 1995; Lynch 1999: 110-123, 184-197; Hong Junhao 1998: 57-100; McCormick 2003; SARFT 2004a; Xinhua 2005a

partners must have no record of actions unfriendly to China within the last three years. Finally, the circular urged strengthened censorship formalities for all joint productions and adherence to the principle that two thirds of them must be focused on Chinese topics.⁹³

7. An Instructive Case

The circumstances surrounding the temporary closure of the publication *Freezing Point* in early 2006 offer an instructive look at the practical application of present media policies. They reveal the complicated maneuvering in regard to the sensitive issues of investment and ownership, as well as a protracted conflict between commercial and political goals and between different concepts of media policy. At the same time, they also expose the inroads of critical journalism and the perseverance of the Propaganda Department bent on using the profit incentive for its own purposes.

Freezing Point appeared in 1995 as a special page in the *China Youth Daily*, the official organ of the Party's Communist Youth League. Later, it developed into a weekly column on current events. In 1999 it grew into a one-page addition, to become extended to a four-page supplement on current events, cultural affairs, scientific developments and famous personages after five years. Its steady enlargement reflected a good standing among the readership earned by dedicated reporting. The supplement soon was commended by the Propaganda Department as the most interesting part of *China Youth Daily* and received medals from the All-China Journalists Association for publishing one of best news columns of the country.

Freezing Point's success was part of larger strategy that aimed at turning the declining *China Youth Daily* into a large, modern and profit-generating enterprise. For this purpose, the paper had formed a joint venture for publishing, advertising and related activities in 2004. All editors and reporters became employees of the joint venture, whose other partner was the Beida Jade Bird Group, a business group that had grown out of successful, state-funded software projects at Beijing University and that specialized in the marketing of technological products. With ample resources from the university and majority shares from the government, Beida Jade Bird Group had evolved into a large conglomerate with investments in the IT sector, in educational activities, real estate developments and in the civilian use of nuclear technology. At the same time, it became the prime investor in central-level newspapers that were put on a commercial basis. According to the agreement between the two partners, Beida Jade Bird Group injected 250 million Yuan in cash into the joint venture, while *China Youth Daily* traded its material assets and operating rights for a 60 percent majority share. But apparently business interests and the political mandate of *China Youth Daily* clashed, or Jade Bird received a discrete hint from the government, its own majority shareholder - for after only 18 months the conglomerate withdrew from the joint venture.⁹⁴

The reasons for this turn-about have never been officially disclosed, but it is striking that the failure of the joint venture came soon after first clouds marred the success story of bold journalism. In May 2005 *Freezing Point* had published a frank report by Taiwan's woman writer Long Yingtai under the title *Taiwan As You May Not Know It*. Long Yingtai, who is close to Taiwan's "Blue Camp" of parties that hold on to the Chinese identity of the island, used a performance of the revolutionary Beijing opera *The Red Lantern* in Taipei to reflect on the democratic way of living on Taiwan, the wide-spread aversion against the former Guomindang one-party rule and the Guomindang army's bloody repression of popular demands in the ill-famed incident of February 1947.⁹⁵ The article ignited a lively debate among *Freezing Point's* readers. But as the analogies to the situation on the Chinese mainland were too obvious, it also provoked a sharp criticism from the Party's Propaganda Department. Liu Yunshan sent for the First Secretary of the Youth League and lectured him on the anti-Party tendencies of the article. However, the journal continued on its course. In June 2005 it breached another taboo and commemorated the sacrifices of Guomindang troops in one of the important battles of the Sino-Japanese War, enraging the Critical Reading Group of the Propaganda Department once more.⁹⁶

⁹³ GAPP 2003; SARFT 2004b; SARFT 2004c; SARFT 2005

⁹⁴ Beida Jade Bird Group; Zhengzhi.com

⁹⁵ Long Yingtai 2005

⁹⁶ Xu Linjiang 2005

Two months later the large-scale pull-out of capital by Beida Jade Bird Group and the liquidation of the joint venture was announced. All editors of *China Youth Daily* and its supplement *Freezing Point* returned to their original employment conditions. As a boon they received new draft regulations for the regular evaluation of the paper's journalists. These devised an elaborate system of financial rewards and punishments for either desirable or undesirable reporting. At the same time, they revealed the hierarchical nature of the propaganda system, the disregard for readership preferences and the true power relationships behind the façade of a lively press. While in the evaluation system the three best articles in the monthly survey of readers earned only 30 bonus points each, commendations by leaders of the Communist Youth League's Central Secretariat drew 80 points, rising to 100, 120 and 300 points for praise by leading cadres of ministries and provinces, the Central Propaganda Department's leadership or Politburo members, respectively. An inverse rank scale governed the distribution of penalty points to be distributed for criticism by different leadership echelons. Directors, vice-directors, editors-in-chief and vice-editors earned 170 percent, 150 percent, 140 percent and 130 percent of the average credit points of all their junior staff.⁹⁷

There was an immediate outcry among many Chinese journalists, who learned about these measures by carefully placed leaks in Chinese internet publications. They missed the lack of any reference to the "supervisory role of public opinion", discerned a departure from the path of press reform and disagreed with the attempt to return to the old "mouthpiece" concept for newspapers. The editor of *Freezing Point*, a Party member, published an Open Letter against the new measures and their claim to embody the principle of "unison between the appraisal of superior departments and the appraisal of the readership". This in turn provoked an angry public rebuttal by the editor-in-chief of *China Youth Daily*, another Party member. Interesting enough, the Party group of the newspaper resolved to revise the controversial regulations once again and to recognize the legitimacy of the Open Letter. But, ominously, the political police of the Department of Public Security began investigations about the dissemination of the Open Letter on the internet.⁹⁸

The conflict between different concepts of press policy, however, continued to simmer. The editors of *Freezing Point* balked at the demand to publish the customary fortnightly report about a predetermined model person with the argument that similar reports on the same person would be printed in all other newspapers anyway. This did not endear them to the Propaganda Department, which is selecting the model persons and regards the existence of regular orchestrated press campaigns as an asset and not as a liability. It compelled *Freezing Point* to comply. In November 2005 the paper published another article by Long Yingtai. It described how the new chairman of the Guomindang on Taiwan had apologized for the past misdeeds of his party such as the detention and execution of political opponents during the period of one-party rule and how indemnity laws were enacted on the island. When remarks about the lacking apologies of the Communist Party appeared on mainland Chinese websites, the Propaganda Department reprimanded the outspoken paper again.⁹⁹

To no avail - for in January 2006 the quarrel carried on. At that time *Freezing Point* published the article of a professor from Sun Yatsen-University in Guangzhou (Canton), who questioned the mainstream of Chinese patriotic thinking and the official school book version of China's stand in the Second Opium War or the Boxer Uprising. According to him, the war activities of the Western powers with the burning of the summer palace in 1860 and the occupation of Beijing in 1900 were not the result of aggressive designs but rather a consequence of the anti-foreign policies of the last Chinese dynasty. On top of this unorthodox and controversial interpretation, the author voiced the provocative opinion that the historical misrepresentations of Chinese school books resembled those of their counterparts in Japan.¹⁰⁰

The article unleashed a chorus of angry voices in the Chinese internet which chided it for its unpatriotic attitude. Moreover, it caught the eye of textbook authors who felt offended and sent a complaint to the CCP Central Committee. There it was forwarded to Liu Yunshan and Wang Zhaoguo, the two Politburo members responsible for propaganda and Youth League work, respectively. They in turn made critical remarks and passed it on to the Central Propaganda Department's Critical Reading Group, which drafted a sharp rebuttal of the original article, culminating in the reproach that it "negated the more than 100 years of the Chinese people's struggle against aggression..., and vented the same air as the imperialist aggressors... , with the spearhead pointed directly against the Communist Party of China and the socialist system." Copies of the criticism were sent to the First Secretary of the Youth League

⁹⁷ Zhongguo qingnian bao 2005a

⁹⁸ Li Datong 2005; Li Erliang 2005; Zhongguo qingnian bao 2005b

⁹⁹ Long Yingtai 2005b

¹⁰⁰ Yuan Weishi 2006a

Central Committee, to the Central Propaganda Department's leadership and, on top of it, to all members of the Central Leading Group for Propaganda and Ideological Work.

And now a machinery was set in motion. Within two weeks of the publication *Freezing Point* was closed and re-organized by the Youth League; the Propaganda Department instructed all Chinese media to remain silent on the affair; and the Department of Public Security ordered the removal of the blog site of the incriminated editor within five minutes, threatening the immediate disconnection of the web company's server in case of non-compliance. The measures provoked long debates in the newspaper's Party branches and in various staff meetings, with arguments surging back and forth between the catchwords: "We must respect news and propaganda discipline!", "We should have freedom of debate!", "We must show patriotism!", "We should insist on the legality of procedures!", "We should not play around with our jobs!" Still, the combative editor of the journal continued his struggle and posted another protest on the internet. In addition, he also challenged the Propaganda Department, based his protest against the closure of the publication and the denial of free debate on the Chinese constitution, the Party statutes and the *Principles of Political Life Within the Party* and wanted to plead it before the Central Committee's Disciplinary Commission.¹⁰¹

The closure of *Freezing Point* unleashed a chain reaction. Numerous foreign media reported about the case, and Long Yingtai sent an Open Letter to the Party's General-Secretary Hu Jintao, in which she portrayed mainland China's lack of freedom as the principal obstacle to reunification with Taiwan.¹⁰² 13 reformist Party elders, among them the former head of the Propaganda Department Zhu Houze, Mao Zedong's former secretary and vice-head of the Organization Department Li Rui, the former vice-director of Xinhua News Agency Li Pu, the former editor-in-chief of the Party organ *People's Daily* Hu Jiwei, the former president of the University for Political Science and Law Jiang Ping and the former director of *China Youth Daily* Zhong Peizhang, published a joint declaration and criticized the information policies of the leadership.¹⁰³ Other intellectuals joined in the protest. The editor of *Freezing Point* formally submitted an information against the Propaganda Department via the Party group of the newspaper, indicting the Department for breach of state and Party law, i.e. the constitutional freedoms of speech and press, the constitution's paragraph that prescribes rule by law binding for all parties and organizations, or the Party principles that promise freedom of debate within the Party. But the Youth League Central Committee refused to forward the document to the Central Disciplinary Commission. The editor finally sent it himself to this highest disciplinary organ of the Party and posted it on the internet three days later.

After altogether five weeks of an internal tug-and-toe the editor succeeded in his campaign to have the journal reopened. However, together with the notification of the journal's resumption he also received the final dismissal from his position and his relegation to a subordinate job in the paper's research section. Also punished was the editor-in-chief of *China Youth Daily*, presumably for allowing publication of the controversial articles in the first instance. The reproach to have disregarded the Party-organ and "mouthpiece" character of *China Youth Daily* served as the main argument for the reprisals. This time, the decision was passed in the name of the Party group of *China Youth Daily*, while the Youth League leadership and the Central Propaganda Department kept silent and the Central Disciplinary Commission did not react.

Ever since, *Freezing Point* continues under a newly appointed editor, who arranged for a published rebuttal of Yuan Weishi's offensive theses on Chinese history. Written by a historian from the Academy of Social Sciences, it reaffirmed that British and French violence during the Second Opium War resulted from long-term imperialist designs and not from the failure of Chinese diplomacy. The Boxer movement's rampaging against all foreigners and symbols of foreign civilization in China was once again declared to have been an act of self-defense. These judgments fully conformed with the earlier verdict by the Propaganda Department. The new editor of *Freezing Point* refused to print a rejoinder by Yuan Weishi and to carry on with an academic debate. The public at large thus was once again presented with the official version of two periods in modern Chinese history: "109 years of struggle for China's independence" during the period from the First Opium War in 1840 to the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 and "56 years of struggle for the country's modernization and its wealth and power" afterwards. It is to the honor of the Academy of Social Sciences, however, that Yuan Weishi's reply has been published on one of the Academy's websites. The reply stresses that prudent diplomacy and a comprehensive reform policy on the

¹⁰¹ Zhongxuanbu xinwenju 2006; Gongqingtuan zhongyang xuanchuanbu 2006; Li Datong 2006a; Li Datong 2006b; Li Datong 2006c

¹⁰² Long Yingtai 2006

¹⁰³ Zhu Houze et al. 2006

Japanese model would have spared China her partly self-inflicted earlier humiliation and that modernization and the reattainment of full sovereignty were well under way even before 1949.¹⁰⁴

The same stalemate with a tilt in favor of orthodoxy can be observed in other respects. The reopening of the closed journal was an unprecedented concession. Its former editor of *Freezing Point* remains unmolested in private life and was allowed to travel abroad after his ouster. Even more important, he was able to quit the journal and pursue an alternative career in China. Nevertheless, the Central Propaganda Department has prevailed and refined its warning system. It introduced a new scheme of penalty points in 2007, with graded point deductions for non-compliant media. This threatens immediate closure of media once an allocated number of points is exhausted. A similar system of point deductions has been proposed for the handling of offensive internet blogs.¹⁰⁵ Party chief Hu Jintao in turn is on the record as counseling refined methods of control and the future abstention from media closures, since these would only arouse the immediate attention of outside observers. He reportedly prompted the resumption of *Freezing Point* with the cloudy instruction to “settle the affair satisfactorily”.

As a sign of the times, the top leadership in charge of propaganda and information policies was reendorsed in office and disproportionately awarded by the CCP National Party Congress of October 2007. Besides the incumbent office holders from the Central Propaganda Department (its director Liu Yunshan and its vice-director Wang Taihua), three additional or out-going vice-directors of the Department (Cai Wu, Li Congjun and Ji Bingxuan) were newly admitted to Central Committee membership. And so was the director of GAPP (Liu Binjie). Equally telling, yet another vice-director of the Propaganda Department (Li Dongshan) who is responsible for press guidance and was involved in the *Freezing Point* affair acted as the Party congress spokesman. All persons concerned from the Youth League leadership likewise kept their positions in the Party’s and Youth League’s Central Committees.

8. Conclusions

While China’s policies of reform and opening-up have prompted far-reaching economic transformations in the media sector, and the leeway for uncensored reporting has widened, the principles of political supervision thus remain essentially unchanged or move at the most incrementally. Despite the gradual evaporation of communist beliefs, some organizational reshuffling, recurrent jurisdictional adjustments and a penchant for new technocratic ways of control, the basic bureaucratic set-up for enforcing media compliance with Party policies stays in line with the Leninist arrangements of the 1950s. They have become ever more sophisticated and comprehensive in regard to the mechanisms of control. While a response to the fundamental changes in Chinese economy and society, as well as a reaction to the revolution of information technology, are at the root of the problem, the WTO accession of China with its outlook of an increased foreign presence in the country seems to work as the catalyst. Viewed as a necessary evil and price to be paid for China’s rise and the country’s own visions of global cultural expansion, the outer bulwarks of fortress China are replaced by an inner cordon to hem in the economic, cultural and political effects of growing openness. In this sense, the tightening comes as a defensive reaction to the impact of outside forces that threaten to shatter the long-term usages of Chinese public life. It is not unique to China, as the defense of cultural diversity and existent political systems in the name of state sovereignty is a widespread, worldwide reaction to the onslaught of globalization. Typically, multilateral commitments for the free flow and exchange of cultural services such as film, TV and news production belong to the thorniest chapters of decades of WTO negotiations.

There definitely is a ring of exasperation in the hectic Chinese activities taking place under multiple pressures: an explosion of information and publications, a shift of reading patterns from the old to the new media, a marked decline of personnel and resources in the supervising agencies, an increasing competition and outside influence through the forces of globalization. Stepping up regularization, tightening surveillance and outsourcing parts of the control effort, combining recentralization of major functions with delegation and self-regulation of minor ones, deterring transgressors by making show-case examples and ceding in other cases where larger interests are involved are integral parts of the response – a delicate mix as much dictated by necessity as by conviction.

The tightening began in 1989 after the Tiananmen movement, but it has assumed campaign-like proportions in recent years. Its main purpose is to prevent the development of political journalism that in the history of Western countries paved the way for the political pluralism. After the economic reforms and the opening-up of the country at the turn of the millennium, the Chinese media move in a high-pressure chamber, where many stages of media

¹⁰⁴ Zhang Haipeng 2006, Yuan Weishi 2006b

¹⁰⁵ Jingji cankao bao, 4 January 2007; South China Morning Post, 9 February 2007

development are collapsed within a brief time span and new compounds are brewing. Some Party organs struggle for survival while others are reverting into court gazettes, and liberal voices battle with powerful nationalistic currents. Small spaces for elite discussion are established, but on the whole, mass tastes are reigning, and commercialism is loose. This reflects the deep transformations of the Chinese polity during the last quarter of a century. But the incipient pluralism is subdued and muffled under a cover, as China's leadership is holding fast to the country's age-old, traditional concept of authoritarian government with centralized power and monistic ideology. It has been challenged by all Chinese revolutionaries of the last century and embraced by many of them once they took over power, experienced the problems of governing a huge country, perceived conflicts that threaten to tear it apart and became occupied by their mission to modernize the country and restore it to wealth and power. The continuation of authoritarian government has been always described as transitional but tended to be prolonged infinitely and justified with tutelage in pursuit of national goals. And just as during the Chinese self-strengthening movement of the late 19th century it is defended in the name of importing advanced Western methods while holding on to a Chinese essence. At the same time the applicability of Western societal and political models to China is ardently denied.

The notion of a Chinese essence is elusive and has been variously interpreted over the decades. Nevertheless, it has proven to be a seductive and seemingly irresistible figure of thought for a part of the Chinese elite, who, after the twist and turns of the Chinese revolutions and campaigns, evince allegiance to a familiar concept of government. It extols the views and the virtues of political leaders, strongly controls political news and divergent voices, grants access to information only in limited doses defined by rank and denies the public at large a right to debate issues of national importance. Unified thinking anchored in shared ideals is valued above all and associated with national strength, a centrally regulated historical perspective is seen as a matter of state cohesion; public interest is accorded precedence before private or group one, information and propaganda conceived as education for the common good. There is a strong element of paternalism, with authority equally dispensing care and praise, bans and punishment. Freedom is an irritating notion that smacks of egotism and anarchy and immediately triggers the concern about its necessary limits. Citizens are essentially viewed as subjects neither capable of nor entitled to independent information and judgment. While their cooperation and spontaneous initiative for the public good as defined by the state are welcome, open dissent and criticism definitely are not. They cause feelings of insecurity and tend to be perceived as disloyalty or, even worse, as treason. Secrecy blends subtly with a cultural disposition to avoid loss of face. If dissent is hesitatingly condoned at all, it has to stay within the confines of discussion on different approaches for reaching state objectives. Public involvement in anti-corruption drives or media reports on local policy implementation that can be construed as governance supervision by public opinion may be tolerable, too.

In comparison with the former state of affairs in the Mao era, this is a step forward. An ever larger group of highly educated, intelligent and sophisticated people with knowledge of the outside world is testing and stretching the limits, both inside and outside the Party. Because of press laws in limbo, varying views within a large and complex bureaucracy, as well as the difference between policy promulgation and policy implementation, these often remain unpredictable. The margins for debate of economic, social, cultural and legal issues have greatly increased in academic journals, and so have the administrative informations supplied by government organs, the local and social news reports or the sports and feature sections of the mass media. But the boundaries for the publication of political news and the discussion of important national problems - which in China quickly involve questions of history and national identity - remain closely circumscribed. For normal media outside the internal information circuits they are highly dependent on the political winds, the largesse, the enlightenment and the momentary interests of the supervisory bodies. At times they may permit erratic and muted publication of political dissent. And even astonishing cases of prolonged, undisguised and sharp challenges to prevailing policies can be documented in the official media. These usually indicate divergent opinions among the upper echelons of the leadership and fade away once new decisions are reached.

Some enlargements of the public market place thus do exist, but they stay clear of major extension work. Large-scale reconstruction activities are rather concentrated on the modernization of the public lecture hall, which stood in danger of neglect and collapse but now is propped up and adorned by new gadgets and teaching devices. Broadening the lecture hall's educational mission with infotainment and recreational offers, its master is turning the management over to operators who woo the public, raise lucrative entrance fees and recruit a broad range of actors. Nevertheless, the master continues to pull the strings, and he is mending them, should they show signs of tearing. Party documents such as the *Views on Deepening Reform of the Cultural System* from 2005 outline a system of cultural management in which "the Party committees lead, the government administrates, the industry practices self-discipline and the companies operate according to law".¹⁰⁶ But smooth formulations as these disguise an enduring conflict. For the

¹⁰⁶ Zhongguo gongchandang 2005

continuation of variable censorship practices necessitates intervention in the daily operation of the news media, which clearly exceeds the blueprint of market-driven reform in which Party and government restrict themselves to planning, policy formulation, regulation, mediation and norms control.

Within this complicated framework, the economic and technological revolution and the arrival of the information society in China have created new opportunities for the Chinese media. From a handful of monotonous lecturers they have turned into a large, brightly clad group of performers. But even though technological progress and commercial interest have driven their surge forward, the tight policies of control are a drag on their further development, both on the national and international level. This is regretful, for many people would appreciate high-quality journalism from China, Chinese voices that probe the dominant pitch of the world or media that offer relief from the rampant demands of all-out commercialization. The insistence of a country on the right to define its own moral limits of public discourse or to protect its cultural sphere from ruinous confrontation with global entertainment machines is legitimate, too. But stretching such considerations to stall and deny fundamental rights of information is no attractive proposition for the 21st century, neither for the own people nor for a world which cherishes variety rather than uniformity in life. It is retrograde, reduces China's credibility and soft power.

In Chinese theory a clear separation of political and commercial matters should solve all problems. Within this scheme, the principle of competition should apply to the commercial but not to the political sphere. In consequence the political reports all too often stay standardized, unattractive and devoid of critical information. As the principles of self-interest and economic gain rebel against the selling of such undesired content, in practice conflicts abound. Negotiating compromises, dodging the intervening powers and seeking safe ground by concentrating on glossy and sensationalist entertainment, commercial advertisements and economic news, avoiding political topics or appealing to patriotic gut feelings has become the daily task of many participants. This does not necessarily raise quality and perverts the meaning of socialist market-economy for the media into a marriage of the negative aspects of socialism with the negative aspects of market-economies. Corruption can be the ultimate result of it.

Alternatively, the Chinese players can boost media income by breaching taboos and pursuing critical journalism. It requires good connections and elevated rank in the highly graded Chinese pecking order, potentially costly researches, argumentative skills and financial assets to back up one's own position in case financial pressures are applied. Punishment for offenders of existing policies or crippling economic losses due to either non-approved and banned, approved but unprofitable and heavily subsidized productions are the wages of those who do not perform well in the game. Past instances like half of the movie production shot in vain due to censoring practices or more than two thirds of a journal's income lost after the removal of critical content offer glimpses of a situation that has been only partially remedied by new business solutions.

The Chinese media thus walk a tightrope, with high risks incurred for either economic or political failure. The many new practices introduced in this article demonstrate how their freedom of movement has turned into a field of contending forces. It has been reigned in again by a Party in defense of its leadership. – Still, it has immensely increased in comparison to former times. This has been brought about by the diversification of interests and the pluralization of actors within a large state, a vast bureaucracy, a rapidly changing economic and social environment.

The complicated structure of control arrangements for the media with the competing strains of both centralization and fragmentation, bureaucratic regulation and autocratic arbitrariness, demands for restriction and pressures for relaxation illustrates a situation found in some other areas of Chinese reform policies, too. It requires codification and adherence to common rules of the game. But clinging to its political prerogatives, relishing its freedom of action and pointing to its undeniable successes in a number of fields, the leadership has only specified economic rights and manifold obligations for the diverse players of a slowly emancipating society. The political leeway for their activities and their rights of participation and information, however, mostly stays on an elusive level of generalization. State and Party agents at the grass-roots level thus exercise the power of interpreting guidelines that are rigid and vague at the same time, bending them in the process. The frequent brokering of disputes and a permanent renegotiation of fuzzy rules on ill-defined areas lurk under the surface of the new Chinese passion for rule by law, here as in many other areas. Unified interpretation by the Propaganda Department is the aim of some but clearly not all participants in the ongoing wrestling between society that is penetrating the Party and the Party that is penetrating society. As of today, the final outcome of the struggle for media control remains undecided. The impatience of journalists, readers and viewers with the tight propaganda regime is growing. But both the power and the will to control and intervene from on high still seem to be larger than elsewhere in Chinese economic and social life.

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