

Pressing the Issue: Sino-American Discourse on the Proper Role of the Media, Past and Present

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Sino-American discourse on the nature of the press as a social institution is a historical subject in addition to one for our times. This article locates today's Sino-American discourse on the role of the media in a broad historical context before observing the degree to which the globalization of media technologies has complicated what for a century was typically a confrontational discourse between the two countries over the appropriate role of the press in society. It reveals that China and the United States sparred over that question from the early 20th century forward and that each country has served as a foil for the other insofar as attitudes about the media, as well as media practices, have been articulated and justified.

Keywords: Sino-American press relations, journalism, globalization, mainstream media, alternate media, digital communications, international relations

Formal Sino-American relations take place at the government level, but informal interactions between the two countries are also critically important. In the informal realm, media relations are highly significant. This includes traditional press forms as well as the myriad forms of information and opinion dispersion via digital communication platforms. In contrast to the carefully managed formal realm of state-to-state contacts, the wider ranging "discussion" between China and the United States taking place in the contemporary press, broadly construed, is more open and points in many directions simultaneously. Thanks to the eruption of publically available conversation via instant messaging services, blogs, social networking sites, bulletin board systems, and so forth, this informal discussion has become a sprawling, multivocal affair made up of both established media institutions and countless alternate discursive pathways (Castells, 2007; Esarey & Xiao, 2011; Yang, 2011). The latter react to and engage with the established outlets in both countries. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) employs various methods to monitor, steer, and disrupt those channels, with considerable success, yet much circulated information and opinion skirts the edges of the mainstream media and achieves a high degree of independence from the state. This situation is in no way unique to the China-United States conversation, but in this case represents a greater change, if not quite a full rupture, from the recent past than in many others.

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The power and influence of the establishment press—the mainstream, self-claimed authoritative, well-funded, elite supported, mass audience media—continues in both countries, but has declined. The establishment presses in China and the U.S., which are constituted in distinct ways and play wholly different societal roles, respectively, now comprise only a handful of voices within an explosively pluralistic media environment. The Chinese government views this situation with concern and spends fortunes to police it (Brady, 2008; MacKinnon, 2012; Stockmann, 2014). But while informal exchangers of information and opinion via various media forms within China and between the two countries must always negotiate with state power, they are not contained by it and in fact now participate in an ever more spatially fluid transcultural space. The exchange of information and opinion between them is an important means through which understandings of the other are mediated for citizens in both societies. It may be regarded as a real-time conversation coauthored by ordinary people positioned in a variety of geographical and ideological locations.

My intentions here are, first, to situate today's Sino-American discussion about the role of the media in a broad historical context and, second, to observe the degree to which the globalization of media technologies has challenged if not altogether altered what for a century was more often than not a confrontational discourse between the two countries over the appropriate role of the press. As Assignment: China (2014), the University of Southern California U.S.-China Institute's illuminating recent series of documentaries on American reporters who covered China over the past 75 years makes clear, that discourse has always been embedded in and impacted the larger context of Sino-American relations. The role of the press in representing and shaping those relations has been fundamentally, historically important.

Indeed, in dialectical fashion, the broad historical context both reflected the discourse and was constitutive of it. The discussion between China and the United States about the nature of the press has moved through a series of stages that map onto the tumultuous transformations in modern Chinese history in particular: interactive and largely shaped by the U.S. as norm setter in the 1910s and 1920s; multivalent from the 1930s through the Communist Revolution; locked in parallel ideological universes during the Maoist era; interactive but contentious during the early reform period; and, finally, tense but multivalent and less predictable in our own age. Owing to space limitations, the article focuses on Mainland China. A fuller study would treat post-1949 developments in Taiwan and Hong Kong, which were entangled with those discussed below.

America's Loud Voice in the 1910s and 1920s

China's 1911 Revolution was carried out in the name of Republicanism; one of the revolutionaries' key concerns, which they enshrined in the provisional constitution of March 1912, was that the new Republic should uphold freedom of speech and press. This marked a dramatic break, as the preceding Qing government denied such freedoms, especially insofar as the Chinese-owned (as opposed to foreign-owned) press was concerned. At the time, China had a small-scale but growing newspaper press. The idea that journalism could be a respectable profession with its own norms and standards was only beginning to take hold, however. Journalists lacked formal training in journalism. Concerned that China's undeveloped media (as compared to the West and Japan) would retard China's progress toward

democracy, republicans promoted the press as a vehicle through which to enlighten "the people" to the meaning and responsibilities of citizenry (vs. subjecthood).

Western ideas about the press and understandings of Western press practices had circulated in China even before the fall of the Qing dynasty (Judge, 1996; Mittler, 2004; Wagner, 2014). Nevertheless, such ideas were embraced by the central government only after the 1911 Revolution. By the 1910s, American ideas in particular had great influence. The influence flowed in a one-way direction, with Americans in the role of teacher and Chinese in the role of pupil. Americans spent considerable energy to export a particular understanding of what the press is and how it should behave.

Correspondingly, Chinese intellectuals primarily looked to Americans to help them develop a Western-style press following the 1911 Revolution. This grew increasingly important to them as China fragmented politically from the late 1910s. Desperate to pull the country back onto the track of democracy, intellectuals sought to amplify their own voices to nurture constructive, responsible public conversation. The modern press was the best educational and mobilizational technology available.

Chinese intellectuals collaborated with Americans to found China's first academic journalism departments. The departments at two American-run missionary colleges, Yanjing University and St. John's University, were China's most developed and clearly were indebted to American ideas, personnel, and money (Volz & Lee, 2009; Weston, 2010). They were closely linked to their counterpart departments at the University of Missouri and Columbia University. American graduates and faculty from those institutions taught in the Chinese universities. Their textbooks and lectures were in English and almost identical to those they used in the United States. The imported ideology rested on a series of fundamental ideas: a commitment to freedom of the press; a clear distinction between news and opinion; and the concept of journalistic professionalism informed by a liberal arts education, a sense of responsibility to the common good, and a set of reporting, writing, and editing skills (Weston, 2010).

Western-oriented Chinese elites largely embraced this ideology, which thereafter became a yardstick by which they judged the quality of a press (X. Li, 2009). But that yardstick could also be turned to other measuring projects, namely, to evaluations of the quality of the American and Western European presses. American teachers had equipped their Chinese students with a tool with which to assess foreign journalism.

Above all, Chinese evaluated the quality of the Western press in terms of its coverage of China, and here we see indications of the impact of Chinese nationalism on the media relationship between the United States and China, a dynamic that continues today. This tendency was clear at the Press Congress of the World held in Honolulu in 1921. The American conveners of the Congress envisioned it as a way for journalists from various countries to discuss the state of their profession at a global level and to agree on common standards for journalism in the wake of the catastrophic Great War. The ideology they espoused was overwhelmingly American in coloration (Williams, 1922).

Several young journalists from China who had previously studied journalism in the United States attended the Congress. Their remarks evince strong grievances against the Western, including the

American, press (Weston, 2010). The following, written in English by two young Chinese journalists, captures the tone. The first is from Hollington Tong:

Unfortunately China has been ignored in the past, in the very recent past. . . . But China can be ignored no longer . . . for this is the beginning of the Pacific era. . . . And there is no Pacific issue in which China is not concerned. (Williams, 1922, p. 158)

Accusing Western papers of inadequate reporting on China, Tong continued in a strident tone:

Would they ever think of sending to Germany a correspondent who does not know something of the German language, German history and German thought; or to France a man who perhaps is not simply ignorant of the French language and literature, of French history and ideals, but who despises them? That is more or less what they do when they send men to China. (Williams, 1922, p. 168)

For his part, K. P. Wang called "the destiny of China . . . the destiny of the world" and appealed for the "assistance and cooperation of the press of other friendly powers" in helping China with the monumental task of modernization. Unfortunately, according to Wang, most China coverage in Western newspapers was characterized by "racial prejudice," "ridiculous story telling" and "sarcastic and sometimes contemptuous comments" (Williams, 1922, pp. 203–205).

Chinese liberals were primed to recognize ignorance, malice, and hypocrisy in the Western press's coverage of China. Such feelings became more pronounced in the 1920s as the movement against Western imperialism expanded and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), its following growing, embraced the Leninist rejection of the legitimacy of the liberal press. The CCP's entrenchment assured that American norms would not be accepted by one of China's two leading political camps. The founding of the New China News Agency (Xinhua) in 1931 and transformation of *Liberation Daily* into the Party Central Committee's mouthpiece in the early 1940s solidified that tendency (J. Li, 2013, pp. 16–18; Stranahan, 1990).

For its part, in the 1930s and 1940s China's other leading political camp, the Nationalist Party, espoused press freedom even as it enforced strict censorship to clamp down on the CCP and other domestic opponents. The majority of Chinese liberals who opposed Nationalist Party censorship were influenced by American journalism ideology. Despite the internal Chinese disputes, when the United States and China allied against Japanese fascism, American government propaganda portrayed China in a sympathetic light, as did most independent media. During the war against Japan the Nationalist government demanded that the press fall in line with its wishes, which it claimed were synonymous with *the* national interest. Some in the American media and government criticized the Nationalists' treatment of the press, but those voices were not highly impactful in China.

The Leninist Press Model and the Ideological Split

When it seized power in 1949, the CCP installed the Leninist press model across China. It held that under capitalism the press espouses the ideology of its owners' bourgeois class position. As Lenin stated:

The capitalists have always given the name of freedom to the freedom of the rich to make profits and the freedom of the poor to die of hunger. The capitalists give the name of freedom of the press to the freedom of the rich to bribe the press, the freedom to use wealth to create and distort so-called public opinion. (Lenin, 1919, para. 13)

Self-appointed vanguard of the masses, the CCP nationalized China's boisterous pre-1949 press, expelled journalists from capitalist countries, and declared that the media represented the interests of the masses. Article 87 of the 1954 constitution, the first passed after the revolution, declared that citizens enjoyed freedom of speech and press; in practice, however, the Party treated the media as its own tool. Mao Zedong signaled this in 1948: "The role of the newspapers consists in their ability to bring the Party program, the Party line, the Party's general and specific policies, its tasks and methods of work before the masses in the quickest and most extensive way" (Stranahan, 1990, p. 1). Unapologetically, the party press was a propaganda vehicle.

The Chinese press portrayed the U.S. as morally bankrupt, riven by class conflict, racist, and crime ridden, and it aggressively dismissed capitalism and its media system. In general, *People's Daily*, the Party's official mouthpiece, presented the outside world in black and white. What counted as credible in a CCP-dominated political culture was counted as false in the American one. The dueling press ideologies existed in parallel conceptual universes and canceled one another out.

The American press accused its Chinese counterpart of distorting truth in the service of Communist ideology and dismissed its content as propaganda. It continuously pointed out the absence of press freedom in China. A handful of left-leaning American journalists portrayed the revolution in idealistic terms, but the establishment press portrayed the CCP and Mao as tyrants (Gittings, 2007, pp. 286–290). A 1951 article in *TIME*, for example, asserted that the Chinese term for *study* (*hsueh hsi*) would be best translated as *wash the brain*, and stated, "So important is *hsueh hsi* that it takes precedence over almost every other activity in Red China. Writers, actors, entertainers, journalists are not allowed to work without having passed their *hsueh hsi*" ("Brain Washing," 1951, p. 2).

With regard to their representations of the other, both presses served a propagandistic function. Attacking the United States as a villainous threat to the Chinese revolution served CCP interests. Likewise, portraying China in negative terms aligned the mainstream American media with anticommunist public opinion in the United States. In the process, the press positioned itself as the protector of the American way of life and "free world."

During the Maoist era, then, the Chinese and American media were foils for one another—stones on which each sharpened its own ideological blade. They were not so much engaged in meaningful dialogue

as they were standing on opposite sides of a canyon hurling invective at one another in tones and styles consistent with their respective political ideologies. Virtually no room for independent exchange existed.

Media Positioning in the Post-Mao Era

Deng Xiaoping's dismantling of the Maoist order from 1978 was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm in the West; American media treatment of China was both producer and product of this enthusiasm. For one thing, though highly restricted, American journalists were once more able to live in and report from China, predisposing them to approach their subject sympathetically. China's sudden accessibility was a central theme of the times. When Deng paid his historic visit to the United States in 1979, he was lauded for holding an American-style press conference and for giving an interview to *TIME*, which portrayed him in a sympathetic light.

Early reform-era China was mediated for Americans with an excited tone and cautious optimism. Stories underscoring bountiful opportunities for American businesses were frequent. A typical example is a 1979 article in *TIME* stating, "Since last fall, new U.S. deals with China—to build hotels, open iron mines, sell planes, oil drilling equipment and even Coca-Cola—have been popping like firecrackers at a Chinese New Year celebration" ("How To," 1979). In contrast to Mao Zedong, who was reviled in the American media, Deng Xiaoping was credited as a visionary who would join China to the world. *TIME* covers conveyed the point: In 1983 the magazine put Deng on its cover with the title "Banishing Mao's Ghost"; two years later he appeared again, accompanied by the title "Moving Away from Marx."

For the first time since World War II there seemed to be epistemic common ground between the two countries. American journalists interpreted Deng's opening to the outside as confirmation of the argument that China under Mao had been nothing short of insane. That perception encouraged a triumphalist attitude in the American press sometimes expressed through affectionate but also belittling reports on Chinese awkwardness when experimenting for the first time with Western-style clothing, hairdos, dance moves, and so forth. A 1980 AP story on the first American fashion show in China, for example, poked fun at the audience's naïveté and prudishness, closing with a quotation from the American fashion designer Halston: "My aim is to help the Chinese people step forward more rapidly into the world" ("China Shocked," 1980, p. 16).

I am not suggesting that treatments of early reform-era China in the American media should be dismissed as so hopelessly self-referential as to be without value. To the contrary, on the whole, the American media labored hard to produce good journalism that took China seriously as a society that had to be understood on its own terms. To a large extent it succeeded. But the American media did not have free access and was on a steep learning curve to understand a rapidly transforming society that had been unavailable for first hand observation for decades.

The Chinese media likewise cast the U.S. in a more favorable light. Although plentiful attention was still given to American problems, the demonization that defined the Mao era was mostly discontinued, replaced by a narrative of the U.S. as a valuable partner in China's modernization. Rather than a society defined by inequality, racism, and violence, the U.S. was now portrayed as admirably wealthy and

modern. The CCP's monopolistic media control enabled it to disseminate the new narrative in comprehensive fashion; opportunities for alternative interpretations were few.

Perhaps inevitably, however, the more access American journalists were given, the more they wanted; expectations had risen. No longer forced to accept that the two countries existed in parallel ideological universes and that their respective medias remained on the outside of the other looking in, American impatience arose where once there had been resignation. If China's leaders were moving closer to the United States, why did they maintain a stranglehold on the media? Did they not understand the logic of the reform path that they were charting? After all, China's constitution guaranteed freedom of speech and press (the 1978 and 1982 amended constitutions followed the 1954 original). The American media appeared ready to school the Chinese in the "correct" interpretation of China's laws. This attitude bore a distinct resemblance to the American media's paternalistic attitude toward China in the early 20th century.

In a period of thawing relations, then, serious tensions remained. American criticisms of limitations on speech and the press were folded into a broader critique of China's human rights record. Stories and editorials about censorship, dissidents, and the Party's positioning itself above the law were featured. Liu Binyan, China's most famous journalist and critic of CCP press censorship, was celebrated as a hero. Predictably, the CCP reacted negatively to the criticism because it found the tone of the attacks offensive on racial, national, and historical grounds, and because it perceived the attacks as threatening to its legitimacy, in that they fed into internal critics' demands for greater freedoms, including freedom of the press.

The CCP reacted by making life difficult for American journalists, limiting their access to people and places in China, bugging their phones, and trailing them. Foreign journalists often relied on Chinese journalists to supply them with information that they wished to but could not publish in their own country. To that small extent, some Chinese and American journalists were working cooperatively. Under such circumstances, American journalists worried that their Chinese sources could face serious punishment if discovered. Then as now the work of foreign journalists in China was a cat-and-mouse game, which in turn induced the journalists to identify with China's internal critics, especially with regard to matters of freedom of speech and press. These ongoing tensions did not negate the broader positive narrative about China's reform process in the American media; rather, they revealed the extent to which the two sides remained cautious of one another.

Tiananmen Square 1989 and U.S.-China Media Divorce

The very fact that American journalists were permitted into China and that Chinese journalists began coming to the United States in larger numbers starting in the early reform years implied that conversation was taking place and that new understandings were being negotiated. With regard to news from China, this often still involved American journalists in the role of author and Chinese journalists as sources. What was markedly new during the mass protests at Tiananmen Square in 1989 was that the American media in China demonstrated explicit solidarity with the Chinese protestors in their standoff with the CCP. The American people were rooting for the students, in whom they saw themselves, and the

American media was swept up in the drama, well outside the boundaries of ideological neutrality. *The New York Times* and other key media outlets emphasized the protestors' demands for democracy and gave plentiful attention to the student leaders, whom they portrayed as heroes (Gittings, 2007; Madsen, 1995).

The student protestors took advantage of the presence of foreign reporters to broadcast their message internationally. They held up signs in English calling for human rights, democracy, and freedom of the press; granted interviews to foreign reporters; and staged made-for-TV performances that displayed knowledge of what "sells" in the American media. The students played to two audiences, one Chinese the other foreign, which they successfully brought together within a single "story" in which understandings about the "good guys" and "bad guys" were shared. By empowering the students by means of the attention they showered on them the American media was an historical actor, not merely an outside observer.

This infuriated CCP hardliners, as did demonstrations by sections of the official Chinese media, which momentarily openly supported the protestors and demanded Western-style freedom (Tan, 1990). In response, the Party maintained that the protests were the result of conspiracy by a small number of "black hands," which enjoyed support from the foreign and especially American media. The Party regarded the American media, especially CNN and Voice of America, as a Trojan horse secreting in bourgeois ideas, distorting events, and exploiting Chinese problems to serve its own commercial, as well as American geopolitical, interests. While the context was entirely different, the CCP's defensiveness and argumentation echoed the young Chinese journalists who accused the Western press of bias and distortion at the Press Congress of the World in 1921.

From today's vantage point, the CCP's approach to the theatrical, media-oriented politics of 1989 looks remarkably flat-footed. The Party appeared unprepared for the fact that nonstate Chinese actors could make creative use of the technologies of propaganda to challenge the propaganda state. It seemed not to understand how new media trends originating in the United States—for example, 24-hour news channels and the transformation of news into entertainment—meant that the Party was vulnerable to being cast as the villain in a drama watched by a worldwide audience.

The tragic denouement to that drama was a public relations disaster for the CCP. Film clips of the crackdown at Tiananmen Square, which the foreign media immediately termed a "massacre," and of the lone man standing bravely in front of the line of tanks, aired endlessly on Western television, and for years after the American media paid copious attention to human rights abuses in China. In a carefully prepared study of *The New York Times* reporting on China between 1993 and 1998 the nationalist Chinese scholar Fan Zhigao noted the proliferation of terms such as *repression*, *suppression*, *autocratic*, *dictatorship*, *rigid*, *Stalinist*, *indoctrination*, and *above the law* in articles about China (Pan, 2003, p. 323).

The CCP now sought more effective ways to spin the narrative within China and without. Ironically, one way it did so was by hiring American public relations firms to craft a more benevolent image. This bears some resemblance to the cooperative efforts between the Nationalist government, the American government, and Chinese and American journalists to improve China's image in the U.S. during World War II. The difference is that following the 1989 crackdown the CCP employed quintessentially

American media techniques to counteract the American media rather than to gain its sympathy. For the next decade, negative American media coverage of the CCP encouraged a dialectical reaction from the Chinese government, which adopted new approaches that owed much to American media culture (Brady, 2007; Stockmann, 2014). In a curious way, the two sides had backed into a kind of convergence.

Contentiousness Within Convergence

American coverage of China is increasing and the reverse is also happening: The number of Chinese reporters given visas to the United States has risen dramatically in the new century, for example. The commercialization of the Chinese print media that took off in the mid-1990s has created a more consumer-driven and pluralistic environment that frequently results in the publication of information unwelcome to some Party officials (Qian & Bandurski, 2011). By and large, however, the CCP is better at monitoring the domestic print media than the digital one, which of course is less easily circumscribed within national boundaries. The fast-paced growth of digital technologies has dramatically increased media interaction between China and the United States. New technologies have exploded communication pathways wide open to create a more pluralistic and globalized discursive environment. To the extent that vast numbers of people in China and the United States are now in direct contact with one another, an intermingling of voices that transcend national borders is occurring like never before.

Western scholarly opinion is split on the degree to which digital media is opening Chinese politics and society. None doubt that change is happening on a mass scale, but what its implications are and to what extent the CCP is able to manipulate the rapidly morphing media environment to its own purposes are contested points (Brady, 2007; Hockx, 2015; Mackinnon, 2012; Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011; Yang, 2011; Zhao, 2008). Much attention has been paid to the Party's efforts to erect a "great firewall" to keep undesirable information off Chinese netizens' screens, and to the Chinese people's accommodation to freedom within limits, within which the range of offerings is so great as to render censored bits seemingly inconsequential. Without doubt, the Party is succeeding at keeping certain material "off limits," though savvy people are playing with speech, memes, and references in clever ways to communicate subversive messages while also using virtual private networks (VPN) to participate in the global media commons.

The CCP's success at conditioning Chinese print and digital media companies to self-censor is as important as its efforts to block information transmission outright, but it also accomplishes its goals by threats and intimidation. So although the Party encourages investigative journalism that ferrets out corruption, and there is a deep commitment to investigative reporting among a cohort of Chinese journalists, it retains the right to crack down on journalists who cross often-arbitrary lines (Bandurski & Hala, 2010). This is just as true for journalists reporting on daily news stories. For example, when students held mass protests in Hong Kong in fall 2014, appealing to and capturing the attention of the American (and world) media much as their Tiananmen Square predecessors had in 1989, the Chinese government accused the United States of interfering in Chinese internal affairs and forcefully instructed Chinese journalists not to deviate from the official line: "All websites must immediately clear away information about Hong Kong students violently assaulting the government and about 'Occupy Central.' Promptly report any issues. Strictly manage interactive channels, and resolutely delete harmful information" (Rudolph, 2014, p. 1). The CCP's censorship of the protests in turn became a story in its own

right in the American press. In one case, CNN host Anderson Cooper covered the censorship of his newscast in China in real time: "And, we've just gone to black in China" ("China Keeps," 2014).

The Party's decree concerning Hong Kong was in keeping with its increasingly bitter attitude toward Western media in general, and to its perception that many Chinese view the Western media as more trustworthy than China's. One year before the Hong Kong protests the Party circulated an internal document on the need to strengthen Communist ideology. On the subject of journalism this "Document 9" stated, "Some people, under the pretext of espousing 'freedom of the press,' promote the West's idea of journalism and undermine our country's principle that the media should be infused with the spirit of the Party." The document indicated the extent to which the Leninist press model remains entrenched:

[Some people] also claim that China restricts freedom of the press and bang on about abolishing propaganda departments. The ultimate goal of advocating the West's view of the media is to hawk the principle of abstract and absolute freedom of press, oppose the Party's leadership in the media, and gouge an opening through which to infiltrate our ideology. ("Document 9," 2013, para. 6)

The Chinese press is closely policed, with bloggers and professional journalists both facing harassment and possible arrest if they displease the censors. In April 2014, microblogger Qin Zhihui was given a three-year sentence for libelous tweets, and Wang Xiaolu, a journalist for the well-respected business magazine *Caijing*, was arrested in August 2015 for reporting on China's stock market crash. Both cases received prominent coverage in the American press. Just as notable as these intimidation tactics is the Party's demonstrated ability to proactively establish its own narrative and sophisticated use of subtle messaging that it smuggles into stories and media venues that on the surface seem not to be about politics at all. These tactics come in for scathing criticism from Western NGOs such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, Freedom House, and Reporters Without Borders, and from digital sites such as *China Digital Times* and *China Media Watch*, which are bilingual platforms produced outside China cooperatively by Americans and Chinese. Those organizations have a strong online presence and constitute good examples of media situated between establishment organs and informal netizen publishing. All are blocked in China.

The establishment American press also publishes extensively on freedom of speech and press issues in China. A quick perusal of *The New York Times* provides many examples; it extensively covered a rare instance of public protest over censorship in China in January 2013; on October 15, 2013, the Chinese writer Murong Xuecun published an opinion piece condemning a crackdown on Chinese bloggers; on June 19, 2014, the paper published an article entitled "Chinese Government Tightens Constraints on Press Freedom"; on December 15, 2015, another entitled "China Is Leading Jailer of Journalists, Group Says"; and on January 8, 2016, a story about a German national named Christoph Rehage whose Chinese microblog account was shut down because he compared Mao Zedong to Adolf Hitler. The article noted that influential people in China were suggesting that Rehage be held accountable to Chinese Internet laws forbidding such statements even though he posted on the non-Chinese YouTube and Facebook, both of which are blocked in China, and did so from Germany.

An increasing amount of American press coverage is being given to the CCP's recently stepped-up efforts to intimidate foreign journalists. In reporting on China foreign journalists also need to worry about invisible lines being drawn and redrawn by the censors and, moreover, that they might be blinder than their Chinese counterparts as to where those lines fall and thus subject to more unwelcome surprises. A case in point is when the Chinese government forced Aljazeera English reporter Melissa Chan, an American citizen, to leave China in 2012 for reporting on sensitive subject matter, a case that received prominent media attention (Melissa Chan, this Special Section). Chan herself has said the reasons for her expulsion are not entirely clear. The situation has been particularly tense since a 2012 *New York Times* story detailing the personal fortunes of top CCP officials. In addition to the content of the story, the fact that *Times* reporters tapped Chinese informants infuriated CCP censors, who understand that Chinese and foreign reporters communicate in a number of ways. From the Party's point of view, punishing foreign journalists has the dual benefit of getting rid of pests and signaling to Chinese journalists that they may not touch similar subject matter. *Times* and *Bloomberg News* reporters have been denied visas. In December 2015, French reporter Ursula Gauthier was denied press credentials after reporting on political tensions in Xinjiang. About this climate, *Condé Nast Traveler's* Dorinda Elliott stated, "I am ashamed to admit that I personally have worried about the risk of reporting on sensitive topics . . . what if they don't let me back in?" Another seasoned journalist, James McGregor, echoed Elliott's remarks: "As the Chinese reaction gets more and more aggressive, foreign reporters in China get more and more wary" (Parker, 2013, para. 6).

Under Xi Jinping's leadership, the CCP is seeking to craft a selectively parallel media universe, using the press to promote its own messages while containing the degree to which Chinese are able to interact with foreigners or read foreign media material it deems sensitive. It also endorses the concept of "cyber sovereignty," that is, the right of each nation to set its own rules for cyberspace. This flies in the face of the idea of cyberspace as a global commons; the concept has been roundly criticized in the American press and by human rights and media freedom NGOs.

The CCP keeps a close eye on intra-Chinese communications, not to censor all expressions of discontent with the government, but instead to prevent Chinese from using digital technologies to organize collective action (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013). Here again, the idea of freedom within limits. But for all the effort the Party exerts to embargo politically sensitive information, it has nevertheless been forced to bend a great deal. It is common in the United States to emphasize how unfree China is, to shake one's head at the restrictions on the Internet, but in point of fact, some 650 million Chinese are online, and relative to the predigital age, access to information in China is exponentially greater and the censor's target far narrower than at any time after 1949. There has been a sea change.

The battle over access to information continues, but the CCP is defending an ever-shrinking plot of ground. Its sensitivity is so great precisely because its control of communication, writ large, is becoming more tenuous as conversational pathways proliferate. President Xi Jinping stepped up pressure on the Chinese media in response to this very fact, stating in February 2016 that journalists "must love the party, protect the party, and closely align themselves with the party leadership in thought, politics, and action" (Phillips, 2016, para. 6). The American press responded aggressively, an example being an

editorial in *The Washington Post* that blasted the CCP for imposing “thought control” and for treating the media as “party handmaidens” (“China’s Newsrooms,” 2016).

Particularly contentious political subjects remain a challenge, but in the main both societies are encountering much more of one another’s media than ever before. American-run radio programs are available in China, as are American-run English language publications produced in China. American programs run on Chinese television, and many mainstream American media sources can be had in China. The flow in the opposite direction is lighter but is coming on, as indicated by the opening of CCTV (China Central Television) America broadcast station in Washington, DC, in 2012. Under the control of the CCP but run on a day-to-day basis by professional Chinese journalists fluent in English in collaboration with American journalists, CCTV America bills itself as “the media crossroads where news and ‘views’ about the world’s two largest national economies intersect and sometimes collide” (CCTV America, n.d., p. 1). The station has caused suspicion. Accusers of CCTV America’s former anchor, Phillip Yin, a telegenic Chinese-American running as a Republican for lieutenant governor in Washington state, have smeared him as a CCP mouthpiece (Hernández, 2016).

The CCP is in containment mode because national and cultural boundaries are no longer the barrier to communication between Chinese and Americans (and others, including Taiwanese and Hong Kongers) that they once were. The huge number of Chinese capable in English, tens of thousands of them graduates of or current students at American universities, and the growing number of Americans with competence in Chinese make exchange easier, while e-mail, microblogging, and texting have made real-time contact a simple matter. Chinese living in the United States read blogs produced in China, and the same is true of Americans in China. Chinese write in English and Americans in Chinese. This intermingling, bilinguality, and cross-fertilization is true in the informal media realm, but also in the formal one, where the subject matter can be highly controversial. Murong Xuecun, a Chinese citizen who lives in China, for example, publishes opinion pieces in *The New York Times* attacking the CCP’s record on freedom of speech and press, as does Yu Hua, a novelist living in China who has published some 20 pieces critical of the CCP and Chinese society since 2009. At the same time, another Chinese national, Eric X. Li, defends the Chinese system in venues such as *The New York Times* and *The Huffington Post*, the latter of which had also published pro-China pieces by He Yafei, a nationalistic CCP official. Chinese born and raised intellectuals and academics who have become American citizens, such as Pei Minxin, Xiao Qiang, and Miles Maochun Yu, appear regularly in the American press. Such people remain well connected with Chinese intellectuals and journalists and as such have a foot in both worlds.

National borders, political systems, and ideology obviously continue to shape Sino-American discourse on the proper role of the media, and finger pointing in both directions continues apace. But today’s environment is one of interaction and discussion across national boundaries. The CCP monitors, interferes with, and seeks to channel that discussion, not to stop it altogether, which would be counter to its own interests and ultimately impossible. So the situation is one of contentiousness within convergence. Today there is exchange, talk back flowing in both directions, and much of it happens spontaneously and in real time. Often acrimonious, the Sino-American media relationship today is more interactive and less predictable than at any time since 1949.

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