RETHINKING POLITICAL ECONOMY: IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY IN GREATER CHINA

CHIN-CHUAN LEE

Abstract

Based on the evidence from Greater China, this essay suggests two theoretical propositions regarding the media's democratic potential. First, the liberal-pluralist approach to political economy, with its focus on the critique of the state, may be useful in analysing the authoritarian media in Third World countries and former communist countries; in contrast, the radical-Marxist approach, with its focus on the critique of the capital, may be used to analyse the liberal-capitalist media. Specifically, the liberal approach goes a long way toward explaining the increased degree of "negative freedom" for the marketised authoritarian media in China, the martial-law media in Taiwan, and the Hong Kong media in the shadow of an authoritarian sovereign. Secondly, in all of the three transitional systems, in fact, both of these approaches may intertwine and coexist uneasily and paradoxically. In the PRC, the state still maintains tight reins on news media, but it must negotiate with the market forces. The relative triumph of representative democracy in Taiwan has made the liberal perspective less (albeit still enormously) relevant, while ushering in the radical approach to account for the impact of media conglomeration on limiting the range of expression. On the other hand, as Hong Kong's liberal media order and mature capitalism are being threatened, concern for media professionalism and freedom has come to the fore. Four more unresolved theoretical issues are also briefly outlined.

Chin-Chuan Lee is Professor at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, email: leexx010@umn.edu.

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Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

Globalisation, the end of the cold war, the dramatic political and economic change in the former Soviet bloc and other authoritarian countries of Asia and Latin America, as well as the world-wide growth of media studies have called for a reorientation of western-based media studies. The Anglo-American literature on the political economy of the media "tend(s) to be indifferent to comparative studies" and "is oddly insensitive to (authoritarian) political and legal determinants of news production" (Schudson 1991). Downing (1996), in a major work on Russia and Eastern Europe, echoes that media theories derived from the traditional milieu of affluent, industrialised, and politically stable nations, have failed to account for the dynamics of regime change and democratic consolidation. Sparks (1997; 2000) also questions the traditional sterile conceptions about the relationship between political authority and market forces. In an ambitious effort, Curran and Park (2000) have assembled media scholars from different countries to address four central questions: (a) the relation of the media to the power structure in society, (b) control over the media, (c) media influence on society, and (d) the effect of media globalisation and new media on the media system and society. The case studies in Gunther and Mughan (2000) compare the role of the media in six stable democracies (the United States, Great Britain, Japan, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands) and four "democratising" countries (Spain, Chile, Russia, and Hungary).[1] In the last issue of this journal, I (Lee 2001a) tried to debunk some of the cliché, stereotypical "Orientalist" discourses (Said 1993; 1994) which tend to reduce the dynamic and complex interplay of media and democratisation in Asia into such sterile and unfruitful conceptual fundamentalism as "Asian values" or Confucianism. I also tried to refocus three problematics — the nature of democracy, the role of market, the global and the national — needed for building a comparative and comprehensive horizon of vision across the Asian mediascape.

It is generally acknowledged that mass media *should* serve, promote, and participate in democracy. But empirically, the media *can* both promote and undermine democracy. Perfect democracy has not existed; nor will it. Different perspectives offer divergent imaginings of democracy. Much of the debate about the relationships between media and democracy seems to have hinged on the various normative standards taken to make judgements as well as the different social contexts in which such writing is embedded. Typical of the post-modern view, for example, Dahlgren (2000) eloquently argues that citizens in Western countries have been losing interest in macro-institutional representative politics characterised by long-term allegiance to the nation-state, parliament, or political parties. Instead, they have channelled their energies to micro-lifestyle, everyday, and identity politics — that is, politics of less predictable, temporary alliances based on class, gender, and racial differences that has closer personal meanings. In stable democracies, some critics (such as those found in Gunther and Mughan 2000) similarly maintain that the ever-trivialising media, in pandering to commercial pressure, have contributed to public disillusionment and ignorance.

On this point, I am inclined to concur with Said (1983, 329) when he observes that in the non-West, modernity itself is "still far from exhausted, still a major challenge in a culture dominated by *turath* (heritage) and orthodoxy." The view that modernity may have different emancipatory potentials in the West and in the non-West seems broadly consistent with a quote from Marx and Engles in the *Communist Manifesto*: "The weapons that served the bourgeoisie in bringing down feudalism will now be used against the bourgeoisie itself."If institutional politics is indeed wearing out its vitality in the West as Dahlgren (2000) suggests, it certainly is continuing to emanate a vast liberating and empowering potential for people who live under state terror. If Western citizens can afford to detest representative democracy, it is because they can engage in lifestyle politics without fear of losing their well-secured right to representation. If such entitlement to citizen participation can no longer be taken for granted, I doubt that post-modern celebration of lifestyle politics would make much sense. It is also questionable if popular democracy can succeed without a solid foundation of liberal institutions.

By the same token, when critical Western writers face widespread public acceptance of the status quo, they ask: "Why do people not rebel more often than they do?" (Downing 1996, 230). What people are called upon to rebel against, I believe, should not be representative democracy itself, but its inadequacy. Representative democracy may not be good enough, but it is not something evil. Critical Western writers stand at the margin of liberal or social democracies in Western Europe and North America, aiming to pursue an idealistic "third way" that is rebellious against the exploitative capitalist way or the repressive Leninist way (Gouldner 1980). One of the most enchanting "third ways" is undoubtedly Jürgen Habermas's concept of the "bourgeois public sphere" (1989). Curran (1991; 2000) uses the concept to prescribe a democratic media system incorporating the civic sector, the professional sector, the social market sector, and the private enterprise sector. Carey (1997), an idealist-pragmatist, also advocates the "recovery of public life" — admittedly, without vouching for its historical truth — to stimulate "imagination of a possible politics." In the post-cold war context in which Leninism has proven bankrupt and capitalism has been a driving force behind the globalising process, Giddens (1994) has constructed, from the liberal left, a new "third way" of social democracy that seeks to go beyond representative democracy and the political domain.

Curran (1991), in a seminal essay on media and democracy, calls for giving liberal conceptions "a decent funeral" because the legacy of old saws "bears little relationship to contemporary reality." But this would be a premature rather than decent funeral, because a large part of the world is not yet so "liberal." Hallin (2000) aptly observes: "The triumph of neo-liberalism means that the liberal perspective will be considerably less relevant." In much of the non-West, liberal institutions have not been fully developed, and harsh authoritarian control of the media is a deeply entrenched fact of life. Obesity and anorexia are exclusively the problems of the rich; the poor suffer from undernourishment and malnutrition instead. It is one thing to debunk the over-promised myths of liberal expectancies in liberal countries, but quite another to annihilate liberal-pluralist values against the larger backdrop of authoritarian control. In this article I aim to bring evidence from media studies in Greater China — including the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, and Hong Kong — to elucidate the complex paradox of political economy.[2]

The Political Economy of the Media: Two Approaches

I have outlined in an earlier essay (Lee 2000a, 26-36) the liberal-pluralist and radical-Marxist approaches to the political economy of the media that represent rather different political images and normative expectations about the media's democratic potential. The comparison is summarised in Table 1 as ideal types that have heuristic values but are not to be overdrawn. Historically, early capitalism was a liberating force against feudalism; the liberal perspective supports "responsible capitalism" against abuse of power by the authoritarian monarchy that tramples on individual sovereignty. The radical perspective is, on the other hand, a liberating force vis-à-vis late capitalism; it criticises liberal capitalist democracy — of which endless capital accumulation and unequal distribution is a central feature — from some idealised forms of social democracy. Both of them are part f the modernity project: the liberal perspective stress freedom, and the radical perspective accentuates equality. If the radical perspective has great emancipatory potential in advanced capitalist democracies, the liberal perspective is still relevant to a large part of the contemporary world where feudalism and authoritarianism prevail. As a cautionary note, these two perspectives are broad-stroke comparisons that have yet to account for the nuanced internal differences within each of them.

Table 1. Two Approaches to the Political Economy of the Media

	Liberal-Pluralist	Radical-Marxist
Political program	Realistic, practical and pragmatic politics; supports responsible capitalism.	Idealistic and critical politics; criticises capitalism and supports versions of socialism.
Type of political economy	"Political" political economy.	"Economic" political economy.
Locus of explanation	"Late developing" and Third World countries, mostly authoritarian.	Advanced capitalist countries. Liberal or social democracies.
The role of the state	Primary. Dominant shaper of economic and media policies. Repressive state power threatens media freedom.	Secondary and derived.
The role of the market	Promotes diversity and countervails arbitrary state power.	Capital accumulation and concentration restrict media diversity and produce communication inequalities.
Media professionalism	Promotes media pluralism and freedom. "Creed of credibility."	a) "Strategic rituals" used to reinforce the established order; b) Tyranny of media professionals at the expense of public voices.
Examples	Blumler and Gurevitch (1995), Hallin (2000), He (2000), Lee (2000b,c,d), Waisbord (2000), Yoon (1989), Gunther and Mughan (2000)	Curran (2000), Garnham (1990, 2000), Herman and Chomsky (1988), Murdock and Golding (1991, 1997), Mosco (1996), Schiller (1992)

Source: Adapted from Lee (2000a, 27).

To elaborate, radical Marxists present a "top down" approach — which I call the "economic" political economy — in that they criticise the existing conditions of the liberal-capitalist media from the high plateaus of various radical humanist formulations (for example, Garnham 1990; Murdock and Golding 1997, 2000; Mosco 1996; Schiller 1992). The market is generally seen as betraying the ideals of democracy and distorting the "public sphere." As such, they seek to redress what they see as the existing problems of "incomplete emancipation," resource inequity, and cultural distortion resulting from unhampered *economic* dynamics of advanced capitalism. They are most penetrating in criticising the impact of corporate reach on commodifying public communication. Their chief nemesis is the capitalist mode and relation of production, as embodied by the military-industrial complex and multinational corporations that manufacture cultural hegemony. In so doing, they tend to treat the role of the state either tangentially or one-sidedly. They also have a contentious relationship with structuralists and culturalists within the Marxist tradition (Hall 1986).

Golding and Murdock (1979) and Garnham (1990, 30), among others, have taken the pluralists to task for paying too much attention to the state-media relationship but insufficient attention to the impact of privatised capitalism on the means of communication. As a mirror image, however, many Western critical scholars have systematically deprived the state of its central role because, I think, the censorious power of the Western liberal state — which includes emergency powers, armed secrecy, lying, state advertising, and corporatism (Keane 1991, 95-109) — is more subtle, benign, and invisible. Not only is its control not as naked and cruel as the authoritarian state; the liberal state also provides legal and institutional protection of media freedom (Fiss, 1996). Insofar as radical-Marxist writers deal with the state, furthermore, their positions diverge. Instrumentalists (notably Schiller 1992; Herman and Chomsky 1988) tend to subsume state power as part of the superstructure often subservient to corporate interest, as if the state-capital relationship were linear and unproblematic. Other writers perceive the liberal state as a central site of democratic struggle against corporate assaults and as a repository of redistributive justice. They favour the state's intervention on behalf of public interest to rectify the distorting market influences on the range of public expression across social sectors (Golding and Murdock 1991, 1997). Thompson (1990, 260-264), for example, advocates (democratic) state intervention in the market to achieve "regulated pluralism." Mosco (1996, 202-203) thus urges critical scholars to examine the role of state intervention in the processes of marketisation, privatisation, and internationalisation of the communications industry. However worthy their efforts may be, seldom have Western critical scholars come to grips with the authoritarian state. In the worst-case scenario, some of them (Schiller 1976; Smythe 1994) even espoused various repressive Leninist alternatives of the former Soviet Union, China or Cuba to the exploitative world capitalism. Totalistic discourses fail miserably in fine-grain politics.

Inasmuch as the radical-Marxist perspective represents a fundamental critique of capitalism, critical writers tend to debunk media professionalism — which is firmly rooted in the capitalistic logic (Schudson 1978) — as an ideologically constructed myth that serves the status quo. Schlesinger (1979) rightly argues that media professionalism is predicated on an unarticulated commitment to the estab-

lished liberal democratic order. Tuchman (1978) argues that media professionalism relies on "strategic rituals" that enable the media to uphold the facade of objectivity when, in fact, their news net tends to be built around the centrally legitimated institutions. Thus, this dominant perspective permeates mainstream media accounts to the neglect of other alternative or deviant views. Fishman (1979) describes how news cycle intersects with the institutional rhythm of bureaucratic agencies. Gitlin (1980) also shows that media construction of a student movement tends to support the reformist group and reject a more radical alternative. The long-term ideological effect of the media is, in the Gramscian sense, the manufacture of social consent to achieve "hegemony" (Hall 1977; Gitlin 1980). To some writers (see Manoff and Schudson 1986), even the narrative form of a news story produces this ideological effect. Objective reporting has been, as Schudson (1978, 160) summarises, accused of "reproduc(ing) a vision of social reality which refuses to examine the basic structures of power and privilege" and "represent(ing) collusion within institutions whose legitimacy was in dispute." Moreover, from a pragmatic perspective, Carey (1997) blames media professionalism for reducing the public from being political "participants" to being mere "spectators." This formulation seems to combine a nostalgic Jeffersonian past and a romantic Habermasian future. These critiques are intellectually powerful but seem to have exerted rather marginal influence on journalistic practice.

To reiterate, the liberating potential of the radical approach is unquestioned where the liberal media are concerned. I appreciate that some radical writers do not pretend to analyse the non-Western media contexts. In addition, it can be argued that insofar as all nation-states and media, Western or non-Western, are subjected to the same constraints of the global capitalist system, there is no need to call for distinct or discrete theoretical models. It is to the latter assumption I wish to react. Within the capitalist world system, it is not trivial to point out that in late-developing, mostly Third World, countries and former communist countries, the state takes a dominant role in shaping the distribution of political, economic and cultural power. If the liberal state is considered both an enemy and a friend of democracy as the media law scholar Own Fiss (1996) maintains, the authoritarian state is then, in my opinion, nothing but an enemy of democracy. To Fiss, the democratic state can only supplement, not supplant, the market forces. But the authoritarian state dominates if not monopolises the political and economic resources upon which the media depend. It also owns key news mouthpieces, institutionalises an elaborate system of censorship and coercion, and co-opts the subservient private media enterprises into a patron-client relationship.

Against such rough and tumble ground of state repression, pluralists offer a "bottom up" approach — which I call the "political" political economy — that empowers political struggles with such (perhaps illusory) liberal images as media professionalism and "checks and balances" in "the marketplace of ideas." The characteristically unromantic and pragmatic liberal rhetoric has instilled a profound sense of hope and legitimacy in a wide variety of popular struggle, resistance and liberation movements, including those in the Third World (Jansen 1991, 137). Student movements in modern China — from May 4, 1919 to June 4, 1989 — have had a tradition of appealing to such liberal ideals as democracy, liberty, science, and human rights. Without doubt, a freer market order not directly abused by the state offers an emancipatory alternative to aristocratic, oligarchic, despotic, or authoritarian dictatorship.

Contrary to radical denunciation, liberal-pluralists view media professionalism as an ideal that promotes a diversity of opinion and empowers the media to check and balance the established power. Liberal politics is a politics of what is practically possible, not what is potentially ideal or ideally potential. It acknowledges human imperfection, distrusts any grand design, and advocates incremental reform rather than large-scale overhauling of the existing order. Market competition has provided more opportunities for freedom of expression in Taiwan (Lee 2000d), South Korea (Yoon 1989), Mexico (Hallin 2000), South America (Waisbord 2000), and South Africa (Hachten and Giffard 1984); even the PRC is beginning to expand media diversity in the non-political arena (He 2000). Like liberal democracy, media professionalism promises no political utopia, yet it has established a realistic record of journalistic practice. In the United States, since media professionalism is deeply embedded in the "enduring values" traceable to the Progressive Movement, the media have displayed high vigilance against government corruption and corporate wrongdoing (Gans 1979). The "creed of objectivity" (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995) creates media space and serves as a "weapon of the weak" (Scott 1988), especially if the weak are devoid of stronger means of resistance.

Evidence from Greater China

In my opinion, neither of these two approaches should be regarded as a *universal* or ontologically prior process. Privileging them on a priori grounds not only overlooks the crucial differences in socio-economic and global contexts but also commits what Whitehead calls a "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." Based on the assumption that these two approaches are two varied yet related *historical conditions* of modern social life, I would like to restate two propositions. First, the "political" political economy is a theory for analysing the authoritarian media, whereas the "economic" political economy is a theory for analysing the liberal-capitalist-democratic media. Secondly, in many *transitional* systems — either moving from authoritarian to democratic rule or vice versa — both approaches may coexist side by side uneasily and paradoxically.

To wit, Greater China has been at the forefront of great societal transformation, acting as a living social laboratory to reflect on the media's role in social change. The PRC and its media have undergone two decades of vibrant and distorting state-capitalist development despite (and perhaps, because of) continued political control. Taiwan has experienced a somewhat chaotic, non-linear democratisation process and media change, while Hong Kong's media appear to have weathered the storm of sovereignty transfer from Britain to the PRC. Our overall and overriding concern is, of course, about the elusive link between media and democracy. Drawing on my own case studies of the PRC (Lee 2000c), Hong Kong (Lee 2000b), and Taiwan (Lee 2000d), I hope to bring certain empirical light to bear on the two posited theoretical approaches to the media political economy.

The PRC: Economic Liberalisation versus Political Control

Berger (1986) characterises the post-Mao policy in the PRC as "marketisation of political management." The liberal-pluralist perspective claims that the capitalist market, by providing a social zone relatively independent of state control, is a necessary but insufficient condition for democracy (Berger 1986, 79-81; Diamond 1992;

Rueschemeyer et al. 1992; Touraine 1997). Two points are of vital relevance here: (a) there is no historical evidence to suggest that democracy can be viable without the support of marketisation; and (b) marketisation itself does not necessarily lead to democratic practices. The media were empirically found to have played a role in "precipitating the breakdown of authoritarianism" (Gunther and Mughan 2000, 25) in a wide range of countries from Spain, Chile to Hungary and Russia. Media liberalisation was part of the intentional strategy to achieve other political objectives in some countries, but in Chile it was "an unintended by-product of the Pinochet government's commitment to free-market economies" (Gunther and Mughan, 2000, 13-14). Singapore, a country which Chinese leaders most admire, is an outstanding example of "capitalism without democracy"(Sim 2001). In line with broad pluralist propositions, I believe that the post-Mao political economy — the development of a state-controlled market mechanism — has resulted in what I call "demobilised liberalisation" with three main mixed characteristics (Lee 2000c), diverging vastly from the Maoist era.

First, while China remains at the bottom of the media freedom scale in the world landscape, the Chinese system has been transformed from totalitarianism to state-capitalist authoritarianism characterised by a higher degree of tolerance for relative separation (and intermeshing) between economic dynamics and political dictates.[3] China's market is structurally embedded in and intertwined with — rather than separate from — the state's policy, while the marketised media do not oppose the ideological premises of the party-state. Yet economic vibrancy has generated partial momentum of its own, yielding considerable (but far from sufficient) media expansion of what Berlin (1969) called "negative freedom" in non-political discourses. The multilayered contradictions between political control and market liberalisation have progressively depoliticised the state, economics and culture, thus creating considerable room for media liberalisation in the social, but not in the political, areas (Lee 1990, 1994, 2000; Zhao 1998). The state is still highly authoritarian, arbitrary and intrusive, but the imperative for it to reckon with innumerable manifest or latent market implications has given the media a freer rein in areas that do not directly confront the party-state dominance. The scope of "positive freedom" for political change remains pitiful, however, and the pendulum swing between the political logic and the economic logic has further caused ideological clashes, factional fights, and oscillating policies.

Secondly, media organisations have been making various, sometimes bold yet ad hoc, attempts at news improvisation and marketing experimentation in order to attract wider and more diverse constituencies in the more diverse marketplace (Pan 2000). The struggle to serve the party vis-ŕ-vis the market has exhibited "uneven development" in favour of mass-appeal media in major coastal cities at the expense of both party organs and interior provinces. If the party-press straitjacket was dominant in the 1970s, the softer and ideologically more diversionary evening press took its place in the 1980s, but the most popular fare since the 1990s has been the metropolitan press (*dushibao*) for it pays closer attention to relevant events and policies that may affect the everyday urban life. The rise of the metropolitan press, with many outlets having reaped substantial profit, owes much to the rapid growth of advertising revenues and disposable income among urban residents in China, prompting experimentation in news format and content to meet the market de-

mand — all the while going around the ideological taboos. While the growing inequity in the distribution of media resources between the coastal and interior provinces raises genuine concern, the erosion of party organs is hardly deplorable.

As several surveys conducted in the 1980s showed, many journalists aspired to playing a greater "watchdog" role to check on government abuses and corruption in tandem with the agendas and rhetoric of the reformist bureaucracy (Polumbaum 1990). In the 1990s, after the interlude of the bloody Tiananmen crackdown in 1989, the media have largely recoiled from political activism and instead plunged themselves into the surging ocean of commercialisation. They now aim to garner profit without overstepping the prescribed political boundary. Newspaper editors concede that their front pages endorse planned economy, the middle pages promote mixed economy, and the remainder advocates free economy. Paid journalism has become a prevalent way of life. Instead of fixing a quick blame on marketisation as the source of media corruption, however, I would first attribute the problem to the unseemly collaboration of the authoritarian power and the undisciplined market, making sporadic (sometimes half-hearted) official crackdown ineffective. Even party propagandists are not immune to media corruption and paid journalism; as an integral part of the corrupt scene, they do not at all prove to be morally or ethically superior to their rank-and-file media colleagues.

Thirdly, He (2000) portrays the schizophrenic market-oriented party media as a "capitalist body" that "wears a socialist face." Each inroad into dogma erodes party ideology. He therefore further argues that the media have transformed their mouthpiece role into being the "Party Publicity Inc," whose job it is to promote party images and legitimacy rather than to brainwash people. A general profile of journalists collated from various surveys suggests that they have been altering their role definition from being party propagandists to being information providers, meanwhile retaining their statist and elitist orientations (Lee 2001b). Exposure of "model" cases of corruption and irregularities may earn media outlets their respect, popularity and hence, profit. At times, individual leaders have tacitly endorsed limited investigative efforts to tackle the malaise of rampant bureaucracy, but these investigations have invariably taken aims at the transgressions of lower-level bureaucrats and business managers rather than those of the higher-ups (Zhao 2000a). Market consciousness has also given birth to some (if altogether too rare) media programs and genres, sensitively addressing public concern in regard to consumer, environmental, and social issues (Zhao 1998; Rosen 2000). The ascendancy of consumer and environmental consciousness poses less immediate threat to the party-state hegemony, but if Taiwan's experience is any guide, it may have the long-term potential of spilling over to bring about the concepts of rights and duties required of political citizenship.

The media do not advocate grand reform agendas nowadays. So far they have at best dared "swat small flies, but not beat big tigers," which an editor-in-chief of a leading metro daily candidly acknowledged to me in an interview as a conscious editorial policy he took. Swatting small flies is not entirely risk-free for journalists, for they may run into some big tigers who find media exposure of their underlings embarrassing. For this reason, even what may seem to observers a very modest, un-heroic and un-wholesome goal (or project) has been well appreciated by the reading masses, as shown in the growth of circulation and advertising. In fine, I

am not celebrating prematurely whatever modest professional gains there might have existed; I am bemoaning the fact that China has too little, not too much, media professionalism, the level of which has even retreated from the heyday of political reform in the second half of the 1980s. Further, these advances in media professionalism may constantly risk being nipped in the bud by the party-state, especially when the regime perceives itself to be encircled by unfriendly forces or when different factions at the top engage in intense power struggles. I would therefore contend that a conditioned tendency on the part of some writers to reject media professionalism or its correlates in China seems patently unwarranted.

To be sure, there are severe limits to what the party-controlled marketised media can do. It seems clear that the state in the PRC is being caught in a double bind between the need to unleash economic momentum (which is a major, if not the only, source of its legitimacy) and the intention to keep marketisation within an official trajectory. The party-state undertook economic reform not to undermine its own authority but in part to salvage itself from the brink of legitimacy crisis after the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen crackdown. The proclaimed "socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics" is undoubtedly state capitalism with authoritarian characteristics, in which private media ownership is banned and all journalists remain state employees. Having acknowledged these conditions, we should keep in mind that economic reform demands more and better information for improving management, financial, and technological infrastructure that may not fully comply with rigid state ideology. Macro-national economic policy and micro-media economic dynamics (being cut off from state subsidies) have together driven the media to scramble for advertising in the stormy commercial sea. The record of this emerging political economy has been a mixed one. On the one hand, as previously noted, more and more media seem to have been conducting themselves in the capitalist way behind the socialist veneer, breeding greater media liberalisation without democratisation (He 2000). On the other hand, they have failed to build a civic consensus on core democratic values (such as the primary role of public opinion, checks and balances), and media experimentation can be shortsighted and vulnerable to the sway of shifting winds of party opinion.

Illustrative of this party-market paradox is the current state-engineered drive toward media conglomeration, in part (at least rhetorically) to meet the prospective competition from abroad after China joins the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The state has been trying to organise press conglomerates around a score of core and affluent party organs, which serve as big sponges to absorb unprofitable, chaotic, and disobedient small publications (Chen and Lee 1998; Zhao 2000b). These conglomerates, however, are not permitted to own any broadcasting institutions or cross provincial borders. Mindful of communist denunciations of Western media conglomerates, I view press conglomeration as a new scheme for state management of the emerging ramifications of media economics and politics in China. China's media conglomerates will remain under the control of the party rather than "rotten capitalists." This novel arrangement nonetheless provides an ideological justification for the state to absolve itself of financial obligations and for the core media to profit from take-overs and mergers. Many of these party-backed press conglomerates seem obviously inefficient, wasteful, and bureaucratic, even though all are striving for huge financial profits.[4] But the very fact that the party-

state finds itself having to negotiate, incorporate, and capitalise on the market forces, instead of resorting to outright repression as it did during the Cultural Revolution, amounts to tacit acquiescence to the limits of its own power.

It should be noted that my aim in this article is not to contend whether liberal democracy or popular democracy should be upheld as China's ultimate goal, but rather to gauge the goodness of fit between two postulated approaches of political economy and interpretations of the observed empirical developments. Even an ardent proponent of popular democracy would still have to demonstrate the analytical power of the Western critical-radical approach when applied to the ills of China. And vice versa. Zhao (2001) has brilliantly traced the changing definition of democracy in China since the late 1970s, when popular democracy was called for, through the late 1980s, when intellectuals and students embraced the elitist and liberal definition of democracy, to the decade of capitalist development in the 1990s, when disenfranchised peasants and workers are deprived of media voices. She contends that some reformers embrace liberal democracy as a tool of popular containment. I concur with the tenet of her trenchant analysis. What I take partial exception to is a peculiar kind of radical interpretation, advanced by a small coterie of the Chinese New Left, that neither frames the primary problem of China's media in state-versus-the-people terms, nor sees the repressive state as China's first enemy (see Lee 2000c for further discussion). Rather, these radical writers (for example, Gan 1998; Wang 1998; Zhang 1998) attack the rising global capitalist domination with its attendant consumer culture, and point to market fetishism as the first enemy of popular-democratic journalistic practices.[5]

Informed by a gamut of post-Marxist, post-modern, post-colonial or post-structural critical theories, some of the radical Chinese writers have disavowed any relationship between the market and democracy or press freedom. They further echo Western critics in claiming that the market has led to the "decline of democracy" and the crisis of the public sphere. Given the dearth of democracy or the public sphere (in Harbermas's sense) in China, I wonder how can the market-oriented media contribute to the erosion of something that does not seem to exist? (Habermas protested during his visit to China in the spring of 2001 that some members of the Chinese New Left, in their zeal to construct anti-imperialist discourses, have (mis)used his theory in such a way that amounts to justifying nationalist and authoritarian orientations of the Chinese state.[6]) Finally, these radical scholars (for example, Zhang 1998; Gan 1998; Wang 1998) are committed to models of popular democracy that are supposed to transcend liberal democracy but in fact smack of the legacy of the discredited Maoist utopia. To be more convincing, I believe that they will have to spell out the modus operandi for realising such radical goals. In the light of the globalisation discourses (see, for example, Tomlinson 1999), these radical writers seem to have slanted the global-national nexus to the global side to the serious neglect of the national side. This radical discourse may even betray Mao's formulation during his revolutionary years — to whose legacy it claims to be an heir — that China should struggle against the twin evils of imperialism and feudalism at the same time.[7] The modern-day Chinese New Left seems more enthusiastic about anti-imperialism than about anti-authoritarianism.

The PRC's impending admission to participate as a full member in the neoliberal WTO will pose immense but unpredictable challenges to the political

economy of its domestic media. Major foreign media conglomerates (such as AOL-Time Warner and Murdoch's News Corporation) have been cultivating close ties with top Chinese leaders and waiting anxiously in the wing for years to march into the China market. If the market is cracked open, they are most likely to start with investment in the new and as-yet financially impoverished telecommunication sectors or in certain areas of media management (such as in advertising), but by no means will the regime abandon its editorial stronghold to foreign or private interests. Moreover, the monopoly status has given the media sector a profit margin far exceeding (even doubling) the industry average — indeed, it is the last ideological and economic "forbidden fruit" the party will concede to challengers.

Taiwan: Before and after Democratic Change

The radical-Marxist approach throws little light on the liberal media struggle against such right-wing, capitalistic, authoritarian states as Taiwan or South Korea. In Taiwan, during the era of martial law (1949-87), the media were dominated by an oligopolistic structure consisting of two newspaper groups and three television networks. This oligopolistic structure was formed through a client-patron relationship between the state and its loyal minority mainlander elites (to the exclusion of local Taiwanese majority population), not as a function of capital accumulation in a "free" market. The lifting of martial law has meant not only the abolition of state censorship (which is no mean achievement), but also the unleashing of the market forces so strongly one-sided as to muffle new and financially weaker voices (which falls far short of democratic ideals). As the neo-liberal Taiwan renegotiates its fluid and intermeshed state-capital relationship, the radical approach is increasingly central to examining how capital concentration strains media diversity, but *not* to the exclusion of the pluralist approach.

Martial law justified media control and suppression of popular participation on grounds that stability was a prerequisite to economic growth, and anti-communism required unified leadership. Taiwan's state encompassed a "triple alliance" of the government, the quasi-Leninist Nationalist Party (KMT), and the military. The party-state owned its own mouthpieces. As part of elite integration, it also kept other privately owned media as a weak, auxiliary, and dependent organ of the state but not strictly as its mouthpiece. Resembling the policy of coercion and co-optation adopted by a group of "bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes" in Latin America (O'Donnell 1978), Taiwan's state traded economic profit for media loyalty, as previously noted, through a network of "patron-client relationship" (Wang 1994; Eisenstadt and Roniger 1981). This relationship, oiled by informal personal ties (*guanxi*), is asymmetrical but reciprocal, but the media were strictly forbidden to foster horizontal alliances with other social groups or labour unions. Those media who willingly acceded to state inducements relished vast economic benefits (via preferential tax treatment, bank loans, and market dominance) and political status (through appointment to the power centre), but those who contested the power structure were ruthlessly punished (by imprisonment and harassment). The media not only accepted authoritarian rule but also helped to rationalise it.

The authoritarian party-state tolerated what Linz (1974) calls "limited pluralism," in which the media were made politically subservient but given considerable autonomy in non-political areas. Typical of the state-corporatist system (Schmitter

1974), Taiwan's authoritarian state presumed to "organize political expression, not to determine its content in any detailed or pervasive way" (Staniland 1985, 75). Major challenges to the state ideology have come primarily from fringe alternative media, first by political magazines in the 1970s and then by cable stations in the early to mid-1990s. State imposition of a ban on issuing any new newspaper and television licenses, which lasted for 37 years, was directly responsible for the formation, consolidation, and maintenance of an oligopolistic media structure altogether loyal to the regime. But in retrospect, the state must have seriously underestimated the subversive power of the low-cost political magazines and cable stations. Barely funded or staffed, they had seemed to be leading a marginal existence — until when they came to be wedded with the burgeoning political movements and together launched vigorous guerrilla ideological campaigns against the powerful state apparatuses. In playing hide-and-seek games with state censors, they openly contested the official "truth," educated the public, mobilised support for oppositional candidates during the elections, and nurtured collective consciousness within the movement groups. All along, these movement groups used the fringe media to challenge the regime's grand illusion of pan-Chinese ideology that actually suppressed local identity and rights. Protesting against official purge of local Taiwanese dialect from television in favour of mandarin, they demanded that local people should elect their own national representatives instead of holding on to those whom the KMT had installed on the eve of retreat from the mainland to the island.

Of the Big Two, the *China Times* sided with the liberal wing of the KMT, whereas the *United Daily News* endorsed its conservative wing. Internal division within the power structure provided a precarious breathing mediaspace. The movement followers frequently launched boycott campaigns against the more conservative *United Daily News* during almost each election. Moreover, the fringe media pressured the mainstream media to publish less contrived accounts of the events. Even if they were defenders of the established order and critics of political movements, the mainstream media also did much to promote abstract democratic values (such as the public's right to know, checks and balances, constitutional rule), thus indirectly testing the official line and helping to develop a favourable cultural climate for change. Interestingly, as Taiwan's journalists uncritically embrace the "watchdog" rhetoric, many liberal-leaning members of the profession, having met obstacles in getting their work printed in their own papers, ended up contributing to the bulk of biting criticism of the regime and investigative expose in various political magazines. The political and media movements had been strongly inspired by idealised liberal-democratic pronouncements and the civil rights movements in the Untied States.

The lifting of martial law has brought about a rapid demise of the party-state media, for they could no longer rely on public subsidies. For legitimacy's sake, the mainstream press must fairly "index" legitimate voices according to the broadened range of views expressed by prominent officials and members of institutional power blocs — including the formerly outlawed opposition and the KMT's splinter groups — in the new political landscape (Bennett 1990). But media discourses have been narrowly confined to electoral politics, factional fights, ethnic conflict, and anti-China sentiments rather than oriented toward the conditions of the working people. The unresolved "national question"—whether Taiwan should eventually be reunited with China or secede from it—has been in the background of much of the

debate and has given some impetus to the opposition at times. The changing political economy binds the once suppressed business capital to state structures in a new coalition; this took a significant turn in 2000 when the opposition party won the presidential election over the KMT for the first time. While definitely superior to authoritarian control, the emerging liberal politics is showing its limitation. This is where the radical perspective becomes relevant.

No sooner had martial law been lifted did the two press oligopolies begin to make further huge capital investment in hopes of securing a monopolistic hold on talents and upgrading their superior infrastructure. Already enjoying potential power as "price makers" in affecting the parameters of output levels, technology, and taste (Caporaso and Levine 1992, 167), they left little room for the new press entrants to manoeuvre. Only 25 dailies out of the more than 200 that rushed into the market after the end of martial law have managed to survive. Only one of the new entrants, owned by a real-estate tycoon turned frustrated politician, has been able to threaten market dominance of the Big Two through suicidal price wars and extravagant give-away of gifts and prizes, simply because it is wealthy enough to withstand sustained losses. But most important, it presents itself as the only paper that puts Taiwan's interest above China's, while attacking others for kow-towing to Beijing. The financial might of the new trio has intimidated potential challengers from entering into the market and elbowed weaker competitors out of it. However, in the late 1990s, they would see their advertising base eroded by another unlikely source: cable.

Many years after the press ban policy was abolished, the state still hung on to television monopoly despite the opposition's relentless protests (and their use of illegal cable stations to challenge it). The television monopoly began to break down when the satellite spillover came from overseas, which boosted Taiwan's poorly equipped and financed cable channels, pulling audience away from the state-controlled television networks. Then a chain of events occurred. The United States threatened to apply trade sanctions against Taiwan's imports if Taiwan could not stop its cable operators from abusing the intellectual property of U.S. films, music, and videos. The pressure from Washington left Taiwan, a client state, with no choice but to expedite the passage of cable television legislation. The cable law was passed expeditiously. It legalised all of the existing 250 outlawed and crude cable channels, and relaxed the quota on foreign program imports, raising concerns about cultural integrity. The strong ferment of an intellectual and movement coalition succeeded in writing into the cable law a clause barring newspaper owners from encroaching on cable stations. Given Taiwan's lack of economies of scale, however, two major industrial-media conglomerates (in place of traditional newspaper owners) have been competing to gobble up the cable channels around the island. As Taiwan's economy deteriorates in 2001 amidst continuing political tension with China and a global market slowdown, the big two newspapers and the big three television stations have all been losing money. None of the cable channels is known to be highly profitable, but the their combined existence has eaten into the advertising pie that would have gone to the establishment media. The golden days of market and advertising dominance may be over for the Big Two and the Big Three. The *China Times* has, for example, scaled back some of its investment ventures made a decade ago. Since the end of martial law, the struggle for democratic transformation has brought more complicated and contingent dimensions to the interplay of the state and the capital in the media field.

Hong Kong: Loss of the Liberal Media Order?

Under colonial rule, the British had maintained a liberal media order in Hong Kong. Recognising that it would be a futile attempt to expunge the historical "China factor" from Hong Kong, the British were content with controlling the rules of the game, and allowed the pro-PRC and pro-Taiwan forces to organise their own press organs (Chan and Lee 1991). The media system spanned the full ideological spectrum of party, partisan, and "professional" orientations. They were largely free to attack both Beijing and Taipei, but not the colonial regime itself. The British and the colonial regime themselves also became fair game for media criticism in the early 1980s when Britain began negotiating with the PRC over the future of Hong Kong. The media largely supported British attempts to obtain continued de facto or *de jure* administration over Hong Kong beyond 1997, only to be frustrated by repeated British failure to deliver promises. In the 1990s, the media also endorsed the British's last and belated attempt to implement limited democratic electoral reform, at which the PRC took offence. Regime change has provoked deep anxiety and suspicion, setting off capital flight and massive emigration, in a land of political or economic refugees from communist revolution. It has produced two anti-democratic tendencies in the media: (a) ownership change and conglomeration, and (b) journalistic self-censorship and the erosion of media ethics (Lee 2000b).

The first anti-democratic trend is ownership change and conglomeration. The scope of the journalistic paradigm has shrunk substantially: the pro-Taiwan papers saw a dim future ahead and opted to close down. Pro-China capitalists purchased and then shut down several critical political magazines. Major newspapers decided to become public corporations in the late 1980s in order to spread around their financial risks associated with political uncertainty. Several of them ventured into real-estate investments and incurred huge losses, others tried to establish business partnerships with mainland outlets to no avail, and still others deployed their hefty funds, collected through the process of public incorporation, into acquiring more media outlets in an already overcrowded market. Moreover, international capitalists (notably Rupert Murdoch) and overseas Chinese capitalists (such as Robert Kuok and Tiong Hiew Hing) have taken over major media outlets in Hong Kong; many of these capitalists have substantial investment interests in the PRC and are aiming to make further inroads into the mainland market. They have tried all sorts of means to ingratiate themselves with Beijing, raising questions about editorial autonomy of the media they owned. In the midst of all of this turmoil, since the cash-rich *Apple Daily* entered into the competitive fray in 1995, specialising in sex and violence, several rounds of throat-cutting price wars have broken out. These vicious battles have led to the shutdown of several financially weaker family-owned dailies and magazines, while costing thousands of media workers their jobs. The market duopoly of the *Apply Daily* and the *Oriental Daily News*, already accounting for 70 percent of the circulation, has spawned other copycats, both in terms of content and marketing strategies. Even more ominous, many mainstream media outlets, due to their weakened market position, are being exposed to the danger of acquisition by interests with close personal, business, or political connections with Beijing leaders. Murdoch's Star TV, turning its back on his earnest vow at the time of its inauguration that he would harness advanced communication technologies to the task of toppling totalitarian regimes, has had

an increasingly close relationship with mainland capital. And for years, Murdoch has been cultivating friendship with top Chinese leaders in a journalistically corrupt manner. The same mainland capital that props up Star TV has also acquired partial ownership of Asian Television (ATV). The other station, TVB, has been careful not to provoke Beijing also.

The second anti-democratic trend is journalistic self-censorship and the astonishing erosion of media ethics. Self-censorship was touched off by real or imagined harms that the new sovereign can do to media interests. The media now operate in the absence of British insulation from Chinese pressure and in the face of unambiguous warnings from Beijing against allowing Hong Kong to be a "basis of subversion." Beijing possesses huge power to dispense rewards and deliver punishment. It can release information to, or withdraw information from, a targeted news organisation. It can confer business opportunities on media owners who invest in China, and favour them with advertising dollars as China-affiliated firms and enterprises are assuming greater prominence in Hong Kong. It can also grant media access to political recognition and status (Chan and Lee 1991). Many tycoons, media owners and journalists had been co-opted into various China-appointed political bodies. Some greeted their appointment with pride, some with duplicity and apparent discomfort, many others with submission. Surveys reveal that most journalists profess to endorse Western professional norms of objectivity, but are fearful of criticising the Chinese government (Lee 1998). Also in evidence is that media organisations have taken unprofessional or even anti-professional measures — such as disseminating writing guidelines on "sensitive" stories, shifting editorial tones and positions, hiring and firing outspoken reporters and columnists — to avoid agitating Beijing.

In contrast to the politically timid "professional press," the apolitical yellow press thrives on blatant exploitation of sex and violence themes, which are the politically safe but commercially rewarding stuff, to which the morally puritan Beijing regime is willing to turn its deaf ear. The yellow press has disregarded media ethics by fabricating stories, invading privacy, and intimidating critics. Depoliticisation, sensationalism, and tabloidisation are ubiquitous. Despite occasional public uproar and government regulatory threats, the yellow press has not only won market popularity but also compelled the "professional press" (notably *Ming Pao*) to pursue low-taste content. (As an antidote to self-censorship, the contrarian *Apple Daily* has been exploiting the strong but latent anti-China sentiments in Hong Kong.)

The liberal-democratic perspective generally lapses into the background until when the liberal media order is in peril. Media professionalism is a "creed of credibility" crucial to upholding media legitimisation in the capitalist market. Media owners or professionals are unlikely to admit to self-censorship, sometimes even in the face of what seems pretty compelling evidence. Notwithstanding concerns about self-censorship, the Hong Kong media are far from being a pawn of the Chinese regime, and policy transparency remains high. The media have developed certain "strategic rituals" — here I redefine the term (Lee 2000b) more positively than Tuchman (1978) would have intended — to shield themselves from the ire of the power that be. These rituals refer to the forms of discursive formation that the media develop in the name of public interest or other socially accepted values to

enhance their own space. Balancing the appearance of media autonomy and the minimisation of political risks is a defensive posture, not something to be romanticised, but the media would have done much worse without the ideological bolstering of professional canons.

I have identified at least three such strategic rituals (Lee 2000b). First is that the media juxtapose the opposing points of view (both supportive and critical of Beijing) side by side by appealing to legitimated professional canons of balance. Second, there is a division of labour between editorials and free-lance columns. Editorials refrain from offending Beijing, but some popular free-lance columns, buried in the inside pages, are designed to be critical of Beijing. Third is the adoption of moderated narrative forms that smooth the critical edge, favour facts over opinion, and use circular and conditional language. After the regime change, the media have shifted their chief target of criticism from Beijing to the China-appointed Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hua. They can also afford to take a more critical attitude when the local interests of Hong Kong seem to conflict with Beijing's positions, because this criticism can be justified by the proclaimed "one country, two systems" policy. The fundamental premises of that policy are, however, beyond media challenge now. The continuing negotiation between power and money will determine the viability of Hong Kong's liberal media order.

What Can Be Learned?

I have drawn on evidence from three constituent members of Greater China to examine the interplay between the liberal-pluralist approach and the radical-Marxist approach to the political economy of the media, especially with regard to their emancipatory and democratic potential. I have made two propositions. First, the liberal- pluralist approach, focusing on the critique of the state, may apply to authoritarian Third World countries and former communist countries, while the radical-Marxist approach, focusing on the critique of the capital, may be used to analyse the media in liberal-capitalist democracies. The liberal-pluralist approach seems to go a long way toward explaining the martial-law media in Taiwan, the Hong Kong media under the threat of an authoritarian regime, and, to some extent, the increased "negative freedom" accrued to the marketised authoritarian media in China. Radical interpretation — which de-emphasises the constraints of the repressive state in the PRC and emphasises the constraints of the global capitalist structure, thus tipping the global-national balance in favour of the global — is a partial if not also puzzling formulation.

Second, in any transitional systems, both approaches may intertwine and coexist uneasily and paradoxically. Of the three constituents of Greater China, Taiwan seems ahead in the process of democratic transition, where the media are now akin to other neoliberal countries, characteristically critical of the state and its leaders while more lenient towards private capital. In other words, the relative triumph of representative democracy has made the liberal-pluralist perspective less (albeit still enormously) relevant, while ushering in the radical-Marxist approach to account for the impact of media conglomeration on limiting the range of expression. In contrast, in Hong Kong, as the liberal media order and mature capitalism are being threatened, concern for media professionalism and freedom has come to the fore. In the PRC, the state still maintains tighter reins on news media than in

former communist Poland, where the state media had to contend with the Solidarity's oppositional media and the church media (Sparks 2000), or during the *glasnost* era of the Soviet Union. Even media conglomeration is orchestrated by the state. But the state nonetheless has to negotiate with the market conditions it created.

We are now confronted with four further unresolved questions, which this article does not pretend to be able to answer in full. The first question is the extent to which evidence from Greater China can be generalised. The answer can only come from painstaking comparative studies, for which the former Soviet Union seems to offer a prime test case. Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* was instrumental in dismantling centralised communist apparatuses and ushering in some fragile forms of representative democracy and press freedom (especially in terms of weakened state censorship). His elite-led political initiative collapsed due to economic malaise, while the liberal institutions did not deeply take root. The collapse of the Soviet party-state has deprived the media of their economic means to survive, and a decade of media transition seems to have been mired in a morass of bureaucratism, corruption, and foreign take-over (Downing 1996; McNair 2000). Deng's China has taken an opposite course of using marketisation to forestall dramatic political change. Will media transition be managed somewhat more smoothly in the PRC?

The second question regards the relevance of the two posited approaches in the post-cold war era. I believe that epistemological and political differences of the two approaches — particularly concerning their fundamental views toward capitalism and its media — were not grounded in the cold war discourses. In the post-cold war era, the liberal critique of the state is still crucial to a far-less-than-liberal world. Western radical-Marxist writers were primarily critics of market distortion of the liberal media, not apologists for the abuses of the Sovietised media. Meanwhile, their critique of the commercialised and conglomerated media in the former Sovietised countries — often taken over by the old elite in collaboration with Western-based transnational corporations — seems to be gaining particular urgency and sharpness.

The third question points to the interplay between the global and the national, or the state-capital nexus in globalising contexts. The global structure may provide opportunities for and impose constraints on the domestic media, as the state-capital interaction is increasingly being played out onto the global stage where multinational corporations and supranational organisations have gained greater power. In this regard, the Hong Kong and Taiwan media have banked on a "global media watch" to discipline the PRC's conduct. The rising global presence of the PRC and its insertion into the capitalist world-system will have enormous impact on the structure and role of its domestic media system. The tripartite media interaction in the political economy of Greater China also merits further inquiry.

Finally, having outlined these two approaches, I come to conclude that a critical synthesis at a higher level of abstraction — a dialectical perspective that will account for the mutually constituting, implicative, and embedded relationships of the state and capital — is in order. The state and capital are simultaneously enabling and disabling to each other; they collude and collide. Market forces may negotiate with, and chip away at, the state forces, and yet the state may co-opt, suppress, or subjugate the market forces. Even a democratic state can, within limits, mobilise marketing pressures against targeted media outlets. In the United States,

the public is overwhelmingly suspicious of the positively interventionist role of the state; but if "the invisible hand" frees the media from government control, it also subjects them to be ruled by corporate madness and its distorting competition. In the PRC, the party-state masterminds the emancipation of economic energies that impinges on the media in ways that uphold and dilute party authority all at once. In both Taiwan and Hong Kong, the ongoing intersecting of the state and the capital is more fluid and but far from settled; this relationship is neither linear nor one-dimensional. In Taiwan, the reshuffling of the state structure (especially the KMT's presidential defeat) has set in motion a reorganisation of the political-economic-media nexus. In Hong Kong, the influx of political economy has produced anti-democratic tendencies of media conglomeration and eroded journalistic ethics, while putting pressure on the media to preserve a modicum of autonomy and credibility in the name of professionalism. This article has not developed such an integrative perspective, but may hopefully help orient my further conceptualisation.

Notes:

1. Neither China nor other Asian "third wave" cases (Taiwan or South Korea) were included in this volume. Japan is a dubious representative of Asian nations.

2. I am most grateful to Dr. Yu Huang of the Hong Kong Baptist University and Professor Colin Sparks of the University of Westminster for providing helpful comments on the earlier version of this paper.

3. Conceptually, Linz (1974) provides a most comprehensive exposition of the distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Downing (1996) has questioned the use of these two categories to analyze the Soviet media context. In the PRC, however, this distinction is not at all trivial. Mao's totalitarian state (especially during the Cultural Revolution) intruded omnipotently and omnipresently into almost every facet of life, whereas Deng's authoritarian state has retreated from the less political domains of social and civic life, with the market operating alongside and in collaboration with the state power. Despite their common propensity toward media control, if totalitarianism is intent on mobilizing people's souls and minds through mass campaigns, authoritarianism is more interested in consolidating the ruling power base through mass demobilization. Some may argue, however, that everything is, ultimately, political and ideological. I object: even though other domains of life should be related to their political import, a totalist position is both analytically self-defeating and, as the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution has amply demonstrated, politically dangerous.

4. My field trip in the summer of 2001 reveals that under the same roof of a press conglomerate may lie several newspaper outlets of similar genre competing viciously with one another. Even though this lack of product differentiation or audience segmentation defies every known marketing principle, the fact that a press conglomerate has more newspapers to its credit may make propaganda officials (who supervise, if not control, the press conglomerate) look more glamorous, at least on paper. Another problem is that the metro daily usually is the cash cow to support the losing party organ, but is seen as politically marginal and not taken seriously in the scheme of press conglomerate structure.

5. These three writers are probably the most sophisticated within this group and their writings are partially accessible to English readers. There are many others whose views are so crude as to resemble those of the conservative ideological chiefs. In fact, it would be revealing to compare the continuity and discontinuity in the assumptions and arguments employed by the old left and the new left.

6. See Xu (2001) for an account of Habermas's visit in China. Habermas reacted strongly and negatively to criticisms made by some members of the Chinese New Left (such as Cao Weidong) regarding his earlier support for Western intervention in Kosovo. Emphasizing the universal applicability of human rights values, Habermas argues that for the non-West to accept them is not tantamount to its surrender to the West, nor should they be seen as metaphysical concepts.

For him, the source of national sovereignty is not self-ordained, but stems from the government's ability to protect the human rights of its people. Noting that the United States represents a mixture of humanitarian self-sacrifice and imperial logic, he claims that when Germany was defeated in 1945, it was also liberated. According to Xu (2001), several Chinese new-left writers have deliberately distorted or badly misunderstood Habermas's writing.

7. There has been a heated debate about whether Chinese dynasties can fit into the historigraphic description of "feudalism," but that is beyond the scope of this article.

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