

ICT and the Demise of Propaganda in China

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Abstract: This article discusses an important direction in the development of Chinese press, politics, and public freedom of expression with the uses of new communications technologies. The challenges posed by the Internet to the Chinese state control of press are discussed. The Chinese leaders in the information age are confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand, the Internet-based information and communication technologies offer enormous potential and stimulation for China's economic growth and speeding up her efforts in integrating with the global economy. But on the other hand, the information revolution poses new threats to the authorities that rely on a tight centralized control of political news. Contrary to popular wisdom, Chinese efforts to control the Internet and other new media have already failed in a sense that Chinese government has lost much control over the information and images that now circulate through Chinese society, particularly during big breaking news events. People are still debating whether the Internet economy be revived. No one can give an assuring answer. But one thing is sure to come that is China is seeing the demise of the classic communist propaganda in a sense that the state tightly-controlled media have lost their audiences when such big news events like the recent 16th Party congress take place.

Methodology *The author has used six case studies including Nanjing food poisoning, Jiangxi school explosion, US-China spy plane collision,, the Three Represents propaganda campaign, 2002 National People's Congress and the 16th Chinese Communist Party Congress to illustrate the pattern of Chinese official propaganda and impact of new ICT development on China's press, public discourse and an emerging civil society.*

I. Introduction

China's relationship with the internet is perhaps one of the most thoroughly documented in the world press. Regular stories in major newspapers highlight the arrest of "internet dissidents," the closure of cyber cafes, or net censorship. In 2002, experts meeting in Washington stated that the Chinese government continues to maintain a nearly rock-solid cyber wall. An American congress commission claimed that China now employs some 30,000 "Internet police" to monitor its citizens, and that it has increased arrests of dissidents and journalists posting illegal content on the Internet. "China has developed the largest and most sophisticated IP blocking and content filtering system in the world." (Pedro Gomes InfoSatellite.com,2002)

But the relationship between the government of China and the internet is far more complex than commonly portrayed in the west.

In the study, the author attempts to shed some light on an important topic that so far has been dominated by some easy assumptions and even stereotyped mind-set thinking, trying to provide a new understanding of the political implications of emerging communication technologies, particularly in the context of a controlled press in a market economy like China.

Some western observers believe that Chinese government sees the trend of the Internet as a constant threat to the state not as a potential resource. They believe that the Chinese government is stifling the Internet revolution because it sees the Internet as a subversive force which will ultimately undermine Chinese communist political monopoly. They have also overestimated the government's ability to control internet users.

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The Internet means different things to different people in different societies. To some, it provides an opportunity to make money; to others, it means freedom from press controls. For still others, the Internet is a public forum in which citizens of a closed society can discuss politics. In the past eight years, the Internet has developed rapidly in China, as it has in the rest of the world. This poses new challenges to the country's press system and media policy.

Some International observers have been admiring the Chinese Communist Party for its rule of China for the last decade that has seen a sustained economic prosperity and an eight percent of economic growth despite of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Europe. Some analysts have argued that the reason why the Chinese Communist Party is able to remain firmly in power simply it keeps a tight grip on Chinese society by censoring.

If it was true that a tight press control system had helped consolidate the party's power in the old media society, but it could also be true that a tight press control system could also weaken and even destroy the party propaganda

system and eventually bury the Party's voice in the new media society. The glorious new economy promised by the Internet has vanished like an April Fool's bubble. The dot-coms that made millions of people become millionaires overnight also led many multi-million-dollar bankrupt in a blink of an eye. However, despite of billions and billions of dollars evaporated in the stock market, the Internet has left one solid and most precious thing in China: an emerging cyber freedom of expression which is beyond the control of the government. People are still debating whether the Internet economy be revived. No one can give an assuring answer. But one thing is sure to come that is China is seeing the demise of the classic communist propaganda in a sense that the state tightly-controlled media have lost their audiences when such big news events like the recent 16th Party congress take place. "Much of the speculation about the Internet's political effects in China has centered on its impact on the mass public. Because the medium allows unprecedented access to multiple sources of images, news, and ideas, some believe it can challenge state hegemony over the distribution of information and ideologies. As more and more of China's educated urban professionals and youth gain access to the Internet, they are becoming increasingly aware of foreign products, culture, and political norms. New commercial Web sites, featuring topics ranging from pollution to homosexuality, place formerly taboo issues solidly in the realm of public debate. Even official media organs use their Web sites to post news that is unavailable in print or on the air. For less than the price of a long-distance phone call, ordinary people can use e-mail to communicate with friends and acquaintances far away. Moreover, in chat rooms and bulletin boards focusing on political and social themes, users are able to circulate news and opinions, thereby generating nationwide discussions not previously possible. Some suggest that as a direct result of participation in these forums, the Chinese people will place demands for political liberalization on the state."(Kalathil et al. 2003)

With the flourishing of satellite TV, cable TV and the Internet, a new media environment has taken shape in China. Official news outlets are being outnumbered by their non-governmental, commercial and overseas counterparts. The Internet is becoming a public medium for people with different ideas, viewpoints and information to communicate with each other.

For decades, Chinese media consisted of newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, broadcasting stations and TV stations under the control of propaganda authorities at all levels. Statistics show that in the year 2001(Zhao Qizheng, 2002), China published 2,111 newspapers, 8,889 magazines, 155,000 titles of books, 2,1000 titles of audio and video products. By the end of the year 2002, China has 450 TV stations, 290 radio stations.

China's media industry saw an annual growth of 25 percent over the last three years, which has ranked it one of the country's backbone industries, next only to electronics, manufacturing and tourism. China has the largest TV audience in the world, totaling 900 million, with an additional 10 million new

viewers each year.

In the past, the government easily controlled and even manipulated popular opinion by limiting the public to only official information source. Watching the 7 p.m. "Evening News" (*Xinwen Lianbo*) on state-run CCTV (China Central Television) had been a national ritual at the family dinner table. Besides daily news coverage, the party and government depended on the program to put across their major propaganda campaigns and political mobilizations. But today, the program is losing audience share dramatically, particularly among young viewers who spend most of their time on the web, watching VCDs and cable TV.

In the days of single-sourced news, people had no way to verify the information they received. For a long time, the propaganda authorities effectively controlled the flow of information, news sources and information outlets. But in the Internet age, this media system is facing the challenge of news from multiple sources. Members of the public no longer rely on official information sources to form their opinions. Instead, when a big news event happens, people compare, analyze and balance the information they get from different sources. They form their own viewpoints after discounting what they consider biased information.

II. ICT in China

For many years, Chinese people get used to read, listen and watch news stories that are gathered, edited and carried on the government-run newspapers, radio and TVs. But as early as October 1998, an Internet company began to challenge this tradition. Here is the story(Chinese Science News , November 27 ,1998):

In the afternoon of August 23, 1998, 23-year-old Wang Han was killed in her hotel room in southern China's city Shenzhen. The police a reward for any clue leading to the capture of the killer.

On October 12, Wang Han's sister Beibei asked Shenzhen Wanyong Information Network, the largest internet service provider of Shenzhen, to report the killing of her sister on the internet.

Huang Cinan, editor of the company, accepted the assignment. "This assignment is of historical significant. It shows that people are beginning to realize that Internet is a mean of communications."

In the night of October 16, an in-depth "A lawsuit of Crying and Blood" appear on the homepage of Shenzhen Wanyong.

In two days, over 6,000 people visited the web site and more than 400 people published their comments on the case on the web site.

Most of the letters expressed their sympathy to the family. Some expressed their anger about the poor security of the hotel. But quite a few readers expressed their strong support to the Wanyong company for its new role in news reporting.

"The Wangyong report marks the beginning that a China's Internet company is reporting news like a new mean of communications. I hope Wangyong will start a news column and persist with news reporting of its own," Bai Lei write in his email.

As an editor of Wangyong, Huang says, "It was the first time I went out interviewing people and gathering information. It was also the first time we did independently a piece of story."

In the past, Huang and his colleagues always get their stories from newspaper and magazine clippings.

But Huang and his colleagues encountered a big headache in writing their story about the killed girl. When they called the hotel manager for an interview, the manager refused to talk to them because they were not from a news media.

The killing story by Shenzhen Wangyong Net has surprised many Chinese journalists who all agreed that Internet is posing a serious challenge to Chinese traditional news media. "It is of extremely enlightening significant to voice people's concern and demands on the Internet." (Chinese Science News , 27 November 1998)

Today, with the major Chinese newspapers opening a web site and an instant access to the homepages of many Chinese newspapers in Hong Kong and Taiwan, the Chinese press, the public and the policy makers have formed different opinions about this new challenge to the traditional media. Sun Baochuan, former chief engineer of *Xinhua* says, "this is a severe challenge to the traditional press, but it is also a rare opportunity." He describes the Internet press as "my newspaper." Professor Zhou Guangzhao, vice-president of the standing committee of China's National People's Congress predicted that the impact of the Internet press will surpass that of the traditional press in the next 10 to 20 years. *Xinhua*, 16 April,1999

Many people believe Internet press will help the public join the debate and supervising of government work. For example, last November, *the People's Daily* opened a forum about a proposed policy of abolishing the system of providing cars for leading government and party officials. In just 12 days, 17,200 people voiced their opinions on the forum. *Beijing Youth Daily*, 23 December 1998 " "Beijing's official corps of censors, who control every word in newspapers and on television, have finally met their match with the Internet," a Western observer says.(*Deutsche Presse Agentur* 1998)

Some Western observers accuse China of building up a degree of Net surveillance, "but the success is limited. With thousands more websites added to the Internet every day, and millions of email messages swirling through cyberspace, censors have no hope of keeping up."(*Deutsche Presse Agentur* 1998)

At a national meeting of editor-in-chiefs of party newspapers early 1999, Xu Guangchun, vice-minister of the propaganda department of the party's central committee disclosed that 69 Chinese newspapers have electronic

editions on the Internet. But he warned, "Now some news organizations do not follow the procedure of application and approval and open their websites without permission. Some news organizations print freely the news stories they get from the websites of foreign news organizations, which has played a misleading role in propaganda." News Front 3, 1999

Despite of the warnings from the senior propaganda official, most of the senior editors of Chinese press regard joining the trend of Internet as a historic tide which you can do nothing but to follow it and join it. As Xiao Pei, former editor-in-chief of Beijing Youth Daily and now editor-in-chief of Beijing Evening News, the largest newspapers in Beijing, says,(News Front 4,1998)

"The Internet is both a channel of information and a source of information. It has provided the newspapers with the fastest channel for spreading information and the broadest source for gathering information." Under the management of Xiao, Beijing Youth Daily has successfully launched several Internet columns which include "Interview through Internet," "Information from Internet," and "Chat in the Net." Reporters from the newspaper have interviewed people almost from all corners of the world for all kind of stories, according to Xiao.

During the annual sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC, the Chinese parliament) in 1998, major newspapers including *the People's Daily*, *Beijing Youth Daily* ran forum or special on-line columns, such as "*Citizens Ask and Delegates Answer*" and "*Citizens' Questions Answered at the NPC Session.*" During the meeting time of the annual NPC of 1999, almost all the major newspapers in Beijing have opened a web site for the citizens to voice complaints. The top question *the People's Daily* posed to its readers is: "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the Chinese government?" It was unthinkable and politically risky in the past for a press to ask its readers such a question. It was equally politically dangerous for a reader to write directly to the media and criticize the government.

A recent Harvard study states that "there is some evidence that the government has attempted to prevent the spread of unwanted material by preventing the spread of the Internet itself." "The government might encourage Internet access through cyber cafes rather than in private spaces so that customers' surfing can be physically monitored by others in the cafe."(Jonathan Zittrain and Benjamin Edelman, Berkman Center for Internet & Society,Harvard Law School)

Despite of increasing pressure for press freedom and demands for political changes brought by the Internet, the government continues its big efforts with Internet development in China. The government has emphasized information technology as a keystone of its economic policy, and Chinese president Jiang Zemin said at a dinner with top leader of 55 global media group on the eve of 16th Party congress, "Internet is an important part of communications of news", *People's Daily*, 7 November 2002 despite the

political and ideological ramifications with it.

Since China went online in 1993, the number of net users has been skyrocketing. The latest statistics show that China has experienced an explosion of Internet users, putting the country second only to the United States in the number of citizens online. By the end of the year 2002, China had 59.1 million Net users -- or 4.6 percent of China's 1.3 billion citizens, and 9 percent of the global total net users. The number of China's Internet users is expected to grow to 86.3 million over the next year. By the end of 2002, China had 20.86 million computers hooked up to the Net.

[://www.newsfactor.com/perl/story/20491.html](http://www.newsfactor.com/perl/story/20491.html)

and most of the computers are at home. Nearly 63.5% use the Internet to read news. Some 24% of adult users and 40% of young users visit overseas websites, including those based in Taiwan and the United States. These news outlets do not need to be approved by the Communist Party's propaganda departments. With over 20 million computers in China, more and more Chinese now enjoy full access to the Internet either at home, in office or cyber cafes, with users averaging 9.8 hours online a week. (<http://www.newsfactor.com/perl/story/20491.html>)

In 2002, a fire in Beijing's "Lanjisu" cyber cafe claimed 24 lives has focused attention nationwide on the country's burgeoning cyber cafes. With the number of users mushrooming from 8.9 million two years ago to about 60 million now, young people are getting used to receiving education online, dates online, shopping online and playing games online. "The Internet makes it possible for ordinary people to take part in government decisions and law making. For example, when the tenth five-year plan for national economic and social development was being drafted, over 10,000 suggestions from ordinary people were sent to websites opened by the central government, of which 300 were taken up by China's State Planning Commission. Both consumers and dealers have been trying E-commerce, trading items like computers, household commodities, books, videos and audio products. According to a latest survey, E-commerce volume will jump to 3.2 billion US dollars by 2004. The Internet is also helping people find jobs in China. About 35 percent of job seekers found employment online." Xinhua, 28 June 2002 Some Chinese farmers sell their flowers and learn about the world through the Internet, which helps them overcome such disadvantages as geographic isolation. In the country once famous for its special greeting "Have you had your meal?", nowadays more people may address each other with "Have you surfed on the net?" However the net has ensnared many young people especially students who are apt to get lost in the virtual community. Mishaps reported at cyber cafes include fires, the sudden death of middle-school students from fatigue and students addicted to the Internet getting poor marks or even dropping out of school. According to statistics from colleges in east China's Jiangsu Province, about 80 percent of dropouts are Internet addicts. Some students just chat or play games online without using the net's other functions. However some computer owners still prefer cyber cafes. A regular cyber café customer said it was cheaper to surf in cafes than at home. It also felt good surfing in a cyber cafe, just like in a cinema, bringing a feeling of merging into a crowd.

After the Internet bubble burst two years ago, Chinese Internet companies are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Late 2002, Sina.com, Sohu.com, NetEast.com announced their first ever profits after years of

losses.(China Daily, 29 January,2002) The Chinese net companies and analysts attributed the pick-up to the growth in mobile phone message services, which account for 80 percent of the sales of the three leading net companies.In the year 2001, at least 20 billion mobile phone messages were sent and received through China Mobile Communication Corp service alone xinhua 29 December,2002. , and the messages could be news briefs, games, political rumours, satirical poems mocking the party and the state leaders. And such messages are so many and could be disseminated as fast as computer viruses, the government regulators seem to have given up of any efforts to control them. Clearly the Internet and ICT have taken root in China. China could be regarded as the most grass-root wired country in the world, comparing to other countries like Cambodia, Vietnam, etc. "Can you imagine that China is the world's easiest and most convenient place where you can connect your laptop with Internet anywhere, anytime and anonymously just dialing 163? The username and password are both 163. You cannot do that in the United States, neither in Japan," Jeffrey Parker, representative of Reuter Group, told an international conference in Shanghai in 2001.

Industry experts predict that China's Internet market will be the world's largest by 2010, while psychologists warn Chinese newspaper readers about the dangers of Net addiction. Bandwidth has expanded rapidly, and Chinese-language content has proliferated. Just about everyone foresees grand potential. Telecom and media giants expect a juicy new market. Human rights activists predict the collapse of the state's information monopoly. Chinese planners envision new tools for control. Kathleen Hartford 2000

But we must have some idea about China's Digital Divide before we jump to a conclusion." How many people in China will really have access to this opportunity? While China is rapidly developing its telecommunication technology,the country still has hundreds of millions without personal telephone access, let alone computers, modems and broadband. Moreover, inequality has widened tremendously since the mid-1980s. Typically, the coastal and urban areas have benefited enormously from the market reforms; vast areas of the countryside, especially inland and western provinces, have stagnated, or worse."(Kathleen Hartford 2000)

According to the official statistics(Xinhua, 23 January ,2003), by the end of 2002, the telephone and mobile penetration into the Chinese population have reached and 16.19% respectively. But the telecommunications penetration varies from province to province. In the eastern provinces, there are 54.1 telephones every 100 people; in central provinces, it is ; the western provinces are . Beijing and Shanghai have enjoy the highest telephone penetrations, with and respectively. The telephone subscribers in China reached 420 million by the end of 2002, Chinese mobile phone users reached 200 million by the end of November of 2002, making China the largest user of both telephones and mobile phones(Xinhua, 20 January,2003). China's broadband for internet has been

expanded to , Chinese language websites reach 293,000, 20.83 million computers have been connected to internet, with an internet population of 59.1 million, making China the second largest population of internet users in the world.(Xinhua, 25 December,2002)

These facts make clear that the Web connects only a tiny minority of the Chinese population, most of whom are hardly experienced, or even interested, in politics. To the bulk of China's cyber citizens, the purpose of being connected to the Web is personal or commercial, not political. One survey shows that 49 percent of the complaints about the Internet's official management point to the low speed, 36 percent to the expensive charges and only 6 percent to the inadequacy of Chinese-language information. For those who are in a position to stage a political act or promote a political idea, especially in the vast countryside and non-metropolitan areas, the Internet is far from being a practical and effective tool at present or in the near future. According to a recent-released survey(Kexue Puji Press 2002) by the Chinese Association of Science and Technology, only a small percentage of people of the Chinese population have access to a computer, or have computer literacy, or access to networked environment:

Chinese population literacy of Internet(%)

Understanding	11.3
Not understanding	34.1
Never heard of	53.1

The condition or quality of being literate with Internet(%)

Understanding precisely	25.8
Understanding a little bit	24.8
Understanding wrongly	19.4
No answer	30

Internet literacy different from region to region(%)

	East	Central	West
Understanding	16.5	10.1	7.2
Not understanding	37	38.3	27.1
Never heard of	45.2	52.5	63.4
Total illiteracy	79.2	83.7	87

The total population having an email address (%)

Yes	4
No	85.4

Percentages of Chinese families having a computer:

Yes	No
6.9	86.9

Percentages of home-used computers installed with a modem:

Yes	no
57.8	36.1

Percentages of home-used computer hooked up with Internet:

Yes	No
48.1	50.3

The average amount of time of Chinese spend online each month

The whole population	0.67 hour
The Internet-using population	8 .66 hours

China is very low comparing to Japan and Singapore in terms of Internet penetration. Only a small percentage of Chinese population have an access to a computer or have computer literacy, or access to networked environment. Networking-based globalization will not have a sweeping powerful impact on China's cultural and political life. The author suspect that Internet will bring a globalized ideology and values along with a cyber democracy into China, but judging from its role of disseminating news and information, it is having a powerful impact on the government propaganda machine. The authorities have yet to feel the need for the state-run press to give up their old-fashioned propaganda model which is seen by the public more as a laughing stock than an effective communication.

III. Case studies of dying propaganda

People are drawn to the Internet for two reasons: communication and information. Communication has been the Net's most popular feature since the invention of e-mail. Other forms of communication have attracted millions worldwide, such as chat room discussions. Information includes the conventional meaning and a much broader range of content materials: news, views, software, images, videos, and music. During time of breaking news, Chinese people use information technology for networking and sharing

information. The displeased Chinese would use the Internet to criticize government bureaucracy and widespread graft and corruption.

Case 1: Nanjing Food Poisoning

On September 14(Saturday), food poisoning caused the death of at least 38 students and civilians in Tangshan Township, Nanjing. Yet Government officials and hospitals refused to give an account of deaths in the poisoning of hundreds of students and workers sickened after eating breakfast snacks in eastern China. Reports in China's state-controlled media on the exact numbers of casualties have been mixed and confused. On Saturday the official Xinhua news agency reported that 41 people had died and up to 400 had been made ill by the poisoning. However, that report was quickly deleted and replaced by an earlier story saying only that "a number of victims" had died and more than 200 were poisoned. The Web site of the state-run People's Daily newspaper followed a similar line saying "several people" had died, but specifying no actual

number (<http://www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/east/09/15/china.poisoning/index.html>). Nanjing officials kept a tight lid on the massive outbreak, which struck hundreds, and intimidated local journalists trying to report it. Nanjing officials all declined to comment, in what appeared to be a city-wide policy to suppress details of the incident from being reported. Local journalists also said they had been warned to stay away from the case. Despite previous reports that as many as 41 had died, Xinhua and other state media did not give a precise figure for the number of fatalities. (AFP 16 September,2002)One local resident complained, "For such a major and unexpected event, foreign TV networks would be constantly reporting it live from the site. Being a local, I could only find a few restricted reports on it. Like everyone else here, I am not clear what is going on. What a shame!" Government mouthpieces typically report good news and present the public an image of prosperity and order, particularly as the 16th Communist Party Congress draws near. One insider in Beijing, however, found nothing unusual about this and said, "If someone exposes the dark side of society, this person will be labeled as being 'subversive' or 'undermining stability and unity.'" (Tang Ren 2002)Let us watch what news stories CCTV reported in its 7 p.m. "Evening News" (Xinwen Lianbo), which is the mouthpiece of the Party and the government and is supposed to cover all the important events that the authorities deems as important that day:(<http://bbs.nju.edu.cn>)

Story 1: Three Represents theory study in the grassroots;

Story 2: A strong national echo of the reemployment meeting, unemployed workers express deep thanks for General Secretary Jiang's caring for them;

Story 3:A good achievements of central government's tax incomes between January and August;

Story 4: President Li Peng of the Nationalo People's Congress visits

Philippines and releases joint communiqué;

Story 5: Special report: Creating good environment to greet the 16th Party Congress;

Story 6: The Closing of the National Special Olympics;

Story 7: Dalian Costume Festival opens in the atmosphere of happiness and harmony;

Story 8: International news briefs

Angry voices were heard over the forum of Strong Nation of the People's Daily immediately after CCTV concluded its news program of Xinwen Lianbo:

"Human life is heaven, above everything else. Such big events will certainly be a leading story. But CCTV ignores it completely!"

"Cry, cry, cry over the lives of the ants!"

"Fly the flag halfway for the mourning of the dead "

"Central Propaganda Department has clearly ordered that mass death can not be reported!"

"The press gave a heavy coverage of the injury of Liu Hairuo (a Hong Kong TV star), but remain completely silent over so many deaths of our ordinary Chinese people."

"Chinese ordinary people are not human beings?"

"It is more difficult to choke the mouth of the people than blocking the flow of the river."

Internet has opened the door to a free flow of information to the Chinese people. Internet chat room (Bulletin Boards System), which has been described as dianzi dazibao (electronic big-character poster – the most efficient mean of mobilizing public opinion during the Cultural Revolution), has provided an unlimited space for the Chinese people to exchange information freely and anonymously.

As a popular part of Chinese online media, chat room is posing a big threat to the Chinese mainstream media – Party press by revising and reconstructing the agenda set by the Chinese official press. An important element of the news media is agenda setting. Agenda-setting theory holds that the mass media determine what is important by leading newscasts with that story or printing it on page one. When news gatekeepers no longer consider an item of importance, they allow it to slip off the public agenda. (Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw 1972:87-176)

For decades, the Chinese mass media which has adopted an effective way of propaganda for agenda setting. But with so many news outlets in the age of globalization, people's media behaviors are influenced by the so-called selective processes. People have developed many ways of revising and reconstructing the agenda set by the official press. For example, the People's Daily launched Strong Nation Forum to give readers a chance to react to the

news and vent their emotions. But most Chinese have used this system not only to discuss the news, but also posted news stories which are unreported in the official media. This media behavior has made people to pay attention to issues ignored by the Party press, making hidden agenda transparent. Using the cases of Jiangxi school explosion and the US-Chinese Mid-air collision incident, we try to find out how the Chinese public opinion is shaped in the age of internet.

Case 2: Jiangxi school explosion

The Jiangxi school explosion of March 3, 2001 is another case to show a liveliness in the Chinese websites not found in the traditional and wholly state-controlled media. When Premier Zhu Rongji came up with a "lone madman" explanation for a deadly school explosion in Jiangxi province at the press conference of 2001 National People's Congress, Internet chat rooms were not buying the story. By then online media was buzzing with reports that the elementary school where at least 42 people were killed -- including 39 children -- was being used as a fireworks factory, and that pupils as young as nine were forced to stuff fuses into firecrackers without pay.

"Here comes a 'madman'," shot back one sarcastic message posted on the chat room of portal site Sina.com, one of scores of acid-toned responses to the Premier's remarks.

"OK he's saved everybody -- government officials, the headmaster, teachers. They should feel totally relieved now!" The official line on the tragedy advanced by Zhu and big government-run newspapers and television stations is almost as damaged as the Jiangxi school, now little more than a heap of bricks. Although online media was fastest with the child labour reports, racier print evening papers and tabloids were not far behind. The tabloid reports, however, were mainly cut-and-paste versions of website stories. Local officials in Wanzai county, meanwhile, found themselves fending off not just foreign reporters who rushed to the area but pushy Chinese journalists, too. (<http://latelinenews.com>)

Case 3: Spy plane incident

The conflict between the US and China over the crash of an American spy plane with a Chinese fighter, resulting in the death of the Chinese pilot, and the forced landing of the American plane in China, is another case to illustrate.

The plane collision over South China Sea triggered a new wave of political debate in Chinese online forums. Like what occurred in May 1999 following the NATO bombing of Chinese embassy, traffic volume surged so dramatically that many portals had to use additional servers. These messages, mostly posted in Chinese, share common threads in blaming American hegemony, mourning

Chinese casualty and demanding an apology from the U.S. government. But there are two crucial differences; unlike two years ago, the Internet has so far not been used to mobilize massive off-line demonstrations. Moreover, there is a greater diversity of opinions. Despite a significant amount of anger, there is something emerging in China cyberspace that is closer to the idea of civil society than ever before. Criticism against feeble leadership reached a pinnacle shortly after the release of the American crew:

“Why does our government have those leaders?” asked another Netizen in frustration.

“They didn’t take enough calcium tablets!?”

Chinese Internet users can also see opinions from the other side of the Pacific. What internet bring to China is an emergent public sphere which is dominated by a debate between right-wing liberals and left-wing socialist democrats, as shown in Qiangguo Luntan(Strong Nation Forum) under the Internet edition of the People’s Daily. “Chinese people are less manipulated running dogs in the Internet Edition of People’s Daily. They challenges the officials articles.”(Jack Linchuan Qiu 2001) TThe rise of chat rooms has created pressures on China’s official propaganda mechanisms, including the government press. The chat rooms are forcing China’s media outlets to respond to a larger universe of news than that generated by Xinhua. The influential chat room hosted by the Peoples’ Daily finds that participants in that forum used it to post foreign news items and commentary that often undermined the governments position during the April, 2001 spy plane standoff with the United States. The Internet news reporting by giving a different or even dissenting views or perspectives of the news events, had forced the government to loosen its initial blackout policy.

Despite the warnings of the authorities against posting unflattering news, comments and political rumours on the web or by mobile phones, most Chinese internet and mobile phone users have never taken such kind of warnings seriously and ignore them completely. The huge amount of personal communications through emails, text messaging through mobiles among 60 million of internet users and 200 million mobile phone users have made it an impossible task for the handful of Internet police or net censors to work. The censors simply focus most of their attention to Falungong. As for most of the western media websites, the censors simply from time to time chose a few websites such as CNN, BBC, the Washington Post, to block as a symbolic gesture to show their threatening power. A click on CNN produces a blank with the following words” *The page cannot be displayed. The page you are looking for is currently unavailable. The Web site might be experiencing technical difficulties, or you may need to adjust your browser settings.*” But in the meantime, the websites of the Washington Times, Times, ABCNews and Foxnews have never been blocked. A brief ban of www.google.com by the Chinese authorities in late 2002 produced a strong international cry and

protests. Under international pressure, the authorities quickly reopened the blocking. When the Chinese newly-elected Communist Party chief Hu Jintao's name was entered, www.google.com replied with 39,500 search results, and when the name of Chinese president Jiang Zemin was entered, Google yields 156,000 results, which contain many unflattering titles. (The above cases show that ICT has far-reaching implications for China's press freedom and democracy. ICT is helping the cause of democracy and freedom in China. Chinese authorities are having enormous difficulty of stopping the flow of information into China. The more it does to try to choke off some information which it deems as sensitive, the more it flows into China through the Internet. ICT has torn down the "Great Firewall of China." In short, while it would be naive to believe that the Internet would liberate China from the dictates of one-party rule, the Internet has indeed expanded the realm of expression in China. Improving Transparency ... (Dali L Yang 2001) In the aftermath of the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, these forums and chat-rooms, such as the People's Daily's Strong Nation Forum, became important institutions in their own right, helping foster new communities in China and abroad. The interest groups could be pro-American, nationalism, new-lefts, right liberals, reform-privileged, jobless, underprivileged. Moreover, the online communities have allowed various social interests to express their opinions.

There are several factors that contribute to any medium's power to impact our perceptions of others, including its format and various technological issues. One of these is the ability of the medium to create narrative frameworks that influence perception and subsequent responses to issues and events. Another factor is the ability of the medium to provide relevant and timely information concerning the subject. I will use the cases of news coverage of Three Represents Thought study campaign, 2002 National People's Congress, and the 16th Party congress to illustrate it.

Case 4: Three Represents Thought study campaign

Before the 16th Party Congress of November 2002, Chinese propagandists were campaigning hard to have this theory enshrined in the Party Charter as a way to position the theory amongst the immortal ranks of Marxism, Leninism, Mao Thought, and Deng Theory. The campaign relies heavily on nightly TV programs lauding the theory and articles in all the Party newspapers. In the evening news program of CCTV Daily Focus on June 27 of 2002, which features the local party and government officials risking their lives to save people's lives and public properties in flood fighting, the reporter told the audience, these officials charged to the frontline of flood fighting because "they have studied the important thought of three represents." (<http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs>), The reporter said that under the influence of Three Represents Thought, a local communist official and all his eight family members were killed in the flood because his selfless deed of

saving other people and failed to take care of his own family. (<http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/>)

The effectless three represents propaganda come from the communist long-practiced way of political mobilization: all articles with one face, all mouths with one voice, everyone parroting words and quotes from the People's Daily editorials or speeches of Jiang Zemin or Hu Jintao. In the age of global communications and Internet, the Chinese government and party press amounts to nothing but a laughing stock for its complete lack of convincing and persuasiveness. For example, CCTV 7 pm news program features a model cadre of three represents every evening. The model cadre could be a village head who was always lazy and sleeping and never cared about villagers' farming and sowing work until he has studied the great theory of three represents.

The Chinese official press today offers no news, no timeliness, no details, no perspective, no context, no relevance but a boring face of the dying propaganda. As a journalist comments about the irrelevance of the communist propaganda in the chat room of China Youth Daily(<http://www.cyol.net>), "I have three pieces of hard evidence to show that Xinhua (the official New China News Agency) has become a foreign news agency while it is still wearing the lebal of Chinese media. Evidence one, Xinhua is extremely concerned about the daily life of Chinese political leaders. Around the clock, it follows the steps wherever the leaders go and cover the speeches wherever they make. Most Chinese ordinary people don't care about their leaders' daily activities at all because the Chinese people believe that their leaders are selfless leaders and whatever they do serve the good of our ordinary people. But the Xinhua 24-hour coverage of our leaders' activities serve none other than the malicious foreign hostile forces; Evidence 2, Xinhua is always slower than foreign press in covering important news events taking place in China but always timely in covering foreign events. On April 1,2001, Xinhua did not broadcast the news of the US-China spy plane collision until the White House and the Pentagon held their press conferences and hours after AP reported the event. Judging from the delay by Xinhua in reporting the event gave the Chinese people an impression that the collision did not happen in front of Chinese door, the plane collided over the coast of California'. But Xinhua always gives a timely international reporting. Whenever there is a bombing in Israel, Xinhua reacts as swiftly as any western news media in covering it; Evidence three, Xinhua is always mean and gives scant coverage of big news event taking place in China. For example, the American press, for example, have heavily covered the worsening situation of Aids in China's central province of Henan. But Xinhua seems to ignore it completely. Thus, I suspect that CNN is partly owned by Chinese investors and Xinhua is totally owned by foreign investors."

Case 5: National People's Congress

Chinese journalism is more an opinionated Writing for Propaganda than a narrative art for news writing. To make it even worse, Chinese press is full of single-sourced information in a multi-sourced society. This case is a comparison between People's Daily CCTV, the New York Times and South China Morning Post in their coverage of NPC(the National People's Congress) which was held in March 2002

People's Daily, front page, March 7,third day after the beginning of the National People's Congress(NPC),feature article,:

Main title: *"Another spring with organic prosperity: a review of the construction of the spiritual civilization of the year 2001"*

Sub-title: *Singing high in great sound in striving forward and striding heroically in the beginning year of the century and the beginning of the "ten-five"*

lead: *After the baptism of big events and happy events, as well as after experiencing the tests of hot points and hard points, looking back at the victorious beginning, it is doubly felt deep and pointed of "grasping by two hands and both hands must be tough."Joining tighter once again to attend the gathering of the spring, delegates and committee members highly praise the spiritual civilization construction.:innovation of theory and practice innovation have produced bright points one after another. Seeking the truth from the fact is lighting the sky with march forward with the time.*

The obvious problem with the above People's Daily story is a lack of human face or any human element. But the authorities speak highly of this kind of propaganda journalism. Let us read another People's Daily story(front page, March 8, 2002, NPC feature article):

Mail title: *Supporting the just ethos and assembling hearts of people*

Second line title: *A retrospect and prospect of the propaganda and thought work by NPC delegates and CPPCC members*

Lead: *It is our party's great tradition and great advantage of paying high attention to propaganda and thought work.*

Saying fare-well to the old year of the eighth of the ten Heavenly Stems and greeting the spring of the ninth of the Heavenly Stems, and looking back the past year, propaganda and thought work can be marked with a circle and dotted with a pen. Looking ahead to a new year, how can propaganda thought work carry on the past and open a way for future?" For this reason, the reporter interviewed concerned NPC delegates and CPPCC members.

1st subtitle:*Glancing back loud main theme, beautiful initiative and bright key note*

"Big events and happy events are arriving home, hot points and hard points are diverse and confused,"NPC delegates and CPPCC members are

describing the just-ended first year of the new century. Indeed, this year has been marked by a whole string of big events and happy events: celebration of the Party's 80th birthday, the important speech on July 1, successful bidding for Olympic Games, joining WTO, APEC meeting.....one after another, people are revivifying' facing the anfractuosity of the international situation, our Party and the government are well composed to handle them.

Facing this heavy and complicated situation, how our great majority of cadres and masses on the propaganda and thought front agglomerate the hearts of the people and inspire the drive? Delegates and members at large agree that the propaganda and thought front did not get impetuous when encountering happiness and were not surprised when shocked by big events. Theme is given prominence, keynote is brilliant, opinion-guiding is correct and held steadily.

CPPCC members Tao Yifan thinks that last year's propaganda and thought work is characterized by outstanding achievement in unifying people's thought, singing high of main theme of "communist party is good, socialism is good, reform and opening to the outside world is good", which has strengthened the cohesion of the Party, cultivating a good opinion environment; which does not only have a brilliant theme, it also has a rich content. For the past year, our newspapers are expanding pages, and strengthening their readability while adding pages; Our TV and radio broadcasts are producing new programs at fast pace, boosting up attraction. And even more we have Tibetan-Xinjiang project village-to-village links, which have made TV screens no more like fog and snow and radio broadcast no more like rain and wind. Online propaganda has also made great progress in news propaganda.

Let's have a look at how "Our TV and radio broadcasts are producing new programs at fast pace, boosting up attraction." CCTV 7-o'clock Xinwen Lianbo story of the NCP closing news:

"Spring wind comes for the fifth time. In the solemn Great Hall of the People, delegates work their hearts out, discussing from north to south, from heaven down to earth and on both south and north of the river, the spring wind is blowing all over....."

On the day the NPC was concluded, the prime-time news program xinwenlianbo devoted 15 minutes of its precious half hour program to reading the following voice-over:

"One thousand mountains are becoming beautiful when the sun rises, 10-thousand miles of territories become spring when the flower blossoms. The grand-style Great Hall of the People looked even more solemn and respectful under the shining of the sun.....Bathing the morning sunlight, about 3,000 NPC delegates with their brave and firm gaze, they self-confidently stepped forward.....When the red sun is approaching the mid-sky,the sunshine has already spilled all over the land.....the delegates are now full of lofty

sentiments. With encouraging words to each other and sharing the same commitment, their shaking hands have become a sea of emotion..... No sooner with the spring wind blowing the green willow is gone when the red wall is mirrored with peach flowers. The beginning of "the ten-five" is marked with flourishing events continuously and happy events one by one.....February 2 of the Lunar year(March 15 on the Solar calendar), the dragon raises its head. By sheer coincidence, today is February 2 and a huge oriental dragon will once again raises its head for a great flying.....

After reading and watching this kind of news reports, Can any Chinese answer such a simple question: Who is my delegate? Can the Chinese deny that the meeting is not a machine for clapping hands or it is not a rubber stamp? The following story is from the South China Morning Post(MARK O'NEILL 2002), which illustrate that the Chinese official press is vastly irrelevant to the Chinese people.

'I don't know who my delegate is- nor does anybody'

For Liang Guolei, selling soft drinks and cigarettes at a street stall, the NPC has little relevance.

"They call themselves the people's representatives but I do not know who my delegate is, nor does anyone I know. We never voted," he said.

"If we have a grievance or a proposal, with whom do we raise it? The media is all controlled, so there is no point in telling them."

Mr Liang, 46, is one of the losers in the reform process. He was laid off from a state metallurgy factory four years ago, with a one-off payment of 40,000 yuan (HK\$37,600), and earns a meagre living from his stall.

He and his neighbours watch the NPC proceedings on television in his small room. They feel so alienated that the meeting could be on another planet, instead of a few kilometres away.

Interestingly, the New York Time, a newspaper sometime regarded as an anti-Chinese western media, gave a relevant coverage of the National People's Congress, which makes the paper read more like a Chinese paper than People's Daily:

Far From Beijing, a Semblance of Democracy(Elistabeth Rosenthal 2002)

WUHAN, China -- Yao Lifa looks like a man with a mission, as he hurtles down the slick sidewalk, head bent against the rain, briefcase bulging with proposals he has brought to present to higher authorities in this provincial capital.

The intensity is understandable. Mr. Yao, 45, spent more than a decade campaigning to acquire the modest political position he now holds, as a

delegate to the local People's Congress in Qianjiang, a small city here in Hubei Province.

In 1998, Mr. Yao threw his hat into the ring in an election where most other candidates were Communist Party members and all had official government backing. Schools refused to let him speak and factories threatened workers with dismissal if they gave him their votes

Undeterred, he pressed the flesh, wrote more than a dozen position papers and pushed thousands of his pamphlets under doors -- eventually muscling China's generally closed political system to act like a democracy, if only for a moment. Drawn by his promises of clean government and more of a voice for ordinary people, voters defied local officials to give Mr. Yao 1,706 out of 3,100 possible votes.

"I wanted it so bad, I didn't sleep for 50 hours and finally collapsed just before the vote," he said, flashing a down-home politician's smile. "Through my campaigning, I've felt democracy getting closer to the people, and that is a trend that can not be held back."

Case 6: 16th Party congress

Babies concern about 16th Party Congress(<http://www.pen123.net.cn>)

(Modern Baby Breeding News, an official newspaper, Issue 512)

By staff reporter

In the morning of November 8 when the Party's 16th congress opened, kindergartens of all districts of Guangzhou organized little children to watch the televised coverage of the opening of the 16th congress. Both the teachers and the pupils were immersed in the warm atmosphere of the 16th congress. While watching the live broadcast of TV, the teachers from the Litai Kindergarten of Liwan District introduced party and state leaders, making hay while the sun still shines. with their hand-made party flags and national flags, all the little children from the Number One Kindergarten of the Provincial Talents Breeding Kindergarten cheered and hailed joyfully at every emotional moment of the meeting.....

The readership level had been expected to rise when the 16 party congress was convened. But with the above sort of news reports throughout the official press, all the official press were ignored by the public. Most of the western observers expect that the newly-elected nine members of the standing committee of the Chinese communist party political bureau at the 16th Party congress will emerge with a new face in the government press, the Chinese

journalist will feel a relaxation of mind and body. But to the discomfort of Chinese journalists, they have to double their efforts in carrying on the old-fashioned propaganda. "I will never have a chance to take a break from now on," a senior political reporter covering the daily activities of the Chinese leaders complained (Lianhe Zaobao, 20 November, 2002). Political journalism in China means that giving top priority to the coverage of the daily public activities of the party and government leaders. These leaders including president, premier, president of the National People's Congress, Chairman of the Political Consultative Committee in addition to the standing committee members of the party. "That means we have to cover altogether 15 persons' daily public activities in our half-hour news program." A reporter with CCTV Xinwen Lianbo said. All of these party and government leaders' activities, meetings and speeches are required to be reported in all the party press, such as the front pages of party papers at all levels in addition to CCTV's Xinwen Lianbo. The real problem with this propaganda journalism is not with the complaining party journalists, but with the viewers and readers. Explaining why he refused watching CCTV news stories nowadays, a professor named Zheng from Beijing Normal University said, "they are too far away from us." The government remains stern control over traditional media in covering big or breaking events such as Nanjing poisoning incident, spy plane, and party congress. The government's blackout of news only help boost rumours and angry voices in the chatroom and emails. As a Chinese said in a chatroom, the way the Chinese state-controlled media works shows that the head of the communist propaganda department is leading an anti-communist propaganda campaign because the government media is burying the government voices by boring people to death. The propagandists only offer what people don't want to read and refuse to give people what people want. If you want the press to tell you what the public need to know, they would say "it's none of your business". (Reuter, 8 November, 2002)

How does China's propaganda machine work and how it makes its agenda? What is the judgement for important news in the minds of many Chinese journalists working for the official media or for propaganda journalism today? Xu Zhaorong, a reporter of *Xinhua* makes the following 14 observations (Symposium of Journalism 1998):

1. *Important activities, personnel changes and meetings of the party and the state, such as the banquets of the National Day, meetings of Party and the national People's Congress;*
2. *The activities of party and state leaders, such as their inspection tours, their meetings with foreign guests, their meetings with home delegates, the departures and arrival of their visits abroad and the tea parties hosted by them;*
3. *Important policies, guidelines, laws, rule, regulations and documents of the party and the state;*

4. *Important commentaries on important events and policies;*
5. *Important speeches and theoretical articles;*
6. *Important model workers and model units, such as communist hero Lei Feng in 1960s and selfless cadre Kong Fansen in 1990s;*
7. *Breaking news, such as launch of satellites, ground-breaking for Three-gorge Dam project, Flood and earthquake fighting, Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests, Gulf War, the collapse of the Soviet Union;*
8. *An organized media campaign to propagandize a focal point of the party and the state work of a certain period. For example, in 1990s, the press is expected to focus reporting on the reform, re-organization and merger of the state-owned enterprises, singing praises of the enterprises who were willing to be merged by a better-performed enterprise; From time to time the press is also expected to join the government campaign of crack-down on pornography and prostitution;*
9. *Important national holidays, such as New Year Day, Chinese New Year, Moon Festival, National Day, May 1(Worker's Day), June 1(Children Day),June 1(Party Day),August 1(Army Day), etc.*
10. *Changes of personnel(above vice-provincial and ministerial level);*
11. *Deaths of VIP and above vice-provincial and ministerial level party and government officials;*
12. *Birthday and death-day of late Party and state leaders;*
13. *Death of foreign dignitaries;*
14. *Important social news such as prices, housing reform, re-employment, and the rehabilitation of Tiananmen event(April 4 of 1996)*

"What have been listed above is our understanding of important news and they are heavily political. But this is the result of what our world outlook and our methodology," Xu writes.(Symposium of Journalism 1998)

In the midnight of November 13, 1998, the night shift editor of *the People's Daily* was busy for the final reading of the next day's newspaper. But a story stopped him from sending the newspaper for printing. It was a story of the summit meeting between Chinese President Jiang and South Korean President Kim. There were no problems with Jiang and Kim. But the problem was how to rank two Chinese senior officials who were present at the meeting: Qian Qichen and Jiang Chunyun. The editor was not sure who should go before whom. So the editor started making phone calls to seek solution to this problem. It was not until 3:10 in the morning before he got the right answer. "This is extremely necessary for running a newspaper," Xu Zhongtian, late editor-in-chief of *the People's Daily* writes(News Front 1,1999) in an article praising the night-shift editor.

IV. Conclusion and discussion

China went from a nearly computer-illiterate nation eight years ago to one with 60 million Internet users. And are expected to reach the 100-million mark by mid-decade. The country could soon become the biggest online population in the world.

The Chinese leaders in the information age are confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand, the Internet-based information and communication technologies offer enormous potential and stimulation for China's economic growth and speeding up her efforts in integrating with the global economy. But on the other hand, the information revolution poses new threats to the authorities that rely on a tight centralized control of political news and views. Internet has also undermined the government media's power of setting agenda for the public, losing its audience and relevance to the proliferation of web sites. The government has to respond to and account for what being disseminated and discussed in the internet. Like the 16th party congress, when the government chose to ignore the public concern by devoting all its pages and news hours to the word-for-word parroting of three represents quotations of Chairman Jiang. As a result, most of the Chinese elite intellectuals and policy people chose to turn off the TV and turn on the Internet. And the Internet allows gossip, rumours, news and views to circulate much faster than before. Many times, these preempt the government propaganda and consequently constrain the leadership's hands. Internet might lend new powers of communication and organization to the swelling ranks of China's disenfranchised. It might provide access to unregulated information, both from inside and outside China. It might even help create a public sphere of dangerously democratic ideas in which the directives of the central government might be overlooked, and perhaps even overturned.

In the process of economic and social transformation, China is developing into a diversified society of economic interests, various values, and political ideals. The ICT is playing an important role in mobilizing intellectual elite participation in political debate in such political and sensitive issues such Sino-Japanese relations, Sino-US relations, Taiwan, human rights, government corruption, etc when the government tries to black out news. During the NATO bombing of Chinese embassy and the spy plane incident, Internet were used intensely in China. With increased access to information and a multiple-sourced outlets of news, the Chinese internet users gathered and exchanged information and ideas through emails, chat rooms and websites, which had actually cracking open the news blackout by the government propaganda department and served as political mobilizer in the country, increasing the visibility of the traditionally secretive government decision making on sensitive political issues, such as international relations, imposing a greater transparency about the government work.

While all chat rooms and forums warn users to adhere to certain norms of

restraint, Chinese internet censors seem to be more tolerant than their counterparts in print and television. The availability of these chat rooms sites allows freer discussion and permits information contradicting The Official Story to flow in. They cannot stop all e-mails. As Taylor Boas points out, "Unlike the telephone, which facilitates one-to-one communication between dispersed individuals, or radio and television, which allow for one-to-many broadcasting from a central location, the Internet is a many-to-many medium that permits each user to send to, and receive from, a multitude of recipients and sources. As such, it does not lend itself to centralized control. The interconnected, transnational nature of the Internet complicates the task of censorship." (Taylor C. Boas 2000)

The political openness brought by Internet has weakened the government power of controlling people's thought by state-controlled media. But can we jump to a conclusion that these cases demonstrate that ICP will help create cultivate and develop a civil society in China?

In an increasingly diversified nation like China, cyber communities are taken shape based on mutual interests, values and ideologies. An increasing number of net users are seeking their identity in the cyberspace. With the drastically changes taking place in China, in term of values and ideology and even profession, more and more elite people have lost their identity. They are reconstructing their identities by joining cyberspace discussion. For example, the internet has regrouped those communities such as the fragmented leftist intellectuals who have been marginalized by the official restriction of the academics publications. But in terms of Internet penetration, only a small percentage of Chinese population have access to a computer or have computer literacy, or access to networked environment. The prosperity of a lively freedom of expression and a cyber civil society is confined to a digital addicts or digital elite. China's today cyberspace is becoming more a forum for factions fight than a serious discussion and debate of public policy.

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 45. The internet and the growth of multi outlets of news in China has led to the demise of the Chinese government propaganda, but also led to the dramatic decline of audiences of all kinds of government propaganda. An obvious example is the Voice of America in China. For many years, the American government has always attributed to the decline of the Voice of American (VOA) audiences to the increasing jamming of China. But as a matter of fact, many Chinese jamming facilities along the Chinese coastal provinces, such as Guangdong's three jamming stations stopped jamming as early as 1992 and 1993. Since Deng Xiaoping died in 1992, the three stations have been tunred into commercial use by the local telecommunications administration for microwave broadcast and pager stations. The dramatic decline of listeners of VOA has been caused by the prosperity of TV, Fm radio, Internet and mobile phone. Most of VOA listeners in China have been urban dwellers. But since 1992, almost 100 percent of Chinese urban household has a TV set, these urban citizens spend more time watching TV than listening to short wave radio; In the past, university students had been the largest population of VOA listeners, but since the mid of 1990s, college students spend their nights listening or chatting over FM hotline, or chatting over the Internet. And the greatest reason for the loss of audiences of VOA as well as the Chinese state press is the loosening of control of press in China. As an editor with Southern Weekend, a commercial newspaper, said, "we do not say directly that socialism is wrong, but we make attack at its practices and its theories; we do not challenge the communist leadership directly, but we make attack at its corruption, which has always been the hottest topic ." With the prosperity of government officials' corruption stories and scandles in the commercial and non-party press, the public will be able to obtain more detailed and accurate inside stories and information from the local press than from a foreign radio.

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