MEDIA AND ELUSIVE DEMOCRACY IN CHINA

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Abstract

This paper delineates the multiple meanings of democracy and offers a social historical analysis on media and democratisation in China. Notwithstanding conventional perceptions about a disjuncture between economic liberalisation and political repression in China, the suppression of popular quests for political participation and the deprivation of media freedom for a majority of the Chinese population preceded waves of capitalistic developments in post-Mao China. The notion of democracy, meanwhile, has undergone significant transformations. Many activists in the late 1970s advocated popular and participatory democracy. By 1989, democracy had taken an elitist and liberal character among its advocates. Since the mid-1990s, Chinese discourses on democracy have assumed more complicated dimensions with accelerated capitalist developments, deepened social stratification, and the replacement of students and intellectuals by disenfranchised workers, peasants, and Falun Gong practitioners as the main forces of social contestation. Many regime protesters no longer appeal to the liberal democratic discourse. Some reformers, meanwhile, embrace liberal democracy as a means of popular containment. Today, China's state-controlled and commercialised media are deeply embedded in the established market authoritarian social order. While the Party makes every effort to prevent horizontal communication between disenfranchised groups and established intellectuals confine their debates to elite journals and cyberspaces, the role of Chinese workers and peasants and their voices remain a key problematic for media and democratisation in China.

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Introduction

China has been a site of struggle for democracy for the past century. In 1898, in the last days of the Qing Dynasty, the "One Hundred Day" reform aimed to create the first constitutional government. In 1912, the first republican government was established under Dr. Sun Yat-sen's banner of nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood. "Democracy" and "science" were the rally cries of the May 4 Movement in1919, which gave birth both to liberalism and Marxism in China. The People's Republic, founded in 1949, made a class-based claim to democracy. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was conducted in the name of "mass democracy." When Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978, he promised democratic reforms, rather than simply launching China into a market economy. Since then, the Chinese state, which continues to claim the mantle of a "socialist democracy," has brutally crashed popular democratic struggles, most notably the 1978-1979 Democracy Wall movement and the student-led pro-democracy movement in 1989. The Chinese search for democracy has indeed been "a tragedy of history" (S. Zhao 2000) that offers "lessons of failure" (Nathan 2000).

As Robert Dahl puts it, democracy "has meant different things to different people at different times and places" (1998, 3). The Chinese term for "democracy," *minzhu*, is even more multifaceted. The procedural versus substantive definitions of democracy is best expressed in a 1989 campus poster: "minzhu primarily means a political system that strives for minzhu"(Han 1990, 142). Moreover, the words *min* and *zhu*, which together make the term *minzhu*, both have multiple meanings. *Min* can be either regarded as a corporate term within a populist discourse (the common folk, vis-ŕ-vis officials, as in traditional Chinese discourse) or a class discourse (the people, vis-ŕ-vis class enemies, as in Maoist discourse), or regarded as "individual citizens" in a liberal discourse. *Zhu* can either mean "master" — i.e., being in charge — or "primary," in contrast to "secondary" — i.e., being taken as a priority by, "perhaps somebody who is in charge" (Guang 1996, 422). Drawing upon the different ideological articulations of these two words, there are, according Guang (1996), at least six different conceptions of *minzhu* in the Chinese context. They range from populist and Marxist participatory concepts to the Chinese Communist Party's class-based "people's democracy" that sees the formerly exploited classes as the basis of its power and whose welfare is of primary importance, to a liberal concept emphasising individual rights. To further complicate matters, while *minzhu* is a modern translation of the Western concept of democracy, the notion of *minben* (*ben* means "root," "source"), or the common people as the sole source of state authority with their welfare as the state's primary imperative, was well developed before the birth of Confucius in ancient China (Wang and Titunik 2000). This earlier concept excludes participation and denotes nothing more than a passive people and a benign ruler. While it contradicts liberal and participatory notions of democracy, it has had a profound influence on Chinese history and contemporary Chinese understandings of democracy. Finally, Chinese concepts of democracy are inextricably linked to China's search for its place in the modern world since its humiliating encounter with Western imperialism in the mid-nineteenth century. As best captured in Dr. Sun Yat-sen's political theory, "the three principles of the people," democracy is not an absolute value. Instead it has been articulated with other values, be it nationalism or people's livelihood.

I approach democratisation and the mass media from a broad social historical perspective in this article. I first provide a brief overview of competing and evolving notions of democracy and their concomitant media theories and practices in the People's Republic of China, up to the student movement in 1989. I then outline the main features of the broad social and intellectual transformation, especially the changing character of social contestations and evolving discourses on democracy in post-1989 China, and developments in media theory and structure. I will then briefly relate the Chinese experience to other countries in the conclusion. Rather than begin with a given concept of democracy and a predefined role for media, I focus on competing notions of democracy and their complicated articulations in media theories and practices in China's unfolding social historical process.

If democracy has not triumphed in China, certainly the market has. Indeed, the post-1989 trajectory demonstrates the inextricable link between the development of Chinese capitalism *and* the suppression of popular quests for political participation and the lack of substantive media freedom for the majority of the Chinese people, through overt political suppression, economic marginalisation, or a combination of both. Moreover, as market relations expand, the intellectual establishment increasingly embraces political conservatism, with a liberal notion of democracy taking hold only among some idealistic and probably more farsighted elite reformers as a way to secure Chinese capitalism against threats from within (official corruption) and from below (worker and peasant revolts). Liberal arguments for an independent media system has been enervated as the Party nurtures its propaganda organs into market-oriented media conglomerates, and selectively liberalises the media market for private and foreign media capital, with the middle class constituted as the favoured clients of a state-controlled and market-driven media system. Post-1989 advances on media freedom have been largely limited to a watchdog role for established media, which has multiple articulations with the traditional *minben* concept, the Maoist notion of mass line journalism, and the liberal democratic "checks and balances." It remains to be seen whether the Party can continue to incorporate various social forces and contain their voices within its rubric of "socialist democracy" or whether a liberal conception of democracy will enable China's rising economic elite to secure hegemony over Chinese society if and when they break their bureaucratic cocoon and end the Party's monopoly of power.

The Communist Revolution and the Bankruptcy of "Socialist Democracy"

It is fashionable these days to see Maoist state socialism as an unfortunate detour in China's long march to capitalism, and maybe eventually, liberal democracy. Chinese liberal intellectuals, eager to rejoin China with the mainstream of Western liberal democracies, have long lamented how the project of national liberation ("salvation") has disrupted the project of liberal democratic development ("enlightenment") (Li 1987). Such an analysis, however, shows no understanding of international political economy. *If* only foreign powers had not invaded China. *If* only Chinese capitalist development had been more even and socially more benign so that progressive intellectuals and impoverished peasants in the market peripheries did not find Maoist ideology and practices appealing. Not everybody embraced

the revolution by conviction. Among other social historical reasons, the revolution was "cool" among educated urban youth and it promised food for hungry peasants. The Chinese revolution was not preordained. As historian Joseph Esherick put it, it was "produced by a conjuncture of domestic and global historical processes" (1995, 55). The Maoist "people's democratic dictatorship" was established after China had failed in its experiments with democracy in electoral and liberal forms. Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Republic of China — with all its liberal democratic intentions — disintegrated from without (foreign invasion), from within (warlord rule and the one-party dictatorship), and from below (communist insurgency). While the new regime did not promise liberal freedoms, it did, as sociologist Richard Madsen (2000) notes, seem to promise freedom from external aggression, internal political chaos, and the hunger and preventable diseases that plagued China throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Although such freedoms and understandings of justice rested on a "foundation of constraints," relative to "the chaos, national humiliation, and personal helplessness felt by many before Liberation, the new freedoms seemed genuine and important to many" (Madsen 2000, 312-13).

While the Maoist regime made a claim to democracy on a class basis, with the so-called democratic procedure of democratic centralism (discussion of an issue within the Party followed by unified implementation) and mass line model of political communication ("from the masses, to the masses"), it is illiberal and antidemocratic both in the representative and participatory sense. The class-based claim to state power and the Maoist mass line model of political communication bear similarities with the traditional concept of *minben* because it presumes the people as the source and sole concern of Party power. In theory, the vanguard Party makes policy in the general interest of the people and determines the direction of society by incorporating the people's concerns, their inspirations, and long-term interests. In this model, the people are incapable of articulating their long-term interests. Instead, the Party studies their situations, collects their opinions and turns these into systematic policies. The Party's task is to mobilise the people and to win their support for active participation in carrying out its policies.

Mass media is a key instrument for the Party to implement the mass line — it reports on the people's situations through a bottom up process, provides the raw material for policy making, and once a policy is made, it is promoted among the people. Although there is some form of grassroots access to the media in the amateur correspondent system and a limited watchdog role in the notion of "criticism and self-criticism," there is no concept of the people's right to know. Nor is there a notion of an informed citizenry participating directly in policy formation. This is best reflected in the practice of journalists writing "internal reference reports" for the exclusive decision-making benefits of Party officials. Moreover, just as there is no right of recall and no mechanism by which the people can make the Party accountable, there is no institutional mechanism that ensures media accountability to the people. Media performance is dictated by the Party and shaped by irresponsible and unaccountable Party leaders and their power struggles. Finally, the corporate concept of the "people," initially juxtaposed with "class enemies" — which no longer existed after the "socialist reforms" in the early 1950s — conceals fundamental conflict of interests among the population (Zhao 1998). The interest of urban dwellers, for example, had always been primary and promoted at the expense

of the rural population under Mao's China. Despite post-Cultural Revolution attacks against "egalitarianism" under Mao, Chinese peasants lived under virtual apartheid in their own country, with tens of millions of them dying of starvation in the worst famine in modern Chinese history resulting from the Party's agriculture and redistributive policies. At the same time, the urban population lived under "cradle to grave" welfare state socialism. This apartheid has nothing to do with colour and everything to do with social class.

If the Party's institutional arrangements for "a socialist democracy" was highly problematic to begin with, their bypassing in the name of "mass democracy" created the disaster of the Cultural Revolution and raised profound questions about the prospects for popular democracy in a society without a liberal tradition. Few take Mao's rationale for instigating the Cultural Revolution seriously today. Yet, as historian Maurice Meisner points out, Mao's ideological rationales at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution must be taken seriously "because they were taken seriously by the Chinese people at the time" (1996, 49). To blame Mao alone for whipping up radicalism among the Chinese people either before or after 1949 is to give him too much credit and to denigrate the Chinese people as nothing but dupes. As Terry Eagleton argues in a different context, "successful ideologies must be more than imposed illusions, and for all their inconsistencies must communicate to their subjects a version of social reality which is real and recognisable enough not to be simply rejected out of hand" (1991,15). Thus, "to believe that immense number of people would live and sometimes dies in the name of ideas which were absolutely vacuous and absurd is to take up an unpleasantly demeaning attitude towards ordinary men and women" (Eagleton 1991,12).

Indeed, it is a testimony to the democratic spirit of the Chinese people (elites *and* peasants) that the economic reforms began with philosophical treatises on truth criterion in the elite media and that peasants secretly subverted the Party's agricultural policies in the countryside. Yet, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Mao's radical anti-bureaucratic impulse (articulated within the context of internal power struggles, to be sure) and the thesis that China's post-revolutionary order had created a new bureaucratic ruling class — a functional "bourgeoisie" that was exploiting the masses of workers and peasants by virtue of its political power — resonated with widespread popular resentment against bureaucratic arrogance and privilege in post-revolution China (Meisner 1996, 51). Following Mao's lead and the "four great freedoms" — the right of the people to "speak out freely, air views freely, hold great debates, and write big character posters" — the entire country was politically mobilised. The big character poster, a widely accessible form of public communication, became the medium of choice for rebellious Red Guards, and the medium of symbolic violence against many bureaucrats and intellectual elites. Mass organisations that reflected a myriad socio-economic grievances and divisions within the new social economic order sprouted out of control. In the absence of a liberal tradition and a stable institutional grounding, freedom of organisation and expression quickly unleashed "nihilistic tendencies, senseless brutalities, and frenzies of violence" (Meisner 1996, 52). The masses, once mobilised, quickly became a force of their own and "founded numerous groups to express themselves spontaneously" (Lee 1978, 1). "Civil society" quickly degenerated into a state of anarchy and manifested all its uncivil and barbarian aspects. Mao quickly retreated. The army was sent in to schools and factories to restore order, the Red

Guards were dissipated to the countryside, all societal organisations not under Party control were eliminated, and state bureaucrats and intellectuals were returned to their positions in established state institutions. While the Red Guards became disillusioned and felt betrayed by intra-party power struggles, for the Chinese bureaucratic and intellectual elite, the Cultural Revolution was a nightmare spelling death for any notion of a popular participatory democracy. Just as the *minben* concept is deeply rooted in Chinese political culture, this aversion to popular participation became deeply ingrained in post-Mao elite political culture.

Market Reforms and Evolving Notions of Democracy: From Democracy Wall to Tiananmen Square

The disillusionment with Maoism and the bankruptcy of "socialist democracy" in its official form led to the post-Mao search for democracy, both at the elite and popular levels. The leadership began to pay lip service to the need to perfect "socialist democracy" and introduced limited political reforms within the framework of continuing Party domination: removing leftist ideological constraints through "thought liberation" campaigns in the media, strengthening the National People's Congress system, promoting the legal system, and introducing rural elections. With Deng's encouragement, there were wide-ranging elite debates about democracy around 1979 (Ling and Ma 1999; Nathan 1985). The most important developments, however, have been popular struggles for democracy, symbolised by the 1978-1979 Democracy Wall movement and the 1989 student movement. Democracy, however, meant different things at these two defining moments in post-Mao China. Similarly, although both movements championed press freedom, there are significant differences in their corresponding media theories and practices. This section reviews these two crucial chapters in the post-Mao struggle for democracy and the respective media roles, while the following two sections focus on post-1989 discourse on democracy and developments in the ideological, social and media fields.

Democracy Wall

The 1978-1979 movement was symbolised by "the Democracy Wall" — a 200-yard brick wall in central Beijing where people posted their big- and small character posters. Democracy was the keyword of the movement. As Guang (1996) demonstrates, the discourse on democracy in this movement has a number of characteristics. First, minzhu was a diverse concept, ranging from Marxist interpretations to liberal human rights discourses. Many advocated a Marxist perspective and made references to both the Paris Commune, which was attractive because of the power to elect and recall leaders and the egalitarian wage structure, and the Yugoslavian worker-management system. Activists were concerned with the Party's unchecked power and official privilege (a problem that the Cultural Revolution was supposed to address) and argued for people's power to manage state affairs by electing representatives and supervising leaders at various levels. They condemned the Cultural Revolution for its betrayal of the egalitarian political and social goals, not the goals themselves (Meisner 1996, 131). That is, this Marxist pluralist perspective took "socialist democracy" seriously and it drew upon a Marxist tradition that identifies socialism with free and competitive political institutions (Nathan 1985, 87-106). Another perspective viewed democracy as a system in which every individual

has "an equal political right to fight for the right of existence" (Wei 1987, 298-310). It drew upon the liberal discourse and rejected the class discourse of Maoism and Marxism. Not surprisingly, it was this perspective and its most famous spokesperson Wei Jingsheng that received the most Western media attention. Mixed with the Marxist and liberal discourse is the traditional minben concept. In this view, a good government that deserves the name of democracy is one that maximises the collective welfare of the people. This corporatist and welfarist concept even found expression in Wei's ostensibly individualistic language (Guang 1996, 432).

Despite their diversity, Democracy Wall activists emphasised the substantive dimension of democracy. They were concerned with democratic control of both the political and economic realms. Procedures may be necessary, but they do not define democracy in and by itself. These activists also assumed the unity of interests among the people. While the proletarian class interest was assumed to be the unifying force for Marxist advocates, the liberal perspective simply assumed that democracy would encourage, in the words of Wei Jingsheng, "the formation relatively homogeneous interests" (1987, 305, cited in Guang 1996, 436). Finally, activists advocated a popular and inclusive notion of democracy. Democracy was defined in participatory terms, including intellectuals, workers, and peasants. Activists stressed the importance of economic democracy–the narrowing of wage differentials between state officials and workers, popular control over the allocation of resources and management of production, and welfare provisions for peasants and unemployed workers. They also stressed grassroots democracy as a way to counter blind commandism from the top (Guang 1996, 437-439). Activists not only advocated, but also practised populist and inclusive democracy. The grassroots nature of the movement was characterised by the very presence of peasant petitioners in Beijing, the fact that most of the activists were ordinary workers and urban youth who had been sent to the countryside, and most importantly, the efforts of some activists to organise peasant petitioners and speak on their behalf. For example, Fu Yuehua, a young Beijing municipal worker, led peasant protesters on a march to Tiananmen on January 8, 1979.

An independent press, together with competitive elections, was one of the two reforms radical activists considered essential to the democratisation of Chinese politics (Nathan 1985, 192), and they tried to practice both. While the official media, small in number and highly centralised in structure, served as sites of intra-Party power struggles and instruments of a top-down "thought liberation" campaign on behalf of Deng, it was small media, namely, big and small character posters produced individuals, and unregistered mimeographed journals that carried the democracy movement. The big character poster was a legal means of communication at the time. As a reflection of a dying era and the beginning of a new era, the "four great freedoms," a legacy of the Cultural Revolution, was added to the state constitution at Mao's recommendation in the Fourth National People's Congress in January 1975. This, however, was the same meeting where a dying Zhou Enlai issued his impassioned call for what was soon to be known as the "four modernisations," a project to be implemented by state bureaucrats and the educated elite. The unregistered journals, numbering at least 55 in Beijing and 127 in other cities (comparable to the number of official newspapers at the time), were produced with mimeograph machines and openly sold on the streets. They called themselves "people's publications," rather than "underground" or "dissident" pub-

lications (Nathan 1985, 23-24). They carried political essays by democracy activists, while their editorial teams were the organisational bases for emerging independent civil society organisations, a situation quite similar to the political magazines that provided the organisational and ideological basis for an emerging political opposition in Taiwan (Lee 1994).

Though Deng initially tolerated the Democracy Wall activists and used their critique of the Cultural Revolution and Mao as a lever in his struggle against the leftists to consolidate his power, the movement soon went beyond what Deng had expected. In addition to organised peasants and urban youth protests, leftists fought back on the Democracy Wall with big character posters charging Deng with "capitalist restoration." Marxist and liberal pluralists pushed for an independent press and competitive elections. When Deng launched a military attack against Vietnam in early 1979 to show China's sincere desire for a new relationship with the US, anti-war posters went up on the Democracy Wall too (Ling and Ma 1999, 384-393). By 1980, the rise of Solidarity in Poland had inspired Chinese worker strikes and demands for independent unions (Meisner 1996, 134). Peasant organiser Fu Yuehua was arrested in January 1979, before Wei Jingsheng's arrest in March 1979. The Democracy Wall was closed in December 1979. The "four great freedoms" were deleted from the Chinese Constitution in September 1980. The Party issued an order to suppress all unofficial organisations and publications as of June 1981. *The post-Mao regime consolidated its power by suppressing the most open forum for discussing the direction of the society. The tension between the project of modernisation and a broadly based democracy had played out its first post-Mao episode.*

Tiananmen Square

By 1989, after a decade of economic reforms and intensified interaction with the West, there was a fundamental transformation of the notion of democracy among its core advocates. Marxist and welfarist conceptions had mostly disappeared in the writings of students and intellectuals, who had become the main advocates of democracy. Democracy was defined predominantly as liberal human rights. The substantive view of democracy had given way to a procedural view and a US-inspired system of checks and balances among state institutions. Democracy in the economic sphere was no longer an explicit issue of concern. The frustration was with the distortion of the presumably autonomous and "pure" market logic by the political structure. Economic freedom was seen as a precondition for political freedom and democracy (Ding 2000, 115). While notions of competing interests were still vague and much of the 1989 movement's rhetoric was couched in the name of "the people," the pluralistic nature of social economic interests had been vaguely acknowledged and political pluralism and democracy became intertwined. Most importantly, democracy had assumed an elitist and exclusionary character among its student and intellectual advocates. Like the Party, they considered themselves the guardians of the national and popular interests, charged with the duty of wakening up and enlightening the people. While *they* wanted to be "in" a democratic system, they saw Chinese peasants and workers as neither ready nor suitable for democracy. As Guang put it:

> *The 1989 activists expressed only horror at the prospect of a minzhu system that would give peasants equal voting rights… One of the greatest ironies of*

> *the minzhu movement in 1989, therefore, is that the student activists acknowledged the fundamental (procedural) equality of citizens on the one hand and tried to "keep democracy safe from the masses" on the other* (Gunag 1996, 440).

Liberalism, not democracy, was perhaps the more appropriate term to describe the main thrust of the democracy claims in 1989. As Unger observed, at Tiananmen in 1989, when activists called for democracy, what they meant by the word was freedom: of the press, of assembly, of association, and of an impartial independent courts system. They wanted the government to take into account a wider range of voices, with a widening of decision-making elite to include them as an educated constituency (2000, 90).

An elitist and liberal notion of democracy, however, did not exhaust the intellectual and social content of the 1989 movement. Many established intellectuals, if not students, still spoke in the language of democratic socialism and advocated democracy from a reformist Marxist perspective (Guang 2000, 566). Others, mostly establishment economic policy intellectuals and social scientists, had embraced neo-authoritarianism. Their views diverged from those of the mostly humanistic intellectuals, or the "democratic elite," who advocated political liberalisation and democratic reform for China (Gu 2000; see also Goldman 1999; Lin with Galikowski 1999). Similarly, a "society versus state" dichotomy, dramatised by the "man versus tank" icon, did not capture the complexity of the Chinese social field. The enormous urban-rural chasm was manifest in the virtual absence of peasants — comprising 80 per cent of the population at the time — from the movement and the Chinese political stage (Selden 1993, 226). While city dwellers, notably students and intellectuals, established intra- and interurban networks and were tuned in to international currents, ideas, symbols and forged communication networks with supporters from overseas metropolis, they "failed to establish, indeed never seriously contemplated establishing, organic ties with the countryside" (Selden 1993, 225). Within the urban population, the division between workers and the educated elite was also acute. While students and intellectuals demanded liberal rights and accelerated market reforms, ordinary urban residents and state enterprise workers, angry about double-digital inflation caused by the price reforms and afraid of losing secured state sector jobs, showed considerable apprehension, even hostility, toward the economic reforms. At various points, the views of workers and students reached the level of conscious opposition (Perry 1995, 316-17).

The issue of popular participation in economic decision-making, although no longer included in activists' definitions of democracy, loomed large and explained popular citizen participation in the movement. Opposition to "official profiteering" was a strong theme that drew urban support for the movement. Urban citizens were outraged by the undemocratic ways in which China's bureaucratic strata enriched themselves through the economic reforms, especially the dual-track price system. Mao's Cultural Revolution had taken "a bureaucratic class" as its rhetorical enemy; yet Deng's economic reforms simply accelerated the creation of this class. As noted journalist Liu Binyan wrote, the market economy and open door policy "created more opportunities for officials to use their power for private ends… Within a few years' time, China has produced a new bureaucratic bourgeois stratum"(1989,164). Underscoring this anti-corruption theme was a broad popular con-

cern with economic justice and social equality. As Wang Hui argues:

> *In 1989, why did the citizens of Beijing respond so strongly and actively to the student demonstrations? It was largely because of the so-called double-tracked price system and unequal way in which wage contracts were introduced. These provided the institutional base for growing social stratification, official speculation and large-scale corruption in the late eighties. At that time, the government had twice imposed adventurist reforms on the price system, generating inflation without any benefit to ordinary people. Their earnings suffered from the agreements they were forced to sign by factories, their jobs were at risk. People felt the inequality created by the reforms: there was real popular anger in the air. That is why the citizenry poured onto the streets in support of the students. The social movement was never simply a demand for political reform, it also sprang from a need for economic justice and social equality. The democracy people wanted was not just a legal framework, it was a comprehensive social value* (2000, 80).

In short, by 1989, while part of the intellectual elite still tried to redeem "socialist democracy," another had endorsed an authoritarian developmental state for China. Students and the "democratic elite," the leading voice of the 1989 movement, on the other hand, embraced liberalism and an elitist notion of democracy. Issues of economic justice and social equality, meanwhile, loomed large among urban supporters of the pro-democracy movement.

These different voices and sentiments, of course, did not receive equal representation in the media. While an elitist and liberal notion of democracy was explicitly articulated by protesting students and their intellectual leaders, the broader notion of democracy that Wang Hui pointed to remained latent. Students resorted to big character posters, political sloganeering, and image making (in the most dramatic form of a Goddess of Democracy as a replica of the Statue of Liberty) and relied on a sympathetic international media, with their liberal lenses, to promote their messages. Given the elite and urban nature of the movement, it is not surprising that mainstream domestic media were main participants of the movement themselves (Goldman 1994; Hamrin 1994; Hood 1994; Zhao 1998). This was in marked contrast to their muted role during the Democracy Wall movement a decade ago. The battle against Party censorship at the Shanghai-based *World Economic Herald,* which had been a main forum for elite debates, was an important episode (Hsiao and Yang 1990). So was the contestation over the notorious April 26 *People's Daily* editorial, regarding the political nature of the student demonstrations (Tan 1993; Zhao 1998). Students marched to major media headquarters to demand media freedom. Sympathetic media coverage of student demonstrations, made possible by a deeply divided and paralysed state control structure, helped to legitimate and spread the movement.

If press freedom during the Democracy Wall movement was practised as the freedom of citizens to publish without prior restraint and to post big character posters, by 1989, it had mostly meant the freedom of established media and professional journalists: their freedom from censorship, their role to act as watchdogs over power holders, and their freedom to speak for the "people," rather than for the Party, which is a subversive argument in that it challenges the Party's claim of unity with the people (Zhao 1998, 34-45). At the height of the movement, journal-

ists, inspired by the students, marched on the streets to oppose Party censorship and demanded "dialogue" with the Party's ideological chiefs over media control. By that time, the number of media outlets had proliferated as a result of market liberalisation, and members of the intellectual elite had more or less gained access to the mass media — either through their role as symbolic producers for established media, or through control of newly established semi-independent media outlets loosely affiliated with institutions eligible for publication licenses. *World Economic Herald*, a paper of, by, and for the intellectual elite, was one such example (Li and White 1991; Zhao 1998). The Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao group, by far the most independent intellectual group, on the other hand, assumed *de facto* control of an existing official paper, *Economics Weekly* (Gu 2000, 157-158). Even state television was used to promote reformist ideas among the public — as the influential China Central Television (CCTV) documentary *River Elegy* demonstrated (Gunn 1993; Wang 1996).

In media theory, the most elaborate thesis, advanced by journalism scholar Sun Xupei (1994), called for a "socialist press freedom" within a broad Marxist reformist discourse. Sun's proposed press structure presumed the importance of public media ownership and a dominant role for the Party-controlled press. However, he argued for supplementary space for papers run by various professional and social groups independent of the Party (Zhao 1998, 181-194; see also Lee 2000a, 556). Media theorist Chen Lidan, too, argued for non-party ownership and ideological pluralism on the grounds of the Party's theory of "primary stage of socialism," during which different forms of economic ownership were justified (Zhao 1998, 40). Just as competitive elections were not a rallying cry of the 1989 movement, these arguments for a supplementary independent media sector were much more modest than the cry for an independent press a decade before. The right of citizens to publish newspapers, a central issue in the elite struggle over a press law in the mid-1980s, was raised by a few outspoken intellectuals, but not a dominant issue (Zhao 1998, 39-41). The rights-based discourse entered the press freedom debate predominantly in the idea of the right of the people to be informed. As Hu Jiwei, editor-in-chief of the *People's Daily*, argued: "Freedom of the press for citizens is the right to be informed as masters of the country, their right of political consultation, their right of involvement in government and their right of supervision over the Party and government" (1989, 8). By introducing the "right" concept, Hu not only challenged the Party's traditional mass line paternalism and instrumentalism, but also went beyond then Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang's enlightened paternalism of "letting" people have more information about and participation in the political process, as expressed in the Party's 13th National Congress Report in 1987. But when it came to imagining an alternative press system, Hu fell back on elitism. His ideal newspaper of the future, one run by entrepreneurs who are politicians or have the power to influence politicians (Zhao 1998, 42), essentially endorses what Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2000) have characterised as a form of clientelism between media and politicians. It invokes the image of Latin American media barons who maintained clientelist relations with politicians or Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, the media baron and former Prime Minister who has just won Italy's May 2001 national elections. Although more desirable than Party-controlled media, this vision of instrumentalised private media is far from democratic. Similarly, although the *Herald*'s heroic fight for press freedom made it a martyr of the 1989 movement,

its political orientation was essentially technocratic, rather than democratic (Li and White 1991).

To summarise, *if the suppression of grassroots democracy activists and the "people's publications" preceded the consolidation of the initial economic reforms of the 1980s, the crushing of the 1989 elite and urban based movement and the deprivation of liberal intellectuals' access to established media preceded the deepening of market reforms in the 1990s.* It is perhaps more than a coincidence that Jiang Zemin's censorship of the *World Economic Herald*, which had been patronised by Zhao Ziyang and tried to publish articles to commemorate Hu Yaobang, the Party General Secretary who was deposed because of his soft approach to students and intellectuals in 1986, played a crucial role in his rise to power.

Capitalist Development, Discourses on Democracy, and the Social and Ideological Fields in Post-1989 China

Although a capitalist market is generally assumed to be the necessary precondition for democracy, a market system must be regulated into being, often with violence and accompanied suppression of genuine press freedom. If Maoists were utopian in believing that they could build socialism in China, Chinese liberals are naïve in believing that a capitalist economy can be a free and spontaneous order without state intervention — including brutal repression. As social historian Barrington Moore reminded us, even the rise of the liberal democratic system in England was not as benign as one tends to think. "That the violence and coercion which produced these results took place over a long space of time, that it took place mainly within a framework of law and order and helped ultimately to establish democracy on a firmer footing, must not blind us to the fact that it was massive violence exercised by the upper classes against the lower" (Moore 1993, 29). The suppression and marginalisation of radical ideas, which flourished during the brief years of complete liberty of the press in England between 1641 and 1660, either through state censorship or through economic marginalisation, was part and parcel of this process (Hill 1972). The apparently independent and advertising-supported capitalist press was not the result of a simple unfolding of some libertarian principle, but the result of calculated liberalisation on the part of British reformers (Curran 1978). The principle objective in repealing the Stamp Duty, for example, was "to destroy radical working class journalism" that had posed a threat to the capitalist order (Curran 1978, 55).

In post-revolutionary China, anti-capitalist ideas were the official ideology to begin with. To liberate the Chinese people from this ideology and to replace it with the ideology of the market has been the main agenda of the post-Mao official media. Despite leftist backlashes — most notably the anti-spiritual pollution campaign in 1983 and the anti-bourgeois liberalisation campaign in 1986 — "anti-leftism" was the main Party line throughout the 1980s. By 1989, radical students and liberals, on the right of the Chinese political spectrum, had threatened the very survival of a deeply divided Party state with their protests. Consequently, they became the targets of state repression. The Party blamed liberalised media outlets for partially instigating the 1989 uprising and launched a media purge afterwards. Many media outlets were shut down, outspoken journalists were removed from their posts, and for two years, leftist "anti-peaceful transformation" discourse and

debates about the political nature of economic reforms dominated the media and threatened to turn back the market reforms (Zhao 1998). But Deng quickly reversed this by calling for accelerated market reforms and a closure to elite debates on the capitalist or socialist nature of the market reforms. According to Deng, the rightist tendency, which was the target of post-1989 purges, was not the main problem. Instead, leftism — i.e. opposition to market reforms and greater integration with global capitalism — was a more problematic force. Deng's ideas — made in informal speeches at a time when he no longer had any official posts within the Chinese Party state and first published by Shenzhen and Shanghai newspapers — soon became Party policy and effectively "reenergized China's capitalist revolution after Tiananmen" (Pei 1994, 84). If 1989 witnessed the state's crushing of the liberal and democratic forces, 1992 marked the triumph of the market facilitated by the undemocratic intervention of an extra-state political power — Deng Xiaoping as an unaccountable individual.

The suppression of liberal and democratic forces in 1989, and the marginalisation of the Party's establishment leftists and the closure of elite debates about the political nature of the reforms in 1992, preceded the state's all-out embrace of the market in the 1990s and the economic reforms implemented throughout the decade, including price reforms, the introduction of the stock market, and large-scale privatisation of state-owned enterprises (SOE). If reform in the 1980s was change "without losers," this was "emphatically not the case" in the 1990s (Naughton 2000, 50). The deepening of the market reforms means the ruthless extraction of the agriculture surplus, and in the urban areas, "the subjection of labor to market forces has created a clear class of losers, most apparent in the large number of SOE workers laid off since 1993" (Naughton 2000, 50). *This could not have been accomplished without state repression of the freedom of the press, association, and assembly.* As Wang Hui put it, … "after the armed crackdown on the June Fourth movement people lost their chance to protest and price reform introduced at gunpoint became a success. All out marketisation in China did not originate from spontaneous exchange but from acts of violence — state repression of the social movement" (2000, 80).

With the triumph of the market reform agenda within the post-1992 Party state, the media launched another round of "thought liberation" from leftist ideology. They promoted the ideology of the market and championed market-oriented government policies, entrepreneurial role models, and successful businesses. Under a repressive bureaucratic state, neither the media nor the public played any meaningful democratic role in checking official profiteering and reforms at state-owned enterprises (Zhao 2000a). As a result, official corruption, which was already the cause of popular concern before and during the 1989 movement, became rampant. The news media, which championed themselves as voices of "the people" and as watchdogs of official corruption before 1989, became highly corrupt themselves. The post-1992 Party decision to wean them off state subsidies and intensified market competition fuelled by the proliferation of media outlets further subjected media outlets and journalists to the power of money. They would give media access to those who can afford it, through advertising contracts, sponsorships of specific media content, or outright bribes (Zhao 1998, 52-93).

In short, *the entrenchment of a market economy in China occurred on the heels of the brutal repression of a popular urban uprising in 1989, of which freedom of press was a*

major rallying cry, and the suppression of elite debates about the direction of the country in 1992. The resulting social order, not surprisingly, is highly unjust and sharply polarised. As He Qinglian puts it, it is a "pyramidal social structure" (2000, 94), with a tiny and highly overlapping and interlocking political and economic elite (7 million people, or 1% of total workforce), an "underdeveloped middle class" (111.3 million people, or 15.8% of total workforce), and the vast majority of Chinese workers, rural migrants, and peasants at the bottom (480 million people, or about 69% of total workforce). At the margins of this system are some 100 million or about 14% of the total available workforce that are either unemployed urban workers or pauperised peasants. In total, "about 80% of the Chinese people live either at the bottom or on the margins of society" (He 2000, 94). This is not the ideal middle class dominated "diamond" shape social structure that liberal advocates of a market economy such as He had hoped for China. As the liberal narrative goes, a market economy creates a middle class, which will be the pillars of democracy. The reality, however, is that the "middle" class is a minority at the top of the Chinese social hierarchy. Whether they will be aristocrats relying on state repression to defend their privileges or democrats willing to share the fruits of economic development with the majority of the Chinese population remains an open question (Zhao 2001).

This new social structure sets the context for understanding the ideological and social fields, as well as discourses on democracy in post-Deng China. The Communist Party, claiming to be "the vanguard of the working class," has created the new proletariat. The nominal "socialist" state, meanwhile, has evolved into an authoritarian developmental state. The Party is thus caught in profound political and ideological contradictions, not to mention the practical irony of Party members turning into capitalists and capitalists joining the Party. The following comment, reportedly made by Li Peng, widely perceived as the "butcher of Tiananmen," underscores the nature of this challenge: "…a vast number of laid off workers have gone on the streets to demonstrate and to protest, demanding jobs and livelihoods. These phenomena occurred in the new China, how can we claim the superiority of socialism? The Communist Party is a party of the working class. If the workers are laid off and unemployed, how can such a Party still be leading?" (Luo 1999, 6-9). Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin's theory of "three representatives" has been a major theoretical manipulation aiming at addressing this challenge. Articulated in February 2000, Jiang redefined the Party as "a representative of the developmental imperative of China's advanced productive force, a representative of the forward direction of China's advanced culture, and a representative of the fundamental interest of Chinese people at the broadest level." Jiang reportedly intends to replace this theory with the existing definition of the Party as "the vanguard of the working class" in the Party's Constitution at the forthcoming 16th Party Congress. According to a well-placed Party theoretician whose name I do not want to disclose, this theory signals Jiang's endorsement of social democracy (personal interview, Beijing, December 17, 2000). That is, rather than reinventing itself after being removed from power, as in East Europe, the Communist Party in China is proactively shedding its communist pretensions and redefining itself as an all-inclusive social democratic party that embraces capitalism with a human face. Though this development is controversial and ideological wars within the Party are once again being fought through internal meetings and unpublished petitions (Xiao

2001), it is clear that the Party is struggling to break out of its own ideological cocoon and abandoning its class-based claim to democracy.

At the same time, with a whole generation of reformist Marxists and liberals either suppressed at home or in exile, the post-1989 Chinese intellectual field has gone through a rapid ideological fragmentation. Various ideological positions (see Li 2000) have found their way in underground publications, limited-circulation controversial books and elite magazines sponsored by quasi-independent research institutions and think tanks, overseas Chinese publications, and increasingly, the Internet. The neo-authoritarians have been absorbed by a developmental state to serve as its technocrats or ideologues. Its most reactionary elements reflect widespread urban middle class fear of the "mob"–expressed in mainstream media fear of the "blindly floating population" from the rural areas, in their capitalisation of the state's "strike hard" anti-crime campaigns, and more explicitly in a popular book by Wang Shan (1994), who suggested solving the "peasant problem" by locking them up in the land again, just as Mao did.

The liberals are positioning themselves as the organic intellectuals of the new elite. But they are divided. Inspired by Frederick Hayek, the neo-liberals oppose state ownership and advocate privatisation and marketisation without any doubts or limits, and see them as the only route to prosperity and democracy in China. Freedom, especially economic freedom, and the entrenchment of private property rights are their core objectives, while democracy is often a rhetorical add-on, if it is in their vocabulary at all. Some declare that "true liberalism is a form of conservatism"(Wang 2000, 84), while others privately believe that the interest of workers must be sacrificed for China to obtain "prosperity and freedom" (Xiao 1999,164). A liberal democratic position, meanwhile, deplores the unequal social order resulting from the reforms and advocates Western-style democracy to go along with a market economy in China. This position views democracy as a means of social containment and as a way for the elite to "protect its own position in the long run":

> *A democratic system is one that can best secure long-term stability, because it can best coordinate the interests of different social strata, especially when conflicts between different social strata are acute at times of economic slowdown. Transition to a democratic system is best taken as a proactive measure by a society's dominant group when they can still control the situation and economic conditions are still relatively good… the opportunity for China is still rather good, so long as its dominant group or elite group have sufficient farsightedness* (Wang 1999, 218-19).

Since democracy is a form of class compromise and a means of popular containment, popular participation is to be avoided. Scared of another Cultural Revolution-type mass mobilisation, and reflective of the elitist notion of democracy among the 1989 activists, some liberal democrats endorse political apathy and reject popular political participation. Wang Dan, for example, see "political indifference" among the public not only as "inevitable in a democracy" and but also not a "bad thing" ("A Dialogue"1999, 93). The frustration for these post-reform liberal democrats is that, "the current power elite in China is not only incapable of thinking of the interests of other social classes, it cannot even think of the long-term interest of its own class" (He 2000, 95-96).

The Party's traditional left, at the same time, continues to oppose privatisation and views China's deepened engagement with capitalism as de facto "capitalist restoration." They reject Western-style liberal democracy and defend the Party's monopoly of political power. Not surprisingly, they have charged Jiang's "three representative" theory as being "revisionist" (Xiao 2001). Rather than defending Marxist and socialist doctrines in theoretical terms, as was the case in the initial years of the reform, however, leftists have tried to incorporate popular discontent against the adverse consequences of capitalist style market reforms into their recent writings (Chen 1999; for original leftist writings, see, Shi 1997; Mei 1999).

Finally, a New Left, inspired by Western Marxist and post-modernist thinking, has begun to develop a critique of contemporary Chinese capitalism within the context of globalisation and have become interested in populist and participatory democracy. Wang Hui, a prominent new left intellectual in China, argues: "Political democracy will not come from a legally impartial market, secured by constitutional amendments, but from the strength of social movements against the existing order, and the interaction between these movements, public discussions and institutional innovation" (2000, 79-80). To the horror of liberals, especially neo-liberals, some have even begun to talk about "economic democracy," that is, popular control and equality in the macro- economic structure and workers' participation in micro-economic management, and "cultural democracy," which underscores a celebration of popular culture, a rejection of the cultural elitism of Chinese intellectuals, and a critique of Western, especially American, cultural domination (He 1998).

Just as the ideological field is being reconstituted, the protagonists of social contestations have also been recast in reformed China. With the re-enfranchisement of the urban educated elite into the middle class strata, and their incorporation into a semi-autonomous public sphere based on small and elite media outlets sustained by both state and market forces, struggles for subsistence and social justice by groups at the bottom of Chinese society, particularly laid off workers in state enterprises and overtaxed peasants in economically depressed rural areas, have become the main form of social contestation since 1992 (Zhao and Schiller 2001). The Falun Gong movement, which cuts across various social classes, meanwhile, has demonstrated the cultural bankruptcy of both the state and the liberal elite's top-down modernisation and enlightenment mission. Unlike the protesters of the Democracy Wall and 1989 periods, neither protesting workers and peasants, nor Falun Gong activists speak the language of liberal democracy. The majority of protesting workers and peasants make subsistence-based moral economy claims and target local mangers and officials for violating state policies and their legal rights. Yet some of them, disillusioned with a Party that still claims to rule in their name, have re-embraced socialism and a radical class discourse on their own with slogans such as "down with political and economic exploitation and oppression," "yes to socialism, no to capitalism," and "protecting workers' class interest" (Yue 1998; Perry 1999; Chen 2000). Moreover, perhaps as a backlash against an elite-dominated discourse on democracy during the 1989 movement, protesting workers in north-east China, according to Dai Qing, a prominent Chinese intellectual, even put up the sign "we do not want democracy" during a protest (personal conversation, November 17, Vancouver). Though neo-authoritarians and the liberal elite may regard this as proof that workers are not ready for democracy, this may be a desperate strategy to solicit state sympathy. It is also likely that the workers feared

that the kind of democracy promoted by China's elites may not deliver them unpaid salaries, food, and jobs, and they were trying to present an agenda that is different from that of the students in 1989. Similarly, the popularity of Falun Gong underscores a popular yearning for spirituality, identity, and community, even pure physical fitness (in contrast to state and commercial sponsored spectator sports — highlighted by the Chinese state's Olympic bids) that goes beyond a narrow definition of electoral democracy. In addition to political and economic rights, broader cultural issues are at stake.

Mass Media and Popular Expression in Reformed China: Political Control and Economic Marginalisation

If the mass media were at the centre of the political struggle in 1989, the dual imperative of state control and market forces has significantly recast their role in post-Deng China. To put it simply, the media are now deeply entrenched in the dominant political economic order as a lucrative and protected sector of state capitalism. They neither connect elite debates with the mass audiences — as was the case with *River Elegy* in 1988, nor are they linked with social movements in any sympathetic way — as was the case with their involvement in and supportive coverage of the 1989 movement. On the one hand, Falun Gong is to be condemned — the media, with its modernist and rationalist thrusts, had antagonised the group long before the state declared it public enemy No. 1, and the issue of media representation was what brought the group to the Party headquarters in the first place. On the other hand, worker and peasant protests do not happen as far as the media are concerned. Several important structural changes in the media sector in the 1990s have contributed to this shift.

First, accelerated commercialisation and state-engineered conglomeration and market consolidation have transformed traditional Party organs into self-interested economic entities, which "have little reason or incentive to offend the state, since they can profit from the market as long as they ritualistically chant the chorus of official dogma" (Lee 2000b, 17). Similarly, although there are wide variations in their incomes, depending on where one works and how corrupt one is, journalists as an occupational group have become some of the most well-remunerated state-sector employees and are well-secured in their middle class status in reformed China. Like the middle class as whole, they may harbour more liberal views than officials at the Party's propaganda department and thus potentially face an ongoing censorship battle with Party propaganda officials. Yet their increased economic and social isolation from the urban working class and the "floating" and rural populations are turning them into a "silent partner" (Kemenade 1998, 401) of the Party in sustaining a marketised and Party-dominated media system (Zhao 2000b).

Second, the structural transformation of the state-controlled and advertising-based media industry in the past decade has meant that a minority of the population, namely the tiny political and economic elite and the mostly urban-based middle class, has been constituted as the most favoured media clients. Although television has a wide reach, the print media, arguably a more important means of political communication in China, remains elite oriented — there are only 35.7 copies of daily newspapers per 1000 people in 1998 (*China Journalism Yearbook 1999*, 617). Even the most successful "mass appeal papers" reach only a small percentage

of the urban population. Shanghai's *Xinmin Evening News*, by far the largest circulation urban papers, for example, had a subscription of less than 1.7 million in 1998 (*China Journalism Yearbook 1999*, 635). Regional disparity in newspaper consumption is staggering: the average adult in Shanghai spent 139.12 yuan on newspapers in 1999, compared with 10.48 yuan in Nanchang, the capital city of Jiangxi Province (China Publishing Science Research Institute 1999, 17). Small-circulation business and consumer-oriented media outlets proliferate and compete with each other for the same affluent middle class consumers in core urban areas. Many journalists, and more and more media outlets, are dedicating themselves to the informational and entertainment needs of the "new rich." Liu Yong, a senior Guangzhou journalist, wrote: "A voice had gained increasing strength by the early 1990s in the Chinese media: China's media have done an adequate job in serving the Party and the proletarian mass. With the stratification of society, different media outlets are needed for different social strata" (2000, 33).

This is in sharp contrast with the media reform rhetoric of "speaking for the people" in the 1980s. If the idea of serving the audience was an oppositional discourse in the 1980s (vis-ŕ-vis serving the Party), serving the middle class has become the operating principle of an increasingly marketed-driven and competitive media system. There are few papers for workers, peasants, and women. Those that do exist have limited editorial independence and have declined both in circulation and institutional power in the 1990s, as they do not constitute premier advertising vehicles (Zhao 2000b). Although the Internet, much celebrated for its democratising potential, reached some 20 million users by fall 2000, these users are mostly affluent city dwellers whose concerns are far removed from the majority of the population (Zhao and Schiller 2001). The undefined corporate concept of the "people" has been reconstituted either as a mass television audience whose huge numbers compensate for their lack of individual purchasing power and are served with a diet of state propaganda and mass entertainment, or assumed an explicit class character — the middle class — in the print media and especially the Internet. The new logic of the system was clearly articulated by Liang Jianzhong, a deputy director of the Guangzhou Daily Group, the Party's most successful press conglomerate. Liang said that his paper reaches the white-collar urban middle class and is thus a more attractive advertising vehicle, while his rival's paper, sponsored by another Party-controlled conglomerate, reaches the "low classes." Consequently, he was confident that if the papers were left to the market alone, his paper would have driven the other out of the market (personal interview, August 21, 1998, Guangzhou). If the Chinese state "has made its choice between the elite and the majority of the people" (He 2000, 97), so has its media system. Though liberal media scholars continue to describe how the market has undermined the Chinese "propaganda state" (Lynch 1999), they have been generally silent about the class orientations of the new media structure. Nor are observers inside China expected to pierce through the thin veil of the official ideology of "serving the people." Liu Yong's book *Media China* (*Meiti Zhongguo*), which describes the reformed media's new market imperatives in unusual frankness, was quickly banned after its publication in 2000.

Third, with the state's active nurturing of media conglomerates as platforms of an information economy, there is little room for new and independent media outlets to enter the market, even if the Party loosens up its structural control. As media scholar Zhang Ximing commented, arguments for the right of individuals to pub-

lish newspapers in the 1980s appeared naïve and impractical by the 1990s, as the cost of market entry has increased tremendously (personal interview, August 21, 1998, Beijing). Rather than proposing a supplementary independent newspaper sector to state-controlled media, as Sun Xupei did in the late 1980s, Zhang calls for several share-holding newspapers and periodicals in which the state has a controlling interest, while individuals or other entities participate in their establishment and operation. According to Zhang, this not only materialises citizens' right to press freedom in the Chinese constitution, but also ensures the relative social and operational independence of some media outlets (1999, 267). By conceding the state's controlling role in these publications, Zhang's proposal illustrates the narrowing of reformist discourse on press freedom in China. As the Party consolidates its media power amidst intensified pressures of globalisation, the Chinese media market is increasingly the playing field of domestic and transnational media conglomerates and individuals with deep pockets. Yang Lan, the former TV celebrity turned founder of a Hong Kong-based speciality satellite television channel aimed at the Chinese market, highlights the level of capital necessary for entering the Chinese television game: "I Am Proud: We Have Lost Only HK63 Million" (Jiang 2001, B1). Since the mid-1990s, the Chinese State has been calculatedly liberalising the operational terms for selected Party-controlled media outlets so that they could expand their market shares and drive politically dubious and economically inefficient operations out of the market (Zhao 2000b). As if this was not enough, the state is consolidating Party-controlled media operations by merging them with smaller publications in the non-party sectors through a quiet restructuring process in which major central and provincial Party organs are having the "last dinner" of gobbling up many marginal papers (Liu 2000, 395-411). The process of conglomeration in the broadcast sector has been in full swing since 2000. Bolder liberalisation measures are under consideration. According to one authoritative source, Vice Primer Li Lanqing has ordered researchers to study three "what ifs" in media policy: What if foreign capital is allowed into the media sector? What if the press licensing system is replaced with a post-registration system? What if non-media capital is allowed into the media sector? (personal interview, November 12, 2000, Beijing). In fact, just as domestic non-media capital has already established a significant number of middle-class oriented newspapers, magazines, and television production studios, foreign capital, from the International Digital Group to News Corporation, have been positioned in the Chinese media market through strategic joint ventures and venture capital investments — mainly in information technology publications, business and consumer magazines, upscale and speciality satellite television markets, and Internet portals and website. These cream-skimming media outlets have put further upward market pressure on a domestic media system that is already skewed toward the affluent upper middle class.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, the mass media have been prevented from serving as vehicles of communication across different social groups. If democracy is to come from interactions among social movements and public discussions (Wang 2000), this is precisely the role that the media are not playing. As a vanguard party which came to power through a conscious strategy of forging a counter-hegemonic bloc with oppositional political and social elements, the Party is making every effort to prevent horizontal communication between social groups and the formation of alliances among various oppositional forces to its rule — es-

pecially the circulation of news about peasant and worker unrests in the mass media and linkages between politically active intellectuals and protesting workers and peasants (Zhao and Schiller 2001). The Party, given its own political history, knows all too well the importance of communication in the mobilisation of social movements. The formation of the Falun Gong movement, which effectively combines the uses of the Internet, printing, and audio-visual media with extensive traditional organisational and interpersonal networks, shows how an oppositional discourse can spread in the digital age. The fate of journalist and popular author He Qinglian is also illustrative. Though He was tolerated for her exposure of corruption in the late 1990s, her work is no longer to be mentioned by the media, because her above-cited article on China's new class structure, published in a small local journal, was guilty of "inciting antagonism between the different strata of Chinese society" ("Preface" 2000, 68). He, however, had stated clearly that unlike Mao, who wrote a similar article in the 1920s to identify the agents, allies and targets of a social revolution, her intention was simply to bring home to her compatriots some unquestionable Chinese realities ("Preface" 2000, 68). Indeed, with their incorporation into the dominant economic and social strata, neither liberals nor leftists on the Chinese intellectual establishment have the intention or the opportunity to organise and mobilise discontented workers and peasants (Xiao 1999, 163-64). While political censorship matters, it is by no means clear that, even if let alone, journalists would not suppress news about social unrests out of concern for social stability. Mass entertainment, the mobilisation of consumption, and stock analysis are politically safe and financially more rewarding.

Arguments for an independent press and "socialist press freedom" are now relics of the concerns from the last century. With the increased pressures of international competition amidst China's anticipated WTO membership, the urgent issue for many established media theorists and media managers is not about how to democratise state-controlled media institutions, but how to capitalise them and strengthen their market power, in order to survive the international market. A "watchdog" role for the Party-controlled, marketised, and conglomerated media has been the main theoretical and practical development since the mid-1990s (Zhao 2000a). After the Party targeted the media for its first anti-corruption initiatives, the media are now called upon to play a watchdog role over ruthless local officials and heartless businesses that victimise individuals in the lower social strata. This role is exercised carefully and delivered in commercially attractive morality tales by what I have called "watchdogs on Party leashes," best illustrated by CCTV's *Focus Interviews* and *Oriental Horizon* (Zhao 2000a). It expresses a number of imperatives: the leadership's anti-corruption drive, the media's legitimisation and commercial needs, a middle-class reformist impulse, the professional ethos of journalists, the general desire for social justice and morality, and a voice for the voiceless in the system. It articulates with various discourses on democracy: the Party's claim to speak for the people; the populist and *minben* juxtaposition of the "people versus the official;" and the liberal notion of "checks and balances." But this type of watchdog journalism has many theoretical and practical limitations and has been gained at the expense of a potentially more substantial democratic role for the media (Zhao 2000a). Whereas calls for an independent media system during the Democracy Wall movement fundamentally challenged the social structure, and media critiques of the 1980s called for political democratisation as a solution to systemic

problems, watchdog news programs of the 1990s have taken the "liberal" turn by individualising and moralising essentially social and structural problems. Thus, they "avoid a critical interrogation of the overall social structure" (Xu 2000, 646). To put it simply, although watchdogs on Party leashes may defuse social tensions, they cannot be expected to shoulder the task of Chinese democratisation. Nor it is likely that the Rupert Murdochs will lend a supportive hand. Indeed, with increased pressures of international competition, Chinese media watchdogs may ended up speaking with an even more privileged accent and making attacks more selectively in their own political or commercial interests, or in the interest of advertisers' desire to reach particularly attractive audiences. CCTV's new and improved *Oriental Horizon*, launched in late 2000, has already reflected this tendency with its upscale orientation.

Conclusions

Democracy remained elusive in China as the world entered the new century. Liberal democracy seems to have taken hold among some members of the Chinese elites after two decades of economic reforms and there is the possibility that village-level elections, implemented by the Party as a means of popular containment, may creep up to higher administrative levels (Unger 2000). Yet bubbling to the surface are various repressed discourses, expressed through class concerns, moral economy claims, xenophobic nationalism, and other non-liberal democratic positions. Chinese discourses on democracy and forms of social contestation remain diverse and continue to be entwined with economic, social, and cultural issues at the turn of the new millennium. The Chinese struggle for democratisation remains unparalleled by historical comparisons. The first domestic reform movement was not powerful enough to copy Meiji Japan's successful transition to a modern constitutional state. Colonialists failed to secure full control of China and the Chinese struggle for national independence did not lead to a democracy, as was the case in India. Being on the other side of the Cold War, there was no opportunity for China to be part of the Cold War-conditioned economic development in East Asia, which resulted in middle class-led democratic transitions in Taiwan and Korea. The "mass democracy" of the Cultural Revolution was a nightmare. Democracy Wall and the "people's publications" in the late 1970s did not lead to the creation of a political opposition, as was the case in Taiwan. Liberal control of the mainstream media in the late 1980s was limited and the reformists inside the Party failed to mobilise enough of a social force in a decisive battle for democratisation in 1989 — as was the case in Russian and East Europe.

Many may wish the Taiwan path for the mainland. But among other things, two important conditions cannot be replicated. First, Taiwanese nationalism, which played a pivotal role in Taiwan's democratisation, was a progressive and oppositional discourse. This is not the case in the mainland. Indeed, it has been the mainstream media and the Party State that claim the mantle of nationalism, while appropriating and containing popular nationalism. Second, like Korea, Taiwan's economic development benefited from a Cold War international political economy, particularly a US that treated it as a client state and unilaterally opened its market to its products, allowing it to develop under a form of welfare authoritarian capitalism that created a large middle class. Post-WTO China does not have this international environment — it would be lucky if China is not driven by a more mili-

tant US into a second Cold War, with the state's capacity to address economic and social issues further diminished. Ongoing US-China political and military tensions — from the US bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999 to the spy plane incident in early 2001 — underscore this point. The Chinese elite has always looked down upon India's democracy (if China's famine victims had a voice, they might have spoken in favour of India, which has not had a famine in its post-colonial history) and loved Singapore. China's emerging state controlled media conglomerate structure parallels the media system in Singapore in many ways. But Singapore, being a tiny trade-oriented city-state, has few industrial workers and peasants, while China has a *billion*. While intellectuals may continue to debate democracy in elite domestic and overseas journals and cyberspaces, the role of Chinese workers and peasants and their voices remain a key problematic for media and democratisation in reformed China.

Acknowledgements:

This paper was produced for the "Democratisation and the Mass Media" Conference organised by the European Institute for Communication and Culture, Bellagio, Italy, April 9-13, 2001. I wish to thank conference organisers Colin Sparks and Slavko Splichal for their encouragements and the opportunity to learn from other conference participants. The title phrase "elusive democracy" was borrowed from Lei Guang (1996).

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