

IV. Discussion

The next step of my investigation builds on the results presented in the previous chapter. Since its main concern is interpretation, the language of this chapter tends to be more argumentative than in the essentially descriptive parts. Although I have good reasons to trust the logic of our argument, the conclusions drawn therein must not be taken for a mathematical proof; there is an interpretative element inherent in them that the reader should consider and try to assess critically.

A second preliminary remark is concerned with the structure of this chapter: It is subdivided into three sections: The first and second will deal with results obtained by investigating national news and international reporting, corresponding to the two main sections in the chapter "results". The discussion of national news and international reporting will focus on differences between party and commercial papers, and therefore aims at answering the first of our research questions: Is there any discernable change in the political content of newspapers that goes back to commercialization? The third part of our discussion turns to our second question: Is it possible to discover: (1) enlarged differentiation within the commercial papers and (2) political profile building of single papers? I therefore characterize the single commercial papers of our set and trace their political profiles, both in terms of national and international reporting.

1. National news

I have presented the results following the greater categories used for analysis, i.e. topics, article direction, criticism, and actors, in the previous chapter. I chose this approach because it provided easy access to the data without bothering the reader with a flood of overly detailed information on the specifics of single issues. The discussion, however, is organized in a different way: As it is my aim to demonstrate the existence of certain political tendencies of commercial and party papers, it is indispensable to integrate results from all categories with regard to single topics.

1.1. The political and the non-political

Commercial papers are at the same time more *and* less political than popular papers: They are less political in that the share of articles belonging to political news in the narrow sense of the word has decreased. These are the topics grouped as "politics" in our analytical scheme, topics clearly dominated by party or state representatives that leave so little room for maneuver for media workers to express any individual viewpoint that even the phrasing is subject to politi-

cal guidelines. These highly political topics include party affairs, propaganda issues, sessions of people's congresses, articles consisting of "very important speeches" of the supreme leaders, etc., and can be labeled "conservative". Even topics that sound more progressive e.g. "political reform" belong to this category, as they contain official directives and slogans, that aim more at administrative reforms and more transparent procedures only which are a far cry from any concept of pervasive political transformation (Fewsmith 2003). For very similar reasons, general reports about people's congress sessions have to be counted as a rather conservative topic, although many China watchers had put great hopes in the evolutionary empowerment of the congresses in the mid-90s (O'Brien 1994). However, more recent developments suggest that the slight increase in the congress' independence has been a flash in the pan mainly due to the power politics of its chairmen Qiao Shi and Li Peng, and that hopes for a more active role of the congresses were overly optimistic (Gilley 2003). In sum, all articles coded as "politics" can be regarded as conservative issues, and the decrease of their share in commercial papers could thus be interpreted as a liberal trend due to market forces. Yet the fact that there are less conservative political articles to be read does not necessarily mean that there are more liberal articles published. The observed decrease of these articles in commercial papers is not due to lowered absolute values, but to a *constant* amount of traditional political articles, while other sections have been enormously enlarged. In order to decide, whether commercial papers have become more liberal or just less political, we have to analyze which kinds of reports closed the gap in the newly established sections. The pessimistic view of developments on the Chinese newspaper market would assume that commercial papers "invested" the new space mainly into leisure time categories like sports and entertainment, sections well-known to interest readers. Yet this is not exactly what happened. Commercial papers, it is true, reported relatively more on sports and entertainment in 2001 than they did in 1992. What seems to be a decrease in non-political news, once the prose sections are included, is an illusion: the functions these prose sections had in the evening papers of the early 1990s were too manifold to simply class them as a mere entertainment category, as they often covered educational or critical articles vested in a "story from real life". It is clear that even the reprint of a truly literary text can carry a lot of political implications and allusions. What took place in the commercial papers concerning the prose-sections should thus be understood as a clearing process: Surely there do still exist a lot of subtexts here, but most of the implicit political content has moved into the respective news sections themselves. A similar process of de-politicizing has occurred in the genuine entertainment and sports sections: While popular papers in 1992 quite often carried articles that were more concerned with sport politics than with sport events (for example in

stressing the importance of sport for the education of a patriotic youth), sport sections of commercial papers today do not differ much from their Western counterparts. Although the still existing political character of sports news and the attention paid to them by propaganda authorities should not be overlooked (Chinese papers were, for instance, forbidden to scold the national soccer team after a defeat in the World Cup 2002, RSF 2003), the general trend is very clear. To sum up, commercial papers strengthened the sections mainly entertaining their audience both qualitatively and quantitatively.

This seems to corroborate the assumption of a trend towards a nonpolitical, entertaining, and - in effect - even de-politicizing commercial press; but this is only one part of the story, because our findings also reveal a stronger emphasis on issues that are neither political in the very narrow, traditional sense, nor apolitical entertainment that distracts the readers' attention from the real problems their country is facing; what has become more prominent in commercial papers instead is a sort of news that is closer to the Western style of political reporting, and to a considerable degree in content, too: Commercial papers significantly increased the share of news that are of high political relevance on the one hand, but are less directly linked to the party and state organs, more issue-specific, less ideology-driven, and closer to the real problems of the polity on the other. We will discuss their treatment of single issues more in detail in the following sections.

1.2. Law/justice

First of all, the large increase of articles about law and justice in commercial papers comes into view. The fact as such already proves a grown awareness of political issues, as many matters connected to law and justice are prominent political slogans of both the authorities and of rather reformist groups (see the articles on judicial reform in *Social Science in China*, Summer 2002); moreover, three features document the nature of this change: First, commercial papers started to report critically of representatives of the party-state and of enterprises, which popular papers never had done in 1992. Second, they reported much more negatively than party papers, while popular papers had not differed from them in this regard in 1992. Third, they reduced the role of the party-state as an actor, while party papers enlarged it at the same time. So far for the facts. But what do they mean? We have to discuss results of single topics in the context of their relevance to political processes and structures to answer this question.

First and foremost, corruption is the issue that comes into mind when examining possible political implications of the topics subsumed under "law/justice" in the present investigation.

Few Chinese, be they experts, politicians, or citizens, would call into question that widespread corruption is one of the major problems of the Chinese state at present and in the near future (see He 2002: 142ff; 172ff; 199ff; Shang 2002: 24; Lü 2000: 228ff). But this is where agreement ends: While the party - at least officially - views the problem as a lack of personal rectitude of single cadres which they claim can be checked with a mix of better inner party control mechanisms, punishments, and moral education, Chinese political scientist see very clearly that moral appeals are of little help: "What is first of all needed to counter corruption are institutional arrangements, using the (political) system to control power (...). Any calls for public morality, ideological education, moral betterment of cadres etc. are superficial" (Zhao 2002: 18). He Cengke, a distinguished scholar on the field, suggests enhanced market reforms and privatization, a further development of civil society, inner-party democracy, and separation of power to curb corruption (He 2002: 275ff). Reports about corruption cases therefore do not necessarily transport the same message: They can be intended to signal the party's resolution to prosecute guilty cadres and its ability to settle the problem; but they might as well demonstrate that the abundance of corruptive practices calls for measures more sweeping than those the party has been willing to make use of until the present day. It seems that, in the eye of the party, the practice of reporting on such cases has already gone too far, if the extent of corruption reports in *People's Daily* is the yardstick; leading cadres have expressed the view that corruption reports have become too frequent and might exert a destabilizing influence (Stevenson-Yang 2003). Third, the high frequency of corruption reports could be understood as a direct response of market-oriented papers to reader demands, as we know from polls that this is exactly the kind of articles readers wish to be published more frequently (see p.). However, this finding should not be overestimated: First of all, reports about corruption refer only to cases already detected and sentenced by the respective party committees. Reader demand alone obviously is no sufficient condition for certain content. Second, it should not be overlooked that it might be a clever move by the authorities to allow a slightly more extensive level of reporting on these issues in the commercial press, as this might serve as a sort of security valve by giving readers the feeling that their anger is expressed at least somehow publicly (Yang 2001). Our interviews, however, suggest that an extent of corruption reports in commercial papers above the average level of party papers is not intended, but only tolerated as a by-product of market orientation.

The political relevance of corruption cases is quite obvious. But there are more topics belonging to the sphere of law and justice that carry some political significance, namely "civil law" and everything referring to "crime". Both experts of recent developments in the PRC's political

system and Western politicians urged by their electorate to support democratic reforms in China have banked on more constitutional and fair procedures in the sphere of law that are assumed to spill over into the political realm (Ji 2002; Nathan 1997: 242) or to substitute for democratic reform as long as the time is not ripe (Pan 2003). It is out of question that Chinese citizens have considerable interest in the new opportunities provided by the progresses Chinese civil law has made; the number of civil law cases has risen, a fact mirrored by the increase of the respective reports in both party and commercial papers. The higher number in the latter might well be explained by the importance civil law cases have for the ordinary citizen to claim his or her rights, especially as enterprises are quite frequently accused or sued. However, two other, more non-political factors of these cases must be mentioned too: First, in most of the civil law cases, money is involved. That is of course not to say that financial interests were a non-political issue. But it would make a difference if law suits were primarily viewed as a tool to generate income, and not as a means to enhance the democratic openness of the political sphere, as Western observers like to see it. A second aspect that might limit the political implications of reports about civil law suits is the entertaining factor that should not be underestimated: Law suits, especially those that involve pop stars or other TV-celebrities, are highly entertaining to hear of, as they often reveal private affairs that satisfy the public's curiosity. Yet, the qualifications we raise here are hard to test, as reader interest in civil law cases will consist of rather mixed and intertwined motives; nevertheless the assumption that commercial papers publish more of them in order to meet reader demands for a more liberal and controversial reporting is still the most likely one, but the possible objections as mentioned above may function as a warning signal against over-interpretations.

Besides "Civil Law", another subject that contains some political implications is the issue of crime: It is no secret to Chinese experts that the country's rising crime rates are also accompanied by increasing social insecurity and poverty (Shang 2002). An (anonymous) Chinese criminology lecturer expressed the idea that the government does not agree with publishing too many crime cases, because "in a way they show social problems, particularly the gulf between rich and poor" (RSF 2004a), a fact well illustrated by the consequences of a report on a gang published in the *Southern Weekend*, in which reporters related the rise of crime at the countryside to social problems: The article gave authorities the pretext for a reshuffle of the paper's editorial board in 2001 (RSF 2002). However, an (anonymous) journalism lecturer at Beijing University predicts an increase in articles on crime, because "these stories sell (...) and now the Chinese newspapers respond first of all to market pressures (...)", even if "this still means taking a big risk with the authorities who do not wish to see this type of story" (RSF

2004a). One should also not overlook a genuine interest in public security issues among the readership that goes well beyond sensationalist desires: A poll conducted in 1997 revealed that almost 50% of interviewees wanted to read related articles related to that topic most, a value second only to the Hong Kong hand-over and ahead of 22 other topics (Yu 2001: 92). We have indeed found commercial papers to report more about crime than party papers do, especially when it comes to crime cases not solved yet, as party papers are more prone to stress successful police work: Reports about unsolved crime cases are almost non-existent in the party press, while those about arrests account for more than 1% of the total. It is also noteworthy that commercial papers reported much more on illegal economic activities and fraud than about violent crime, while party papers wrote slightly more about the latter. What can be learned from these findings is, that party papers frame crime in a different way than commercial papers do: In the party press, crime mainly appears as an undertaking of single, violent individuals, against which the state protects the citizens well. In commercial papers, another picture prevails: The protective state plays a role, but its limited capability to ward off crime comes into view, too. This is, however, not necessarily to be understood as a hidden criticism of the police and thus the party-state: What we have said above about the non-political attractiveness of civil law suits is even more true for crime reports: They are thrilling, not only in China. We have to be cautious not to view every aspect of the Chinese society from a political angle: Crime reports in tabloids in the West must simply be understood as what it is: Naked sensationalism. Why should it turn eminently political as soon as it occurs in China? Moreover, among Chinese scholars of the field there is little doubt that the excessive crime reports in the commercial papers are intended to attract readership, but belong to a rather non-political "tabloidization" of the press. Another difference between party and commercial papers regarding their crime reports deserves more attention: In market-oriented papers, criminals are not predominantly portrayed as thieves and evil-doers from the lower ranks of society, and breaks of the law by companies and economically active individuals are reported about to a greater degree. While robbery and theft are social ills that would lead a majority of people to cry for more state-activity in the sense of enhanced police operations and more severe punishments, the framing of criminality as a phenomenon mainly occurring in the economic sphere calls for a protection of citizens through the means of law and supervision of production and sales processes.

In sum, the commercial press reporting on issues of law and justice did respond to and try to match readership demands. The motivation, as shown above, is of a dual nature. While audi-

ences appreciate law and justice reports as one aspect of a more liberal journalistic style, they are also interested in them because of a genuine appetite for sensationalism.

1.3. Accidents

Accidents are very similar to crime cases in their ambiguity: They owe, for sure, much of their attractiveness to the sheer fact that their objects are horrible and often fatal events. But in China, reports on accidents are definitely political, too. Many of the reports that have been coded as "accidents" refer to mining disasters, outbreaks of fire in factories, crumbling houses or bridges and the like, in short: their subject is not a fatal individual mistake (as it would be the case in most traffic accidents), but a more complex failure of political authorities, business leaders, and responsible personnel. Especially in mining, accidents are often caused by a ruthless exploitation of workers and mines that disregards safety aspects, silently tolerated by politicians who either do not want to close profitable sites or are directly influenced (i.e. bribed) by the mining company. It is therefore significant that commercial papers on average report roughly three times as often about accidents than party papers do (the paper focusing most on the issue reporting even eight times as frequently as *People's Daily* does). Moreover, party papers stress how much the political authorities are concerned with the problem, and emphasize immediate measures undertaken to save lives and avoid similar cases in the future: On average, more than 80% of all reports on accidents in party papers mention reactions by the party-state, while only 32% of the articles in commercial papers do. We can thus conclude that, the "tabloid aspect" of such news notwithstanding, this sharp difference must be attributed to the stronger inclination of the commercial press to meet their readers' demand for criticism.

1.4. Social problems and conflict

One might argue that corruption and accidents are the dark sides of China's thriving economy; so are the emerging and ever acerbating conflicts between social interests groups, not to say classes, and between workers (Cai 2002) or peasants (O'Brien 2002) and the authorities - an embarrassing fact for the ruling communist party. People are well aware of the fact that cadres profited more from the reform policies than the average citizen did (Fewsmith 2004) and express strong discontent with the existing income inequalities in polls (Lu 2001: 42). Unemployment has been identified as one of the greatest concerns among the Chinese citizenry (Fewsmith 2003; Yu 2001: 92). There is therefore little doubt inside and outside China that economic performance will decide the party's fate. Steady economical growth on the one hand

and the smoothing of social conflicts on the other, are the two prerequisites for maintaining the power at least for the near future (Sun L. 2002; Kang 2002).

Of course, reports about heavy labor unrest are far off the limits of public reporting in China, and even more subtle articles about social problems were rather rare in 2001. However, if any paper mentioned the sensitive issue of open conflict between units or openly staged protests of citizens against institutions and authorities, it was exclusively commercial papers who did so. As for the other topics that potentially touch upon social problems, the amount of reporting in party and commercial papers did not differ significantly. Yet differences occur as soon as one focuses on the direction of the respective articles. Commercial papers reported only a bit more frequently on "Worker's Issues", but they did so much more critically, averaging with an average score of the mean article direction of 2.8 compared to 1.6 in the party press. With the exception of *Guangzhou Daily*, all commercial papers yielded significantly higher values than the party papers, three of them even between 3 and 4. Moreover, criticism in the commercial paper had a clear main target: While only 1 out of 19 articles on the issue in the party press criticized enterprises, more than a third of the 58 articles in commercial papers did. Correspondingly, reporting on "Social Security" and "Labor Market" was more critical in the commercial press, with average party paper values below 1.3 in both issues compared to 1.8/1.9 in the commercial press, and with several papers showing quite high values in both cases.

Although these findings suggest that commercial papers are more prone to make the country's social problems subject to their reports, some remarks are necessary to qualify the assessment of the results: First of all, if commercial papers were really characterized by a tendency to report more on social problems, we would expect not only more critical, but also a much more frequent reporting on the issues in question. However, only 1-2% of all articles deal with social problems, compared to roughly 25% that report on other economic issues which will be discussed later. Second, no paper dares to blame the party-state for the social injustices. All of them point to single enterprises as the responsible units instead. Hence, the real problem, i.e. the lack of an effective legal protection of worker's rights (not to mention the non-existence of independent trade unions that could fight for their interests), is not confronted at all: According to the articles in commercial papers, the problem consists in solitary acts of injustice committed by single enterprises, not in political shortcomings. It is evident that this is exactly where propaganda directives have drawn the red line; and it is the true reason why the weekly *New Daily*, an offspring of *Worker's Daily*, was forced to stop publication in March 2003 (the official reason was a report ridiculing the people's congress), for this paper had crossed this

line several times with its daring and outspoken reporting on social injustices (observation by the author, who read the paper frequently in July and August 2002).

These qualifications in mind, we nevertheless may rightfully state that most commercial papers made use of the little room they had to report on phenomena that are at the heart of the people's concerns. It is a remarkable finding, though, that not all papers followed this path. In two of the three categories in question, *Guangzhou Daily* had shown patterns typical of a party paper, and *Beijing Times* also displayed values rather close to party paper profiles. There are two competing explanations for this fact: One might argue, that these two papers have the highest party affiliation among the commercial papers, *Guangzhou Daily* as the organ of a municipal party committee, *Beijing Times* as the offspring of *People's Daily*. Hence, they would be forced to keep closer to the party line than other papers when especially sensitive issues are touched. The second attempt at explanation would suggest that these two papers are more business-oriented than other papers, and therefore tend to downsize social problems. It is impossible to decide this question here; we will have to take a closer look at the characteristics of single papers later (see p. 149) to gain some ground for a valid judgement.

1.5. Economy

Economic issues lie at the heart of most newspapers in our sample: With the only exception of *Yangcheng Evening News*, all papers devote 22%-28% of their reports to economic issues. If all economic topic-categories are aggregated, party papers and commercial papers do not differ with regard to the amount of economy-related reports, but clearly with regard to the reasons and intentions they have for publishing them: Commercial papers have a larger share in stock market reports, reports on single enterprises, and on "consumer issues", while party papers have a larger share in all the other topics. Party papers, hence, show a particular feature in their economic reports; namely to fulfill a propagandistic task: Their political character is reflected in the large share of issues that go well with the party's claim to be a promoter of economic growth and the protector of the "laobaixing", the man on the street. First of all, reports on agriculture are to be mentioned, as they account for more than 4% of all the reports in *People's Daily* and *Liaoning Daily*, while the topic is virtually absent from commercial papers. This is, of course, partly due to the fact that these are urban papers, while the two party papers mentioned have to cover rural areas as well, but it can hardly explain the huge amount of reports. Moreover, the mean direction of the respective articles is 1.3 in *People's Daily*, 1.2 in *Liaoning Daily* and 1.0 in *Beijing Daily*, and so even more positive than the mean values of all articles across all topics, even though agriculture is the most crisis-ridden branch of China's

economy. Consequently, the reports have to be taken as propagandistic efforts to assure the public that the government is aware of the problem and to reassure the reader that improvements are imminent. They are not meant to inform the public, but, considering the real dimension of the challenge, to downplay the problems. As far as other branches and economic aspects are concerned, the gap between wishful propagandistic thinking and reality is considerably narrower. The progress the Chinese economy has made is indisputable and undoubted by most Chinese citizens. It is therefore a natural target for the party papers' propaganda: A large amount of their economic news is about new infrastructure that are a symbol of the economic progress and that are reported on positively throughout in the party papers (mean 1.3). Commercial papers are a bit less enthusiastic (1.7 on average), but this difference is nothing special to the newspaper landscape of 2001: The same gap also occurred back in 1992; it is an issue untouched by the effects of commercialization. This could be explained by the fact that most of the issues belonging to this category had been typical objects of citizens' complaints well before the sweeping changes of the 1990s set in: The few negative reports stem from letters to the editor that are usually concerned with minor shortcomings of road construction work and the like. It has been one function of the evening papers since the 1980s to offer some room for voicing these concerns (Polumbaum 1994).

A more substantial and newly-emerged difference is the reporting on single enterprises and stock markets. While party papers stick to the invariantly positive reporting (1.1 on average) that was a common feature of all papers in 1992, commercial papers show patterns very different from the early 90s: Mean article directions are significantly higher (2.1, ranging from 1.5 to 2.4), and the extent of their reports has risen enormously, even if the considerable proportion of quotation lists is subtracted. Articles commenting on ratings of particular enterprises have not been coded with respect to their direction, but viewed as neutral, as they rather objectively reflect developments on the markets. We interpret these findings as the emergence of an objective economic section similar to those to be found in Western newspapers; reports on enterprises and economic developments fulfill the major task of informing readers about events that may influence their own economic behavior; enterprises facing difficulties are made subject to critical reporting, prospects and risks are analyzed. Correspondingly, lots of reporting is dedicated to stock market developments. This tendency is even more accentuated in all the successful economic papers that have emerged in recent years (see p. 43), with their straight-out comments on economic players that will probably drag the general interest papers in the same direction (Interview).

If news on stock markets and enterprises are the concern of rather well-off people, consumer issues appeal to the man (and woman) on the street as well. They cover information about goods and services that may portray the product as attractive or rather point to its flaws. As to the latter, this is an issue of high importance to the Chinese public (see below); as to the former, the nature of such articles is difficult to determine: Any article about consumer issues coded as affirmative might reflect the editor's or the journalist's intention to show the economic progress of the Chinese society and the achievements due to the wise leadership of the party. However, it might be nothing more than a so-called "soft ad", a phenomenon often described by Chinese media scholars. Journalists and companies strike a deal: The enterprise pays for the article, in exchange for an ad placed where readers would not be aware of it. Such "soft news" are illegal and stigmatized officially, but they are nevertheless still a common practice that is well hidden and hard to trace, not only for Chinese authorities, but also for the researcher. So we can only assume that a considerable proportion of affirmative articles about products is not to be understood as a political statement, but as a news section "colonized" by advertisement; further assumptions that affirmative articles are more frequently meant "seriously" in party papers, i.e. that they should rather be regarded as news articles than as soft ads, cannot be upheld on the basis of the information the author was able to obtain; interviews suggest that this practice is common in papers of any kind.

Negative reporting about goods and services as consumer protection is definitely a political issue; originating from grass-root organizations, consumer protection has developed into a movement that has partly been absorbed by the government via semiofficial "China Consumers Association". Yet it is still one of the spheres that bear certain signs of civil society activity (Yan 2000: 171ff). Even if this very political approach to the issue would have to be down-scaled, the fact remains that Chinese audiences are eager to obtain "useful" information, and that objective and trustworthy news on consumer issues definitely belong to this category. CCTV's "Quality reports for the week" that depicts producers threatening the health of consumers to increase their profit, have even been regarded as a sort of "*jiaodian fangtan*" for consumer issues, and were subject to censorship for a too daring report (Epoch Times, 25.05.2004). We would therefore expect audience-oriented papers to pay special attention to the issue. However, even though commercial papers on average report more on the issue than party papers, which was the other way round in 1992, the differences are not significant, as long as mean values are considered. Nevertheless, there does exist an important difference: Whereas the shares of "consumer issues" in party papers are comparatively close to each other, commercial papers differ enormously from each other in this regard: "Consumer Issues" ac-

count for only 0.9% of all reports in *Guangzhou Daily*. but for 6.1% in *Beijing Star*. We will discuss the issue of the single newspaper's specifics in more detail later, and it might therefore suffice to say that "consumer issues" evidently is one of the topics that commercial papers use to sharpen their profile. For party papers, a minimum reporting on an issue so important to the governed seems to be indispensable, the more so as it gives an opportunity to underline success in the party's economic policies: party papers show lower mean article directions than commercial papers, and their reports most often center on the state as the main actor. This contrasts with the pattern found in commercial papers, which do not only write more critically, but increasingly prefer citizens to representatives of the party-state as main actors (commercial press: 243 articles with citizens as main actor, 151 with party-state; party papers: 27 citizens, 81 party-state).

While consumer issues thus show distinct patterns of market-oriented reporting, no such differences between party and commercial papers could be traced concerning international trade: All papers were quite positive in their reports about the issue (with a few exceptions connected to trade with Japan). This is surprising, as WTO-accession was the focus of international trade issues in 2001, and analyses inside and outside the PRC predicted highly divergent consequences for different branches of the Chinese economy (Li et al. (eds.) 2000: 48ff; Zhang et al. (eds.) 2002). We would therefore expect different interests and some concerns to be mirrored at least to some extent in commercial papers. On the other hand, the conformity is hardly surprising, as WTO-accession was one of the major political hot spots in the government's agenda that year, and propaganda directives were perfectly clear in this regard: "As it is a government policy to attract foreign investment and welcome foreign investors, journalists should create a public opinion that provides a favorable environment for such activities" (Sun 2001: 29).

All in all, economic reports show a similar pattern to report on social problems and law issues as demonstrated before: There are some topics of high symbolic or actual importance that are guided very strictly, with market forces ruled out completely by political directives; on the other hand, as our results suggest that some commercial papers use less restricted issues to attract audiences by way of reporting more critical than party papers.

1.6. Society

In stark contrast to economic issues, both party and commercial papers report very little (2-3%) on topics we classed as referring to the society. But commercial papers within this small share at least focused on issues that would count as "social" in the Western sense, i.e. reports

on gender issues, family, generation conflict, and youth, while the paternalistic and ideological topics "minorities", "customs", and "solidarity" account for most of the respective share in the party papers. Reports about "ethnic minorities" usually praise their cultural autonomy, the economic progress they make, and their happiness to live in the Chinese state - perfectly ideological articles, that are mainly published by *People's Daily*. Similarly, reports about individuals being helpful to each other, supporting a good cause, and the like, quite obviously intent to portray the PRC as a society full of harmony and solidarity - a picture that would be a lie in any society, and even more so in China. A bit less ideological, but still at least paternalistic in its approach, are the articles concerning "back-ward" or "uncivilized" customs and common behavior that are much more frequently to be found in party papers (except for *People's Daily* - it might be below the paper's dignity, as it is free to dwell on "harder" ideological issues), probably because readers don't like to be educated and thus show little enthusiasm for such articles. Consequently, commercial papers publish them very rarely. If party papers take up topics more resembling social issues in the Western sense at all, they mostly do so in an affirmative way, averaging on a mean article direction of 1.7.

Commercial papers show a very different feature: In contrast to 1992, when they published quite a lot of articles on acts of solidarity among the people, they now report very little on the more ideological issues but focus almost half of their reporting on the topics "family", "youth", and "seniors" (including aspects like gender issues, the generation gap, and the like). Moreover, they do so rather critically, averaging on 2.7 (mean article direction) on the issues, with all commercial papers showing higher values than the three party papers. The state, who is the main actor in the reports in 21 of the 40 party paper articles, is to be found only in 47 of the 241 articles in commercial papers, while citizens/individuals play a more important role there (93 compared to only 1 in the party press).

All in all, commercial papers are marked by a profile very different from that of party papers in their reports on social issues: They portray Chinese society much more as a place of private conflicts and individual problems, whereas party papers stress harmony and concord. Commercial papers write about private concerns as originating from individual activity and decision-making, while party papers emphasize the state's vital role in issues thought to belong to the private sphere according to liberal understanding. As this divide was not found in the newspaper landscape of 1992, it has to be attributed to the changes that have set in meanwhile, and so indicates how much closer commercial papers are to social reality and daily experiences.

1.7. Science / education

Alluding to a May Fourth-slogan, one might say that the party promoted Mr. Science and Mr. Economy to gain new legitimacy after the Tiananmen-incident. Recalling the central role of students and academics in the protests, further political implications of all issues concerned with science and education become evident. Another factor are the economical consequences of the academic exodus (or to be more precise: not-returning from studies abroad), that probably is only partly due to political oppressions, but also induced by better opportunities offered abroad. Reports on great prospects for the scientific community in a thriving academic landscape are surely intended to keep more brilliant brains from "draining". These are the reasons for the extraordinary prominence of these topics in the party press in 1992, where it accounted for more than 3% of all articles and thus ranked among the top single topics; the popular press followed and also published quite a lot articles about science (more than 1%). In 2001, reporting about the issue decreased in all papers, but is still prominent especially in the party press, as the political reasons to put the issue high on the agenda certainly are less urgent, but the brain drain is still vexing the Chinese economy (Li C. 2002). Another apologetic element is often inherent in reports about cultural studies and archeology (which belong to the topic "cultural institutions"): The Chinese government has made great efforts to produce more or less scientific proves for the origin of mankind from Chinese soil, and other "findings" that shall prove a chain of a "yellow people" reaching far back into pre-history, and it did not refrain from forcing relevant research institutions from heavily infringing on due scientific procedures (Sautmann 2001).

But science and education are issues not only the state is very concerned with; so are people who make a lot of efforts and take financial burdens to ensure their children will get a degree from good schools and universities, and academics that try hard to find teaching and research positions. We would expect them to demand a rather objective reporting on educational establishments and a critical assessment of shortcomings in educational policies, and thus a different tone in the respective reports in commercial papers. However, this is only partly the case: In commercial papers, articles on education (at kindergartens, schools, and universities) are only a bit more critical (2.3 compared to 1.9 mean article direction), but they mention more often individuals as main actors (20% compared to 4%) and less often the party-state (4% compared to 41%), and voice more, if slight, criticism on educational institutions (10% compared to 5%). These results suggest that commercial papers certainly show a pattern a bit different from the party press, but respond less to audience demands compared to other topics we discussed above. It is difficult to explain this finding: We can rule out the idea that reporting

about the educational sphere is more restricted and more tightly controlled than the more sensitive social issues. Neither can we, for the same reason, assume that editors stress problems of the educational system less because readers would pay more attention to social problems: If there were a distinct reader interest in critical reporting about science and education, it would be quite easy for editors to publish corresponding articles, since it is a less thorny issue. It thus seems most reasonable to conclude that the audience's preference for critical and less state-centered reports in this regard is existent, but weaker compared to other issues. This conclusion is further corroborated by polls that revealed respondents to be far less concerned with educational issues than with social, economical, and political issues (Yu 2001: 92).

1.8. Health / environment

A very similar pattern occurs in the field of health, health care and related policies and institutions. Once again, commercial papers report a bit more critically (2.2 mean article direction compared to 1.9), publish more articles in which citizens play a major role (11% compared to 5%), and are more often critical of "other units" (i.e. hospitals in most cases, 7% compared to 3%), but these differences are anything but impressive. However, if we take into account that popular papers in 1992 were even more affirmative than party papers (1.4 compared to 1.8), some response to assumed readership demands is perceptible.

Differences are more marked in terms of reports about environmental protection: First of all, the large amount of articles that deal with the problem in the party press is astonishing, accounting for more than 3% of the total compared to only 0.5% in 1992, and a value more than twice as high as the respective share in commercial papers. Although more than two thirds of these reports deal with environmental policies and other measures to curb the problem, reports about single cases of pollution that do not mention any countermeasures by the state are also more frequent in the party press than in commercial papers. This is surprising at first glance, as we know that environmental problems are pressing throughout the country (Zhang 1999; Shi 2002: 356ff) and that pollution has already led to single incidents of protests and civil society activity (Jing 2000; Ho 2001). But why do party papers write even more about it than commercial papers? We think the finding can be explained by the fact that environmental protection is a rewarding issue to focus on: It is a problem that severely affects the lives of many Chinese citizens, but in most cases it is enterprises or individuals that are immediately responsible for environmental pollution. The issue is therefore one of the few urging problems that can be addressed by the party-state itself which thus appears to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. One should also not overlook that environmental concerns in China

are - similar to most Western countries - rather a concern of better educated and well-to-do persons (Fewsmith 2003); only 18.6% of all respondents to the 1997 poll named environmental issues as a topic they would like to read much about in papers (Yu 2001: 92).

1.9. National news: All topics

Having interpreted results for the single topics, we can now come to an assessment of the aggregated values we found for party and commercial papers before: Market-orientation did not only lead to an overall increase in critical reporting, but led to a different handling of topics of considerable political sensitivity, namely social problems and the sphere of law and justice, where commercial papers were found to be much more straightforward and outspoken. Soft topics like health care or environmental issues showed no or rather small differences. These, however, were - together with news about society - important in that they displayed citizens as individual actors and rather free from state-intervention, while most of the criticism in the more sensitive reports was expressed by representatives of the party-state themselves. Criticism of authorities, which we found to be more frequent in commercial papers, should be assessed as an even more important feature, as it focused on more substantial issues (corruption, accidents) in market-oriented than in party papers (bad performances of government agencies).

The limits of deviation have also become quite clear: even our fine-tuned instrument that was designed to detect differing opinions even where direct challenges of government policies are impeded by the political system, could not detect any differences in reporting on international trade relations and on criticism of the government related to social problems. It is interesting to note, though, that enterprises are held responsible for a number of problems in commercial papers, a fact surely reflecting the ruptures within Chinese society in recent years. The function of critical reports on social and economical issues combined with criticism of enterprises will be further discussed in the third section of this chapter, where differences among commercial papers are being analyzed. Before we do so, we will take another look at differences between party and commercial papers, turning to the content of their international reporting and the images of foreign countries they produce.

2. The image of foreign countries

Before we start the discussion of the results we *have* produced, a remark on issues that have *not* been under investigation is due: the image of a country is, as we all know, not only - maybe not even predominantly - shaped by reports on its society and the behavior of its government on international floors, but to a large degree by sport cracks, movie stars, and other

celebrities that do only very seldom occur outside sport and entertainment sections - parts of the papers that have not been included into coding as far as foreigners are concerned. The issue would nevertheless deserve a study of its own, as the portrayal of sport, pop culture, and, above all, Hollywood movies carries messages whose political implications are highly important (which is proved by orders CCTV received from the ministry of propaganda in early June 2002 not to screen any advertising that featured foreign celebrities; RSF 2003); such a survey would surely reveal great differences between different papers in this regard. Whatever the image of the US, Japan, or Taiwan in the news sections, the lifestyle of these countries has a great impact on the minds of the young generation, which need not correspond with the image created in the "serious" news section.

Moreover, advertisement contributes to the image of foreign countries - especially of the West -, although this influence is probably very difficult to trace scientifically (however, quantitative research about values implicit in advertisement in Chinese newspapers in general has been conducted by McIntyre/Wei 1998: 33). It is nevertheless more than a random guess to suppose that the abundance of Western models in ads suggesting wealth, beauty, and success produces - or enhances - feelings of a certain kind towards countries associated with fair hair and white skin, be it envy or admiration or a mixture of both.

While these categories are - at least to some degree - obscure, we will now continue with the facts our results did reveal: We start with (1) some considerations concerning the general reporting on foreign countries, (2) look at cases that are more complicated to explain, as they did not show any relevant differences compared to 1992 data, first and foremost results concerning the US, before we (3) turn to those countries that did reveal significant changes between commercial and party papers, namely Japan, Russia/Former SU, and the developing world.

2.1. International news reporting and world affairs: 1992 and 2001

The driving idea behind our choice for these two years for comparison were considerations concerning domestic Chinese politics (see chapter II, p. 59f), as national news are at the core of the study. It has been our aim to select two time intervals that would allow a sound comparison in the fluctuating and ever changing field of politics. Yet, as we turn to international news, political situations are much less comparable; world affairs changed a great deal in the course of the 1990s, even before September 11th seemed to change everything to some degrees. In terms of both China's foreign policy and most Western countries' China policy, 1992 was a time still dominated by the fresh impression of the successful revolutions in East-

ern Europe and the unsuccessful democracy movement in the PRC (we will discuss China's bilateral relations at that time more in detail in the following sections). Yet in July 2001, 1989 was history. The protagonists of these days were either dead or out of office (except for Li Peng). While in 1992, "most favored nation"-status had been a hotly debated issue in the US election campaigns, China in 2001 has even joined the WTO. While trade sanctions were no issue any longer, the 1992 enthusiasm for new world order rhetoric had given way to a new (or old) Manichean language of "us and them" in US foreign policy, on the other hand. But changes did not only occur in Sino-US relations; domestic and foreign policies had also altered in Japan and Russia to a certain degree, which has to be considered when discussing our results. September 11th surely further bedevils any comparative interpretation: Even if one might find exclamations about sweeping changes exaggerated, the events definitely changed at least foreign policy agendas of all countries from one day to the other, especially the one of the US, which in turn had great impact on Chinese foreign policy, or at least on official foreign policy propaganda. We thus have to be prepared to face two sources of data distortion in our 2001 sample: (1) A sudden switch in propaganda directives how to report about foreign affairs, especially about the US, and (2) the "news effect", i.e. that a single event dominates the entire reporting about international affairs, which is perceived as so extraordinary in its scale and impact that the time is unique politically and also in terms of press coverage and thus incomparable to other time slices.

It is important to be aware of these problems, but they should not be overstated: Any longitudinal study of international news reporting has to deal with changes in world affairs. They are surely a factor, but need not be fatal to analysis. Provided they are examined, and results viewed in this light, assessment of single factors - as in our case, press commercialization - is possible. Second, as our study is not concerned with the *content* of international news as an absolute value (for instance: "do Chinese newspapers report more positively about the US in 2001 than in 1992"), but just traces differences between types of papers, changes of which would only then interfere with our data if they were to alter the *modes* of press reporting. This could happen in two ways: Events could change the attitudes, interests, and demands of the audience and thus alter the direction of market forces. Alternatively, those market effects that we expect to influence international news reporting might be exceptionally overruled by political directives due to special circumstances that arise from a changed international environment. All in all, our analysis will therefore have to consider three aspects: 1) Changes in China's bilateral relations that gave rise to changes in official viewpoints (which would be mirrored directly in the party press and to a certain degree in the commercial press, too); 2)

Changes in citizens' attitudes towards the countries under investigation, which might alter audience demands for the respective news reporting (which would be mirrored in the commercial press); 3) exceptional political circumstances that might further increase the dependence of commercial papers on party directives (which would block market effects expected under usual conditions).

2.2. Politics prevail: Reports about the US and Western Europe

2.2.1. Reports about the US

According to these considerations, we will first look at the developments of Sino-US relations from 1992 to 2001 and analyze possible changes in official viewpoints and public attitudes towards the US in order to gain some ground for the interpretation of our data.

The Bush (sr.) administration had been comparatively soft on China, partly rewarding China's willingness to cooperate on proliferation and trade issues in 1991 and 1992, and because of support of the US during the Gulf War (Lampton 1995: 77ff). China sought to avoid any confrontation wherever it could in those years that were still overshadowed by the Tiananmen incident, and kept a tough stance only on Human Rights issues. The Clinton election campaign consequently picked Bush's China policy as a target of criticism and forced Bush to permit sales of fighter jets to Taiwan, but besides that, the Bush administration tried to keep relations with China as smooth as domestic pressure and the Clinton campaign would allow (Tucker (ed.) 2001: 450ff; Schaller 2002: 203ff). Consequently, Deng hoped that Bush would be re-elected, and official propaganda proved to be quite restrained throughout the second half of 1992, the time covered by our first sample. The Clinton years witnessed a long list of events that severely strained Sino-US relations, beginning with the rows over the MFN-status, China's bid to host the Olympics that was impeded by the US, struggles over Taiwan and Tibet, efforts to condemn China at the UN Human Rights Commission, and the Belgrad embassy bombing. Things became worse when Bush jr. stepped into office and labeled China a "strategic competitor", promoted ballistic missile defense systems and - in practice - questioned the "strategic ambiguity" over Taiwan.

However, Bush - just as Clinton before - had to renounce his initial slogans soon after taking office and sought a "constructive relationship" after the jet collision in April 2001 had demonstrated how risky diplomatic and military low-level exchange could turn out. The surveillance plane collision highlighted the tensions, and afterwards both sides tried to build up their relationship (Harding 2002: 57f; Tucker (ed.) 2001: 458ff). That was the situation in July 2001, when our second sample sets in, a situation partly comparable to 1992: Common interests

were stressed and problems shelved for the time being; domestic affairs, namely the lavish production of the CCP's 80th anniversary festivities, Jiang Zemin's effort to have his "theoretical achievements" written into the constitution, as well as successions struggles dominated the Chinese leadership's agenda just as the concern for domestic stability had been predominant in 1992. What had changed, though, was the prevailing public attitude towards the US. There is no doubt that the long list of conflicts and provocations mentioned above severely damaged the image of the US held by the majority of the Chinese citizenry. Although we are lacking 1992 data for comparison, there is ample evidence suggesting that anti-American feelings have not been a common attitude among the Chinese at the beginning of the decade, but rather gained strength with the number of confrontations between the two states (Zhang 1998; Yu 2001: 99; Miles 2001; Lin 1999: 172ff). It is of no importance for our investigation whether these critical attitudes are fabricated by government propaganda or if they are justified in one way or the other - their existence is beyond any doubt, and we would expect them to be reflected somehow in contrasts between contents of US coverage in commercial and party papers (see Lee 2002: 106). Moreover, ten out of the fourteen issues of the sample were published after September 11th, an event that enhanced both of the two contradicting trends, the official and the public view: To the leadership, the events provided new perspectives for China's foreign policy, as it was no longer at the top position of the US security agenda (Garrett 2002: 38). Even though all the major thorny issues in Sino-US relations were still present and the more influential wing of the Bush administration successfully tried to hold containment strategies upright, the new situation offered opportunities to the Chinese leadership - eager for face-keeping and seemingly good relations with the US - that were to be seized (Harding 2002: 67ff); consequently, the Chinese government officially demonstrated its support for the US-led global counter-terrorism effort (Shambaugh 2002: 244ff).

So far for the official response. It is hardly surprising that the public reacted differently. Schadenfreude was the predominant mood expressed on web sites, (quickly banned) campus posters, and private conversations (observations by the author in several Chinese cities, September-October 2001). To sum up, September 11th had surely increased the gap between official and public views of the US that had already existed prior to the event, and would thus have enlarged differences between party and commercial papers, if market forces had exerted their influence.

Yet our main findings concerning the US have been that party and commercial papers did not differ much in neither 1992 nor 2001 in any regard, i.e. in mean article direction, attention,

topic distribution, or mean article direction of single topics. There is only a slight tendency of commercial papers to report more on military and domestic issues and less on international politics and trade. The expected negative trend of market-oriented papers did not occur. Compared with their overall reporting, articles about the US were even rather positive (i.e. less negative than those about other countries) in commercial papers.

The only marked differences in comparison to 1992 were found in rather marginal aspects, in terms of frequencies and topic distributions: An increased share of reporting on the US in both kinds of papers, a more even distribution of topics, and a more uneven distribution of frequency among commercial papers.

After September 11th, market mechanisms were set out of force by political decisions: The party leadership issued directives on September 15th (RSF 2002) - that is, before the first post-September 11th issue of our sample was published - that forbade newspapers to voice any political or moral comment on the events, neither any condemnation of radical Islam or terrorist attacks (besides repetitions of the official announcements) nor any reflection of the malice that Chinese web-sites were abundant with at that time. Papers that had expressed respective views were criticized. This was, however, just a difference in degree, and nothing genuinely exceptional. Relations with the US had always been tightly controlled by the propaganda authorities, no matter whether the president's remarks about Taiwan are the issue of the day, or the collision of jets over the Chinese coast-line, or the embassy bombing in Belgrad, or any other of the various hot spots that made Sino-US relations so precarious in the entire course of the 1990s. That is, however, not to say that government control is not the main reason for the highly congruent reporting, it just means that it would be no factor special to the events that took place during the period covered by our sample. It is still very likely that strict propaganda control led to the uniform reports.

However, if one puts less stress on the uniformity of values but rather focuses on the slight differences in topic distribution and article directions, one could be tempted to argue a bit differently: September 11th was an event that - for various reasons - enthralled the Chinese public and thus forced any paper to report extensively on it. As it was forbidden to explicitly voice an individual viewpoint, all papers could do to meet these demands was to describe the attacks themselves, describe the reactions of the public, and the military consequences the US drew in Afghanistan. The fact that they focused a bit more on military issues and "domestic politics" (where reports about the attacks belong to), and less on international politics (where reports

about governments, including the Chinese, expressing their solidarity, belong to) than party papers did, proves a certain flexibility of commercial papers and their willingness to correspond more to the readers' interests. So does the fact that some papers devoted almost their entire international news section to issues related to the US (and thus to the attacks), while others, especially party papers, but also a few commercial papers, were less one-sided. This interpretation is furthermore supported by the observation that differences in mean article direction between commercial papers were slightly more marked in 2001 than in 1992, which indicates a certain independence of market-oriented papers to portray the events in the aftermath of the attacks. Results of another study of press coverage of September 11th in the PRC (which compared, however, two mainland papers only) also found some difference between a commercial and a party paper at a rather subtle level, as the commercial paper put the events more frequently in the context of "war", while the party paper preferred terms like "crime" to describe them (Hsu 2003: 91f). An extensive study prepared for US congress found national (=party) papers to report a bit more positively about the US in September 2001 than commercial papers did, which would support the assumption of a market-oriented press responsive to audience demands. However, the same study revealed that party papers had been more negative during the plane collision incident in April, events we would also expect commercial papers to make use of (USCC 2002). We may conclude that results of this study as well as those of others are either ambiguous or very subtle; values differ too little to discern any strong general tendency of commercial papers to respect reader demands to a considerable degree. If the differences should be considered significant, we would expect them to be mirrored in significantly different mean article directions. But that is not the case. We find very similar values for popular and party papers in 1992 in terms of mean article directions, and the same slight predominance of military issues in the popular press as observed in commercial papers in 2001.

All in all, our interpretation rather emphasizes the political imperative which towers above over the commercial one - policy issues so crucial for the PRC as relations with the US are not left to the market.

We should nevertheless stress that results might have turned out differently in a period of time not dominated by a single event as the last third of 2001. In times less mesmerized by the September 11th-attacks, Chinese papers would probably have been freer - both politically and economically - to choose what to report on and how. We should therefore not go further than saying that in times of high political sensitiveness, market effects are not discernable in the Chinese newspaper reporting on the US.

2.2.2. Western Europe

The results yielded no very clear picture of reporting about Western Europe: The amount of negative reporting in commercial papers was well in line with the general trend that market-oriented papers show lower values in their mean article directions than party papers do; only a slight tendency of commercial papers to report more extensively and more positively about society, but less frequently and more negatively about international politics could be discerned. These findings could be a weak indication of a greater openness of commercial papers towards lifestyles and values of Western societies, which we possibly could not detect in the case of the US because of the overwhelming September 11th-effect and because animosities against the US superimpose the openness for the West as a societal model. The negative portrayal of Western European society in the party press, in contrast, would then have to be understood as an effort to avoid a too rosy picture of a society opposed to communist and authoritarian ideals in many respects. This assumption is backed by the fact that commercial papers show higher values regarding this topic for Western Europe than for any other country, while the respective values in the party press are extremely low. Yet, we have to stress that this trend is only a weak one, as it is not found throughout all papers of our sample, and would thus require further investigations for confirmation. Differences in reports on international politics can be simply explained by the high ratio of reports on official exchanges in the party press. As reports on international politics in the commercial press are not more negative or positive than those on other regions, there is little reason to assume any specific audience preference to be reflected here.

2.3. Commercialized news: Japan, Russia, developing countries

2.3.1. Japan

Sino-Japanese relations deteriorated significantly from 1992 to 2001: At the beginning of the decade, Japan was a very esteemed partner of the Chinese leadership: Not only was it by far the largest aid donor and among the most important sources of foreign investment - facts that have not changed to the present day - but, more importantly, Japan kept politics and economics apart after the Tiananmen incident, and was the driving force behind the 1990 G7 decision to resume normal economic and political relations with China (Lampton 1995: 93). A second reason for the comparatively warm atmosphere in the second half of 1992 was a new trend in Japanese society and political circles to reconsider the country's history and take more responsibility for war atrocities (Yoshida 2000: 94ff) following the death of emperor Hirohito. During his visit in October 1992, the new emperor Akihito at least expressed that he "deplored the

unfortunate period" in which Tokyo "inflicted great sufferings on the people of China" (Lampton 1995: 96). However, the following years witnessed a conservative counter-movement that organized resistance against the "new sincerity". The issue remained hotly debated in Japan during the 1990s and during the period covered by our second sample, with civil society efforts to spread historical knowledge struggling with conservative reluctance to admit the facts (Yoshida: 100f; Yang 2002: 17f).

Along with concerns about such debates, sensitive security issues (territorial disputes; missile defense), that had been downplayed when Japan was needed as a helpful voice in world affairs after Tiananmen, gained more public prominence in 2001 (Drifte 2003: 48ff; 93ff; Hughes 2002: 72ff). Apart from the general impression (probably shared by all foreign observers of Chinese society) of a wide-spread dislike of Japan among the Chinese population, we have also more scientific proofs of strong anti-Japanese attitudes: An extensive poll found 41.1% of all Chinese citizens stating that they detest (taoyan) Japan in 1997 (Yu 2001: 97). In 1994, at a time before the massive deterioration of Sino-Japanese relations set in, the respective value had been not much lower; what changed in 1997 was a sharp drop in the number of people saying they liked Japan (from 26.8% to 9.5%, Yu 2001: 97). However, in both years, interviewees found official Sino-Japanese relations to be much better (72.9% assessing relations being good in 1994, and 45.5% doing so in 1997); they have obviously been conscious of the gap between personal inclination and official relations. The main reason for anti-Japanese feelings turned out to be Japan's dealing with its past, an issue interviewees were much more concerned about than trade relations (Yu 2001: 100).

Both, the developments of official relations and the readership's attitude towards Japan are mirrored by our results: Mean article direction values of reports about Japan have dropped dramatically in both party and commercial papers, but the decrease in the latter is especially impressive. Due to its role in the aftermath of the Tiananmen incident, Japan had to be portrayed in a positive light in 1992; it seems that a sort of division of labor was applied: party papers reported most frequently about trade relations with Japan, while popular papers emphasized strong cultural ties, which perfectly matched the different functions the papers had in national news reporting, with popular papers being a softer version of the more unveiled propagandistic impetus of the party press. However, when the West was well back into business in 2001, Japan lost the newly gained currency with the Chinese government, and there was no need for preferential treatment in the official propaganda any more. This explains why reports on Japan in 2001 were not as enthusiastic as in the 1992 party press; however, party

papers are still eager to focus on favorable issues, especially trade, but also cultural news, in order to portray Japan as a neighbor deserving good relations as an important investor (see the example for political intervention below). Commercial papers, on the contrary, seem to have taken to Japan bashing instead, following the common, almost collective hatred of Japan. Obviously, market-oriented papers please their audiences when demonizing Japan. The atrocities of World War II and the unwillingness of both the Japanese public and the political class to confess the guilt of their nation lie at the heart of negative reports, which are, interestingly, not limited to the subject of war crimes: the hostile attitude spills over into the economic section, where commercial papers also portray Japan much more negatively than party papers do. One case that illustrates these characteristics of party and commercial papers is the reports on an orgy with Chinese prostitutes that was organized by almost 200 Japanese tourists in a hotel in Guangdong in September, 2003; the propaganda department intervened when commercial papers began to report on the incident that of course stroke a chord with their audience. Officials reminded the editors-in-chief of the importance of Japanese investment for the economic development of the region (RSF 2004). However, as our data revealed, such single interventions do not prevent commercial papers from playing their anti-Japanese card.

We can therefore conclude that the observed changes in the reporting on Japan are a clear evidence for the impact of the market mechanisms that have come into play since the mid-90s.

2.3.2. Russia

Contrary to Sino-Japanese relations, Beijing and Moscow have fostered their ties in the course of the 1990s. In 1992, when Yeltsin visited Beijing, relations were strained due to historical distrusts, unresolved border disputes, and the Chinese backing of the unsuccessful authoritarian coup against Gorbachev (Lampton 1995: 83f). In 2001, however, after a period of rapprochement in the 1990s, both sides at least officially declared the wish for enhanced economic and political cooperation, and signed the "treaty of good-neighborliness, friendship and cooperation" just when our second sample sets in (July 16th, 2001). Certain common interests (Russian sales of weaponry, joint opposition to US missile defense systems) notwithstanding, Russia's and China's mutual relations are far less important than their relations with the US or Japan, since both countries need but neither can offer what they most demand: investment. Despite rhetorical efforts and many joint communiqués in the 1990s, very little has been achieved in terms of bilateral trade (Rozman 2000: 169), which is rather a local issue important for the Northeast only. The treaty's value thus lies more in the stabilization of a relation

still characterized more by mutual suspicion than by trust (Rogachev 2002: 4), even if certain strategic potentials of an enhanced cooperation might be existent (Dittmer 2002: 404). September 11th surely posed a threat to the recently improved relations, as several common concerns became less important, but on the other hand, counter terrorism became a stronger, if not a new, common interest as both countries have to deal with Muslim minorities that to a greater or lesser extent have resorted or may resort to force in the future (Mikheev 2002).

To sum up, Sino-Russian relations are officially portrayed as more important than they really are. We do not know of any research on attitudes towards Russia among the Chinese citizenry, and there are no indications of a certain dislike or of favorable attitudes. Except for those living close to Russia's borders, few Chinese have first-hand experiences; and one might assume that only for the older generation are the confrontations in the 1960s and 70s of significance. The country's present-day image is probably shaped by Russia's disappointing economic performance in the 1990s. It is therefore most reasonable to assume no specific readership demands as far as articles on Russia are concerned.

In 1992, popular papers followed the tune set by the party press, as there are no differences between party and popular papers discernable in any regard, be it article directions or topic distributions. At that time, the political interest in Russia and its meaning for Chinese inner affairs was quite different: Although both party and popular papers dedicated every second article to Russia's foreign relations (taking rather pro-Russian stances, as opposition to NATO was the issue of the day) and its trade relations (frequently with China), party and popular papers also wrote a lot about the country's internal affairs, which they portrayed quite negatively in order to warn the Chinese public not to follow the Russian path towards democracy and to justify the "Chinese solution" of 1989. This is how the only moderately positive values (compared to Japan in the same year or to Russia itself in 2001) can be explained.

In 2001, however, the diplomatic developments described above were well reflected in the overwhelmingly positive reporting on Russia in the party press compared to the rather restrained reports in 1992, while values in the commercial press had decreased due to reports about negative events readers are much more interested in than in diplomatic kindness. To be more precise, most commercial papers picked a single incident as the main object of their reporting about Russia: the sunken submarine "Kursk" and the events and discussions following the disaster. It is highly doubtful, whether such reporting would have been allowed by the authorities if the fatal accident on the Chinese Ming class submarine (in early 2003) had happened earlier; it is only in retrospective, that the "Kursk" reports gain a somewhat subversive image. What drove editors to pay so much attention to the incident was probably the dimen-

sion of the accident and its military connotations, two issues popular with the Chinese audience. As, in contrast to the Japanese case, no indications lead us to assume any general anti-Russian mood in the Chinese population pressing for these negative reports, it rather seems that Russia in general does not attract much attention of Chinese audiences, giving not much reason for any reporting, and that it was pure chance that one single incident broke this rule: Those reports did not focus on Russia, but centered on a (Russian) disaster.

To sum up, a shift in official foreign policy propaganda resulted in changes in the party-papers reports on Russia, but commercial papers did not follow this turn. On the contrary, due to a lack of reader interest, reports on Russia even took the opposite direction in market-oriented papers.

3.3.3. Developing countries

Like reports about Japan and Russia, articles about developing countries showed tremendous shifts in 2001 compared to 1992: While party papers displayed stiff constancy in their reporting (mean article direction and topic distribution being almost identical for Africa, Latin America, and "Other Developing Countries" compared to 1992), commercial papers that had not differed much from the party press before, are characterized by a perceivably more negative reporting and focus on other topics than popular papers did. It seems that commercial papers are quite similar to Western newspapers in their selective attention to Africa's natural disasters and Latin America's political instability and high crime rates, these three being the factors that contributed most to the negative values of mean article directions in the commercial press. These results resemble very much corresponding findings for Western media, and should therefore be understood as the expression of a rather universal human interest in shocking news. So far for the bad news in commercial papers; the positive reporting in party papers, on the other hand, can again be explained by political considerations of the Chinese leadership. The countries of the "Third World" are a helpful tool for Chinese foreign policy in UN-committees and in the General Assembly to vote down human right issues or issues connected with Taiwan's claim of statehood.

2.4. Commercialization of international news: concluding remarks

We can conclude that there are in fact market effects to be found in international news reporting, but that they are rather restricted to the periphery of China's international relations: Commercial considerations are allowed to affect news on Russia, Japan, and the developing world, regions certainly of significance for China's foreign policy, but not its major concern. When

the most vital interests of the country are concerned, market forces are entirely overruled by political directives. This is, however, no surprising finding; the ability of the party-state to hold a firm grip on the media has never been questioned. It is beyond any doubt that foreign policy - as all major national policies - is no suitable topic for critical debate or explicit deviation from official guidelines. What we have been looking at are more subtle efforts by market-oriented papers to distinguish themselves in this policy field, and in this regard our findings clearly suggest that editors have understood the opportunities offered by their readers' inclinations and aversions and learnt to take advantage of them.

3. Newspaper profiles: the emergence of a political spectrum?

The first two sections of this discussion were concerned with our first question: Does the political content of commercial papers differ from the content of party papers? Our overall answer to this question was, apart from certain qualifications, positive. We now turn to our second question: Besides differences between commercial and party papers as such, is there any tendency of commercial papers discernable to distinguish themselves from each other? In other words: Does market pressure force these papers to develop a characteristic profile that gives them an advantage in the competition with other market-oriented papers? Are there signs of an emerging newspaper landscape that will develop a political spectrum?

We have said before that, for quite obvious reasons, newspapers will be restricted to very cautious signals of their political orientation, if they have any at all. They would be traceable in the attention paid to certain topics, in the amount of critical reporting on certain issues, in the way the economical sphere is framed, and in the way state-society relations are mirrored in topic distribution, actors, and criticism.

The most comprehensive value, the mean article direction, suggests a negative answer to our question: The gap between minimum and maximum values is 0.47 with commercial papers, and 0.44 with party papers; which means that the political considerations driving reports in the party press have brought about results not significantly different from those in commercial papers propelled by market forces - Can we exclude that decisions in the commercial sector are also political at heart? If that were the case, we would expect commercial papers to follow the political tune set by the respective party organs; there is, however, no evidence for that: Beijing has the most liberal party paper, but rather conservative commercial papers, while Liaoning's market-oriented paper is the most liberal in our sample, although Liaoning's party paper yielded a value closer to *People's Daily* than to *Beijing Daily*. Correspondingly, we

would have expected Guangdong to produce the most outspoken commercial paper, but *Yangcheng Evening News* is clearly second to *Liaoshen Evening News*. Thus, differences in mean article direction are probably not caused by political instructions. One could, secondly, think of the degree of party affiliation as the dominant factor determining a commercial paper's mean article direction; in fact, *Guangzhou Daily*, which is the most hybrid paper of all as it is an official party organ *and* a commercial paper at the same time, shows the lowest value, and *Beijing Youth News*, affiliated to a party mass organization, yielded quite a low value, too. But on the other hand, the paper with the loosest connection to the party-state, *Beijing Star*, shows the second-lowest value of all commercial papers, while there are remarkable differences between papers that are characterized by a comparable degree of party affiliation (the evening papers and *Beijing Times*).

So far, differences between commercial paper seem to be driven by other than political forces; but still, mean article directions let these differences appear rather marginal at the first sight, as we have seen above. However, greater gaps come into view when focusing on the politically relevant categories "criticism of party-state", "criticism of enterprise", and "actor citizens": In all three categories, differences between commercial papers are much more marked than those between party papers, a distinction not found in 1992. Some commercial papers publish almost as little criticism on party-state representatives and enterprises as party papers do, while others show exceptionally high values in this regard, clearly shaping their own profile by criticism reports. These general results are already some indication of market diversification that resembles a political profile. Looking at single topics, this trend becomes even more pronounced:

3.1. Social problems and economic issues

We have already discussed the importance of economic and social problems to the Chinese public above. In fact, some commercial papers evidently try to distinguish themselves by reporting about social problems in a distinctive way: While commercial papers do not differ more from each other in terms of the general attention paid to the issue than party papers do, they show enormous differences in terms of article direction, criticism of party-state, and criticism of enterprises. Four commercial papers are close to party paper values in terms of mean article direction (2 - 2.2), while two papers show distinctly higher values (2.6) and one, *Beijing Youth News*, even the exceptionally high value of 3.5. Among the three most critical papers, one equally blamed party-state representatives and enterprises, one voiced twice as much

criticism of the latter, and one accused enterprises exclusively and to a very high degree. In stark contrast, another commercial paper did not voice any criticism of enterprises at all, but quite a lot of the party-state, while all the other commercial papers voiced no criticism of the party-state and only moderate criticism of enterprises. Correspondingly, papers differed enormously regarding the main actors of their articles: Citizens were actors in 4.2% of the articles in one commercial papers, but of 54% in another, with the other papers were distributed over this spectrum.

As no such clear-cut divides are to be discovered between party papers, the commercial papers' distinct way of reporting about social problems is a very clear indication of their deliberate attempt to distinguish themselves.

Similarly, there are much more distinct differences to be discovered between commercial papers when it comes to issues subsumed under our comprehensive topic-category "economy": Papers differ enormously in the attention they pay to "consumer issues" and "stock market"; moreover, except for one paper, the two issues seem to be mutually exclusive to a certain degree: Papers that report more on stock markets than the average commercial paper report less on consumer issues, and vice versa. This is an important finding, as these two issues appeal to two different kinds of income classes: even though many Chinese show great interest in stocks, the ups and downs are still more of interest to those who have the spare money to engage in this activity. Consumer issues, on the other hand, although the respective reports may sometimes include expensive high-quality products, are rather the concern of the man on the street who has to look after the pennies.

Furthermore, parallel to the comprehensive topic "social problems", commercial papers show greater differences in their treatment of enterprises than party papers do: Criticism of companies is very rare in some (lowest 1.5%), but more frequently to be found in others (maximum 10%), and values are quite evenly spread across this spectrum.

All in all, social problems and economic issues seem to provide a ground for commercial papers to develop something like a distinct thematic profile. We will now turn to the second sphere of potential political significance identified before, the field of law and justice.

3.2. Law / justice

We have found that commercial papers differ largely *from party papers* in their reporting about law/justice issues, but in contrast to reports on social problems and economic topics, differences *between* commercial papers are only marginal in this regard: Mean article directions are quite uniform, and so is the share of articles about political corruption. There is a

wider span concerning reports on crime, but this is only due to two papers that show the maximum and minimum values; differences between the other five papers are far from being very distinct, as only one topic reveals significant differences between commercial papers: Illegal economic activities, and that is a telling fact: Again, it is a topic close to the economic sphere that is chosen by papers to distinguish themselves.

We understand these findings as an indication that either political directives or editorial caution forms a general ceiling for both corruption reports and news about crime cases; our interviews rather suggest that the tight interplay of media workers and cadres responsible for propaganda leads to a common practice in this regard that manages without written regulations. This explains why values do not exceed a certain level; that almost no paper falls short of them on the other hand, is due to the other factor shaping news content in the PRC: the market. For in contrast to economic issues, which appeal to different kinds of readers differently, corruption is an issue that unites the Chinese people in indignation: Even if polls found affluent and better educated people to worry more about the problem, interviewees from other backgrounds also expressed great concern about it (Fewsmith 2003). Papers thus have no reason to report less on corruption than they are - explicitly or implicitly - allowed to. The differences found in reports about crime cases should not be overestimated: As we said, there are only two commercial papers differing significantly on the issue, and the one showing a very low value in this regard is *Guangzhou Daily*, whose restraint might be more due to its responsibilities as a party organ than to commercial considerations. It thus seems that the prevailing uniformity between commercial papers is due to an effect parallel to that in corruption reports; it seems that the combination of political and economical pressures lead to a greater uniformity between commercial papers on law/justice issues. The only exception to this rule confirms our conclusion drawn in the previous section, i.e. that economic issues are the battlefield commercial papers are fighting on with each other.

3.3. Other topics

As for most of the remaining topics, differences between commercial papers generally are not larger than those between party papers. Efforts to distinguish themselves are not to be found in reports about "society" and "science/education"; there is, however, at least one interesting finding concerning "health/environment": In these categories, a much greater variety of criticism can be found within commercial papers. Some papers quite frequently hold enterprises responsible for environmental pollution, while others show low values close to those of the party press in this regard. Yet the attention paid to environmental issues does not differ as

much as we had expected, since we know from polls that concern about environmental problems is more often to be found with better educated and more prosperous people (Fewsmith 2003); similarly, we had expected commercial papers to leave a footprint on issues like science and education, as these are topics that readers should be interested in to different degrees, following different educational backgrounds. It is hard to say why this expectation has not been met by our data. Possibly, education as a key to success is in fact so common a value among Chinese of all social strata - an assertion frequently made and in accordance with the author's own observations, but nevertheless never examined by social science as far as we know - that there are no preferences of certain groups of readers that papers could try to appeal to. But we should still expect intellectual and educational backgrounds of readerships to play a role in newspaper content; the result is therefore somewhat unsatisfying in this respect - maybe a more detailed category system that measured different levels of education would be more instructive.

The only topic where stronger differences between commercial papers are traceable is "accidents", a very ambiguous topic, as we have seen above, for it contains both political and sensationalist elements. Interestingly, the topic is most often and most critically reported on in *Liaoshen Evening News*, the commercial paper of a mining region, which suggests that in fact a more political reader demand is behind the abundance of respective reports. We will discuss this issue in more detail when turning to single paper profiles in the following section.

3.4. International News

We have shown above that competition between commercial papers is mostly mirrored in their reporting about social and economic issues as far as national news are concerned. In their reports about foreign countries, market-oriented papers also try to distinguish themselves: As for topics, differences are larger concerning reports on international trade and international culture; both topics are prominent in some papers and only marginal or virtually non-existent in others, while both party papers in 2001 and popular papers in 1992 showed quite uniform values in this regard. They also show values fluctuating stronger not only regarding the *amount* of coverage of the US and Japan, countries we can assume to attract special reader attention, but also regarding the *direction* of their articles about the US, Japan, Western Europe, and Russia, i.e. all the major players in world affairs. Differences are traceable, even though less markedly in the case of the US (span in party papers: 0.08, in commercial/popular ones: 0.29) and Western Europe (0.47/0.62), but very clear in the cases of Japan (0.1/0.91) and Russia (0.27/1.01).

3.5. Four types of newspaper profile

We will now try to interpret our findings concerning single newspapers in an effort to characterize some of them regarding the profile of their political content. The guiding idea of this section are distinctions commonly made when discussing Western newspaper landscapes: One is the difference between quality and tabloid papers, another one pertains to the papers' content as far as economical issues and political attitudes are concerned (i.e., to label it very roughly, if they rather take pro-business or pro-labor stances concerning economics, and if they are rather conservative or liberal concerning politics). According to these differentiations, we can expect papers to resemble one of four "ideal types": liberal prestige; liberal/pro-labor tabloid; conservative/pro-business prestige; conservative tabloid.

Beijing Youth News: The paper is marked by a very pronounced critical reporting, which is mirrored in frequent criticism of party-state representatives and an extensive coverage of (and negative reporting on) politically-sensitive issues. Although we found the paper to report surprisingly little on environmental issues and not as much on science and education as one might expect, the paper's reports on such issues is more critical than in other newspapers. *Beijing Youth News*, is certainly the paper in our sample that underwent the most radical transformation since 1992, having developed from an organ of a party mass organization into one of the leading and economically most successful dailies of the country. However, some remnants of its ideological and organizational affiliation are still recognizable in its large amount of affirmative articles, the largest share of reports on party affairs, and the second-largest on the military among the commercial papers. The suggestion that the latter might also be due to a young readership more enthralled by military issues is refuted by the fact that *Beijing Youth News* dedicates less space of its international news reporting to military issues than other commercial papers do, while it was a very special characteristic of the paper in 1992 to excessively publish reports about war and weaponry. Moreover, *Beijing Youth News* is the only paper in our sample that does not portray the US in an overall negative way. It even has a slightly positive mean article direction value, which is largely due to more reports about cultural issues and a more positive reporting on the US' society and domestic politics.

Reports on sports and entertainment as well as about accidents are a bit less prominent than in most other commercial papers, while there is more reporting in most "culture" categories, another clear indication that *Beijing Youth News* appeals to an educated readership. Although the paper is very outspoken on social problems, other commercial papers are more distinguished

in their criticism of enterprises and certain economic issues in general. It therefore seems that *Beijing Youth News* is more marked by political than by economic features of its content.

All in all, *Beijing Youth News* very much resembles a quality newspaper since it carries contents that are highly political, tries to be as close to the idea of media as a critical institution, a "watchdog", as it is possible under the political conditions prevailing in the PRC, and chooses topics that rather appeal to a well educated readership.

Beijing Star, on the other hand, is quite the opposite: It reports very little on politics in general, and is very conservative in its reports on issues that show some marks of criticism in other papers. Reports about entertainment are the most frequent among all papers, and no other paper writes more about consumer issues. This is the only topic where the paper takes some critical stance, while reports on the economy and on social problems are even closer to the party press than to many commercial papers. Reports on crime and accidents have just the same frequency as reports in other commercial papers.

These findings are the more interesting as *Beijing Star* is the youngest paper in our sample, and the one with the loosest party affiliation. It thus would have room to maneuver - but in effect, the paper's enormous success is obviously not based on developing a political style, but is, on the contrary, due to other maxims: avoid thorny topics except those that speak to the readers financial interests directly; do not molest your audience neither with the country's problems nor with propaganda; focus on entertainment and the little thrills of crime and accidents instead. After all, *Beijing Star* does not seem to appeal to lower social strata: otherwise, there should be less culture and more social conflicts if it was the paper's strategy to attract these readers. *Beijing Star* audience appears to be rather apolitical middle-class.

Liaoshen Evening News is a third kind of paper: Although it showed the most critical reporting on average, this was less due to criticism of party-state representatives, but to a very pronounced criticism of enterprises and a focus on social problems; probably the bad condition of Liaoning's heavy industry is the reason why reporting on economic issues is so critical, while this situation is not mirrored in the province's party paper. As a matter of fact, the gap between the two Liaoning papers is extraordinarily wide in any regard, just like the one between the party's rhetoric and the people's reality. For the same reason, the large amount of reports about accidents probably reflects not only the sheer fact that large-scale accidents do happen more frequently in a province characterized by mining and an ailing industry, but also that people

know of the institutional short-comings and personal responsibilities for them, and want to read articles about the deplorable state of affairs.

Cultural topics are very rare in the paper, and so are international news, with the exception of populist topics; no paper shows a higher share of articles on military affairs and human interest stories, and the share of reports on accidents in the international news section is above the average. While entertainment and sports are not more prominent than in other commercial papers, *Liaoshen Evening News* is number one in other topics of mass interest, like crime or consumer issues.

All these characteristics combine to an image of a paper that is sensationalist on the one hand, and critical on economic disparities on the other - we may call it the early stage of a left tabloid, to distinguish it from the type of a conservative tabloid we found in *Beijing Star* and the liberal prestige paper we see in *Beijing Youth News*.

The last element of the matrix is a conservative prestige paper: *Guangzhou Daily*. The paper is just as critical as a paper has to be in China if it wants to be taken seriously by the readership; its mean article direction is exactly 2.0, it voices some, if moderate, criticism on party-state representatives, and touches sometimes, but not too often, upon sensitive issues. Another marked characteristic of the paper is its clear pro-business stance: negative reporting about enterprises is largely restricted to stock-market-relevant news about single companies. *Guangzhou Daily* does not write articles critical of enterprises in the context of environmental pollution, consumer issues, or social problems, the latter topic being virtually not touched upon by the paper. In terms of topic distribution, news on the stock market and enterprises feature very prominently, while reports about consumer issues are virtually absent.

The paper's conservatism is exclusively revealed in the sections concerned with economic, law, or societal issues. In terms of directly political and ideological articles, *Guangzhou Daily* is as unobtrusive as all the other commercial papers, reporting very little on party affairs, military and ideology, while its entertainment and sport sections resemble those of most other commercial papers. It so answers the minimum demand readers will make on a general interest newspaper worth buying. Still, *Guangzhou Daily* distances itself from populism by publishing only very few reports about crime and accidents (the only exception is the paper's populist writing about Japan).

Guangzhou Daily is thus the perfect modern party paper: conservative in content, pro-reform-minded in the sense of the Communist Party, but adapted to the new market conditions and able to combine market success with political correctness.

We will not discuss the other papers of our sample here. The four papers dealt with are by far the most exemplary cases for the four divisions of our matrix, so the rest can be omitted.

4. Summary

The data provides evidence of a grown political plurality in the Chinese newspaper landscape. Differences in content between commercial and party papers proved to be most accentuated with regard to sensitive topics: The sphere of law and justice and reports on social problems and conflicts. Differences were significantly less marked in less sensitive areas such as health care or education. The distinctly political tune of commercial papers could be traced in every category, the most important being mean article direction and targets of criticism combined with topic frequencies.

Yet certain limits of critical reporting are also obvious: The share of reports about corruption cases is high in all commercial papers, but does not pass beyond a certain mark. The obsession of Chinese officials with pedantically defined "correct lines" (like Hu Yaobang's "80% positive news" benchmark, see p. 67) may - implicitly or explicitly - be at work here. Another example for political limits is criticism of cadres in connection with social conflict, or international news that are of highest concern, namely reports about the US or about international trade relations (including WTO-accession).

On the other hand, some political differences between commercial and party papers *were* traceable in the international news sections: Market-oriented papers evidently try to satisfy reader demands by reporting negatively about Japan and by focusing on sensationalist news as far as Russia or developing countries are concerned.

All in all, commercial papers used political content in a different way than party papers. But this is not where diversification stops: Political differences *among* the pool of commercial papers could also be detected. Four types of commercial papers could be identified which vary with regard to political viewpoints and styles, namely conservative prestige papers, conservative tabloids, liberal prestige papers, and pro-labor tabloids.