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**Media and globalization in contemporary China: an introduction**

**Squeezed from three sides: Chinese newspapers in the reform era**

**China Central Television's Spring Festival Gala: entertainment and political propaganda**

**Media match-maker, match-maker media – a personal view**

**Media and gender issues in China**

**The media as the judge: the role of the Chinese media in addressing injustices**

**Gushihui: the success story of a popular literary journal**

**Regulating Internet cafés in China: economic and political interests in moral disguise?**

**Chinese journalists and the media's conditional autonomy**

## THEME: Media and Globalization in China

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**Cover:** The second issue of *Xin Jing Bao* (see article on pp. 6–7)

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**norden**

Shortly before we delivered our last material for the present *NIASnytt* to NIAS Press, an official telegram from the news agency Xinhua in Beijing reported that, from now on, news on natural disasters in China will not be treated as top state secrets but, instead, be published right away.

Thus, China takes yet another step into the world of freedom of speech. On the other hand, last year a step backwards was taken when Chinese TV stations at the county level were closed down.

The bulk of articles in this issue of *NIASnytt* gives you the background and some insights into the status of media praxis within a globalized China in transition to a modern world. We give you cases of the daily press, television, popular culture and the Internet. Gender issues in media taking steps forward are discussed, as is media playing the role of a judge.

A modern-traditional mixed media system will present itself. Today's transforming China is disclosed through the analyses of radical changes of the media system. In short, a one-party political regime has been challenged by Western globalized modernity ideals, step-by-step to introduce a capitalist market economy over the last two decades. Which all the more characterizes the contradictory contents, the formats and the limits of the Chinese media, too.

*Håkan Lindhoff & Lena Rydholm,  
both from Stockholm University and guest editors for this issue*

#### Contents

Media and globalization in contemporary China: an introduction  
*by Håkan Lindhoff, Jan Ekecrantz and Lena Rydholm • 4*

Squeezed from three sides: Chinese newspapers in the reform era  
*by Göran Leijonhufvud • 6*

China Central Television's Spring Festival Gala: entertainment and political propaganda  
*by Lena Rydholm • 8*

Media match-maker, match-maker media – a personal view  
*by Göran Sommardal • 11*

Media and gender issues in China  
*by Bu Wei • 13*

The media as the judge: the role of the Chinese media in addressing injustices  
*by Marina Svensson • 15*

*Gushihui*: the success story of a popular literary journal  
*by Marja Kaikkonen • 18*

Regulating Internet cafés in China: economic and political interests in moral disguise?  
*by Johan Lagerkvist • 20*

Chinese journalists and the media's conditional autonomy  
*By Elin Sæther • 22*

#### Also in this issue

Editorial: New owners, new strategy and then a new logo! • 3

NIAS SUPRA package • 24

Staff news • 25

Recent Visitors • 25, 28–29

Black clouds on the e-horizon: the Internet, governance and democracy  
*by Jens Hoff • 26*

NIAS Press 2005 book sale • 30–32



## New owners, new strategy and then a new logo!

NIAS' world has been changing as of late and we thought that it would be time to modernize our logo and visual identity to reflect these changes. The new logo that you see here is based on NIAS' original logo, the peacock, which has been part of NIAS' visual identity for a long time now. The peacock has been maintained, since it is so well known and because we like it. The peacock represents NIAS' link to Asia and the bird also has a great power of attraction, something that we would also like NIAS to have. What's more, the peacock can be seen as a symbolic representation of NIAS and its many partners. The new design of the peacock has been simplified and streamlined to express the Nordic character of NIAS.

The logo as such, peacock and text, is meant to reflect NIAS' Nordic background and identity and the text in the logo is therefore written specifically for NIAS with simple, yet forceful characters based on the font Sigma. The simple writing style and powerful appearance is meant to imbue the text with a strong Nordic character.

The logo is accompanied by comprehensive design standards that will help NIAS harmonize our future external communication.

In the near future, our readers will see the new logo and standards being gradually implemented in our external correspondence, on our web site, and in our publications. We trust that our readers will like the new look of NIAS and also appreciate the combination of change and continuity as well as of Asian and Nordic countries.

We are also planning changes for *NIASnytt*. We are cutting the annual number of issues from four to three as of this year. At the same time we are considering editorial improvements, both with regard to design and content. We would also like to see a higher degree of integration of our communication, publishing and information activities.

*NIASnytt* is a platform for communicating research undertaken by Nordic researchers and their partners. For each issue we appoint a Nordic guest editor who commissions articles through his or her network around an agreed theme. We would like to maintain that format and strengthen it.

The focus of this issue is on the media in China, a topical and intricate theme that generates a lot of interest in and outside China. The guest editors are Lena Rydholm from the Department of Oriental Languages and Håkan Lindhoff from the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, both at Stockholm University, who have brought together for this issue a group of mainly Nordic scholars working on related topics. We trust that you will find the theme interesting and pertinent.

*Enjoy your reading!*



Jørgen Delman, Director



**Håkan Lindhoff** is senior lecturer at the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication (JMK) at Stockholm University. His research interests are with Chinese media developments and globalization, economic reporting, media economics and media history. He and Lena Rydholm initiated the multi-disciplinary research program and network 'Media and Globalisation in Contemporary China'.

# Media and globalization in contemporary China: an introduction

By Håkan Lindhoff, Jan Ekecrantz and Lena Rydholm

*In the current era of globalization China is one of the regions of the world where changes in the media system indicate radical changes in society. China is a transforming society – introducing a capitalist market economy under a one-party political regime. Both socialist and traditional Chinese values have been challenged by Western modernity ideals, channelled not least through the media system, including the Internet. This makes it an interesting task to analyze the various roles of media in the modernization process of China. In today's market-oriented and unevenly globalized China – with accelerating cleavages between urban and rural areas (Zhen 2001, Bu Wei 2001) – the media make up a space where the contradictions of modernization are visible. The media also provide a new infrastructure, contributing to the fast inclusion of China into global TV and Internet (Zhao 2004, 2005).*

## Media market expansion – a challenge for party-state regulation

The contemporary transformation of China is a unique case of a party-state-market matrix of influences with media in a central position. The media expansion has challenged the earlier state regulation and funding of the media. Expanding markets of consumer products have expanded advertising and sponsorship (Donald et al. 2002, Lee 2000, Zhao 1998). Whilst the creation of a new type of Chinese consumer is a high priority (Zhen 2001), the democratic fostering of modern political civic ideals seems so far to have been a lower priority.

Official party and central newspapers comply more to old forms of political regulation, than local newspapers. According to some observations, the news is subject to stricter regulation than entertainment and cultural contents. Freedom of expression is said to be wider in radio shows and on the Internet than in the press (Ma 2000). When financed to a high degree by various advertisers, including state authorities and

companies, freedom of the media might have increased in relation to state and party bodies. On the other hand, this may have caused a growing degree of self-censorship in relation to some heavy advertisers and sources, the state included.

Reports on the development of corrupt relations between the media and their sources abound in China, through the (re)introduction of premodern forms of so-called 'envelop journalism', where media employed reporters are rewarded by their sources for treating them well in their news stories. Such corrupt reporting practice disappeared in the U.S. over a hundred years ago, but have survived for instance in Mexico.

## Globalized Chinese media – a modern-traditional mix

Like other modernizing societies China is a unique hybrid modernity (Pieterse 1998) – a mix of very traditional and late modern traits, visible not least in the television programme output (Zhao & Guo, forthcoming). Chinese media in a variety of genres both reflect and contribute to create a specific Chinese modernity in which the absence of

popular participation and democratic rule are naturalized and even legitimized. The role of the media in the prevailing mix of political authoritarianism and outspoken market-orientation has not yet been fully explored (Ma 2000).

Media globalization in China is a dialectical process in which foreign, transnational media gain an ever stronger position in the Chinese market. 'Compared to their Euro-American counterparts, Chinese media appear more 'global' by way of alluding to such news sources as the Qatar-based TV network al-Jazeera, importing soap operas from Brazil and Venezuela, and selling pop music stars from Japan and South Korea' (Shi 2005:36). However, there are restrictions on the content (foreign media may not deliver news, for instance), including also self-imposed restrictions: 'Given the potential for profits in China, the transnationals will do nothing to provoke discomfort amongst China's political elites' (Jirik 2004:133).

At the same time Chinese media, not least television, are eagerly expanding in the world market, for instance the



**Jan Ekecrantz** is chair professor in Media and Communication Studies at Stockholm University. A trained sociologist, he has studied media and journalism in historical and global perspectives for many years and published extensively, most recently on comparative research in the global age with a focus on Latin America, the Post-Soviet world, and China. The questions addressed relate to new mixtures or hybrids of traditional and late modern cultural forms as well as the political functions of the cultural sphere.



**Lena Rydholm.** More background information on p. 8

Chinese-language international Channel 4 of Chinese Central Television (CCTV) aiming at Chinese residing abroad, the English-language Channel 9 of CCTV, and the newly opened CCTV E&F, the Spanish- and French-language channel of CCTV, all to be seen worldwide via satellite or the Internet. The 30 million diaspora audience is only one reason for this expansion (Chan 1996). There are also economic and political rationales relating to China's position in South-East Asia, and worldwide (Zhao 2003). Outright political propaganda, pre-1978 style, is much replaced by indoctrainment (cf. Lena Rydholm's article below, p. 8f) or by de-politicized programming of infotainment type, often with an outspoken nationalistic bent (Sun 2002; Zhao & Guo, forthcoming, p 14). Added to this, the 'online chauvinism' spreading fast on the Internet (Lagerkvist 2005), as seen, for instance, in the hostilities between China and Japan in April 2005.

**A research network on 'Media and globalization in contemporary China'**

All contributions within this edition of *NIASnytt* are written by members of a multi-disciplinary network of senior researchers and doctoral candidates within Sinology and Media and communication studies, at universities in Stockholm, Lund, Oslo and Beijing. The network was set up in late 2002 through the initiative of scholars at Stockholm University in a combined effort to study contemporary Chinese media. There is a need for globalization of Western media studies, as well as a need for Sinology about modern media genres, using media studies methodologies. It is also important to attain a deeper understanding of the ways in which the profound

changes of China and Chinese media are channelled to us through European media.

To date, the network on 'Media and globalization in contemporary China', with its base at Stockholm University, has built an international reference network, where media researchers and sinologists in Beijing, Burnaby in Canada, and Scandinavia, are active members. A network seminar was organized in Stockholm in January 2004, and a three-day conference in Stockholm in December 2004 with invited Chinese media researchers as key-note speakers – Professor Zhao Yuezhi from Burnaby, and Professors Bu Wei, Guo Zhenzhi and Hu Zhengrong from Beijing – to enlighten the network on contemporary media developments. The December conference was sponsored by The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. Contributions from this conference will be published later this year in a joint volume by the departments of Journalism, Media and Communication and Chinese Studies at Stockholm University.

**Perspectives on media functions and social contradictions in China**

Some of the contributions should be seen as pilot studies or primary reviews of research work in progress, for instance those by Rydholm, Svensson and Lagerkvist. There are some obvious links between the different themes treated in the articles. The question of media creating, exploiting or expressing tensions or contradictions between various driving forces is recurring such as between economic and political interests (cf. Leijonhufvud; Lagerkvist), or between commercial and ideological forces (cf. Rydholm), or between media and law as well as injustice and press freedom (cf. Svensson). Some articles look more carefully into

media as potential forces for change, reviewing fields like gender issues (Bu Wei), and critical journalism (Sæther), or using case studies, of an annual television gala (Rydholm) and a popular literary journal (Kaikkonen).

The media in China might fruitfully be described by various metaphors, so illustrating different media functions. Newspapers and television may have the role of a judge, according to Svensson, while competing with the formal judicial system. Journals and the Internet are change agents within gender issues, according to Bu Wei. Local newspapers might be critical media, according to Sæther, although the autonomy is conditional. Modern media in China, like the Internet, may give a leeway for a growing mass of individuals to communicate on various social changes, as is shown by Lagerkvist.

Chinese media contents (especially television) have expanded vastly within entertainment, giving the public popular culture, new ideologies and escapism. This does not mean that the media are emptied of old ideas; refreshed patriotism may well be packaged as entertainment, as is well demonstrated by Rydholm. That media roles in China have been transformed over time is elegantly shown by Sommardal.

The contributions given here on Chinese media transformation represent different perspectives. They might, though, be seen as a common platform for our multi-disciplinary research programme and network. Future in-depth studies will probably disclose economic and political mechanisms, as well as social and cultural relations within media-China that are as unique as is the transformation of the Chinese society following an unprecedented pattern.

**Relevant bibliographical material** concerning 'Media and Globalization in China' is available at [https://rex.kb.dk/F/?func=file&file\\_name=find-b&local\\_base=nia02\\_mec](https://rex.kb.dk/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b&local_base=nia02_mec)



**Göran Leijonhufvud** is presently a researcher with the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights at the University in Oslo. He is investigating village elections among China's minority nationalities.

He is also researching issues of freedom of speech and the media situation in China. His monograph *Going against the Tide: On Dissent and Big-Character Posters in China* (Curzon Press 1990) probed the patterns of expressing dissent in imperial China and the People's Republic.

Leijonhufvud was China correspondent of *Dagens Nyheter* and other Nordic European newspapers 1971–75, 1981–84, and 1989–2003.

# Squeezed from three sides: Chinese newspapers in the reform era

By **Göran Leijonhufvud**

*Three strong forces set the tone for Chinese media today. The main driving force for change is commercialization. Newspapers are engaged in cut-throat competition for readers and advertising. The press is more open and informative than ever since the founding of the People's Republic – but also more sensationalist. However, the Communist Party is in no mood to give up ultimate control. The third strong force is all the new outside influences such as the Internet.*

Party control is the constant factor. Commercialization and influence from the Internet and other outside forces are relatively new trends since economic and social reforms started around 1980, exposing China to the forces of globalization.

Of the three forces, commercialization is the one that the media themselves can most readily control, while they have little or no control over the Party and the new outside forces.

Apart from the Internet, the main new outside forces are drastically improved telecommunications and increased citizen mobility. On several occasions, newspapers have had to pick up cases which were first spread on the Internet or via sms. While the Party is still able to impose a news blackout at any time and on any subject, such as the anti-Japanese demonstrations in the spring of 2005, news is still spread independently by e-mail and mobile phone.

In 2004, China had about 2,000 newspapers with a combined daily circulation of 93.5 million copies, more than 9,000 magazines, and more than 80 media groups. With only one or two exceptions, all newspapers are owned by either the Party or by government units at different levels. The Party's policy is to push the papers to the market. This is in line with market reforms in other

sectors of the economy, but is also motivated by a lack of Party and government funds.

The Party is speeding up this process by withdrawing financial support from all but a handful of its strategic newspapers. The reform was initiated in 2003 and covers 1,452 newspapers. The intention is to close roughly half of them. For instance, the policy requires all county-level papers to shut down. The rest of the newspapers will try to survive on the open market.

## More readable

The above measures mean increased commercialization. Even before this latest financial reform, newspapers became much more readable in order to attract buyers and advertisers. We see a more lively journalism, and the layout is colourful and adventurous, sometimes excessively so. Media groups have also been quite inventive in introducing new forms of distribution.

The style of writing is changing, as well. We do not always have to read between the lines – or read between the lies, as someone put it – to understand the political subtext in leading articles. At the same time, many papers have become sensationalist, depending on such subjects as sex, violence, and the private lives of pop and film stars to increase circulation.

Another effect of the push to the market is increased corruption. It is standard procedure for companies holding press conferences to distribute 'red envelopes' with cash to reporters. The culture of corruption also colours relations between government units and media. In connection with a serious mining accident in Shanxi province in June 2003, eleven journalists were bribed to help local officials cover up the gravity of the case. Among these journalists, four were from the national news agency, Xinhua (New China).

## Look at Canton!

There is a lively newspaper scene in Canton (Guangzhou), provincial capital of Guangdong and an economic powerhouse. Many trends first visible there tend to spread to other major cities.

## Why is the scene more lively in Canton?

One explanation is that this is where market reforms started. The city is also at a convenient distance from the political power centre in Peking, reminding us of the old saying 'Heaven is high and the emperor far away'. Furthermore, the vicinity to Hong Kong influences the style of journalism.

In Canton there is a fascinating situation with three newspaper groups, all belonging to

the Party, in fierce competition. Typically such a group keeps one flagship paper, which is staid and politically correct. But around this flagship, new commercial vessels are launched in the sea of the market economy: usually one mass circulation tabloid and one magazine, sometimes also one quality weekly.

The Nanfang Group is under the Provincial Party Committee. Its flagship is the old Nanfang Daily (*Nanfang Ribao*). It also started the tabloid, Southern Metropolitan News (*Nanfang Dushi Bao*) and the 21st Century World Herald (*21 Shiji Huanqiu Daobao*). Well known all over China is Southern Weekend (*Nanfang Zhoumo*), noted for its investigative journalism.

The Guangzhou Daily Group is built around Guangzhou Daily (*Guangzhou Ribao*), the main organ of the Municipal Party Committee. It launched Information Times (*Xinwen Shibao*) as a tabloid in direct competition with Southern Metropolitan News. Information Times was originally a business paper, but was relaunched as a racy tabloid, heavy on lifestyle content, to compete for advertising money.

The Yangcheng Evening News Group is also under the Municipal Party Committee. Yangcheng Evening News (*Yangcheng Wanbao*) is the flagship, while New Express News (*Xin Kuai Bao*) is another attempt to break into the mass market. The paper broke the story about the Japanese sex orgy in Zhuhai in 2003. The group also runs the business paper, Yuegang Information Daily, and the News Weekly (*Xinwen Zhoukan*), the latter in response to *Nanfang Zhoumo*.

Testing the limits

China's president Hu Jintao is on record telling regional authorities 'to allow journalists to report even 'negative' events without undue delay'. He also

told media to devote more time and space to real reporting and less to the daily rituals of the leaders. The gates have opened for reporting on accidents, crimes, corruption cases and environmental problems.

The Sars epidemic two years ago is an interesting case. After an initial cover-up, the government had to allow media to report in depth on the spread and consequences of the disease. Foreign observers drew parallels with Chernobyl and the demise of the Soviet Union. When the Chernobyl nuclear plant exploded, it forced an opening in media coverage, starting a chain of events that eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

But nothing of the sort has happened in China after Sars. When it comes to sensitive subjects, newspapers are still on a tight leash. The authorities' constant harassment of Southern Weekend for its investigative reporting is proof of that. Its chief editors have been frequently replaced, until finally the present one is an apparatchnik.

Many newspapers are constantly testing the limits, and having to pay for it. Zeng Wenqiang, a Southern Metropolitan News reporter who first broke the Sars story in Guangdong, has been temporarily removed from her duties for not seeking clearance for running controversial stories. Another one of the paper's critical reporters had two fingers cut off her hand in what looked like a triad-inspired attack. Her case illustrates the risks of the profession. An enterprising reporter risks prison as well as intimidation by local thugs, if he or she has offended powerful officials or companies.

Continued on p. 12

新京报



The second issue of New Beijing News (*Xin Jing Bao*, 12 November 2003). This daily is an example of how Nanfang group expands from its base in Canton. It is started in cooperation with Guangming Daily and is an ambitious project to run a quality paper with a sober layout.



导读  
反恐,在后“9·11”时代  
罗布泊,小罗布泊惊世再现

深度解读“郎旋”



国家医药

日本报驻京记者 刘震  
救灾医药储备的问题  
罗布泊,小罗布泊惊世再现

Southern Weekend (*Nanfang Zhoumo*) is the pioneering weekly for investigative journalism. The leading story in this particular issue concerns mismanagement of storage of disaster relief provisions.



**Lena Rydholm** has a PhD in Sinology and is a senior researcher at the Department of Chinese Studies at Stockholm University. She is the chair of the Nordic Association for China Studies (NACS) 2005–2007. Lena Rydholm participates in two multi-disciplinary research programmes “Literature and Literary history in Global contexts” and “Media and Globalization in Contemporary China”.

Spring Festival Gala 2005.  
Photo: Chen Yan

# China Central Television’s Spring Festival Gala: entertainment and political propaganda

By **Lena Rydholm**

*The following article is based on the results of a pilot study I made for a research project on China Central Television’s Spring Festival Gala within the research program ‘Media and Globalization in contemporary China.’*

## Television broadcasting in China and a new form of entertainment

Television broadcasting in China started in 1958 with the founding of the TV station Beijing Television. Television became the mouthpiece (*houshe* meaning ‘throat and tongue’) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), a new medium for political propaganda and education. During the 1970s most provinces started their own television stations, but the impact of television was limited before the reform era, since few could afford to buy a television set. In 1978, Beijing Television was renamed China Central Television (CCTV). This party-state controlled national television company became the major propaganda tool for promoting the CCP policy to modernize China

through economic, political, social and cultural reforms.

In 1979, advertising on television was allowed. Thereby CCTV promoted the reform policies, while participating in the market economy by starting to make profits. The television set became the most wanted consumer item. Through the transformation of China since 1978, television has become the most influential mass medium in China, with more than a billion regular viewers in the 21st century. Today CCTV broadcasts 16 open national channels, as well as 11 pay-channels and 28 web-channels. In addition, there are about 300 TV stations at provincial and municipal levels; some broadcast several channels.

In 1983, CCTV created a new television format, the Spring Festival Gala (*chunjie wanhui*).

The Gala is broadcast live from CCTV’s studios in Beijing between 8 p.m. and 1 a.m. on the Chinese New Year’s Eve (in January or February, according to the traditional Chinese calendar). Provincial television stations also relay the Gala. CCTV claims that between 80–90% of the population view the Spring Festival Gala. The Gala was a huge success in the 1980s, when television entertainment was still scarce, but now, with many other channels and amusement options at hand, young urban people are less interested.

Today, the Gala might have over a billion viewers, since it is also relayed by satellite to many other countries and broadcast live on the Internet. During that one evening, CCTV now brings in around 200 million yuan in





advertising fees. The Chinese New Year's Eve is the most important traditional holiday, when every Chinese is urged to return home to be united with the family, to eat dumplings, to light fireworks and to watch in the New Year (*shousui*). According to CCTV, watching the Spring Festival Gala has been added to the traditional celebration ritual.

**Entertainment and propaganda: 'Unity and stability'**

The Spring Festival Gala is the biggest entertainment spectacle of the year. It presents cultural performances of all kinds: singing, dancing, Peking opera, short plays, comic dialogues, martial arts, acrobatics etc. It reflects some of the best parts of ancient and contemporary Chinese culture. The Gala features the most popular artists, pop stars, film stars and performers. Invited sports stars, recent Chinese Olympic games winners, also provide important symbols for national pride during the Gala.

These programmes deliver far more than entertainment, they promote the politics endorsed by the CCP. The Spring Festival Gala is a perfect example of what Sun (2002) calls 'indoctrainment', indoctrination in the form of entertainment. The Gala reflects the political elites' current policies and ideology, showing off the level of economic and technological development and cultural achievements. Among the varied official themes of the Gala over the years, we find combinations of traditional celebration themes like 'joy', 'luck', 'family reunion' and 'harmony', with slogans favoured by the CCP, like 'progress', 'bold advancement', 'self-pride', 'patriotism' and 'unification'.

By far the most common theme has been 'unity' (*tuanjie*), also implying 'stability'. The Spring Festival Gala has been an important vehicle for promoting the traditional Confucian values

of harmony, unity and stability that have regained importance during the past three decades, when Chinese society and culture have been in a state of turmoil through the transformation of the entire economic system. Large income differences, corruption, increasing unemployment, loss of workers' benefits etc. have created discontent and protests from peasants and workers. From the 1980s, the regime abandoned its old political ideals, by replacing the planned economy, the class struggle and 'serving the people' with the major enemies of the past: capitalism, consumerism and the pursuit of personal economic gain, and consequently faced problems of credibility. All this, along with peoples' lack of political influence, inspired demands for democracy among students and urban citizens. It all ended up in the tragedy at Tiananmen square in 1989.

After 1989, the CCP more than ever needed to promote 'unity' and 'stability', as a prerequisite for continued economic progress as well as for staying in power. After the midnight bell-ringing of the Spring Festival Gala in 1990, both President Jiang Zemin and Prime Minister Li Peng made a live appearance and expressed New Year's greetings to the people, the army and the police force. In the name of the CCP and the government, Jiang urged everyone to wish 'stability, unity and the happiness of the people' of the motherland. Li Peng also expressed his hopes for a 'stable economic development'. Then they shook hands with the first row of the studio audience, the famous artists.

**Patriotism and unification: The big Chinese nation-family**

A convenient available ideology to unite the people and fill the

ideological void since the beginning of the reform era is patriotism. The humiliations China suffered by Western aggression during the Opium Wars of the 1840s, losing territory to foreign colonial powers, has never been forgotten. Nor have the humiliations of the two World Wars, or the U.S. support for the Taiwanese regime. There has been a strong, genuine anger among large parts of the Chinese people, and a demand (boosted by the government) for reunification with Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and for turning China into a strong superpower, economically and morally superior to the USA.

Right from the very first Spring Festival Galas of the early 1980's, unification was a strong theme in the program. Some of the hosts and artists appearing at the Gala were famous film stars and singers from Hong Kong and Taiwan, expressing wishes for unification with China in songs praising the motherland. Hong Kong singer Zhang Mingmin's very popular song at the Gala of 1984 'My Chinese heart', is one of many examples:

'Even though I have not been close to the motherland for many years/ That does not matter, it cannot change/ My Chinese heart/ Even though I'm wearing Western style clothes/ My heart is still a Chinese heart[---] The Yangtse river, the Great wall, the Huang mountain, the Yellow River/ Carry a lot of weight in my heart/ The blood flowing through my heart/ Swells with a Chinese sound/ Even if I am far away from home, this cannot change/ My Chinese heart.'

When China retrieved Hong Kong from the British in 1997, it was the cause of great celebration and supposedly ended the 'Hundred years of humiliation'. This historical event was duly highlighted during the Spring Festival Gala of 1997, in the hosts'

introductory speeches and through the specially composed main theme song of the Gala: 'Hand in hand and hearts united'.

New Years Eve is the most important evening for family reunion in China. According to the traditional Confucian view, the state may be seen as an enlarged family (B. Zhao, 1998). New Years Eve is the perfect time to convince not only the increasingly stratified Chinese population and the 55 minorities of the nation, but also the compatriots in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and the fellow countrymen residing abroad, that they all belong to the same big, Chinese nation-family. They all belong to the 'Chinese nation-race' (*Zhonghua minzu*) (Dikötter's translation, 1996). New Year's Eve has become the evening of the 'Chinese nation-family reunion'. In 1998, it appeared as the official theme of the Gala of CCTV.

At the Gala, artists may sing local operas in their own dialect, and minority people dressed in their traditional clothing perform songs praising the motherland,

thereby showing that they are an integral part of the big, Chinese nation-family. The songs often honour the scenic beauty of China, and may praise Mao Zedong or the present CCP leadership. A good example of this is the song '56 ethnic groups all singing the same song', performed by Jiang Dawei, with background dancers in traditional minority clothes (Gala of 1986).

### **Praising the party, the army and the people**

**Songs during the Gala** often praise the CCP, sometimes also using family metaphors, as in 'Oh, [Chinese Communist] Party, most beloved mother', sung with tear-filled eyes by a young girl dressed in white (Yin Xiumei, the 1984 Gala). From the late 1990s and onwards, the images of the Chinese leaders sometimes appear as video clips during such performances. In a comic dialogue performed by Jiang Kun and Li Wenhua, the economic progress is depicted: how the living standard is rising, how people are getting richer, able to buy television sets, to

build houses, to get married etc., 'all thanks to the CCP's good policies' ('Praising hometown', Gala of 1984).

During the Spring Festival Gala, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is always celebrated. Young women sing about the courage and loyalty of the soldiers. They sing of the battle flag being so 'beautifully red' because it is 'coloured by the soldiers' blood' (i. e. 'Eulogy to the heroes', Gala of 1989, and 'Blood-coloured splendour', Gala of 1987), as CCTV simultaneously shows video clips of hardships suffered by PLA soldiers on their missions. There are also songs, speeches and videos thanking construction workers, fishermen, factory workers and peasants for their contribution to the economic progress. Comic dialogues, songs, speeches, video clips and short plays provide role models, promoting normative values and behaviours. Sometimes appointed 'model workers' are invited to sit in among the studio audience.

### **The Spring Festival Gala of the 21st century**

With the development of television technique and stage art, the show has become more sophisticated in the 21st century. In the 1980s, the stage was small, with few props and lights, and singers often performed alone. There used to be technical errors and shaky cameras.

In the 21st century, the Galas contain advanced stage art and many props, computer-controlled lights and stage effects and all kinds of television technical devices, cartoons and video clips. But the technical, artistic and aesthetic achievements of the programme in the 21st century do not mean that the nationalistic content is decreasing. It is just packaged much more expensively and sophisticatedly, and made even more appealing to the audience.

Spring Festival Gala 2005.  
Photo: Chen Yan



# Media match-maker, match-maker media – a personal view

By Göran Sommardal

*Göran Sommardal has tried to make sense of the presence of the match-maker in the Chinese media. He tries to explain how the annoying idea of an uninterrupted and continuous bawdry in media has got its congenial linguistic expression at last.*



**Göran Sommardal** is a literary critic and producer at the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation. His doctoral thesis was on classical Chinese poetics and he has published extensively on Chinese literature.

First of all, let me admit that I have not fully explored the sources to determine the exact point of time for the entering of the notion of media into the People's Republic of China. However, it seems to be a safe assumption that it arrived from Taiwan or Hong Kong in the early 1990s, i.e. in the aftermath of the massacre at Tiananmen Square in Beijing on the 4th of June in 1989.

In my dear old dictionary from 1979, 現代漢語詞典 (Dictionary of Modern Chinese), there is not yet a word for public(ist) media. The only medium listed is the 媒介 ('meijie'), which denotes a person or thing that unites two objects, like for instance, a fly transmitting an epidemic disease from an infected individual to another uninfected one.

'Meijie' was soon to become one of the common expressions in the PRC discourse used to denote the regular media, although another word, 媒體 ('meiti'), has later come to replace 'meijie', at least in academic parlance.

More recently, a third word has entered the Chinese media market, 傳媒 ('chuanmei'), short for 傳播媒體 'chuanbo meiti', which is the current collective denotation of public media.

In this context, we should also pay attention to the fact that the notorious institution once known as the Ministry of Propaganda (宣傳部 *xuan-chuanbu*) coincidentally has changed its name into the Ministry of Media Publicity (傳媒

部 'chuanmeibu'). Albeit this institution, under either name, indeed wields the power of a ministry, and more, it is in fact an organisational unit within the Communist Party with no formal link to the Chinese State Council, 國務院 'Guowuyuan'. The proper translations of those two censorship authorities, consecutive in Chinese history, might instead be (The Party's) Department of Propaganda and Department of Media Publicity, respectively.

Nevertheless, such old 'things' cloaked in their new names illustrate and exemplify the fast ideological progress of the Chinese hybrid of economic capitalism within the framework of political dictatorship, much better than any complicated critical ideological analysis. The conception of propaganda is still quite positively defined in my dictionary from 1979, more or less described as a form of information to the masses and a tool to make them ready for action, not unlike some kind of communist campaign journalism. But after the historically final ideological disenchantment caused by the 4th of June the time-honoured propaganda tool-box has lost most of its power-political use, even though the notion is still current in the names of certain authorities and institutions at lower levels of power. At the highest official level, it is alertly replaced with the free-marketish, democracy-reminiscent media publicity.

This review of the late history of specific vocabulary

may look both intricate and interesting. However, the more long-lasting discursive ironies reveal themselves when we dig us down further a bit into the feudal etymologies behind the Chinese conception of media. The fact is that we will find the figurative forerunner of today's media on the feudal dating scene: the match-maker, 媒人 ('meiren'), that once was de-feudalized in the PRC into 介紹人 ('jieshaoren'), 'introducer', at an early phase of socialism. But now, more than 50 years later, the match-maker ('meiren') has got the chance to make a comeback, this time riding, as it were, on the ever more market liberal and rampant capitalist development in China.

This 'mei', with its conspicuous female *radical* (one part of the character), which in its Chinese context does *not* denote someone who wants to get to the root of women's issues. It simply tells us that the job of negotiating a marriage, *mediating*, was usually done by a woman. Now this 'mei' returns to haunt us, in China, and hundreds of years later.

In the faraway days of classic democracy the *press* did represent the worthy counter-weight to the legislative assembly, the executive government and the judicial power. But now, only on very rare occasions the glorious thought of the fourth estate as an adequate understanding of the rôle of media makes itself felt.

Thus, the spiritual meaning of modern media being possible to

derive from a Chinese mediaeval match-maker, and worse still: the media seen as a go-between, is no pleasant thought.

Western broadcasting corporations, too, have been obliged to let their media and entertainment operations match-make and go-between the sinister Chinese publicity code and the axiomatic ambition to tell the truth.<sup>1</sup> Illustrious examples of such media match-making is the black-boxed agreements between Disney and the Chinese authorities, as well as the tacit but obvious political concessions made by News Corp in order to acquire a license for Murdoch's various commercial media projects in the PRC and Hong Kong. Complying with all this in

order to be able to woo the Chinese media market.

A still more frightening association faces us in the recollection of the historical fate of such a 'meiren' (the individual journalist, as it were), if the match-making does not cater to the delight of the authorities. What can happen, then, may be similar to what happens to Mother Wang, in the classic novel *Men of the Marshes*, after she has established the first contact between the lewd wife of bandit-hero Wu Song's elder brother, Wu Da, and thus procured forbidden joys for the polygamous Ximen Qing, always on the move to enlarge his harem. Ximen Qing and Golden Lotus barely make it to the next novel –

the erotic classic *Jin Ping Mei*, whereas the match-maker is sentenced to, 剛, 'gua', a traditional method of execution by which the felon is dismembered and cut to pieces until dead.

Ever since the concept of 'media'/media publicity' rose above the Chinese conceptual horizon, this etymologic presence of a 'match-maker' has offered me a newfound ironic consolation, while at the same time reminding me of the ubiquity of today's media carnival.

**Note**

<sup>1</sup> For a piece of general information, see 'Media men perfect the kowtow' by William Atkins, *South China Morning Post*, April 24, 2002.

**Continued from p. 7 (Leijonhufvud)**

**Repeated harassment**

The pioneering editor-in-chief of Southern Metropolitan News, Cheng Yizhong, has been repeatedly harassed by the authorities. Last year, he spent five months in custody while the authorities tried to have him prosecuted on embezzlement charges. An online debate among intellectuals about his case seems to have contributed to his release without charges.

Recently, Hu Jintao has tightened the Party's grip on the media. This year, the Publicity Department of the Communist Party issued several directives to rein in metropolitan newspapers and trade publications that had expanded their scope of reporting, geographically and in content. For instance, many of the high-profile articles of Southern Weekend exposed high-level corruption in other provinces. The weekly also uncovered the blood-donor aids

scandal in Henan province. The ban on 'extra-territorial' reporting deals a serious blow to investigative reporting.

The new rules also mandate national media to 'communicate' with officials in the area being investigated and inform them of the content in the planned articles.

Another regulation instructs journalists not working for official media to attend week-long courses in Marxism-Leninism, ethics and relevant regulations. The journalists then have to pass an exam to get a licence, which they have to produce when they cover news or attend official events.

The Party is trying to control the newspapers with the help of this kind of ad hoc regulations. The sensitivity of media issues is highlighted by the failure to enact the media law, which has been discussed for years.

**Relevant bibliographical material concerning 'Media and Globalization in China' is available at [https://rex.kb.dk/F/?func=file&file\\_name=find-b&local\\_base=nia02\\_mec](https://rex.kb.dk/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b&local_base=nia02_mec)**

# Media and gender issues in China

By Bu Wei

*Since 1949, Chinese women have had political, economic, cultural, marital and other rights legal. 'Equality between men and women' is not only a political slogan, but is also to some degree an actual practice in China. At the end of the 1970s, China began to carry out 'socialist market economy', and many 'women's problems' such as female workers being laid-off, female students having difficulty in gaining employment, rural girls dropping out from school, women being trafficked and other problems suddenly came forth. One of the results was that new women's popular organizations were established as part of the new women's movement in the 1980s and 1990s. These organizations began to explore solutions to gender inequality. At that time media and gender issues were not addressed by women activists.*

Around the time of the 1995 UN Women's Conference, however, some media scholars and activists paid attention to gender inequality under the influence of international interaction during preparations for the conference. In 1993 and 1994, the All-China Women's Foundation began to prepare a research project on 'images of women in the media'. Also, before the conference, some articles on media and gender issues were published in issue 2, 1995 of *Journalism and Communication*, published by the Institute of Journalism and Communication of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). This was the first time that gender issues were addressed in the field of communication studies. In addition, some journalists from the Capital Women Journalists' Association (CWJA) in Beijing launched a media monitoring movement. They criticized the stereotypical representations of women in the news of eight mainstream media.

During the UN Women's Conference of 1995, there were over 70 workshops on media and women at the NGO Forum. These forums exerted a great deal of influence on Chinese women and media, and The Platform for Action lists 'Women and Media' as one of the twelve critical areas of

concern under the Strategic Objectives and Actions. After that, many scholars, activists, and journalists consciously focused on gender issues in the media and made them become much more important than ever before.

## Media for women

In China all media at national and provincial levels are sponsored by the government. At present there are about 300 radio stations, reaching 93 per cent of the national population of 1.3 billion, and there are about 300 TV stations, reaching even 94 per cent of the rural population. Meanwhile, about 9,000 periodicals and 2,000 newspapers are published. Since April 1994 all kinds of Internet functions have been introduced to China. At the end of 2004 there were about 80 million Internet users representing 6 per cent of the population.

Before 1978 media agencies were strictly under the control of the government, and as a result, most of the content in the media was limited and used for political propaganda. Currently the media content is influenced by many factors such as economic development, commercialism, local tradition, traditional culture, western media values, and the needs of the audience, as well as the political environment.

Sharp competition in the media market has led the media to be concerned about audience needs and has made the media open more space for reflection and discussion on many women/gender issues, and a variety of women's images have entered into TV, newspapers, magazines, and even to CD-ROMs and the Internet.

In mainstream media, the programme 'Half the Sky' on CCTV, started in 1994 during the preparations for the UN Women's Conference, has disseminated much information on women, challenging gender stereotypes and discrimination. Another important medium is *China Women's News*, initiated in 1984 by the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF). Under the banner of 'women's liberation', the newspaper has published many news stories and articles about women's rights. In 1992, *China Women's News* created a pocket-sized magazine called *Rural Women*. This is the only magazine in China aimed at rural women.

Besides national media, there are some provincial and municipal level media for women in China. Of the 300 central, provincial, and municipal television stations, seven of them had established programmes specifically for women as of October 1998.



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According to recent statistics, there are about five newspapers and 50 magazines for women. Compared to overall media resources in China there is still limited media space specifically for women, and especially for rural women, who make up above 60 per cent of the female population.

**Women as media workers**

According to incomplete statistics from a 1995 survey, nearly 200,000 people in mainland China currently work in the news industry. There is a total of 87,000 news professionals, of which 28,000 or 33 per cent are women. At present there are no statistics to show how many women encounter obstacles to entering the news media profession, but during the 1980s and 1990s such incidents happened regularly. An invisible barrier has always blocked women from getting the same opportunities as men in the media industry workforce.

The 1995 survey also showed that at high decision making levels (editor-in-chief, deputy editor-in-chief, chief of staff), women occupied just 8.5 per cent of the positions; at middle decision making levels, women occupied 17.8 per cent of the positions. In the news organizations, women are mainly engaged in reporting on social, cultural, educational and – to some extent – economic issues. However, in comparison to male reporters, fewer women report on economics, politics, and sports. These topics are viewed by mainstream society as the most important fields of hard news. Since then no great change is found in this respect.

**Women as audience**

The research institutions and the news media have conducted hundreds of audience surveys since 1982, and every survey includes the female audience. However, very few surveys have

included a gender analysis. They largely overlook the issue of gender, and the needs of the female audience are thus lost in a sea of statistical data.

Another important issue is rural women's access to media, information, and knowledge, and their right to participate in media. To date there have been no studies on rural women's use of the media.

In China, the informational stratification is prominent. Some studies have described the typical Chinese Internet user as a male, with a university education, a good salary, and a computer and telephone line in his home – that is, someone who is a part of the social elite, with economic potential and somewhat strong influence on society. Besides, technology, especially hi-tech related to computers, has been regarded as a male-dominated field, thus obstructing access and use of new media for women.

Recent studies have found that there are four gaps between men and women in relation to the Internet. There are gender gaps in access, in usage patterns, in needs for using the Internet, and also, in attitudes towards the Internet.

Besides access and use of media or information and communication technology it was also obvious that media have not as yet become the learning and communication tools for rural women and other vulnerable women groups.

**Women's interventions and actions**

As mentioned above, the ACWF Women's Institute launched a media research project in 1993-1994. In addition, the ACWF initiated a workshop at a NGO Forum held in China in 2000 and a national conference 'Mass Media and Women's Development' in 2001. The ACWF also organized a dialogue between government departments, media and women's organizations

and activists. This effort aimed at improving the state communication policies.

The 'Media Watch Network' was founded in 1996 as a part of the CWJA. The aims of this network is to encourage the media, a) to portray diverse images of women in a balanced manner, b) to monitor and resist mass media reporting that demeans women, denies the independent character of women, or strengthens stereotypical images, c) to ensure through negotiations that women's needs and issues of concern to women are appropriately reflected, and d) to provide a good climate of public opinion for advancing equality of the sexes.

The network's main activities include:

- (1) participation in a number of international and domestic monitoring activities and the opening of a special 'Media Watch' page in *China Women's News* as a platform for media monitoring;
- (2) planning and implementing participatory gender training for media people;
- (3) promoting the visibility of women's issues in the mass media, especially important gender issues in China such as discrimination towards the girls, violence against women, women's reproductive health, and women's rights.

Besides the 'Media Watch Network', other women's popular organizations make use of the mass media through negotiating with the media for disseminating information on gender equality issues. Developing a 'Journalists' network' is a communication method in some organizations. The 'Domestic Violence Network', founded in 2000 works together with the 'Media Watch Network'.

Moreover, women's popular organizations have created and

**Continued on p. 19**

# The media as the judge: the role of the Chinese media in addressing injustices

By Marina Svensson

*There are several expressions currently in vogue in China that reveal people's low opinion of the formal legal system and their high expectations with regard to the media's ability to redress injustices. 'Thirteen minutes of television redresses ten years of grievances,' is one such expression, referring to the impact of the television programme Jiaodian fangtan (Focus), which is shown for exactly thirteen minutes each evening. Another expression holds that 'journalists are more important than judges.' What are the reasons behind people's faith in the media and lack of faith in the formal legal system? Which legal issues are addressed in the Chinese media and how? To what extent are the Chinese media able to address injustices and carry out investigative reporting? And what are the dangers with expecting the media to take on a quasi-judicial role?*

## Lack of faith in the legal system: Which are the alternatives?

Today Chinese citizens have several possible channels to vent their dissatisfaction and to seek redress. Their choices depend on the issue at hand, faith in the system, knowledge and experience of the effectiveness of different methods, level of education, and power and influence. Different groups thus prefer different methods, or make use of different methods depending on the circumstances. The choices range from making use of informal contacts (*la guanxi*), writing petitions and letters to the authorities (*shangfang*), going to court (*da guansi*), and approaching the media.

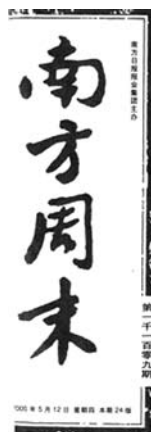
Apart from legally sanctioned methods such as these, when everything else fails people might become so desperate that they resort to unsanctioned and even illegal methods, such as demonstrations and strikes, or even violent attacks and riots. Reliable information on open protests is difficult to come by, but official reports indicate that mass

protests have increased in recent years. The Public Security Minister was thus recently quoted as saying that whereas there were some 10,000 mass protests in 1994, more than 74,000 such cases took place in 2004 (Shi Ting 2005). This serves as another indicator that people regard institutional and legal avenues to be ineffective and are becoming increasingly desperate.

We can learn of Chinese people's views on the legal system and the media from media reports, case studies and surveys. According to a 1997 survey of 1,510 citizens in six cities, close to 93 per cent of the respondents did not regard China as a country ruled by law. When asked what they would do if conflicts or disputes with others occurred, 74 per cent nonetheless indicated that they



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## 上访者老安的“黄金周”

Writing letters and petitions is one way Chinese people can make their voices heard. After much debate, new regulations were put in effect on May 1, 2005. This was reported in *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend), a weekly with a reputation of critical and investigative reporting. The weekly had published several articles debating the usefulness of the petition system.

would turn to legal means for resolution. However, they also believed that such means would not always be effective and therefore indicated that they would try other avenues as well. About 49 per cent said that they would seek help from the media, and 25 per cent would turn to their work unit for help. 14 per cent said they would seek out higher authorities for their interventions, whereas only a mere 2 per cent would attempt to demonstrate. (CASS blue book, 1998)

In a survey from 2001, 78 per cent of the urban residents surveyed said that if running into injustices they would seek out government officials, 74 per cent would turn to the media, and 73 per cent would turn to the legal system. For the rural population the figures were 75 per cent, 57 per cent, and 57 per cent respectively (CASS blue book, 2002) These surveys indicate that people 'shop around' and are willing to try out several methods

Chinese journalists are called upon to present the official view and for example justify the periodic 'strike-hard against crime' campaigns. Zhang Jun was sentenced to death during the 2001 strike-hard campaign and the media dwelt at length on the cruelty of his crimes.



simultaneously. Also, they show that media are getting more popular as a means of justice, but less so within the rural population.

Although Chinese citizens are increasingly willing to make use of the legal system to seek justice, as new laws for instance make it possible to sue officials, their faith in the legal system is quite weak. Their low opinion is warranted since the legal system suffers from many and severe problems, including corruption, local protectionism, and undue interference from local governments and Party officials. All too often the politically and economically powerful are above the law and abuse their power.

### The role of the media in China

Ideological and economic changes have paved the way for more critical, investigative reporting in the Chinese media at the same time as a whole range of social and economic ills have appeared in the wake of the reforms. The commercialization of the media has forced journalists to write stories that interest their readers. This has led to a rising attention to social and legal problems on the part of the media. Many citizens seek out journalists with their stories since they believe that the media is the most effective and important avenue for redress. In the West, people also turn to the media as an alternative or complement to the formal legal system when it has failed them, and with the expectation that publicity will help their case. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, due to the weakness of the formal legal system itself, the Chinese media might have a more important role to play in the sphere of informal justice than media in the West.

But one shouldn't forget that the media in China are the

mouthpiece of the Party. There is no independent press in China and journalists' freedom to report and publish is severely restricted. However, since the reform period started in 1978, the media have been called upon to play a partly new role as a watchdog over lower level bureaucracy. This new role is a result of widespread corruption and difficulties with implementing laws and policies. Recently one senior official, Chen Wenxi, vice-minister of the Office of the Central Leading Group on Financial and Economic Affairs, praised the media for bringing cases of injustice to the attention of higher authorities and so helping them to address the situation. This being said, however, Chinese journalists need to be careful when undertaking this task. Many topics are out of bounds and the boundaries shift rapidly, as the periodic clampdowns on the media show. Journalists also risk becoming victims of local officials when attempting to reveal illegal activities and injustices. Many stories don't make it to the newspaper due to pressure and self-censorship.

### Legal cases and injustices reported in the media

There are a great many problems connected to the expectations that the media might perform judicial tasks when media are still controlled by the Party and expected to serve its interests. Some issues are definitely beyond the limit, such as social and legal injustices in minority areas, and critique directed at Party leaders and national policies and laws. Critique can only be directed towards lower level officials and their abuse of power when Party interests are not hurt. When a vice-governor in Henan recently was arrested for the murder of his wife, the



media was put on a hold until the propaganda department issued information on the case.

National level media are more immune from interference from local officials than lower-ranking media. But often a case is first reported in the local media and then picked up by national media, giving rise to public debate and official interference. This interference and redress can take different forms. Sometimes, individual or collective cases may lead to legal or policy changes, and thus have an impact beyond the individual case.

The single most influential case in recent years is that of Sun Zhigang. Sun was a computer expert who was arrested by the police since he didn't have his identification papers with him. His death in custody did not only lead to demands that those responsible should be punished but also to calls to abolish the provision permitting the police to arrest people without identification papers. The reasons of success in this case – the regulation abolished and those responsible brought to justice – was a combination of several factors and the work of different actors. First of all his father was not intimidated by the police and approached the media that then also dared to publish the case. Legal scholars then added their voices and called for legal reforms.

In other cases, the media reports only lead to changes and justice in that particular case, whereas similar cases go unreported and therefore unaddressed. In some cases the media reporting makes the authorities take note of previously neglected problems. But often reports on one particular type of case, such as recent reports on mining accidents or land confiscations, only follow after political leaders already have decided to focus on that issue.

Be that as it may, official blessing to report on a specific problem will lead to articles on cases that otherwise would go unreported. These articles serve as warnings for officials not to commit the same mistakes. Even the Party, it seems, have to rely on the media when trying to address injustices since national policies and laws are not followed.

In June 2005, the Chinese media reported that a power plant had hired some toughs to attack villagers in Shengyou village in Hebei. The plant wanted their land but the villagers, who were unhappy about the compensation, held out for two years. In the ensuing fight several people were killed. The report rapidly led to the arrest of the local officials who hadn't come to the villagers' aid for years, but supported the power plant. It is likely that this report was possible only since the newspaper was not based in the province and since the issue of land confiscations now has become a top priority of the political leadership. Many similar incidents go unreported since local journalists don't dare to report on the cases.

### **Impact of the media on the legal system**

Although most Chinese commentators are appreciative of the media and feel that media have a function to perform in the field of legal justice, some have begun to complain that the media have too much power and might even threaten legal work. As Yin Li, a producer of *Law Today*, one of the most popular legal TV programmes, puts it: 'The media is not a judge or a Bao Clear Sky [referring to the upright Judge Bao in Chinese folklore].' There are several examples where media pressure has ensured that the courts finally have taken up a case or

speeded up the handling of a case. But there are also fears that the media attention might have prompted a harsher sentence. One case that received a lot of publicity was that of a police officer who killed a number of people while driving drunk. Reports on this case led to an uproar in the media and among the general public. When the man in question received his death sentence he claimed himself that he had been sentenced to death by the media.

Another case that illustrates the power of the media and public opinion is the so-called BMW case. In October 2003, a driver of a BMW ran over and killed a peasant woman in Heilongjiang. The driver claimed that it was an accident but the Internet was soon full of reports clamouring for justice. People were concerned that the powerful connections of the driver might make her escape punishment. There was a re-trial but in the end the court withstand outside pressure and didn't give a heavier punishment. The case illustrates the power of the media and the danger that legal justice might be subverted by public opinion.

In China today the problem of media interference however pales in comparison with the pressure that Party and local government exercise on the courts. The legal system would rather be strengthened if the Chinese media had more freedom to report on legal and social injustices and to supervise the judiciary.

**Relevant bibliographical material**  
concerning 'Media and Globalization in China' is available at [https://rex.kb.dk/F/?func=file&file\\_name=find-b&local\\_base=nia02\\_mec](https://rex.kb.dk/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b&local_base=nia02_mec)



**Marja Kaikkonen's** research deals with modern Chinese popular culture. Her recent work has focused on popular literature, its publishing as an economic phenomenon that has received considerable interest from the authorities, the relationship between elite and popular culture, and the changing status of popular culture during modernization. She is at present Head of the Dept. of Chinese Studies at Stockholm University.

# *Gushihui*: the success story of a popular literary journal

By Marja Kaikkonen

*During the last decade, the Chinese popular literary journal Gushihui (Story session) has consolidated its reputation as the best-selling, most profitable, most adaptable, and most politically correct cultural journal published in the People's Republic of China. A long array of government prizes and honours has been awarded to this tiny (32mo, which is less than A5) and seemingly trivial journal, which most educated people sniff at, and which no literary critic considers 'literary'. Gushihui's secret appears to lie in its low price and its appeal to great numbers of ordinary, relatively uneducated readers, whose cultural consumption has not been entirely taken over by TV and film.<sup>1</sup> But with more than fifty almost identical competitors,<sup>2</sup> there must be something else to its success.*

*Gushihui* was established in the early 1960s but stopped publication during the Cultural Revolution. It was restarted in 1974 under the title *Geming gushihui* (Revolutionary story session), and revived under the original title in 1979. Originally a bimonthly or a monthly, it was turned into a semimonthly in 2004. All along it has remained a simple low-tech publication with a small amount of advertisements. As late as 2002 it was still entirely in black-and-white print except for the cover, but since then some more colour has been added.<sup>3</sup> The number of pages has stabilised at 96 since a number of years; the same applies for the retail price, 2:50 RMB (yuan) per issue.

## **Short stories and humour, in 3 million copies or more**

The typical contents of *Gushihui* consist of 20–25 short or very short stories and a few jokes. The shortest stories are only less than a page long, the longest about 16 pages. Most stories are from two to four pages long. They are sorted into columns that recur in most issues during a number of years, thus making it easy for the readers to locate

their favourites. Such columns have titles like 'New Chinese legends', 'Suspense stories', 'World of humour', 'Treasury of folk stories', 'Stories of emotions', 'Overseas stories', and so on. The stories deal with the daily lives of ordinary people in town and countryside, who come into contact with crime, corruption, family troubles or moral dilemmas. Around 40 small illustrations, most of them black-and-white drawings, adorn each issue. The cover is made up of a photograph, often of a blond family at play accompanied by pets, toys, food, or flowers, always in a beautiful landscape and with carefree air.

Everyone in the publishing business in China knows *Gushihui*. It gained fame in the 1980s after a spectacular rise in sales: from 267,933 monthly copies in 1979 to 6,280,000 in 1985.<sup>4</sup> Other popular journals also made great advances at the time, but many of them disappeared in the tribulations of the market of the 1990s. *Gushihui* managed to adapt, time and again, to the rising costs and paper shortage as well as to the increasing competition and

oversupply on the market, and has succeeded in keeping its sales between three and four million copies every issue through the years.

This has been possible in spite of heavy jumps in the retail price. While the price per issue in 1985 was 0,30 RMB and in 1990 0,65 RMB, it reached the intimidating 2,00 RMB in 1995. To the surprise of the editors, the readers did not give up *Gushihui*, and the sales volume continued upwards, surpassing 100,000,000 RMB in 1998.<sup>5</sup> With a staff of less than ten persons, *Gushihui* and its wealth are considerable assets to the publishing company, Shanghai wenyi.

## **Popular strategies: Activating readers**

Various strategies have been adopted to keep *Gushihui* popular among readers, and many of them have turned out to be so effective that they have not only been recommended by Chinese authorities but even successfully imitated by many other journals. Much credit for this development is given to the editor-in-chief, Mr. He

Chengwei. Perhaps the most important of the strategies that *Gushihui* pioneered was to activate its readers and writers. The first competition for soliciting stories from readers was held in 1981.<sup>6</sup> With prizes and publicity, such competitions became a popular feature recurring ever since. In recent years they have been complemented by writing contests on specific topics or for specific columns in the journal.<sup>7</sup> In 1985, a year-long correspondence school for story writers was run; it attracted 8,000 applications from among the readers. It was repeated the following year with 6,000 participants.<sup>8</sup>

In 1987, a new form of writing competition was started. It was called 'Story relay' (*Gushi jie long*), and the readers were asked to write an ending to half a story supplied in the journal. The best endings were then published in coming issues and the writers were awarded. From 1986, *Gushihui* started awarding its own writers in a ceremony.<sup>9</sup> The choice of best stories was first made by an expert panel, but soon the readers were invited to vote, and today the expert panels are vanishing. The readers who had voted for the winning stories participated in a lottery.

Since the 1990s, short maxims or aphorisms sent in by readers have been published at the bottom margin of each page. They often quote well-known individuals<sup>10</sup> but can also be the readers' own thoughts.<sup>11</sup> In any case, the name of the sender is published. This gives a chance even for non-writing readers to get their name in the journal.

Between December 1999 and April 2001, the journal ran a public access homepage on the Internet, and an e-mail address for correspondence was made available in the journal in

January 2001. Today, an even better method to reach the readers has been found. Since 2004, each story is given a code number for immediate sms voting via mobile phones, and exclusive *Gushihui* news is sent back to those who vote.

Having had a traditional, rather old-fashioned, image for a long time, *Gushihui* has now entered the IT-age and appears more modern than many of its more fashionable competitors.

### Notes

1 Much of this article is based on interviews in Shanghai with Editor-in-chief He Chengwei, 15 September 1995, and with Editor Xia Yiming, 26 April 2004.

2 Shen Guofan, *Jiedu Gushihui: Yi ben Zhongguo qikan de shenhua*. Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue chubanshe, 2003, p. 6.

3 The information of *Gushihui*'s present state is based on the 2004 issuance.

4 Shen Guofan, p. 53.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

6 '*Gushihui* da shi nianbiao', in Shen Guofan, pp. 366-374; p. 367.

7 E.g., this is how the column 'Baixing huati' (The topic of the people) works. It was started in 1996.

8 '*Gushihui* da shi nianbiao', p. 368.

9 *Ibid.*

10 E.g. 'Callous military might cannot extinguish the boiling blood of the masses.' – Mao Dun; 'The most outstanding person attains joy only through pain.' – Beethoven. *Gushihui* No. 318 (May 2004), pp. 44 & 40.

11 'Those who believe that there is nothing that money cannot do are often people who will do everything for money.' – Wang Hongyuan; 'Avarice and happiness will never meet.' – Shi Jing. *Gushihui* No. 287 (February 2002), pp. 48 & 84.

### Continued from p. 14 (Bu Wei)

developed alternative media such as websites, newsletters, publications and theatre troupes in rural areas. Empowerment through communication is a real possibility, for instance, some rural women have become strong after joining theatre troupes depicting anti-domestic violence.

In 2000 and 2004, some women's popular organizations initiated 'Beijing Plus Five Action' and 'Beijing Plus Ten Action',<sup>1</sup> working together to review the changes after the 1995 UN Women's conference, as well as the remaining obstacles and challenges in the communication field.

These actions have found that China's media development is very imbalanced. Using media as an empowerment tool for women's development still faces many obstacles and great challenges.

### Note

1 Follow-up meetings (5 and 20 years) after the 1995 Women's Conference in Beijing.

### Relevant bibliographical material

concerning 'Media and Globalization in China' is available at [https://rex.kb.dk/F/?func=file&file\\_name=find-b&local\\_base=nia02\\_mec](https://rex.kb.dk/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b&local_base=nia02_mec)



**Johan Lagerkvist** is a PhD candidate at the Department of East Asian Languages, Lund University, Sweden. His main research interests include the social and political impacts of globalization on China, mass media and Internet development in China and Southeast Asia, China's intellectual history in the 20th century, and political change in authoritarian states.

# Regulating Internet cafés in China: economic and political interests in moral disguise?

By Johan Lagerkvist

*Since April 1994 all kinds of Internet services have been introduced to China. By 2004, 80 million Internet users, representing 6 per cent of the population, regularly surfed the net in China. And by the end of 2005, the country's online population is projected to reach more than 100 million, second only to the United States.*

Faced with ever growing numbers of Internet users, the Chinese government continues to battle for the mastery of its people's consciousness in the digital territory, walled in by what is often called 'the great firewall of China'. This national firewall consists of the blocking of foreign websites, technological filtering, and censorship of online content (cf. OpenNet Initiative, 2005). China's dual track strategy towards the Internet is well known. The state actively encourages businesses, schools and private individuals to go online. In this respect it has been very successful. At the same time and with a hard hand, the state also enforces regulations that limit free speech in the electronic meeting places. National and foreign IT companies, for example, must bow to the demands of the authorities aiming at resisting the influx of what are perceived to be subversive political ideas and hostile cultural influences on the Chinese Internet. There have been frequent reports in the past about how Yahoo, Google, and Cisco have assisted in limiting free speech and key word searches. More recently, in June 2005, it became known that Microsoft censor their blog hosting service 'Spaces' from words deemed inappropriate by the authorities.

## Internet café on fire

The history of Internet regulation in China is about law making bent on keeping abreast

of the rapid development of modern communications technology. In accordance with the needs of an authoritarian communist party, the bureaucracy and the police around the country hunt down any information or content that seek to de-legitimize the communist party's hold on power. Regulating parts of Chinese cyberspace like individual web logs today has a forerunner in the regulation of the physical meeting places we call Internet cafés, or *wangba* in Chinese.

These Internet access points became very popular in the late 1990s. While demand for them was huge the authorities were slow to issue business licenses to would-be-operators. As a result many illegal Internet cafés mushroomed. This development worried different government ministries and the Chinese communist party. But it also gave rise to anxiety among parts of civil society. The official discussions were of a moral kind, and arguments that Internet bars should be shut down because they contributed to offline and online crime, illicit political activity, and youth vice were also given plenty of space in mass media, academic writings, and policy documents. It was especially after the fire in the Lanjisu Internet café in Beijing in 2002, that the interplay between lawmakers, parents, and the mass media resulted in a new set of regulations specifically

targeting the Internet café industry. Consequently, various government agencies have issued regulations governing Internet cafés since the late 1990s.

## Harsher regulations for the Internet cafés

The first decree explicitly targeting the Internet café industry was the 1998 'Notice of the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Information Industry, the Ministry of Culture And the State Administration for Industry And Commerce on regulating the operation of, and strengthening the administration of security in connection with Internet cafés'. The second important decree was the 2001 'Measure for the administration of Internet access centers'. The third significant regulation was the 2002 'Regulations on the Administration of Internet Access Service Business Establishments. In Article 23 of this regulation it is stated:

'Units operating Internet Access Service Business Establishments shall examine, register, and keep a record of the identification card or other effective document of those customers who go online. The contents of the registration and records shall be maintained for at least 60 days, and shall be provided to the cultural and public security agencies for examination in accordance with the law. Registration contents and records shall not be altered or destroyed during this period'.

One wonders what is the rationale behind the Chinese party-state's stern measures directed toward Internet businesses? Is there a unified official ideological stance on what constitutes the negative effects of the Internet cafés? A recently published booklet by the communist party's Central Committee on how to bolster the morals of Chinese youth gives some clues on the position of the party vis-à-vis Internet cafés (cf. 'Some views of...', 2004). The usual suspects and culprits singled out by the officials are pornography, online gaming, religious superstition, slandering of China and the communist party, defamation of party leaders, and encouraging succession from the Chinese nation-state. This short policy document emphasizes the importance of strictly enforcing the regulations of blocking youngsters below the age of 18 from Internet cafés, and the compulsory installation of filtering software blocking pornographic and other 'unhealthy content' before it makes it to an individual screen.

**Moral or moneymaking concerns?**

Obviously moral concerns abound and for many years the Internet cafés have been portrayed as having a corrupting influence on the nation's youth. But there is also a moneymaking component to all this indignant agitation, because somebody has to pay for the filtering software, and naturally the Internet cafés make up a large market segment in this regard. Research on the implementation of Internet café regulations by law scholars He Bing and Zhao Peng has shown how much economic interests lie behind these regulations. In fact, the new restrictions have forced individual operators out of business while new licenses have

been exclusively given to chain operators subordinate to the Ministry of Culture (cf. He Bing and Zhao Peng, 2003).

Interestingly, the existence of economic deliberations can also explain some inner-party resistance toward the crackdown on Internet cafés. Although most bureaucrats and lawmakers toe the official party line on what constitutes the hazards of Internet development, there have been differing voices among Chinese legislators regarding the regulation of Internet cafés. Members of Guangzhou's People's Congress, for example, have expressed fear that excessively harsh registration rules might limit the development of the Internet cafés in Guangzhou, to the detriment of both the info-seeking public, the business community, and the state's coffers.

**Public support for regulations of Internet cafés?**

The parents of children frequenting *wangba* [Internet cafés] are often mentioned as a motivating force and ally in the state's law enforcement regarding Internet cafés. Indeed, there are several reports describing parents' fear of their children becoming addicted to online computer games in unregulated net bars. And some researchers have been of the same opinion, arguing that the government has felt pressure from parents and media reports to react strongly against the illegal *hei wangba*, or 'black net bars'.

Other observers, like Chinese law scholars He Bing and Zhao Peng, have argued to the contrary. According to them the Internet café businesses were too heavily regulated already *before* the Lanjisu fire. Well before the tragic fire killing 25 youngsters, people eager to start a net bar due to rising demand saw no other option than setting up unregistered internet cafés. Thus, before the fire at Lanjisu, the government's regulations and

licensing rules were *not* legitimate in the eyes of the public, as citizens were demanding more outlets and business owners were unsatisfied with over-strict licensing procedures. But after the Lanjisu arson and the subsequent media storm, even harsher rules than those previously in use were relatively easy to implement.

**The net as a threat to Chinese culture or to the Party?**

Obviously, a great many party ideologues and academics clearly take the question of Internet café regulation very seriously, and are working creatively to find an antidote to 'the Internet poison'. Given their putative starting points they obviously have good reasons to care. The cultural spread of political ideas about, for example, ideological pluralism constitutes concrete threats to the monopoly of power and information held by the one-party state. Of course people's fears of rapid social change and far-reaching globalization should be taken seriously, but the fact is that Chinese youth and culture are not under as much threat as the party.

A lot of the stated worry about cultural imperialism and cultural pollution is based on the fear of what foreign values might mean for the political socialization of the young, which is why the Internet is a delicate question for the Chinese communist party. But the net is far from being a threat to Chinese culture and its allegedly defenseless young people. Rather, the talk about cultural protection, teenagers being in harm's way, and fighting pornography serve to mask the economic interests of the bureaucracy regulating Internet cafés and the political woes among communist party leaders worrying that Chinese cyberspace might provide activist meeting places fomenting political opposition to their rule.

**Relevant bibliographical material**  
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**Elin Sæther** is a PhD student in Human Geography at the University of Oslo. Her dissertation focuses on the critical press in China and the changing political role of the media.

# Chinese journalists and the media's conditional autonomy

By Elin Sæther

*A noteworthy feature of Chinese media during the last ten years is the emergence of critical journalism. In the absence of an official declaration redefining the political role of Chinese media, a gradual diversification has taken place. An important part of this is an increasingly critical journalism concentrating on social problems. The critical journalism is practical in orientation and focuses on specific issues dealing with concrete problems (Zhao 2000). It has led to an expansion of what can be written in the open press. Today, news about natural disasters, corruption, and other negative stories appear frequently in the media, in spite of their earlier status as political taboos. Critical journalism is only a small part of the media landscape, but represents the clearest challenge to the established role of the media.*

The construction of a critical public discourse and a potential new political role for Chinese journalists is the topic of my PhD project and my main source of data is interviews I conducted with journalists and editors in July–December 2002.

## Pushing the limits

There are some Chinese journalists who choose to focus on investigative and critical news if their employer is willing to publish such stories. Those who see themselves as critical journalists experience restrictions in very different ways, depending on what they strive to do and factors such as the history of the work place, local authorities and circulation of the paper or journal.

The result is that some journalists see themselves as quite free to do what they want, while others see themselves as prevented from asking any crucial questions. Those who choose to push the limits have to find their way through a complex pattern of openings and constraints. The limits are seldom codified and clear, rather they depend on when, where and who the story involves, and they fluctuate with the policies of the political leadership.

## No trespassing – the importance of avoidance

Some areas are still simply taboo within Chinese media today. A journalist based in Guangzhou summed up that to write critically about the party or the army or to voice opposition to official policies on sensitive issues such as foreign policy or religion, is not allowed. Other topics can be covered as long as they are confined to local levels of society. Hence, articles about corruption abound, but there is an absence of journalism that analyses the problem in general.

A television journalist working for one of CCTV's channels experienced that a programme about mining accidents was classified as unsuitable for broadcasting. At that time, mining accidents were frequently discussed openly in the media, but the TV programme focused on the connection between poverty and mining accidents. As a result, his editor refused to broadcast the programme. The reason was probably that it stated the fact that mining accidents occur most frequently in the poorest provinces, and that they have a more structural cause than greedy and irresponsible private owners who neglect necessary

security measures.

Similarly, journalists explain that they can write moving stories about devastated people and their personal histories, but articles that link the party (CCP) to their fate are out of bounds. State involvement and responsibility in conflicts also prevent journalists from writing about them. Strikes and labour protests directed against a state-owned enterprise are very sensitive, while similar protests within the private sector can be covered in the open media.

The Hong Kong based activist Han Dongfang was not at all surprised by the absence of coverage when tens of thousands of state employed oil workers were demonstrating in Daqing. The party-state fears negative public attention in cases where the state is an active part, because this can inspire workers to revolt in other places. The argument is that such negative attention will threaten the social stability. Han Dongfang explained that journalists are less restrained when they cover workers' conflicts with private actors, because such disputes are seen as limited to the concrete cases.

## Conditional autonomy

The major reason why critical journalism challenges the

mouthpiece role of the media is that it builds on the idea of an independent position which allows the journalist to question the performance of authorities. This understanding is not compatible with communist ideology where the party is seen as the vanguard of the people. The journalists' role as propaganda workers is contrary to the idea of independent media. However, compared to the restricted role journalists had before the reform period from 1978 and onwards, Chinese journalists experience a new autonomy and are able to write about cases they consider important.

Party and state repression remains important, but changes are taking place. The state now accepts news and analyses both in print and on television that would not have been permitted a few years ago. The limits to journalists' freedom appear when they take an interest in a case that somebody would rather not have made public. Their autonomy is conditional because the newly won freedom they enjoy is unprotected. The current situation is an exposed and insecure situation for those who challenge private and public authorities by revealing power abuse and injustice.

It is still an open question why critical journalism has been increasingly tolerated by the party-state. One plausible explanation is that as long as critique is limited to the local level or the private sector, the central state remains unexposed. The information gathered by journalists can be useful to the party and state, and if the central level shows an inclination to respond to the information by correcting (local) mistakes, the criticism can even contribute to increased legitimacy.

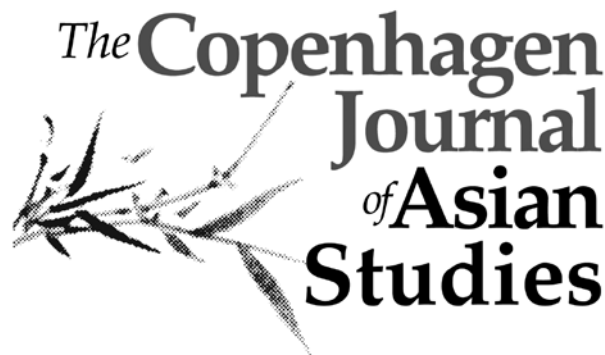
When authoritarian governments allow critical utterances, it is sometimes

explained as 'letting out steam' (Scott 1990). In the Chinese context it is important to realize that the relationship between state and media is not a peaceful equilibrium. Critical journalists do not meekly accept the restrictions imposed on their work, but consciously endeavour to expand their freedom of speech. This means that the critical practice also carries a democratizing potential. Stories exposing the problematic aspects of the Chinese development give a voice to people who remain poor and deprived.

### Concluding remarks

The impetus behind the ongoing changes in the Chinese media is certainly a combination of many factors. It is important, however, to realize that the increased freedom that journalists experience was not given to them. It is a result of years of pushing the line. The media development is fluctuating, but the party-state finds itself in a situation where the process simply cannot be turned back. Still, as critical journalists continue to carve out a new political role, they are doing so in a situation characterized by conditional autonomy.

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# Staff news

**Stig Toft Madsen** joined NIAS in September as a senior researcher. During his stint at NIAS he will work to augment NIAS's engagement in India and South Asia through new research initiatives.

His earlier work includes, among other things, studies of the history of the legal profession in India; human rights in South Asia; rural change and farmers' movements; biotechnology in agriculture; fisheries development in Karnataka; forest policy, conservation and environmental history; ethnic and religious conflicts. An anthropologist and sociologist by education, he has worked in Denmark and Sweden, most recently at International Development Studies at Roskilde University.



**Jan Kanne Petersen**, production coordinator at NIAS since 2004, left the institute at the end of August to meet new and exciting challenges elsewhere. For the next two years he will head a EU Social Fund project dealing with the structural reform in regards to the available and required staff resources and competences at both regional and communal levels.

We wish him all the best in his new job.



**Vandra Harris**, Flinders University, South Australia, will be working at NIAS until February 2006. Her research project is based on her PhD research, which focused on practitioner perspectives on the impact of international development on culture in Cambodia and the Philippines. The research results indicated that development workers in these countries sought a more participatory approach from their funders, and this has implications for international development agencies. Her aim is to explore the implications for development partnerships with international aid organisations, specifically Danida and Sida.

# Recent Visitors

The Asian Studies Section at Copenhagen University's Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies and NIAS organized an internal seminar on Society and Religion in Modern Tibet with five high level representatives of the cultural and educational fields in Tibet Autonomous Region in China on 5 September 2005. The Tibetan participants were: Mr. **Phuchong**, Vice-chairman of the Foreign Cultural Exchange Association of Tibet Autonomous Region, Mr. **Tsonglho Jampa Khedrup**, monk from the Tsonglho Monastery in Riwoqe County, Mr. **Tsewang Jigme**, President of Tibet University, Director of the Academy of Social Sciences of Tibet Autonomous Region, Lama **Losang Dondrup**, Member of the Standing Committee of the Tibetan Buddhism Association, and Mr. **Kelsang Yeshe**, President of the Tibetan Language Ancient Books Publishing House. The picture (*right*) shows the traditional exchange of gifts.





# Black clouds on the e-horizon: the Internet, governance and democracy

By Jens Hoff

*Utopians have long drawn a picture of a future democracy in which democratic dialogue and decision-making would take place through modern communication technology. Once the talk was of cable TV and digital telephones, more recently it has been of the Internet and the World Wide Web. But where once there was optimism that technological development would bring greater democracy, today there is concern about the opposite effect.*

Jens Hoff is a professor in comparative politics at Copenhagen University, where he specializes in the study of information and communication technology (ICT), power and democracy. His research has focused on the importance of ICT for political institutions and processes as well as for political culture and identity. Within the broader field of comparative politics he has done research in governance, and citizen and user participation.

Just a few years ago, proponents of “cyber democracy” could point to how, with the Internet, power was shifting away from governments and media monopolies towards citizens and social movements; there was a steeply increasing number of organizations and debate forums based on (or making good use of) the Internet; and the democratic potential of ICTs was stressed in national ICT plans like those of the Danish Government. Together, all these developments served to cement a myth about the inherently democratic character of ICT. Thus, the more the possibilities of the technology could be unfolded, and the more that PCs and the Internet could be spread to all corners of society, the more democracy would prevail.

However, the advent of the millenium seems to have changed all that. The growing economic and political importance of the Internet has seen it increasingly become the object of different kinds of regulation and control, and especially since 9/11 there has been a dramatic growth in state and commercial censorship. Principally, this has been at the hands of nation states, big companies and civic networks/NGOs.

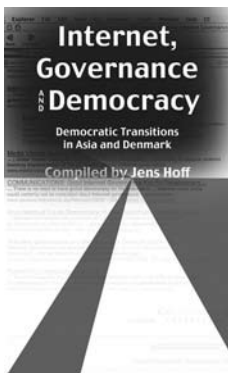
It is well known that many totalitarian regimes censor Internet content by installing filters at the server level to control users’ access. Generally, what filtering programs do is compare parts of or a whole data-file (e.g. a website) with a pre-defined set of rules. The result determines if the user will be allowed to receive and view the file on his/her computer. However, as the known filters are often known to make obvious errors, they risk making matters worse than before. First, they create a false sense of security. Second, important value choices are made by the producers of the filters resulting in a form of political censorship being imposed on an audience with little knowledge of what is going on.

There are many different ways in which commercial actors try to influence and dominate the Internet. Most of these practices are 100 per cent legitimate and normal. However, a number of

existing and especially emerging practices seem to work to undermine important aspects of democracy. Here, recent developments regarding copyright and patents are of democratic concern at the moment.

It is well known that, with the digitalization of a wide range of consumer products (including movies, music and books), pirate duplication and distribution has become a problem. Companies in the affected industries such as the recording industry and the motion picture industry have claimed large losses in potential sales. It is therefore not surprising that the involved companies and their associations have taken increasingly stronger measures to protect their property and preserve copyright in cyberspace.

Naturally, there are good reasons to support copyright measures because, without a system to protect against theft and plagiarism and to ensure appropriate compensation for expended resources, the circulation of ideas central to liberal democratic society could wither. However, the problem seems to be that in cyberspace it is difficult in practice to apply the longstanding principles of protection of intellectual property, and that the measures



**INTERNET, GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY**  
*Democratic Transitions from Asian and European Perspectives*  
Compiled by Jens Hoff (Copenhagen University)

The Internet and other modern information and communication technologies (ICT) challenge existing political thinking, systems and processes all over the world. Whether or not they will lead to more transparency in policy-making and governance – or enhance democratic participation and empowerment – they have certainly provided new opportunities for politicians, governments and civil society. Asia and Denmark differ widely but, in both cases, the Internet acts as a frontrunner of globalization and forces policy-makers, governments and civil society alike to consider how to use the Internet. The book comprises the proceedings of a workshop that for the first time brought together leading specialists from Asia and Denmark who presented their latest research on these issues.

NIAS Press, November 2005, 160 pp., illus.  
Pbk • 87-91114-67-5 • £15.99

taken seem to have a number of unintended consequences, among these restrictions on creativity and self-expression.

Most bothersome from a democratic perspective is, however, the development of so-called digital rights management (DRM) systems, which work on the basis of codes built directly into the communications media themselves (for example into the motherboard of PCs).

A notorious example of copyright protection, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, was passed by the US Congress in 1998. This has been employed as an anti-competitive tool, has stifled legitimate research into cyber-security and encryption technologies, and has undermined "fair use" of products. It has also impinged on academic databases and electronic journals restricting their use, and many believe that the Act will put restrictions on academic work in the public domain.

We could console ourselves with the fact that the Act is only an American law if it were not for the fact that similar heavy-handed laws are being adopted in a number of other countries. Also, the US is pushing the Act in bilateral trade negotiations, and many of its elements are manifest in treaties administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

However, of greater concern from a democratic point of view are the measures currently being taken to protect intellectual property and copyright through technical means, in particular the attempts to build codes into software and hardware to structure permissible communications. Most notable in this respect is Microsoft's Palladium system.

Palladium is a further development of Microsoft's existing DRM system, which works with sound and video files

in Microsoft's Media Player. A recording company or a video producer who wishes to control the use and copying of the product on the buyer's computer can use Microsoft's Media Player. With software from Microsoft the producer can change the sound or video files to encrypted files, which can only run on Media Player if the user has a digital key, something the user has to buy. The producer can regulate the number of times a tune can be listened to or a video can be shown, and whether the sound or video file can be copied or burnt on a CD. This system is very similar to other DRM systems, also those developed on open source platforms. However, a major difference is that Palladium generalizes the DRM system, so that the whole operating system on a given PC will be controlled by a system of rights, where not only sound or video files but also e-mail, databases, text, pictures and other programs are protected against unauthorized use.

If things turn out as Microsoft expects, Palladium will become the standard operating system on the next generation of computers. Seen in the context of the market dominance of central Microsoft products like the Office package and Internet Explorer, Microsoft will be able to decide which programs it is possible to run together with its dominating products. If Microsoft programs are used on most people's computers it means that Microsoft will obtain the possibility of denying other programs access to data protected by Microsoft programs. Thus, Microsoft will have a crucial influence on which programs it will be possible to run on the computers.

If, therefore, the most important information/content providers in society accept

Palladium, it will force citizens to also use Palladium if they want to buy text, sound, or video files, or if they want to send and receive protected e-mails and other information from (for example) public authorities. A worst-case scenario is that even search engines will have to be certified by Microsoft before citizens can make use of them.

In this way Microsoft and its partners will obtain a crucial power to decide about what it is possible to distribute over the Net and what not. Also, Microsoft will be able to tap computers for information, and this goes for citizens, businesses and public authorities.

If Microsoft gets away with patenting Palladium, this will give it power of enormous dimensions in a world where computers and the Internet are increasingly the means of citizens' access to news, entertainment, information, products of various kinds, jobs, private communication, etc. This power will set Microsoft up as a very significant political authority in the information society.

To conclude, what we see is a serious undermining of the Internet as an open, liberal and free public arena. Gradually, limitations on access in the widest sense as both free access to different kinds of hardware/software and information, on privacy, on diversity and on openness have been or are being imposed. This infringement on the Internet as a symbol of liberal democracy is happening in the shadow of "the war on terrorism", and the Internet might be seen as one of the bigger casualties of this war.

**This article is an edited and abridged extract from the author's contribution to the book *Internet, Governance and Democracy* (details opposite). In fairness, we should note that the author had no chance to review this text.**

# Recent visitors



**Wang Fengxian** from the Institute of Sociology, Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, worked at NIAS for two weeks in August, collaborating with NIAS Senior Researcher Cecilia Milwertz on the project Chinese Women Moving Boundaries – Activism, Constraint and Support. Wang Fengxian's stay was financed by a grant from the Danish Social Science Research Council (SSF).



**Marko Keskinen** from the Water Resources Laboratory, Helsinki University of Technology, held a SUPRA Scholarship at the beginning of September. He is working on a Ph.D. project on 'Water and Society – Approach for Analysis and Integration: Experiences from the Mekong River Basin'.



**Kaisa Oksanen**, University of Jyväskylä, likewise had a SUPRA Scholarship in June. Kaisa Oksanen is carrying out a Ph.D. project on 'Civil Society and the Rhetoric of Democracy in Hong Kong'.



*Left:* Professor **Feng Chun**, Beijing East District Party School, **Chen Ling**, Chendou Party School, Sichuan province, Professor **Ma Xiaoyun**, the Central Party School, Beijing and **Yin Zhengyuan**, Uppsala University visited NIAS in August. Cecilia Milwertz (NIAS) is also on the photo.



**Anne Gram Junge** from the Institute of Archaeology and Linguistics, University of Aarhus, held a SUPRA Scholarship at the beginning of September. She is writing an MA thesis on 'Seksualoplysning for unge mennesker i en moderne kinesisk storby, Shanghai'.



**Annelies Ollieuz** from the Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, likewise held a SUPRA Scholarship in June. She is writing an MA thesis on Women in an Isolated Village in East Bhutan.



**Jens Jacob Horst** from the Institute of History and Area Studies, University of Aarhus, held a SUPRA Scholarship in June. His MA thesis is on SARS in China.



**Taina Järvinen** from the Department of Political Science, University of Helsinki, held a SUPRA Scholarship in June. She is carrying out a Ph.D project on Human Rights in Post-Conflict Situations. The Case of East Timor.



Guests from the Nordic Centre at Fudan University in Shanghai visited NIAS in August. Among them were (from left) **Maria Heno**, **Gry Irene Skorstad**, **Chen Yinzhong** (Director) and **Ann Tang**.

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**Liuda Kocnovaite** (left), the Department of Moral and Social Philosophy, University of Helsinki, **Mari Laaksonen**, the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, also the University of Helsinki, each held a SUPRA Scholarship in August. Liuda is carrying out a Ph.D. project on 'Transformation of Ethical Discourse in the Era of Globalisation'. Mari's MA thesis is on 'Peaceful Village and Angry Ancestors. Healing Ritual as an Institution for Conflict Management among the Semai of Malaysia'.



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