I. Theory

The role the press might play in the transformation of the Chinese polity is the subject of the present study. This chapter will (1) provide an overview of the existing studies dealing with transformation processes in the PRC and prospects for regime change or stability. The aim of this overview is to locate the present thesis within the broader stream of research on China's political prospects, a stream consisting of a bulk of investigations concerned with single, specific aspects of this transformation process. I will then turn to the more narrow field of research on media and democracy and therefore (2) introduce some suggestions made by media scholars how to analyze the media's role in transition processes from a comparative perspective, and make an attempt at combining their ideas in one comprehensive analytical scheme. This scheme will finally be used to (3) present the state-of-the-art research on media and democracy in China.

1. China studies: Will China democratize?

Western political science as well as Western politicians have three major interests in China: Security, economy, and stability. Research on security issues deals with China's foreign policy goals, international cooperation in diverse policy fields, and military strategies; studies on the Chinese economy are interested in developments and structural reforms (including international trade regimes) that might change the nature of state-society relations and lead to shifts in the government's agenda and in inner-party power structures; and the research interest in "stability" focuses on the question, whether or not China will experience some sort of regime change in the near future, and tries to assess various factors (see below) that might help or hinder such a transition.

All three interests are intertwined to a certain degree, as developments pertaining to one sphere can be cause and effect of changes in the other two: The assessment of China's foreign policy, for instance, at least partly has to reckon with developments of the domestic economy and of international trade relations as well as with the leadership's considerations for domestic political stability, for international political conflicts more than once have given rise to anti-government protests in the past. On the other hand, it probably will make a difference to foreign policy advisers in the West, if security scenarios for the year 2020 assume a democratic or an authoritarian China to be the strategic competitor (or partner) in the Far East - leaving the question aside, as to whether the former would make things really much easier (see Bernstein/Munro 1997 and Bachmann 2000). The connection of the "economy" and the "stability" issue is even more obvious, as the effects of economic reforms are among the driving forces

for social unrest and thus a destabilizing factor, but are at the same time regarded as the key to further economic growth which is the last source of legitimacy for the communist party.

The present study, however, is concerned with the third set of questions, that deal with the issue of stability or change. Even if today one might refrain from putting the question as bluntly as a the *Journal of Democracy* did in its first issue in 1998 ("Will China democratize?"), curiosity about the path China's political system is going to follow in the coming two decades is the driving force behind many research projects that deal with specific trends or conflicts that can be observed within the party-state, within society, or in state-society relations. Of course, no single survey can claim to directly link the micro-level developments, that are usually under scrutiny in a reasonably limited investigation, to major political reforms that would result from them; yet most studies concerned with domestic political evolutions in the PRC explain their relevancy by referring to the significance of this greater question, and frame the specific research interest accordingly. Moreover, even social scientists from mainland China have recently been discussing quite frankly the fact that China is not only in an economic, but also in a political stage of transition, making it perfectly clear that this process is heading towards greater democratization of one sort or the other (Qin 2003; Kang X. 2001). Not only are there many voices vehemently advocating democratic reforms that indirectly question the fundamental principles of the communist party (Hu 2002; Qin 2002; Jia 2001; Huang R. 2002; Xu 2002), but mainland China's political science has also developed rapidly in terms of scientific quality in the last five years, scholars having contributed very valuable analyses and empirical research especially on such topics as: prospects and problems of grass-root democracy (Guo, Z. 2002; Wu 2002; Tang/Huang 2002; Huang, W. 2002; Xiang 2002; Cai 2003; Lai 2003); the structural reasons for corruption (He 2002; Wu 2003; Zhao 2002; Wang 2001); and the consequences of income disparities and of increasing social stratification for regime stability (Sun L. 2002; Lu 2001: 42ff and 142ff). Although I follow conventional wisdom to separately deal with books and articles published inside mainland China and with those published without political restraints, I can only highly recommend to take the work of mainland China's colleagues seriously. This pertains in particular to certain problems the leadership itself wants to be solved, and that therefore can be discussed quite unrestrictedly.

Having said this, I focus on articles dealing with China's transition that have been published outside the PRC now. I have arranged the multifaceted single studies in a two-layered scheme in order to gain a better overview of the major topical directions research has been heading for since Deng Xiaoping passed away and the 15th party congress decided to push market reforms beyond existing limits in 1997:

Sphere	Themes	Literature
Political System	Party: elite splits; leaders' attitudes; party reform (1)	Oksenberg 2001; Fewsmith 2001a, esp. 77ff; Fewsmith 2001b; Teiwes 2000; Friedman 2000; Dickson 2000
	Grass-root Democracy: township/village elections (2)	Li 2003, Li 2002, Pastor/Tan 2000, Oi/Rozelle 2000; Manion 2000; Cheng 2002; Zhong 2002
	Constitutionalism: people's congresses, law reforms (3)	Keller 2000, Shi/Bu 2000, Tanner 1998
Society and Economy	Protests of the Poor: labor unrest and rural discontent (4)	Bernstein 2000; Lee 2000; Howell 2000; Chen F. 1999 Solinger 2003; Bonnin 2000
	Power of the Rich: democracy via growth and business (5)	Pearson 1997; Foster 2002
	Pressure from the Committed: civil society groups (6)	Jing 2000, Lo/Leung 2000, Fulton 1999, Potter 2003
Culture	History: Confucianism, imperial rule, failed republic (7)	Hu 1998, Hu 2000, Metzger 2000
	Elites: intellectuals, dissidents, influence of art (8)	Wright 2002, Goldman 2000
	Citizens: political culture, values, attitudes (9)	Shi 2000, Zhong/Chen/Scheb 1998

Fig. 1: Research on prospects for regime stability and change in the PRC, 1997-2003

The entire corpus of articles dealing with aspects of regime stability or change has been divided into three main categories: Studies concerned with the political system, those that deal with social conflicts and unrest stemming from economic inequalities, and finally studies investigating cultural factors that might influence political evolutions. Every main category has again been subdivided into three subcategories that define the objects of the respective studies closer. The third column refers to articles and books representing the particular field of research; monographs and articles dealing with several aspects which thus defy classification have been excluded from the overview and will therefore be mentioned briefly here: Ding (2002) provides a very valuable overview of discussions of intellectual élites on democracy, development and prospects of grass-root democracy, and trends of an emerging civil society (which corresponds with the second, sixth, and eighth topic in our scheme). Ogden (2002) is concerned with the same issue, civil society (8), and furthermore focuses on political culture (9), grass-root democracy (2), and improved legal procedures and individual rights (3). Lum (2000) weighs the state's actual capacities of control and suppression against the potential destabilization through the rise of reform factions within the communist party (1), and assesses the chance for a push for democratization initiated by labor or peasant unrest (4), and the role intellectuals could play in this process (8).

This literature overview is not meant to be exhaustive; however, the quoted articles include the most accomplished examples of the respective field of research, and the unequal number of articles referred to mirrors the greater importance of single research interests compared to others. The categories surely could have been broken down into smaller units, but then boundaries between them would be even more blurred than artificially built categories are already. In my opinion, the different branches of research on regime change in China are best covered by these nine categories.

However, there is one exception to this rule, which is exactly the subject of the present study: Research on media does not fit in neatly with any of the nine categories. True, most subjects are also influenced by factors predominantly dealt with in other contexts, as, for instance, the assessment of labor protests has to take into account possible leadership splits and the political culture of workers (their inclination to take to political action, etc.). But studying political implications of media structures is bedeviled by a more fundamental problem: While labor issues first and foremost belong to the economic sphere, media issues can hardly be classed according to any of the categories: As the media is tightly incorporated into China's political system and meant to be a pillar of communist rule on the one hand, but run by organizations that are more and more loosing their political character and turn into media companies on the other, it

has to be situated right in the middle between the political and the economic sphere. What is even more puzzling, media units are large profit-generating enterprises and are expected to develop into agents of civil society discourses that should reflect societal disruptions at the same time. Should the political role of the media be studied in the context of the rising power of entrepreneurs and companies or rather by considering its function for civil society? Or is the media yet, above all, a producer of cultural products which therefore must be studied under cultural aspects of regime change?

This outcome might be bewildering at first glance: The classification meant to provide a pattern to locate the topic of the present study reveals that such an exact location is just not possible; media is a cross-sector issue, touching upon many aspects of China's changing polity, economy, society, and culture. Even though research on China's media and its political role does exist, it is hard to clearly connect such research to one branch of political China studies. This multiple character poses some difficulties to approach the subject; "China studies" does not provide any concept that might serve as a starting point for media research. However, it may be questioned with all due respect if a science of this name exists at all beyond sound research on Chinese philology or history. When present-day phenomena of the economic, social, or political sphere are made the subject of investigation, it seems wiser to turn to the respective social sciences for theoretical guidance, and apply their general insights into social mechanisms and structures to the specific case. As far as the subject of the present thesis is concerned, political scientists and media scholars have not only provided a multitude of case studies that analyze countries in transition from authoritarian rule and the political role different media systems have played and are playing in this process, but also try to infer some general conclusions about the media's role in democratization processes from these cases. I will therefore introduce some of their results in the following section, and continue their efforts to build a general theory of media and democracy in transitional societies.

2. Media studies: The media's impact on democratization processes

Most research observing the interplay of media and democracy has so far focused on established liberal democracies, and either called into question (e.g.: McChesney 1999), defended (e.g. Page 1996), or qualified (e.g. Curran 2000) the traditional liberal understanding of the positive role a free press would play for the public control of the government and as a market place of ideas where citizens participate in discussions about their *res publica* (an overview of the main arguments is provided by Wheeler 1997: 1ff;). Critics of the media's political influence have pointed to economic interests that interfere with the political function media is

thought to exert in democracies: First, concentration of capital on a few influential media companies at national and international level leads to a concentration of communication power unchecked by any democratic procedure (McChesney 1997: 2ff); second, inasmuch as companies are companies in the first place, and politically responsible actors only in the second, their main interest is making profits, which means that those low-income groups that do not contribute to the media's advertisement revenue will not be catered to, and thus their views will remain unexpressed (Sparks 1992); third, media competition establishes a market, no public forum: people can only buy what is offered, and choose among contents and views that are provided by the media, but not necessarily express genuine concerns and proposals (Curran 2000: 129ff). Some authors even claim a malicious scheme discovered by their research and do not make any differences between "so-called" democratic and non-democratic regimes: "The ideological planning of communist governments and their creation of propaganda to inform and advise "the people" represent the same basic intentions capitalists have - to protect the political and economic interests of the ruling elites" (Lull 2000: 62). As the present study is not concerned with an established liberal democracy, I will not elaborate on this discussion; what will be of some interest for our topic, though, are critical observations of the double character of the media as political agents *and* profit-oriented enterprises, as far as it is a factor in transitional societies as well. Especially in the Chinese case, it is important to keep non-democratic aspects of media commercialization in mind, and not to oversimplify the issue by interpreting any change in ownership structures as political liberalization. Having conceded that, however, one has to warn (possibly) well-meaning postmodern Western scholars against defending autocratic media oppression by their efforts to rescue non-Western people from imperialism: Some authors lament that "pro-capitalist media information flooding the world" with their "arrogant and ethnocentric perspective" (Merrill 2000: 34) and state that "many Third World countries at present do not want a Western model for their communication systems (...). They do not think that government direction (even control) is necessarily bad" (Merrill 2000: 39). Maybe they did not sufficiently reflect upon who rejects freedom of expression, if it is really "the people" or rather governments and élites that hijacked their citizens' voices. That is, of course, not to deny that there in fact might exist a notion of free media deviant from the common Western understanding among non-Western people, and that the liberal concept is a normative idea clearly originating in specific Western historical and cultural roots (McQuail 2000: 3) - it is just meant as a caveat not to superimpose ideas currently popular in the West under a slogan advocating the opposite. I will discuss attitudes towards Western ideas of free media prevailing among Chinese scholars and citizens in more detail below (p.

37f), so it might suffice here to mention the substantial doubts of two leading Hong Kong based Chinese media scholars, as to whether it makes sense to frame research on the political role of mainland China's media with other than liberal theories (Lee 2000: 9; Chan 2001: 115). It should furthermore be noticed that most mainland Chinese authors seem much less troubled by methodological problems rising from diverging cultural backgrounds. Most of them either explicitly (Liu/Pu 2000: 179) or implicitly assume that psychological, economic and political processes do not differ that much from one people to another.

Yet, even if we agree that political processes in countries with different cultural backgrounds are basically comparable, the problem remains that cases are diverse and to a certain extent unique due to historical legacies, economic systems, cultural specifics, and so forth. The following compilation of case studies is meant to illustrate the problem and to warn against any underestimation of its consequences.

2.1. Abundance of case studies - lack of a general theory

One common approach to come to terms with the diversity of case studies is to group countries according to their geographical or historical features; yet this does not necessarily help much: Although there may exist some common preconditions for transition in, say, Eastern Europe in contrast to Latin American countries, differences between single cases are still significant (for Eastern Europe see Johnson 1998: 112ff, for Latin America see Lavin 1996: 21ff). To start from structural aspects, the preconditions for transition of media systems differ enormously from country to country:

A) Development: Some of the "third wave" states are deeply stricken with high rates of illiteracy and poverty so that substantial parts of the population are out of reach of modern media (for two African cases, see Frère 2000: 443ff), while other cases like industrialized Taiwan have reached per capita incomes and distributions very similar to Western countries.

B) Political culture and history: Some societies still have the vivid memory or at least the historical recollection of former vibrant civil societies and democratic media (like in most middle East European countries (Theen 2000: 292f; Johnson 1998: 107; with some qualification Milton 2000: 59ff)), while others had to learn these lessons basically from scratch like Cambodia (Sotharith 2002: 33).

C) Economic status and ownership: Some countries started the transition process with a basically privately-owned press like Thailand (McCargo 2000: 169) or Greece (Stangos 1991: 276), while in other cases state-owned press monoliths existed (Russia: Mickiewicz 2000: 88ff) or other mixed forms of ownership and state-society relations; other influential actors

like the church played a role in some African countries (for Ghana: Karikari 1998: 198f; for Nigeria: Bourgault 1998: 91ff).

D) Political system/media policies: Some countries that were to democratize in the 1980s and 90s had a rather liberal media system with little restrictions on content before the transition process set in (Philippines: Atkins 2002: 73), while others were under strict ideological control (evidently in Eastern Europe: Milton 2000: 70ff with notable qualifications to make for the Hungarian case: Sükösd 2000: 135ff; Indonesia: Atkins 2002: 26f; Sen/Hill 2000: 51ff; South Korea: Youm 1998: 177ff), and, again, anciens regimes that had tried softer ways of authoritarianism (Jordan: Jones 2002: 291ff), or did fail to keep their grip on the entire media landscape (Chile: Tironi/Sunkel 2000:173f).

The picture is not becoming any clearer when turning to actors and processes:

E) "Which role?: In some countries, the media has played a very active role in the struggles of transition processes and has been an agent of democratization, like in Thailand (McCargo 2000: 166), Ghana (Karikari 1998: 187ff), Chile (Tironi/Sunkel 2000: 173ff) or South Africa (Jones 2002: 45). In other cases, the role of the press was a less recognizable yet still extant feature of the core transition period, as in the Philippines, or Spain (Edles 1998: 22; Gunther/Montero/Werth 2000: 44ff), and, contrary to the Eastern European pattern, even in Poland (Johnson 1998: 112). In a third group of countries the official press played but a marginal role and switched to a democratic mode only when the outcome of events was manifest, and after major political decisions to liberalize the press had been made (Russia: Jones 2002: 373ff; South Korea: Youm 1998: 175). In these cases, however, the political role of the media in transition wasn't necessarily nil, because their impact on the establishment and stabilization of the new democracy has been at least one crucial factor among others, as in Poland (Millard 1999: 73) or Taiwan. This point deserves to be further researched, since several cases of unsuccessful or poorly successful transition cases are marked exactly by shortcomings in the liberalization of the media and in the political role the media is able to play. In Russia, for instance, after initial steps to liberate the press had developed well under Yeltsin, who used the media as an ally against the former Soviet establishment (Murrell 1997: 112f; 144; Ellis 1999: 69; Rutland 1996), the second half of the 1990s witnessed heavy setbacks in media freedom that endanger the democratic evolution of the country, and even threatens freedoms already achieved (Mickiewisz 2000: 98ff). In Zimbabwe, this reversal has been almost complete, with President Mugabe lifting the entire set of liberal media policy the democracy movement had struggled for (Nordlund 1996: 202f). And even in the success stories of Eastern Europe, critics

have found problems with the democratic role of the media stemming from old communist legacies (case studies in Milton 2000).

F) Effects positive or negative?: But even where media systems have developed into some arrangement that can be called free in terms of political conditions, it is far from clear whether these newly freed media systems are a factor in favor or against the establishment of liberal democracy in the states in question: Especially in Eastern Europe, an audience inexperienced in the critical reporting practiced by free media is observed to grow discontent with the performance of the new political system; as a second problem, market pressures seduce editors to play the nationalist card to attract readers, thus exacerbating ethnic tensions and undermining the political culture of the new democracies, while in the Philippines, the media, pushed by the audience, established themselves as a critical actor that fulfilled its watchdog role and thus played an important part in bringing down the Estrada regime (Coronel 2001).

G) Further complication arises from the question "which media?": 1. If media played a role in transition, was it the official media, incorporated into the existing political structures one way or the other, or was it oppositional, even illegal media like the Polish Samizdat? 2. Was it national actors or international players like *Voice of America* that were the driving force behind subversive media action. Satellite broadcasting has proved the major challenge to authoritarian governments in South-East Asia in the 1990s. (Atkins 2002: 73ff), but had almost no effect in Russia.

Further: If it was international news workers, has it been illegal to receive their broadcasting or has the content of their programs been the daily food of a given country's media consumers (like in the GDR)?

H) Discussing different media products, another distinction comes into play, namely the difference between print, broadcast and new media, not to speak about other, rather marginal forms of expression that might be summarized under the general term.

Up to this point, we can conclude that it is already difficult to understand the question what political role the media plays in transition processes, let alone answering it. Let us resume:

(1) The question could mean, which role media played to initiate a transition process, to assist an ongoing one, or to stabilize its results.

(2) It could, much more basically, ask whether media is a positive factor in democratization processes or not, and under which conditions media might promote or hamper successful transitions to democracy.

(3) It could ask, which media actors play which part in transition processes, distinguishing official and opposition media, legal and illegal, national and international media.

(4) It could ask, what kinds of media products are significant for any transition process: Whether it is newspapers rather than television or new media, or which one of them plays which role in specific circumstances or stages of transition.

2.2. Gaining ground for a comprehensive framework for comparison

The great amount of case studies as well as these diverse questions are the pieces of the puzzle that theory building has to put together. Fortunately, some scholars have made initial attempts to systematically sum up previous single cases and to generate, if not a comprehensive theory of the media in transitional societies, at least a cohesive and sufficiently abstract argument that provides some clues to answer our question. Inevitably, as most attempts concentrate on a few selected case studies as their starting point, such previous efforts do not claim to tell the whole story, but only to integrate the cases under scrutiny. Differences among them may therefore - for the largest part - be attributed to different perspectives, not necessarily to different points of view about the media and politics in general. Consequently, these differences should not be regarded as contesting models, but as observations that may be mutually assisting.

I will sketch out the major arguments about the role of the media in transitional societies that previous investigations have brought forward so far. As a second step, I will make the suggestion, that these different approaches might be integrated into a single, comprehensive theoretical framework that can be used as a systematic tool to analyze the political role of the media in any given transitional society.

I will focus on those attempts that try to point out which role the main branches of the media (press and broadcast) played for and in the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule in countries around the world. This means that I have to exclude efforts concerned with the establishment of democratic rule after the authoritarian regime has been overthrown (see for instance Jakubowicz 2001 for Eastern Europe).

Jones (2002) analyzed four case studies - the role individual papers played in the transition processes of Nicaragua, South Africa, Russia and Jordan - in a comparative perspective. While restricting the scope of the investigation to print media, his goal is rather ambitious: Jones searches for "basic imperatives that unite both capitalist and state-socialist press systems", and asks what sponsors do expect from their media. He further examines the rationale for and the ethics of journalist practice, and explains "what tensions and clashes may result from the interaction of sponsors and professional journalists" (Jones 2002: 23).

The comparative model he provides focuses on two objects, namely on what he calls the "mobilizing imperative" and the "professional imperative". The former is concerned with power structures that stem from economic conditions (who owns the media? which parts of the society have the financial or intellectual capacity to be addressees of news broadcast?) and political control mechanisms (who decides what can be reported about? what exactly are the limits?). The "professional imperative" is concerned with journalists and editors, their attitudes, values, and interests. In this regard, it is the crucial point for transition processes whether media workers are imbued with a professional spirit that leads them to try to perform a watchdog role, and to provide the public with relevant information and a forum for public opinion and exchange of ideas (Jones 2002: 23ff).

Although Jones doesn't explicitly interpret his own approach in these terms, one is tempted to divide his two "imperatives" into a "structural" and an "actor" complex. This might provide us with a valuable starting point: Structural aspects so far identified are: ownership; political control; socioeconomic development. Actor aspects are: how do journalists perceive their own role and how do they overcome obstacles in order to perform it.

Curry (2001), generalizing experiences from Eastern European countries after the transition process set in and major power shifts had already occurred, distinguishes three key actors, whose actions and responses need to be considered. 1. Makers (Journalists): Like Jones', Curry's approach is concerned with the professional attitude of Journalists in different societies, 2. Rulers: What use does the new political elite want to make of the media?, and 3. Users: Which are "probably the most problematic actors in the role of the media democratization" (Curry 2001: 137), because especially the economically marginalized parts of society will be shocked by the open criticism of institutions and authorities and by the amount of negative reporting, and will possibly assign the new content of the media not to the newly-won freedoms, but identify them as illnesses of the new political system; which interpretation will naturally destabilize the new order.

Beside these three players, a fourth factor needs to be mentioned according to Curry: international media. Its impact is ambiguous: While it is quite obvious that international broadcasting can destabilize authoritarian regimes, because it undermines their monopoly of information, it is also possible that, after first steps of transition have been taken, images from more developed or freer societies create a demand for quick developments that cannot be matched by the transitional economies and polities, and thus destabilize a positive transformation process.

A fifth aspect are the differing preconditions of transition. Curry identifies "three worlds of democratization": The West (historical), the communist world and the late democratizing countries of Southern Europe, and a "third world" in which "there is a real division between the politically active and literate population and the inactive and illiterate or non-media oriented segments of the population" (Curry 2001: 132f). As far as the latter are concerned, the media are not playing a significant role in democratization processes.

Chan (2001), having primarily cases from East Asia in mind, follows a similar line of thought: the media can promote or slowdown democratization. It promotes democracy when the media "help spread democratic ideas, reflect the voices of contending parties, provide the public with quality and relevant information, articulate the social choices, and facilitate public deliberation (...). What contribution mass media can make towards democratization varies with a host of determinants such as the power structure, political culture, media configuration, market pressure, organizational constraints, press ideology and personal inclinations" (Chan 2001: 108).

He distinguishes different modes of media control that work along a matrix of high or low constraints (political control of the media) and inducements (economic incentives to cooperate with the authorities rather than to check them) which the political system exerts on and offers to the media. The combination of these factors results in four modes of control: (1) Laissez-faire (liberal media systems of the west, with low constraints and low inducements; (2) Co-optation (a privately owned press with no strong power checks, but high symbolic and financial inducements to refrain from a too critical stand, for instance Hong Kong); (3) Incorporation (like South Korea or Taiwan media before transition, where the press was a dependent organ, but not the mouthpiece of the government); (4) Repression (authoritarian regimes). Yet Chan stresses that "like many ideal types, the boundaries between these models are sometimes not as distinct as they should be" (110).

Chan's main argument is, that "the configuration of media is primarily a function of the pattern of power distribution" (Chan 2001: 110), and that a more equitable distribution of power will thus always result in a more relaxed mode of media control. "The media may rise to represent critical public opinion (...) when they break from the spell of the prevailing power system under the combined influence of an energized civil society, well-developed alternative networks of communication, professional oriented media staff, and consumer pressure" (Chan 2001: 111). But on the other hand he stresses , that "not all the media in a market democracy serve as

a source of empowerment and as a public forum", because rewards for leaning towards the ruling elites might be higher (Chan 2001: 115).

Sparks (2001) tries to gain ground for a general theory of media and democracy by combining two geographical and two political categories. He contrasts case studies from Europe and Asia, and identifies each as democratic transition from communist or authoritarian capitalist rule. He then subdivides cases into five categories of elite-cohesion, based on the degree to which political and economic power over the media is concentrated. In this scheme, the absolute dependence of media from the party-state both in political and economic (ownership) terms typical for communist states would form one pole, with the free media of northern Europe being the other. Cases of authoritarian regimes with a partly privately-owned press would be placed between them, but closer to the communist dictatorship. Sparks then sketches two paths of the media's role in regime decay, one for the European communist case, one for the Asian capitalist case. A marked difference between the two comes into play as soon as regime decay turns into open crisis: the existence of a privately owned media would then yield the advantage of being able to adapt more quickly to the new situation, open up faster for controversial discussions, and push harder for new limits of media freedom: "Put very crudely, there is a greater probability that, during the process of regime decay, significant sections of the mass media will be able to exercise a greater degree of independence from the ruling party in societies resting upon private property than those in which state control of decisive sectors of productive property is the norm" (Sparks 2001: 27). On the other hand, once the regime has collapsed, media in former communist states enjoy a greater freedom than their counterparts in former authoritarian countries, because the latter will still be in the grip of private capital that owned the media companies, and the survival of these structures will leave less room for new actors to emerge on the media market (Sparks 2001: 22).
Interestingly, Sparks is puzzled by one case that does not fit into either of the two categories: China. As he aptly observes, the co-existence of a communist party-state with a more and more privately owned market economy leads to a hybrid state of the media, that is neither communist nor authoritarian capitalist. Second, China is the only case where authorities withstood the worldwide pressure for democracy in 1989 and which accordingly does not fit any scheme of regime collapses. But Spark does not stop here. Arguing that centrifugal forces will lead to another serious crisis of the authoritarian-communist state of the PRC, he expects that "transition in this case will be marked by both the dual crisis of authority that offered such radical potential in the case of European communism, and by the popular mobilizations that

have been such a marked feature of the cases of capitalist dictatorships in Asia" (Sparks 2001: 28f).

McCargo (2003): summing up his study of the political role of the media in East and Southeast Asian countries, McCargo distinguishes "modes of agency" and "modes of control" as useful analytical categories: Modes of agency can be distinguished as to whether the media works as an agent of stability, of restraint, or of change. His three modes of ownership and control are: direct state control, control through licensing private media and free press.
While McCargo states that analyzing regime changes in Southeast Asia in the 1980s and 90s, "generalizing about the role of the media in transition was impossible" (McCargo 2003: 154), he nevertheless identifies certain patterns: "Typically, minority elements of the print media, allied with the international media and internet sources, formed coalitions for change - while incumbent governments were more successful in controlling the broadcast media. Large newspapers often waited for the political tide to turn. There was little evidence that the media could themselves initiate transitions, but the supporting role they played could be crucial" (McCargo 2003: 154f).
McCargo stresses the complexity of private-state relations in media work, as "it would be wrong to assign a blanket description to the media as "progressive" in their political orientation", because financial or personal ties to the political establishment might shape a specific media's standpoint (McCargo 2003: 49), and media is often used as a political weapon not only by the state, but also by private actors (McCargo 2003: 12).

O´Neill (1998) discusses four factors that might determine the role different kinds of media might play in a transition process: First, the shares of different types of mass communication in a given country's media landscape, namely print, broadcast, and new media - which differ in their dependency on literacy and economic development -will be a factor to be reckoned with, as a given media's impact on the audience and the chances the state might have to control them will differ significantly from one kind of media to the other; broadcast, for instance, is assumed to have the largest impact on the audience, and can also be controlled more effectively than print media (O´Neill 1998: 8).
He further reflects on the degree and form of state control: A pre-censorship or a post-censorship system might influence transition outcomes in either way: a pre-censorship media system wholly discredited among the population might boost the call for a comprehensive media reform in times of transition, which again may have a positive effect on the process. On

the other hand, the "sheer monolithism of the press (...) may effectively block any meaningful diversification" (O`Neill 1998: 9). In post-censorship systems, there is some space for alternative thought, that might assist the democratic course, but "the very existence, however marginal, of this opposition can also serve as an excuse by new elites to avoid real media reform in periods of transition" (O´Neill 1998: 10).

A third aspect is the market and property ownership: The role of the media will partly depend on ownership structures, whether it is directly owned by the state or indirectly via state monopoly in authoritarian third world countries, or if it is "private, although their owners may be state-run or allied industries in the hand of an economic elite, thus leading to media collusion with those in power" (O´Neill 1998: 10).

A fourth point O´Neill makes is media globalization: Seeing the successful transitions elsewhere in the world can spark off a democracy movement in a country, if certain preconditions for it are given; opposition groups find it easier to access relevant information and organize resistance, while governments find it more difficult to control news and interpretation of facts and thus to shape the minds of their people. Technological advances (Internet) are likely to enlarge this potential. On the other hand, there might be an anti-democratic effect of global media, in that some big players either by dominant influence or by buying into smaller media of a given county, dominate politics and thought of a society from outside, without any democratic control from within (O´Neill 1998: 15).

Finally, **Curran/Park (2000)** built five categories the cases under investigation can be grouped in, distinguishing a political aspect (whether the country in question is democratic (1) or authoritarian (2)) and an economic aspect (whether the economy is neo-liberal (3) or regulated/dominated by the state (4)), adding a fifth category of "mixed" societies (5) that are either currently undergoing transformation or characterized by mixed regimes. They suggest four systematic questions to gain ground for a comparative analysis of transition cases around the globe: How do the media relate to the power structure of society (including economical power)? What influences the media and with whom does control over the media lie? How has the media influenced society? What effect does media globalization and the new media in general have on the media system and society? (Curran/Park 2000: 12)

In sum, these seven approaches have covered almost the entire range of world regions, political systems, and economic structures, and have given many valuable suggestions how to compare cases that seem hardly comparable at first sight due to their specific features. Most of

them are intended to compare a limited number of case studies, and none of them has claimed to be anything like a global theory of the media's role in transition processes that should be applicable in every single instance. However, there is an urge to put forward a general theory, that could possibly develop from the preliminary considerations the authors have brought forward. In the following section, I will present a model how such a theory could be built up by integrating these seven approaches.

2.3. Integrating the models: A comprehensive theory

Reviewing the seven analyses, there are five aspects that at least three of the scholars consider as appropriate categories of comparison, which means that questions related to these five aspects might be understood as providing some clues to the understanding of the media's role in transition processes of any country under investigation. The scheme presented below gives an overview of the five analytical aspects and the seven models:

	Chan	Sparks	Mc-Cargo	O´Neill	Curran Park	Jones	Curry
Market structures: ownership/ audiences	+	++	+	+	+	+	+
Political control: constraints / inducements	+ +		+	+	+	+	+
Development: literacy, media reach, etc.				+		+	+
Professionalism: attitudes of media workers			+			+ +	+
International media: access, image, content			+	+	+		

Fig. 2: Factors of media involvement in transition processes

A plus (+) indicates that the respective author(s) regard the aspect as relevant to decide which role the media has played or is likely to play in a given country's transition process. Two plusses (++) indicate that the model especially emphasizes the point in question.

The five analytical aspects can be well defined by the questions we have to ask when we want to understand the media's role in any given country in transition:

(1) Political Control: Through which means can political authorities directly control media content? What are the administrative structures, laws, and ideologies that refer to media policy and practice? Who decides what can and what can't be reported, what exactly are the limits, and by which methods does censorship safeguard that they are kept to?

(2) Ownership / Markets / Audiences: Who owns media companies and thus takes decisions about the employment of editorial staff and sales strategies, and to which degree does ownership influence styles and contents of a given media? Is the media predominantly privately owned or state-owned, is there open competition on a fully developed and diversified market or do oligopolist structures prevail? What kind of media styles and sort of content do audiences demand, and is this demand a decisive factor for political media content?

(3) Professionalism / Attitudes of media workers: Do journalists regard themselves as political or societal forces independent from the political establishment? Are they imbued with professional ethics that are characterized by values such as truth, courage, and integrity, so that they are driven by the wish to exert a watchdog role? Or do journalists, on the contrary, regard themselves as loyal supporters of the given political system; are they, as a third possibility, simply interested in personal economic gains which they would not wish to risk by challenging political authorities?

(4) Economical development / Literacy and reach: Which part of the population has access to which kind of media? What are the limiting factors (literacy; low income; remoteness of areas)?

(5) International media: Do citizens have access to foreign broadcasting or publications? What kind of influence do foreign media productions have on the people's minds? Under which conditions may foreign media companies operate in a given country?

Yet, the theories outlined above have not only suggested helpful questions to ask, but also drawn conclusions from answers: Certain features could be identified that point to a rather active role of the media in democratization processes. Evidently, political control and economic structures are considered the two most important factors that determine the political role of the media in times of transition; generally speaking, the former is regarded to be the

more significant one: Unless the political leadership splits up into different factions, political control can be exerted directly and on a wide range of issues. As long as the system of rewards and punishments is tight enough to cover all journalists working for the mass media, it is highly unlikely that the media is going to play a positive role in a given country's transition process. Loopholes in control mechanisms and diverging attitudes of leaders towards censorship may, however, prepare the ground for the media to be an agent of change. This is even more likely when the media is privatized to a considerable degree, although most scholars mentioned above remind us that private ownership can be a regime stabilizer too, especially when capital is concentrated and when financial incentives suggest cooperation with political authorities rather than challenging them. Generally speaking, a privately-owned media will be more prone to assist a democratization process by highlighting existing ruptures in the population and by emphasizing the diversity of civil society interests, in which a state-owned media will not take interest or much less so. There are, however, certain prerequisites to be fulfilled: There has to exist a true competition between media companies who have to be targeting a specific audience with specific demands.

It seems that media commercialization alone is no sufficient condition for a positive political role of the media in transition processes; only combined with market structures, politically aware audiences, and loopholes in the political control mechanism can economical interests of media companies and of private investors develop into a political force advocating change.

These two aspects, political control and market structures, are commonly regarded as the major factors determining the media's role; the three other factors are, all in all, considered less important, but might nevertheless influence events at critical stages. If journalists feel obliged to ethical values such as truth or freedom of expression rather than to the political objectives of the authorities, then it is rather likely that they will side with protesters and even run the personal risk of voicing dissent. But they will defend the old order if their professional ethos is closely linked to the ideology in power. The most ambiguous situation occurs, when personal monetary gains are the professional goal of media workers. In this case, the media corps will act cautiously as long as the old regime is in power and, during a political crisis, switch sides as soon as it seems rewarding - and safe enough to do so. Similarly, media reach and the impact of international media are not necessarily factors for or against democratization, but need favorable conditions to develop their potential as agents of change. Generally speaking, greater media access increases the number of information sources and the level of political knowledge, especially about the outside world in case of international media access. However, it depends on the attitudes of foreign media companies (will they comply with authoritarian

rule in order to get their program aired?), political frameworks (how tightly are e.g. internet sources controlled?), low language barriers (is there a "free" country speaking the same common language whose media can reach the population of the "unfree" country?; does a large proportion of the population understand English?), and other aspects to decide whether or not the access to international media can count as a democratization factor. As to the impact of domestic media, much will depend on the kind of media the majority of the people have access too. Of course, the more people consume media products, the greater is the political impact of the media; but that's a truism. What will make a difference, though, is the dominating media branch: Television is the most easily politically controlled, as it is costly and technically difficult to run, while papers are more flexible and more easily established. The internet, of course, is the media most difficult to supervise.

We can thus conclude that any analysis of the media's potential role in a country's transition process has to start from systematic answers to the questions posed by the five complexes as outlined above. Political control mechanisms and market structures should be at the heart of such an analysis, but the other three aspects have to be considered as well. The five factors, whose assessments might point to different directions, have then to be weighed against each other in order to obtain a sound idea of what can be expected from the media in the respective case. This is what I will do in the following section.

3. Applying the framework: Media and democracy in China

As for the formal structure of the analysis, I will make use of the analytical framework described above, discussing the five single categories found to be the key factors. Therefore, it will be necessary to deal separately with certain aspects of the Chinese media that are closely connected in practice. Especially the terms of political control, which are intertwined control mechanisms via (indirect) ownership regulations and (direct) political processes and institutional settlements, are to be split up into the two respective categories "ownership" and "political control". I would argue, however, - in addition to the formal necessities of our analytical tool - that this subdivision also makes sense regarding the matter under investigation, since developments in ownership structures point to a different direction than trends in political control mechanisms do.

The analytical framework outlined above tries to integrate different attempts of media scholars to understand the media's role in democratization processes. These attempts to their greater

part do not differentiate media branches. However, as soon as one aims at analyzing the interplay of media and democracy in more detail, every statement about any aspect, be it ownership, reach, content, etc., must distinguish between different general media branches such as broadcast, print and new media. As the present study is concerned with the Chinese press only, the following analysis will focus on newspapers especially in those aspects that show similar patterns for all kinds of mass media; diverging conditions of other media branches will mainly be discussed where differences matter substantially, that is in the case of "development" and "international media". The order of the five sections following is due to compositional considerations of the author's.

3.1. Development

Newspapers were the main source of news during the first three decades of the PRC; building on the party press system that had evolved during war and civil war times (Ting 1974: 80ff) and on the remnants of the bourgeois press that had experienced a brief flourishing in the 1920s and early 1930s (Ting 1974: 65ff; Liu 1971: 131). During the 1950s, the newspaper industry did not expand much (consisting of 265 papers and printing 9.36 Mio. issues), until during the Great Leap Forward, due to efforts to mobilize the rural population, numbers rose to 1884 and 30 Mio. respectively. After the failure of the Great Leap, numbers dropped again and came to an absolute low during the Cultural Revolution, when only very few newspapers were published at all. However, the political significance of newspapers has been immense throughout all these stages, as they were the most important source of information by far.

While newspapers thus had always been at the core of the mass media since the founding of the PRC, television was, despite sporadically transmitted programs in a few cities from the 1950s onwards, no factor until Deng's reforms provided the prosperity that was necessary for the spread of the medium (Lull 1991: 20, Nathan 1985: 165). Soon after the TV-boom set in, 92.3% of respondents to a survey conducted in 1982 could be classed as "watchers" who spent roughly 90 minutes per day watching TV on average, while only 81.1% answered they read newspapers regularly, spending an average of 55 minutes per day on reading (Womack 1986: 68). Interestingly, although TV even at this early stage proved to reach much more people, almost 40% of respondents named newspapers as their major source of news, but only roughly 20% did name TV (Womack 1986: 71), which was clearly recognized as entertainment rather than a serious source of news (Womack 1986: 74).

After two decades of breathtaking economic growth, the reach of TV is of course still higher than that of dailies, but a recent investigation produced numbers that are even slightly below

those of the 1982 survey (TV reach was 81-92% in three major cities compared to a 69-74% reach of dailies; Weber 2002: 60). What has changed, however, is the function TV has as a news source: Another survey conducted in the late 1990s found respondents to rely more on TV as a source of news than on newspaper articles, although newspapers were still regarded more important to "understand viewpoints and trends in society " and were still important to roughly 80% of respondents as a source of political news (Yu 2001: 225).

Illiteracy is very unlikely to restrict the impact of the press, as China's literacy rate reached 90.9% in 2002, a value higher than that of Turkey and twice as high as Pakistan's (HDR 2003). In terms of education, China is also rather comparable to well-off Asian-Pacific countries than to any society in the developing world (see education indices in HDR 2003), so that we do not have to expect patterns of news consumption differing much from western audiences.

Apart from the reach, even if the seven o'clock evening news on CCTV 1 enjoy the same authority in the eyes of their audience as People's Daily, the party press is all in all still considered a more "official" medium than TV. It is therefore hard to judge which medium is more influential on the minds of the Chinese people: "Television is quickly becoming the most potent shaper of popular images and values, but the party press retains its status as the foremost ideological instrument" (Lee 2000: 17).

Further changes in the media landscape closely connected to growing economic prosperity of the population are the rise of cable TV, that set in in the mid-90s, and the expansion of new media access since the late 90s. The share of cable TV reached 7.1% of residents in Beijing and 15.1 % in Guangzhou in 1997, and the number of internet users rises quickly (Weber 2002: 71).

As in both cases international media play a great role in political as well as in economical terms, we will deal with them in more detail in the following section.

3.2. International Media

Media globalization and media ownership are two intertwined factors that might influence future political developments in the PRC. China's national media systems are challenged by competitors operating from abroad, which undermine the party's control of media content to at least a certain extent. Although the Chinese government has repeatedly tried to reinforce its control over foreign broadcasting, especially over satellite dishes from Hong Kong, since Hong Kong television broke Beijing's monopoly of information especially in southern China.

(Latham 2000, Redl/Simons 2002; for most recent developments after the SARS crisis see *The Epoch Times* 29.04.2004).

What is even more delicate is the trend towards multinational media companies directly investing in the PRC. As revenues are more promising in this branch than in the print media, international capital and big multi-national media conglomerates are eager to enter the Chinese market with TV-networks, a process already under way since the early 90s (Chan 1994: 72ff) and accelerating ever since: Not only such Western companies like AOL-Time Warner, Murdoch's "News Corporation" (Star TV), and MTV, seek to get shares of the mainland TV-market, competitors from Hong Kong also do (Weber 2003: 282ff; Zhou 2002: 114ff). As the issue is of highest political sensitivity, the Chinese government has until today curbed the inflow of foreign capital in their media market (Redl/Simons 2002: 26), and excepted the broadcasting industry from the free-trade regulations postulated by the WTO-regime before joining it. Any changes to this policy are highly unlikely in the near future (Weber 2002: 69). However, there do exist enough loopholes for foreign investment into national media units, as restrictions are lower for other segments of the media industry, and broadcasting units may absorb capital from units belonging to those segments which effectively allows hidden foreign investment in national broadcasting (Guo 2003: 14; Zhou 2002: 4f; Weber 2003: 282ff). Yet, although many Western and Chinese scholars correctly point to the subtle influence of Western formats on Chinese audiences and expect a new drive for more opening, if not democratization from this increasing financial foreign engagement, the manifest political effects of this investment should not be exaggerated: Up to the present day, foreign enterprises have been very willing to conduct self-censorship as this proved to be a prerequisite for market access. As Yuezhi Zhao has put it poignantly: "The simple fact is, that transnational media corporations are in China to make a profit, not to promote democratic communication among the Chinese citizenry" (Zhao 2003: 58). As long as the Chinese government is determined to uphold its grip on media content, there is in fact not too much change to be expected from foreign investment, as international media companies have already proven to be willing to trade off self-censorship for market access (Feng 2003: 48). The modes of political control thus becomes a major focus of analysis when discussing the media's role in China's democratization process.

3.3. Political Control

As explained above, I will deal with political control mechanism in a stricter sense only in this chapter and leave those control mechanisms that belong to the financial/ownership sphere to

the respective section below, although they have originally been designed as a tool for political control as well. Instead, I will focus here on the propaganda system, censorship and the specific Chinese understanding of public opinion. Reference to historical developments is made only when necessary for the understanding of today's problems (to obtain further information, see Fang/Zhang (2000) especially for pre-modern times, Ting (1974) for the first half of the 20th century and Liu (1971) for the early decades of the PRC).

Differences between media branches arising from the institutional setting are rather marginal and therefore not discussed in detail: It does not matter which part of the bureaucracy is in charge of which branch of the media; there can be no doubt that the propaganda departments have the final say when it comes to decision-making in the field of media policy (Hemelryk/Keane 2002: 11f; Lee 2000: 18).

3.3.1. The propaganda "system" (*xitong*): mechanisms of control

To give the reader unacquainted with the PRC's political system a sketch of its structure, one may say that it can be described as a organizational hierarchy consisting of four horizontal layers of power: central, provincial, county, and local, and of (at least) six vertical axes of power, the so-called *xitong*, often translated as "system". But this term is misleading; *xitong* rather means a line of command in a certain policy field, in which all responsibilities are graded from the head of the *xitong*, usually a member of the Standing Committee of the communist party, down to minor officials of lower horizontal layers. One of these *xitong* comprises, for instance, decisions about financial-economic guidelines and lawmaking, and another one is the propaganda *xitong*. Every administrative unit has its own propaganda branch, and every media unit has a party secretary responsible for media content. Lower levels are supervised by officials of the level above (Su 1994; Hsiao/Cheek 1995: 77ff).

The system was established quickly after the CCP assumed power in 1949, when the new rulers had to merge two existing media systems: The seeds of their own propaganda apparatus established in the Yan'an-period and the "bourgeois" media that had developed in the big coastal cities in the first half of the century. Initially, as in many other policy fields, communist power was not strong enough to wipe out the existing media and install its own system in its place. The center started, instead, to integrate the bourgeois papers into the system just half a year after the PRC was founded and established the propaganda bureaucracy in the following year (Lynch 1999: 22).

Yet it is important to note that, the pivotal role of the propaganda ministry and the responsible cadres of the central party committees notwithstanding, this system is decentralized to a cer-

tain degree: While the center issues directives and internal bulletins about current propaganda issues that shall guide media workers all over the country towards the party's understanding of "correct thought work", concrete decisions on personnel, style, and content rests with lower layers in the *xitong*. In effect, this propaganda system is neither as rigid and uniform as the former Soviet Union's, nor as flexible as media systems in authoritarian capitalist states that allow privately-owned media to steer a free course as long as they refrain from openly criticizing the ruling elite. This leaves enough leeway for editors and journalists time and again to test the limits of their freedom. Moreover, political authorities have more than once - ex post - approved of experimental ways of the media and so in the end helped to push the "boundaries of the legal" a bit further. Nevertheless, journalists are still very cautious to do so. China's propaganda system is very effective in preventing anyone from crossing the lines drawn by the party, as I will describe in the following section.

3.3.2 Censorship

Remarkably, pre-publication censorship does not exist: Censorship is exerted via a rather diffuse net of propaganda guidelines, news suppression, precedence-setting post-publication criticism, punishment of journalists, or self censorship. The result is a "guided" media content: General policy statements set the tone, and more explicit directives transmitted from propaganda authorities to editors and reporters make it perfectly clear what must not be reported on. (Zhao 1998: 20; White 1990: 104; Zhang 1993: 196). One example might illustrate this practice: In early 2004, all Chinese media organizations received a notice which listed reports whose publication was interdicted (e.g. the appreciation of the currency; a fatal car accident caused by a person of public interest), restrictions concerning certain topics (college student unemployment, crime, security issues), or very general admonitions (no report of gossip in the mainstream media) (Anonymous 2004).

But, as with any policy in the PRC, actual implementation depends largely on personal connections and is therefore highly arbitrary (Interview). Propaganda in the PRC is - in practice! - no monolithic block. Large differences exist between regions and provinces with regard to the extent the press is controlled by the party (Yang 2001: 48f). As a rule, the personal relationship between the journalist and the official in charge is of great importance (Lu 2003: 23).

3.3.3 Three political functions of the press

In the history of the PRC the press has served three different political functions, of which only one can be considered wholly consistent with communist ideology, namely propaganda. A

second albeit entirely unwanted and therefore unacknowledged officially is that of a vehicle for inner-party struggles. The third one, supervision, which was originally a genuine part of the official ideology, has changed its nature since the mid-1990s.

The first two will be dealt with only briefly, so the focus is on the third function, supervision. This is for two reasons: First, because the third function is the most complex and esoteric one of the press in China: While most readers will have no difficulties in understanding the role of the press as a propaganda tool or as a weapon in inner-party-struggles, supervision by the press in the Chinese sense of the word needs a more detailed explanation. Second, the concept of supervision by the press is highly relevant for the interplay of media and democracy in China, i.e. in a field, where most of the changes within the Chinese media landscape have taken place both in theory and practice.

The press as a propaganda tool: As soon as the communist party controlled a sufficiently stable power base in central China during the civil war, Mao planted the theoretical and political seeds of what was to become the propaganda apparatus within a year after victory (Lynch 1999: 22). Subtle changes in media function and structure notwithstanding, the major function of the press as a mouthpiece of the party has never been challenged by any contender for power, and has been restated over and over again by leading figures up to the present day (even by those who are quite correctly located in the more liberal wings of the party, like Hu Yaobang was in the 80s; Polumbaum 1990: 41), as the incoming fourth generation of leadership makes it perfectly clear that propaganda still is at the core of the media's political function.

The unintended function of a vehicle in inner-party struggle needs some more careful explanation, as its symptoms might easily be confused with phenomena that would indicate more substantial political changes. The pattern of inner-party-struggles via the press can be described like this: Usually, prominent party leaders or factions would make use of one organ affiliated with their local or organizational power base, and let the paper contest views of their opponents. The last major case of such a "paper battle" occurred in 1992, when Deng had to break conservative resistance against further market reforms (Goldman 1994). By that time a broad elite consensus over major policy directions was reached, and factionalism became a less prominent feature of inner-party decision-making in the 1990s. Yet, as organizational and regional connections are still the most important power sources for Chinese politicians, and major newspapers being still affiliated with respective party organs, reoccurrence of the phenomenon is rather likely if frictions among the party leadership, especially over succession

issues, should reemerge in the near future. It is therefore important to distinguish diversification of media content (as an indication of reduced political control) from diverse political views held by organs of different party factions (as an indication of a divided, but not reduced political control). The line between the former and the latter may be hard to draw in specific cases - it is still debated today whether the Shanghai Economic Herald of the late 1980s was just a tool of the Zhao Ziyang-faction (Zhao 1998: 66) or the first "herald" of a more open Chinese press, whose courage has not been matched so far by any paper in the 1990s (Lee C.C. 2000). More generally speaking, however, there can be little doubt that, in the 1980s, diversification of views did reflect disruptions among the leadership more than they were a reflection of a free civil society discourse (Goldman 1994: 28ff). This distinction is important; it is true that the degree of freedom a paper like the *Shanghai Economic Herald* (in the 1980s) or *Southern Weekend* (in the 1990s) enjoyed is a good indicator of the central authorities' attitude towards liberalization, but the fragile and volatile stand of individual papers is no reliable indicator of the global development of content diversification. Second, one has to take the political, social and economic environment into account: Only if any observed diversification of views in some papers is accompanied by (1) a diversification of readership demands, (2) political decisions made or under discussion to expand press freedom to a certain degree, and (3) incentives felt by any player on the newspaper market to report differently than other media do, then we have reason to regard such diversification as a marker for media diversification rather than an indication of factional struggles.

3.3.4. Supervision: A concept in flux

I will now deal rather extensively with the third political function of the press, *jiandu*, which is best translated as "supervision". The concept exists ever since the communist propaganda system had been established, but was significantly upgraded by the party in 1998 and has since then developed into a new phenomenon in China's media landscape that attracts much attention from Chinese media scholars and the citizenry. As the concept is closely linked with the idea of public opinion, I will start with some general remarks on the meaning of "the public" in the Chinese context (1), describe how the concept worked in practice before the 15th party congress (2), discuss changes the concept underwent since then in theory and practice (3), and finally provide an overview of the ongoing academic debate about the concept in China today (4).

(1) To serve as a propaganda tool and vehicle of inner-party struggle might be called the traditional roles of the press in more than one sense. Dittmer (1994) has shown how deeply the propaganda function is embedded in Chinese intellectual and political tradition: Chinese intellectual tradition carries a polarity between the positive term public, *gong*, and private, *si*, which bears connotations of selfishness and undue lust for personal profit (Dittmer 1994: 90f). The modern notion of "the public" can be traced back to this traditional value system. The Marxist scorn for "bourgeois privacy" only added to this concept. While, in the West, the processes of secularization and commercialization have emptied the notion of the public of any substantive, positive content apart from a set of "rules of the game to govern the free play of private interests" (Dittmer 1994: 91), the term *gong* has never lost its positive, concrete content in China. Which can be characterized as value-laden, consensus-oriented rather than diverse, vindicating more aspects of human life (parts that would be considered strictly private in the West), and claimed by the political elites as a sector in which they set the rules. In sum, the public in China "is not a morally neutral grilling in an openly competitive public arena whereby the objective truth will be sifted out, but rather a bright spotlight of virtue that gives prominence to superior individuals or achievements for others to observe and to follow" (Dittmer 1994: 93). Consequently, the Chinese term for public opinion, Yulun, primarily referred to "leadership views as reflected in the official media which the masses are expected to share" until the mid-1990s (Dittmer 1994: 90). Public opinion prior to 1998 (when a certain upgrading of the term set in, see below) has thus been little more than *opinion made public*. Consequently, any discussion on public opinion in the PRC is primarily concerned with mass media; the Western practice of opinion polls - the second medium that can voice public opinion - is of marginal, but increasing importance in China: Initially performed by - hardly objective - research institutes since the mid-1980s (Hood 1994: 41), polls have developed into an instrument of considerable political influence in the late 1990s (Liu 2001: 402ff; Yang 2001: 29), but still - for the good or bad - neither shape nor represent public opinion as extensively as they do in Western democracies. Discussing public opinion in the Chinese context thus has to focus on the mass media and, for the early decades, on the press.

(2) From the very beginning of communist rule there existed, at least theoretically, a second, less prominent role of the media, and an understanding of the public closer to the Western concept: In Mao's words the media had "to reflect the lives of the masses", to bring the mass line from the people to the party's ears. Mao - again: at least in theory- understood the mass line as being generated in a dialectical process by the masses and the party. The press, in this

theory, had to give a voice to the needs of the people, so that the party could adjust its policies accordingly. In practice, however, the press fulfilled this task more in the manner of a secret police than as a public forum: the two channels, that were (and still are) used to let the leaders know about the mood of their people were the "internal" dossiers (*neibu cailiao*), articles published only for the eyes of cadres at a certain level (with a fine-tuned system of degrees of exclusivity; see Hsiao/Cheek 1995: 80ff and the discussion in Yang 2001: 30f). The other institutionalized feature of this public service mission are the "mass work departments", found in every news organization, that handle letters and other communications from members of the public up to the leading cadres (Hood 1994: 41). In practice, except for the brief period from 1987 to 1989, only a tiny fragment of this critical reporting has been allowed to be actually published, and was generally limited to either minor officials of the administration or to rather marginal concerns, such as traffic problems.

It should not be overlooked, though, that in specific cases this channel in fact provided an efficient way for the people to claim their rights against corrupt officials or misbehaving semi-state organizations, or much more basic, to complain about inconveniences concerning local sanitation or traffic. Newspapers were thus, even before 1998, "more than any other mass medium (...) regarded as a kind of court of last resort for grievances and complaints" (Polumbaum 1993: 298f). Yet voicing criticism and complaints was never a prominent function of the media prior to 1998, although Chinese students of public opinion seldom fail to stress that the media has always been encouraged to write criticism reports on corrupt officials since the founding of the PRC (see Tian 2002: 63ff; Yang 2001: 50ff): In April 1950, the Central Committee published the "decision concerning open criticism and self-criticism in publications", which stated that newspapers should publish criticism of cadres, in order to "foster the ties between the people and the party" (Wang/Wei 2000: 4) and the "decision on the progress of newspaper work" from July 1954 postulated that newspapers should openly criticize occurrences of "bureaucratism". However, these decisions also made it clear, that such criticism had to be expressed "under the guidance of the party", and if one considers the historical circumstances - the Anti-Three and Anti-Five campaigns - the idea behind the decisions was obviously to use the press as a political weapon of the party, not as a civil society watchdog. After the turbulence of the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution, the documents of the early Deng regime repeated these concepts: In January 1981, another central committee decision stated that "in the last years, many publications have voiced the suggestions of the masses, provided positive criticism and self-criticism and thus strengthened the relationship between the party and the people (...) we should from now on keep to this practice" (cited after Wang/Wei:

2000:6). Again, the context is the power struggle between the reformist Deng faction and the remnants of either leftists groups or conservatives. Another power struggle was the background of the brief press liberalization after the 13th congress, when Zhao Ziyang pressed for more intense political reform; the most prominent and liberal paper of these years, the *Shanghai Economic Herald*, served as the reformist's organ. In his report on the work of the government, Zhao formulated three principles for the media, namely that (1) the media should supervise the work of cadres and officials by public opinion, (2) inform the public about important events, and (3) reflect debate about important issues (Zhao 1998: 36). After the Tiananmen-incident, the party's tune went back to normal; as late as 1994, Jiang Zemin (on the National Conference on Propaganda work) confirmed the conservative stance on media policy: In his words, the function of public opinion was to "correctly guide the people", news were expected to publish positive role models of noble spirit and to stick to the "party principle" (Luo 1999b: 157).

(3) It is thus beyond any doubt that press supervision played nothing but a very marginal role both in theory and practice prior to 1998, and it is no random guess that Chinese authors tend to stress continuities exactly because they want to veil the policy turn that has actually taken place with the liberalization in the aftermath of the 15th congress, that led to a push not only for economic reforms, but also to an invigorated policy debate about political reform in 1998. Yang (2001: 24) explicitly connects the liberalization drive after the 15th congress to new prospects for "supervision by the press" and most Chinese scholars, while citing Deng to bolster their argument, do not deny the qualitative difference between Dengist concepts of public opinion that were obsessed with uniformity, on the one hand, and growth of diversity in the expression of public opinion that allowed debates on a broad array of fields in the late 1990s on the other (Liu 1999: 17ff, 88ff; see also Chen L. 1999: 128f; Yang 2001: 25).
As a matter of fact, the political shift of the 15th congress manifested a new tune on press supervision. Party leaders now stressed press supervision as a helpful tool to counter corruption and cadre misbehavior. New premier Zhu Rongji ostentatiously visited journalists of "*Jiaodian Fangtan*". This TV-program already backed by former premier Li Peng had started in 1994; it had twice won awards of the propaganda ministry (Chan 2002: 38) and was run at prime time in one of China's national channels - which are clear indications that it should not be regarded as oppositional. Nevertheless, Zhu's visit, in the view of the Chinese public as well as in the opinion of Chinese media scholars, meant a major breakthrough on the issue of media supervision. The number of letters citizens wrote to CCTV, for instance, rose sharply

from 300,000 in 1997 to 4,443,000 in 1998 and again to 7,311,000 in 2000 (Feng 2003: 47), which must be related to the new popularity of the format (see below). As it may well illustrate the new media policy, it is worth to describe the *Jiaodian Fangtan* program more in detail: *Jiaodian Fangtan* is a sort of "special media zone" and has grown in popularity over the years (viewer rates are about 30%, which means that some 300 Million people are watching the program every night; Chan 2002: 37). Zhu's visit and his explicit backing of critical reporting and of the new political function of the media was considered to upgrade an experimental practice (Liu 1999: 190ff). Surely, *Jiaodian Fangtan* is a daring program, that uses undercover investigation techniques to detect corruption and social problems (for examples see Li X. 2002: 23f. and the print version of some exemplary programs in Yuan et al. (eds.) 2000); the frequency of criticism is unconventionally high (more than a quarter of all reports in 1999; Chan 2002: 42), and the program criticizes even high officials and departments and thus goes well beyond the conventional "swatting flies" only; it is furthermore extremely popular not only in terms of viewing ratings, but also as an institution: citizens besiege the studio in long queues, attempting to get their story into the program (Liu 1999: 185). Still, both the limitations of its reports and the positive propaganda content it carries make the party-state's liking for the format understandable: The most frequent reports are not critical ones, but about propaganda issues (e.g. reports on the *falungong* sect or foreign policies); criticism is omitted at sensitive times of the year; there is no criticism of cadres on the first two levels of the party or government (central and provincial; ministry and bureau); criticism is largely limited to policy implementation, not to central policy formulation; there are "progress reports" which boast on problem solving or which defuse previous negative reports; no controversy over any policy is expressed; all in all, almost two third of all reports can be considered to be the "party's voice", as they are concerned with propaganda issues or affirmative reports, and only one third expresses the "people's voice" through criticism reports (Chan 2002). *Jiaodian Fangtan* therefore serves as a "model program", far from endangering the rule of the communist party, but sufficiently aggressive to be a threat to corrupt local cadres.

However, formats like *Jiaodian Fangtan* and criticism reports in the press are certainly a double-edged sword: Internally, the wisdom of exposing too many cases of corruption has already been called into question by party officials (Stevenson-Yang 2003: 239). The fact that the new trend has been approved by the authorities does not mean that they can fully control its effects, and no one knows, whether the 1998 initiative for "supervision by the media" will be intensified or rather curbed in the near future. Even though the perception of an ideological shift was further nourished when Jiang Zemin in his "Three Represents" theory emphasized the "general

interest of the majority of the people", which has been interpreted to naturally strengthen the role of public supervision (Tian 2002: 72ff; Yang 2001: 63), actual reforms do not allow more than a very cautious optimism. Although some of the "fourth generation" leaders, like Zeng Qinghong, seem to favor further press liberalization as a means to counter corruption (Nathan/Gilley 2002: 194), only time will tell, what Hu Jintao's encouraging more open media coverage of shortcomings in society and politics after the SARS epidemic are worth - magazines that *did* report frankly about it were in trouble shortly after (Zeitlin 2004). Moreover, the new propaganda chief, Liu Yunshan, reminded media bosses to keep coverage of sensitive topics to a minimum; according to his guidelines, all publications must continue to stick to the party line and maintain a quota of articles and analyses put out by Xinhua, and Hu Jintao himself has stressed the need to stick to the party principle again in December 2003 at a party conference on propaganda (RSF 2004a).

(4) Since assessing the political significance of the new concept (or rather the actual significance of the old concept) is difficult, it might pay out to listen to some contributions Chinese academic discussion has recently made to the issue.

From the early 1990s on, research on public opinion that is heavily influenced by Western concepts has found its way into the Chinese research on mass communication (Hu 2001: 110ff, see there for the changes in definitions; Keane 2002: 9). Public opinion since then has been more and more used in a sense closer to the Western notion of the term, as it is accepted in most publications that public opinion originates from the attitudes of the people and not from party propaganda (Liu 2001: 32ff). Its main political function is now considered to be the supervision of cadres by public opinion. It is supposed to serve as a forum for public discussions of important policy issues that strengthen the participation of the society, and as a "security valve" for pressures that may arise from struggles among conflicting interests (Yang 2001: 39).

Obviously, this is only to some extent what the Chinese government has in mind. More conservative scholars support the official line and stress that "positive guidance of public opinion" led by the party has to be distinguished from "negative guidance of public opinion" too independent from party directives, which could endanger public security (Hu 2001: 226). These scholars favor restrictions on criticism reports, and some publications still promote the ultra-orthodox understanding of the media as a weapon in ideological class struggles (Kang Y. 2001: 18) or the nationalist view of the press as a battle field, where foreign interpretations of international politics must be defeated (Lu 2001: 109; Kang Y. 2001: 264). Yet conservative,

left-wing, or nationalist views do not dominate the discourse. The (liberal) majority of scholars is not content with the current restrictive practice of "supervision by the press" and complains about the practical ban of any criticism of high-ranking politicians (national-ministry or provincial-leadership level) and of cadres of the own administrative level (Liu 1999: 215, who gives some illustrations there; Wang/Wei 2000: 10, 34; Tian 2002: 102). Yang (2001: 26) postulates that no topic and no person should stand above supervision (except institutions and persons directly linked to state security).

It is clear that no publication dares to question the legitimacy of party influence on the press right away - that would be dissidence. Thus even liberal scholars acknowledge the role the party has to play (Yang 2001: 17ff; Chen 2000: 328f). Yang points also to the fact that press supervision, if fine-tuned and well-dosed, might consolidate rather than question the existing political system: "Press supervision can also serve as a way to let off some air for discontent masses. If they see that at least some wrong-doers are punished and that the authorities do at least something about the problem of corruption, people might be satisfied with that and won't urge for further measures or political liberalization" (Yang 2001: 42).

Nevertheless, in recent literature public opinion and press supervision are often regarded as concepts closely related to the question of democracy and people's political participation (Qiao 2001: 423; Tian 2002: 103: "As it represents the will of the majority, "supervision by public opinion" is the most democratic power under the political framework of the socialist state"). Liu (1999: 33) argues, that the suppression of public opinion by cadres or enterprises is a suppression of democracy, and that the turbulence of the Cultural Revolution was largely the result of a lack of democracy, namely the freedom to express opinions. Yang (2001: 43f) stresses the function of public opinion as a channel for political participation, and concludes that it is even more important as long as other channels, namely elections, do not exist. Furthermore, Chinese scholars often point to the positive effect press freedom had in the West to check governments and to expand peoples rights in the 1960s (Liu 1999: 26ff; Yang 2001: 13) and get close to the classical praise of the liberal model of the press formulated by Siebert/Schramm (Yang 2001: 60ff) and to the concept of a "fourth estate"- role. (Jian et al. 1999; Ma 1998).

As to the concrete progress that could be achieved within the existing political framework, the dominant role of the party in the process of public opinion building has been questioned: "The problem lies in the fact, that in some places the right to control public supervision lies concentrated in the hand of the party secretary alone. Thus, efficient public supervision is not possible" (Liu 1999: 189). Therefore, more independence of the press by an effective distribution of

power is postulated (Liu 1999: 217). Yang (2001: 11) calls for "the realization of the "freedom of the expression" provided in the PRC constitution and argues in favor of a press law that should cover the right of journalists to investigate, report, and criticize, and that should explicitly protect the right to do so against institutions and authorities (Yang 2001: 68f). This is of growing importance to critical journalists, since institutions, enterprises and individuals tend to defend themselves against critical reporting by charging the media in court on the ground that reports were not based on facts or that personal rights were violated by them. It is clear that such practice intents to suffocate criticism (Yang 2001: 107). Media workers therefore hope for a press law that would guarantee the right to investigate and publish critical reports and thus provide a legal basis for their work (interviews). However, drafting a press law is an issue that was on and off the agenda since the 1980s, and it seems rather unlikely that it will be established in the near future, as it is a thorny issue that promises no rewards to the politburo member who would take it into his portfolio, but bears a high risk if it would turn out to back up the press more than the party intends to (Stevenson-Yang 2003: 235).

In sum, political control of media content is still tight and efficient. Yet, there are two aspects that might point to a less strict application of the existing mechanisms in the future: The most important one is the rising significance of public opinion as a corrective of corrupt government practices. While the party seems to be content with the extent to which this new concept is applied, the attitudes expressed by Chinese media scholars suggest that the potential of public opinion has not been exhausted yet. Second, if one considers the extent to which media control is decentralized and therefore open for experimental changes in the hands of local politicians, the analysis of political control offers at least some hope for an active role of the media. However, these "seedlings" should by no means be overestimated: China's control of the media is still one of the fiercest in the world and there will be no major breakthrough the central leadership does not approve of.

3.4. Ownership and market forces

Political means like propaganda guidelines and administrative mechanisms are the more visible control the party-state exerts on the media. I have shown in the last section that the party's political grip on the media has been changing, even if only slightly, since 1998: Public opinion, meant as a weapon of the party to influence society at will, might in turns challenge the party's authority if criticism reports grow too abundant. Yet, the actual practice is still controlled rather well by the authorities, and public opinion has to be regarded more as a latent

force than as an actual threat to power. What has been much more in flux in the last decade is the second factor of media control, i.e. ownership structures and financial dependency. I will focus on the press again in this section, as the general problem all media workers in the PRC are facing is very much the same in all branches in this regard: No matter if we are studying TV-stations, radio broadcasters, book publishers or journalists in the print media, while most units relied on direct or indirect state subsidies until the late 1980s, they now have to generate advertisement income to survive on the market, and find themselves in the same dilemma of serving two masters at a time, audiences and political authorities. They compete for advertisement income by attracting large audiences that provide the incentives for companies to run the ads (Hemelryk/Keane 2002: 9; Redl/Simons 2002: 21ff; Li X. 2002: 18; Weber 2002: 58ff); on the other hand, they all face largely the same restrictions of the party-state in terms of broad propaganda outlines that frame political and (to a lesser extent) non-political contents, even if there do exist some differences in degree (Lee C.C. 2000).

3.4.1. Control through ownership

Theoretically, privately-owned newspapers do not exist in the PRC. Independent papers are not permitted, because each newspaper must be licensed in the name of an organizational unit which formally serves as the publisher. Furthermore, papers are directly supervised by Party groups and committees within the units that publish them, and the institutions above those units, be it government or other. Yet publishers increasingly try to bypass this regulation by winning institutions which lend their names to those papers (Stevenson-Yang 2003). This practice dates back to the 1980s, when about 100 papers made such informal arrangements; at that time however, it was only social interest papers which did not cover political issues (Polumbaum 1990: 49), with only a few exceptions (the *World Economic Herald* was technically published by the Institute of World Economy under the Shanghai Academy for Social Science). This has changed since the mid-to late 1990s, when even influential, overtly political newspapers had found organizations that would lend their name to practically independent publications (Interview; see also Stevenson-Yang 2003: 227f and Feng 2003: 43ff). However, obligatory licensing is still an important lever of government control, that provides local and provincial governments with the instruments to get rid of irksome publications; consequently, this lever has been used time and again by several governments for various reasons, but as it is a solution that not only hits the publisher as a critic, but also as a tax-payer, other kinds of punishments are more popular among the Chinese authorities. Personnel management appears to be the other major control mechanism beside direct political control via the propaganda

system today (Yang 2001: 113). Respective authorities have used their right to remove too critical journalists and editors from leading positions in media units throughout the reform period; yet, when in April 2003 the liberal *Southern Weekend* became - once again - subject to a major reshuffling of their editorial board, it turned out that the reaction of journalists to the practice had changed: While sacking People's Daily liberal editor Qin Benli stimulated protest by other Journalists in 1989 (Polumbaum 1990: 52), a decade of pragmatism later editors and journalists just took advantage of the diversity among China's provincial leaders and of the paper's attractive economic success, and started a new publication (*Dongfang Zhaobao*) with similar goals, now under the aegis of the Shanghai municipal government (RSF 2004a). This story tells a lot about a significant power shift between media companies and governments: The financial dependence on the state that characterized most media units well until the late 1980s has turned into an interest of the state in the commercially successful activities of media companies; in former times, the party-state had not only funded the media's spending on their personnel and their production costs, but also regulated basic components as paper supply, and even, via forced subscription, ensured a readership for party papers. This changed significantly when papers increased their advertisement income by more than 100% from 1992 to 1993, with subsequent annual increases of about 30%, and advertisement thus turned into the main income of papers by the mid-1990s (Dong 1999: 6). Today, large media enterprises have turned into important pillars of public spending: *Guangzhou Daily*, for instance, is among the five largest taxpayers of Guangzhou (Zhou 2002: 186). After more and more papers won financial independence in the course of the 1990s, and *Guangzhou Daily* had proved that even a party paper could compete successfully on the market, the end of forced subscriptions or subsidies for any paper (except five) was announced by July 2003 (RSF 2004a). This latest reform move will have direct consequences for many ultra-conservative papers that had been protected from the market's harsh judgement so far: the step is of enormous importance: it means, that all orthodox party papers that no reader would spend a penny on will either have to move into the direction of the commercial papers or close down. Consequently, almost 700 publications had had their licenses withdrawn at the end of 2003, and another 87 declared themselves to be "commercialized" (RSF 2004a).

3.4.2. New plurality of editors and papers

It is true that the 1980s and early 1990s already witnessed a steady and substantial increase of diversity in terms of outlets and publishing units: As has been shown, one feature of structural changes in the Chinese media has been decentralization, with an increasing number of outlets

circulating especially on sub-provincial levels (Wu 2000: 49), and, along with it, a "second dispersion of power to run the press also happened along the path flowing from the political centers" to governmental departments and organizations that lie rather at the periphery of power (Wu 2000: 51; see also Zhang 1993: 199). But both trends have gained much more impetus since the mid-90s: As described above, organizations with a very low political profile such as cultural organizations are also allowed to run general interest papers. This process has at least partly made the state restriction on licensing inefficient, as "ownership of the media by non-state sectors is becoming more and more prevalent", and "newspapers published by social organizations (...) are becoming the major competitors of the communist party-state press" (Wu 2000: 53). In the 1980s, such papers had been rare exceptions, but in the 1990s not only the publication of influential general interest or economic papers, but also of political magazines such as "Strategy and Management" or "Far East" (*Dongfang*) became de facto independent, with only very loose affiliation to the backing unit.

Parallel to the new plurality of editors, a new plurality of papers can also be observed. While prior to 1994, each city's urban evening paper held a de facto monopoly, the new tide of so-called metropolitan newspapers kicked off a fierce market competition that still characterizes the urban press market today. Especially in Beijing and Guangzhou numerous new papers have emerged since 1994, partly out of old party papers that underwent a complete reshuffle in personnel, style and content, partly as seedlings of other papers, and thirdly, papers that were edited by units that had not been active in the press business at all before, especially the influential business dailies that carry a political section often quite outspoken on policy issues. While prior to 1994, competition among general interest newspapers did not exist, as there was only one major paper of this sort available in each city, the situation today is marked by a wide range of competitors that developed from different origins; to give the reader some idea of the divergent paths that led to the establishment of today's newspaper market, I provide some examples in the following paragraphs.

(1) Metropolitan papers : From the mid-1990s on, as a direct consequence of the new economic framework, competition on the media market reached a new scale. A third generation of papers, as they have been labeled by Chinese scholars, entered the market under the name of "metropolitan papers" (*dushibao*), most of them being seedlings of municipal party papers. This step was the beginning of genuine competition on the media market: It undermined the regulations that forbid the existence of more than one paper of the same kind at the same administrative level exactly for the purpose of impeding competition. With the rise of the "met-

ropolitan papers", which did not differ much from the evening papers, the quasi-monopoly of evening papers was effectively broken (Liu/Zhang 1999: 92ff).

(2) Party papers turned commercial: *Guangzhou Daily*

Guangzhou's municipal party organ *Guangzhou Daily* has always played the role of an avant-garde party paper, having been the first to expand its format from four to eight pages in 1987 in order to broaden the range of its reporting, and the first to experiment with an independent distribution network in 1991. Consequently, *Guangzhou Daily* was chosen by the national propaganda ministry as an experimental unit: As the first party paper fully engaged in market activity. In 1996, shortly after the Guangzhou Daily Group with *Guangzhou Daily* at its core had been built up, the paper attacked the popular *Yangcheng Evening News* by adding a large section on culture and entertainment. This opened a new stage of competition. Earlier experiments with active recruiting of personnel and financial incentives for the staff that tore down the old payment system based on rank and seniority were intensified, and younger, better educated journalists not only from Guangdong got their chance for quick promotion (Sun Y. 2002: 4ff).

(3) Mass organization paper turned commercial: *Beijing Youth News*

Beijing Youth News, the organ of the Beijing Communist Youth League, has been even quicker than Guangzhou Daily in many aspects to experiment with new management and recruiting styles, starting in the early 1980s, and again it was one of the first to break waves after the Tiananmen-incident by giving up the secure municipal subsidies in turn for a guarantee that the paper would be allowed to keep any profit it would generate in 1991 (Zhao 1996: 145f). In the following decade, *Beijing Youth News* expanded in many respects: since 1993, it is published daily (while it was a weekly before), and enlarged its circulation to 180,000 copies the same year (from 29,000 in 1981); advertising revenues rose from 350,000 Yuan in 1991 to 86,000,000 in 1996 (Sun Y. 2002: 74f) and astronomical 640 million in 2001. The paper is not only one of the biggest players on Beijing's newspaper market, but also one of the few papers that circulate nationwide.

(4) Economic Dailies: The latest development in China's newspaper markets is the emergence of Economic Dailies as players on the general interest sector. Daily papers specialized on economic issues had existed before, but some of them changed their nature from the mid-90s on, turning from dull vehicles of propaganda and statistics into up-to-date papers that engaged in

debates about current (economical) policy issues (Li 2001), and provided their readers with reliable business information. One of the fore-runners was the *China Business Daily*, a weekly paper that is still considered to be one of the most influential in its branch, and the first one to explicitly target a certain segment of the population (age 20-45, business background, male) and expand the scope of their report to policy issues and international news in order to come closer to the range a general interest paper would cover (Sun Y. 2002: 215ff). In 2001, two new papers were established, that followed the same path, and they are widely successful: the *21st Century Economic Daily*, which belongs to the *Southern Daily* group, and the *Economic Observer*, which is edited by an enterprise, the *Shandong Sanlian* group (Sun Y. 2002: 251). The latter marks a significant step towards press liberalization, as the affiliation to the party state via indirect political dependence of the enterprise on central authorities is extremely loose.

There is, however, also a trend which runs counter to the tendency of a growing plurality, namely the central leadership's attempt to force the building of a few large media corporations that shall replace the multitude of small players on the market. While the motive for that step is probably economic in the first place (large companies are more efficient and can compete better with international players; see Lu 2001: 161ff), there are also political effects that must be taken into account. A dozen major media companies are simply more easily controlled than 2000 newspapers responsible to 2000 organizations, governmental bodies, and party branches. Therefore, students of the Chinese media have been alerted by this politically-induced concentration campaign (Zhou 2002: 24ff, Zhao 1998; Fischer 2001). The development in fact demands further attention, as it will significantly reduce the number of actual actors while the diversification of products will go on undisturbed, suggesting a fallacious variety of papers. However, the trend towards a greater multitude of editors is still the dominant one at present.

3.4.3. Readership demand

Journalists, editors, and scholars interviewed by the author in Beijing in August 2002 unanimously expressed the view that the competition on the newspaper markets will drive editors to further sharpen their political profile: Different papers will deliver diverse views of interest to specific social segments of society. Chinese scholars of the issue see the connection between market success, readership attraction and political newspaper content very clearly: "The major factor in revenues for newspapers is advertisement income, and the key to economic success thus a large and prosperous readership, that makes a paper attractive for enterprises to let it run

their ads" (Fan 2001: 35), and they conclude that "one result of the growing media competition is that the position of the audience has been upgraded enormously" (Chen 2000: 40). In terms of political content, this necessity will increase critical reports: "The growing importance of audiences and the longing for readers to see their critical views expressed leads the press to lean against the masses (...) as one of the most important strategies of the media to win the market competition" (Yang 2001: 12). "Any media enterprise that does not perform public supervision, will lack vigor and spirit, and will have no competitive force (...) and will not attract the reader's interest. To the contrary, if it emphasizes supervision, it will be welcomed by the audience and gain not only political influence, but also generate profits" (Yang 2001: 18). But this is not where the process is expected to stop: "The second round of competition will lead the general interest newspapers to sharpen their profile and to specialize: Although they are still called mass appeal paper, in a society characterized by increasing plurality, this abstract "mass" does not exist any more. Plurality of society will lead to the individualization of newspapers" (Sun 2002: 199; see also Zhang 2001). A similar point is made by Fan, who concludes from his own empirical research that the trend towards plurality of topics will develop further: The interest of the people will further differentiate according to the process underway in society: Different educational backgrounds and income levels push for a wider spectrum of issues offered by the media (Fan 1999: 143). Moreover, at the local level, scholars have already traced interest groups exerting their influence via the media (Cheng/Huang/Wang 2003: 68).

These assessments of the market forces at work can be based on several empirical research projects conducted by Chinese media scholars that provide us with some insight into Chinese audience demands, especially with respect to those for critical reporting that are of special interest for the present study. All surveys of readership interest we know of document an alleged greater interest in political news and practical information than in entertainment. When asked about their motivation to buy or read a newspaper, most readers would declare that these were the kinds of topics they like most to read about (Liu/Zhang 1999: 25ff; Luo 1999a; Yu 2000: 52; Fan 1999: 141; Yu 2001: 92). As to the specific preferences, the results of the studies are difficult to compare due to different category sets applied and a lack of detailed definitions (see Fan 1999: 141f, Yu 2001: 92, and Luo 1999a for results). Beyond the strong preference for political news in general, the only feature that could be revealed by all surveys is a strong demand for critical reports: According to a poll conducted by the Anhui Institute for Social Sciences, 90% of the interviewees supported more critical reports in the media (Yang 2001: 42). Qiao (2001) found that readers appreciate critical articles more than any other kind

of news reporting, but that the majority was displeased with both the quantity and quality of the criticism which is for the largest part directed only against low-ranking officials. Similar results were produced by Luo (1999b: 158). In another survey, Yu (2000: 95) built 17 topic categories and asked Beijing residents which kind of articles they most liked to read in newspapers; "critical and investigative reports" ranked second (with 61.1 %), beaten only by "reports on personalities and affairs that are currently hot spots" (66.9 %), a very broad category. Correspondingly, asked which social functions consumers wished the media to fulfill, most interviewees regarded "being the voice of the people" as overly important, while the more official term "help people to perform supervision by public opinion" ranked only 7th among 13 items, whereas the traditional propaganda function "guiding public opinion" finished almost last (Yu 2001: 221). That finding was confirmed by another survey of the same author (Yu 2001: 242; see also Liu/Zhang 1999: 26). Growing self-confidence of the readership is further confirmed by Fan's survey (1999: 140) about the self reception of readers, that found readers to rely much less on the official media to form their opinion on public matters in 1996 compared to 1992, and more readers disagreeing with the claim of the party propaganda to streamline the people's thinking on political issues: Asked whether they would change their opinion, if they found it to disagree with official statements transported by the media, 48.3% answered to the affirmative in 1992, while the number dropped to 33.1 % in 1996, with 40.1 % answering to the negative (1992: 23.8%). Luo (1999b) also concludes that the party's hope to mould public opinion and people's minds is largely in vain, as people tend to think more independently, and pay less attention to grand political issues but more to their own lives, and consequently expect papers not to produce party-speech, but reliable facts - no utopian role models, but interesting stories that come close to real life (Luo 1999b: 158). Liu/Pu (2000: 179f) also infer that it is at least questionable, whether the party's "guided public opinion" in fact reaches its goals, as readers have become more self-confident and more critical of party papers over the years.

The demand for critical reporting ranks high across all ages, educational backgrounds, and both sexes (Yu 2000: 95ff). Nevertheless, there do exist differences among these groups. Asked, which kind of reports they would hope to appear most in newspapers, interviewees answered as follows with regard to critical reports (the overall interest in such reports was the second highest of all 17 topics, see above):

Total		61.1
sex	male	63.6
	female	58.8
age	19 and below	51.1
	20-29	54.3
	30-39	64.2
	40-49	65.4
	50-59	66.2
	60 and above	62.1
education	elementary school	40.5
	basic middle school	40.5
	higher middle school	62.2
	first academic degree	56.4
	second academic degree	85.7

Fig. 3: Readership interest in criticism reports (in %)

Evidently, criticism reports are rather demanded by male, grown-up or even aged, and well-educated readers, although values for almost all (except for the lowest) ages and educational backgrounds are quiet high.

I have quoted several Chinese scholars, who expect contents of newspapers to differ greater as market forces propel editors to attract specific audiences, and who predict a rise in criticism reports as readers of all ages and educational backgrounds demand them. Scanning the empirical research done by Chinese scholars so far, we can assume the first proposition to be true: Readers first and foremost demand critical political content to make a difference between papers, and they do reward papers that devote a comparatively large share of their reports to critical issues. Putting aside the question whether editors are good at guessing their audience's demands, it is, however, highly uncertain to which extent editors and journalists actually meet the expectations of their readers. It is one thing to establish the citizen's - hardly surprising - wish to read more about the corrupt practices of their leaders and the real problems they are facing in daily life instead of listening to propaganda fanfares, but has the incentive been strong enough to overcome the political pressures that try to keep media content unaltered? So far, no consensus has been reached on this question, as I will show in the last section of this

chapter; having discussed the role of those who decide about, profit from, or consume news, the following section will deal with those who actually produce them: China's journalists, whose professional attitude should make a difference, as suggested by the theory of the press' role in transition processes outlined above, and who were in fact one of the most active groups pushing for democratic reforms in 1989.

3.5. Journalists

Talking about China's journalists of today, it is inevitable to recall their role in the 1980s. Outstanding Journalists were then among the public figures who pushed for institutional and ideological breakthroughs towards a more liberal society (like Wang Ruoshui (Lee 1990: 12) or Qin Benli (Berlin 1993: 270)). Besides these outstanding personalities, a general tendency of China's Journalists to show some commitment to press liberalization could be observed as soon as reform policy affected the media, which evolved into a movement for press reform. Journalists postulated not only rather technical improvements (writing styles), but also structural reforms that would give the Journalists a greater say in the news production process (Polumbaum, 1990: 37; 44ff). Throughout the 1980s, this movement gained strength and impetus, resulting in a widely felt need for reform among Journalists at the end of the decade. Yet "it must be emphasized that the press corps' attempts to expand the scope of journalistic power were not entirely antagonistic toward the state" but rather received some "tacit if not explicit encouragement from the political authorities" (Polumbaum 1993: 303). In the spring of 1989, however, journalists went beyond their professional role, and became an integral part of the protest movement: It was news workers themselves who helped to generate the atmosphere of political change by joining the protests (Goldman 1994: 32; Berlin 1993: 270). Tan (1993) has identified two reasons why journalists played a very active role in the events: They had access to information the rest of the population was barred from, namely knowledge about misdeeds and corruption from officials or sons of influential politicians. So they new better than anybody else of the decayed condition the communist party was in, and they also felt the need for democratic reform. Secondly, especially the younger journalists were characterized by "professional pride, expertise and energy, knowledge about the West (...) and questioning spirit" (Tan 1993: 280). A less heroic motive is mentioned by Zhang (1993: 196f), who points to the economic interests of journalists, who could only profit from a further liberalization of the media; Zhang nevertheless stresses the political background of the majority of journalists in the second half of the 1980s: Most of the newcomers were freshly graduated from the universities and thus open to new, Western ideas, while some of the elder journalists had experi-

enced labor reeducation during the Cultural Revolution and had lost their enthusiasm for the party in the camps. White (1990: 93) has observed, that diverging political fates during this time did still produce tensions between old rivals within single media units: "They are periodically revived by events such as those of mid-1989. For actuarial reasons, many of these conflicts within units are likely to last until the turn of the century" (White 1990: 93; see also Zhang 1993: 200).

After the crackdown, the conservatives pounced on the media workers who had proved as "unreliable". Purges of journalists and editors began immediately after June 4th and continued well into 1991. *People's Daily* lost almost its entire editorial staff, 597 out of 700 were blacklisted and four imprisoned, and many other media organizations were forced to undergo changes in leading personnel (Zhang 1993: 202f, Polumbaum 1994: 120). The leadership strengthened its grip on the media workers via the All China Journalist Association, that was equipped with a new, much more conservative board (Polumbaum 1994: 122). Yet, Zhang (1993: 204ff) has shown how imperfect this new strictness was right from the very beginning: Although many eminent media workers were purged, there remained liberal minded journalists in both substantive number and quality to pursue their goals. We can therefore expect today's journalist corps to be both politicized and cautioned, although the new trends of the 1990s are hard to assess, and the political attitude can only be guessed from the past and from very cautious present research: a survey carried out in 1997 (Yu 2000: 13ff) found almost 60% of journalists to think that "social change was happening too fast", a statement not too characteristic for progressive attitudes, and the most important political task of journalists was described as to "help the people to understand party and government policies", which doesn't sound very recalcitrant either. However, the eagerness of journalists to truthfully answer such awkward questions might be doubted. This interpretation is supported by more progressive attitudes to be found in the same survey almost as frequent: 85% of interviewed journalists contended that "helping the people to exert supervision (of officials)" was an important task of journalists, too, and only a minority responded that the country's "management of news" had improved. While single cases of courageous journalists and editors prove that idealism (or at least the ambition that daring reports be printed) is not totally absent, other cases point to the opposite direction. Journalists can also be part of the problem when they take bribes for reporting about products or persons in a favorable way (or report not about negative events). Although at least some of these charges were groundless and nothing but political sniping at critical journalists (Zeitlin 2004), this self-critical assessment of media workers (revealed by the poll quoted above) proves that money often interferes with journalistic ethos: an overwhelming majority of inter-

viewees admitted that "accepting gifts" in turn for favorable reports is a wide-spread phenomenon in China's journalistic circles (Yu 2000: 23).

3.6. Assessing the factors

Reviewing the five factors that influence the media's political role in transitional societies, two of them clearly point towards a positive and active role of the media and let the press appear a factor rather in favor of democratization, while two others let such a positive role appear quite likely or at least possible:

(1) The quick economic development has provided a large number of Chinese citizens with access to most mass media, and a growing share of the population has also access to cable TV and the internet. Newspapers are widely spread and regarded as an important source of political news.

(2) Market forces drive China's media companies towards a more critical and diverse political reporting due to the interplay of economic pressures to generate advertisement income and consumer demands for critical reporting. This factor points to a media landscape that will more and more reflect the plurality of viewpoints existing within society and will thus contribute to the democratization process.

(3) International media are making great efforts to enter the Chinese market, but it is not clear whether their appearance will have positive consequences for a democratization process. Access to the internet and to cable TV, in any case, undermines the state's monopoly of information in many ways, and thus points to a positive influence of international media. The government, however, has not ceased to take partly effective measures which aim at the control of media content. Moreover, international media companies have proved to be ready to comply with the authorities for profit's sake.

(4) Journalists have contributed enormously to the democracy movement of 1989, but it is not quite clear if the press corps is still such a strong factor in favor of democratization. Yet there is some evidence that the conservative roll-back of the early 1990s has not removed all rebellious spirits from the editorial offices, and that at least a significant part of China's journalists is, for different reasons, willing to take personal risks by publishing articles that test the limits set by the propaganda authorities.

However, the one and only factor that clearly points to the opposite direction is political control. Yet it is probably the most decisive factor of all. Although the party has been propagating the concept of "supervision through public opinion" since 1998, it is still the firm determina-

tion of the party-state to block any substantial democratization of the polity in the near future. Its grip on media content is not likely to be loosened to a significant degree.

Having analyzed the (five) major aspects of the media and democracy in transitional societies, we now have to weigh the different factors in order to come to a conclusion as to whether the media in the PRC is likely to be an agent of change or not. Yet this proves to be an extremely difficult task as the two most decisive factors point to different directions. The problem could be solved in two ways: Looking at the input (processes, attitudes, intentions) is the one option, looking at the output (the actual media content) the alternative one. The first approach would weigh the single media policies and their implementation, acts of crack-downs and censorship, etc., against single cases of daring journalists, the establishment of new newspaper types, financial activities of commercial papers, etc. The assessment could further be based on interviews with journalists and politicians whose judgement probably will be based on quite similar criteria. The "output" approach would try to analyze whether the political content of the media can be surveyed to grow more diverse, critical, and - in political terms - reader-oriented. Generally speaking, most scholars have tried to employ both approaches, but the strength of their analysis clearly consisted in the "input" approach to the problem. Wu (2000: 46) has grouped opinions on the nature of Chinese media development as "continuist" and "reformist": While scholars adherent to the former argue that political control over the media is still tight and no politically significant changes in media content have occurred, the "reformist" perspective states that substantial, if only gradual, steps from an authoritarian, monolithic media systems towards a more open, pluralistic landscape can be observed. However, one should keep in mind the artificial character of any such divisions: Like Wu himself, most students of the Chinese media would agree that "both the continuist and the reformist perspectives have certainly contained partial truth and have contributed to the transitional Chinese media." (Wu 2000: 46). This suggestion calls for a position between a too optimistic view of "sweeping change" and the pessimistic one of ossified political structures (Wu 2000: 46).

Rather skeptical conclusions have been drawn by Zhao (1998: 161f), who speaks of a "propagandist/commercial model of Journalism within the framework of an emerging authoritarian market society" and infers that the dominance of the political element will prevail as media units in China are first and foremost political organs, which have to obey the party in the first place and the market only in the second. Zhao argues that market forces are not exclusively centrifugal forces in political terms: The interest of media enterprises to dominate markets can very well go together with the political interest of the party-state to control content; in fact, the

efforts of the state since the late 1980s aimed at limiting the number of media units rather than expanding it for both economic and political reasons. Correspondingly, some analysts from mainland China also argue that the drive of the market towards rationalization via the building of huge media enterprises could enforce rather than weaken the party's control (Cao 1999: 13).

Another sophisticated analysis was brought forward by Lynch who borrows the term "praetorian" sphere from Huntington, who coined it for non-institutional and chaotic patterns of political participation. Although Lynch convincingly describes the loss of control over media content that the party-state has suffered, he nevertheless emphasizes "that when propaganda states crumble, they do not automatically evolve into liberal democracies" (Lynch 1999:4). In his view, commercial media will not necessarily make use of the newly gained freedom from state interference in a constructive way, individual efforts to cash in audience interest in political scandal notwithstanding.

Even Li Xiaoping, the former executive producer and program director at CCTV, who was responsible for the *Jiaodian Fangtan* program (see 52), does not pronounce an unambiguous judgement: Although she is quite enthusiastic about the new watchdog role the media is playing, she has to admit some short-comings of the current practice of critical reporting and points to the danger that the quality of reports might suffer due to market forces in the near future (Li X. 2002: 30). The latter point has been emphasized by several authors inside and outside China: the vacuum left by the former political orthodoxy may well be filled by a yellow-press journalism that does not use the new freedoms to engage in stories that matter politically, but those that just sell no matter what their social or moral implications might be (Polumbaum 2001: 277; Yu 2000: 301). It is highly questionable whether the absence of politics from the press alone generates a more open public sphere (McCormick 2003: 30). This concern should be taken very seriously when expressed by Chinese scholars as well. Though it must be conceded that it is often little more than a reactionary response to liberal challenges of communist orthodoxy; but the idea that commercialization might weaken rather than strengthen the public sphere has also been expressed in the decisively liberal journal *Dongfang* (Zhai 2002: 68).

3.7. The open question

In sum, this approach of studying policies and market trends, and of interviewing actors and analyzing structures has revealed many valuable insights into the interplay of politics and media markets in the PRC, as far as the "input" side of the analysis is concerned. The weaker part

of all these assessments, however, is the empirical basis of their "output" analysis: While the judgements implicitly have to be based on quantitative terms (like: "critical reporting has become more frequent"; "there is more entertainment than politically relevant reports in commercial papers", etc.), they lack a substantial quantitative analysis of political media content in the PRC to validate their argument: If those advocating an impact of market forces on the political function of the media are right, we should be able to detect certain changes in the media's political content that can be only explained by the market forces (i.e. media companies catering to audiences demands). If proponents of a predominantly political impact are right, no such changes in political media content should be traceable to any significant degree. Yet, no reliable study has ever produced data that could back one argument or the other. As long as the implicit quantitative judgement inherent in the assessment of market and political forces is not made explicit, any such assessment will bear the character of an assumption rather than that of a sound argument.

The questions other researchers have left to the open shall therefore be answered in this thesis:
Do commercialized media respond to *political* audience demands? Can such a response be measured objectively? And how can we isolate market effects from political influences in our analysis?
If proponents of the theory that market forces transform the media into an agent of change were right, differences between those papers relying on the market and those relying on state subsidies would differ significantly with regard to their content. Moreover, a market dynamic should be observed that forces commercialized papers not only to differ from party papers, but also to distinguish themselves in contrast to competing market-oriented papers. If no such differences could be detected, the skeptical "continuist" views would be backed.

In the following chapter, I will explain how the methodological problems to answer the questions have been solved.

4. Summary

Efforts made by scholars of media studies and social sciences to contribute to a general theory of media and democracy in transitional societies have been chosen as a theoretical starting point. Seven models developed by other researchers have been integrated into one comprehensive theory that identified five factors governing the political role of the media in transformation processes. This scheme has been applied to the Chinese case. Analysis of the five factors (political control mechanisms, market forces, professional attitudes of journalists, international media, and media development) revealed that (1) political control leaves some loopholes for experiments with political content, and that (2) the commercialization of media units combined with specific audience demands puts some pressure on editors to sharpen the political image of their paper. However, one crucial question remains unsolved: Did these economic pressures overcome political repression at least to some extent, or did political control prevent editors from keeping up with audience demands? Currently, scholarly debate on the issue is divided: While some advocate the idea of a substantial increase of political differences between Chinese newspapers due to commercialization, others stress that the amount and frequency of such deviations from the party press is not large enough to justify the notion of a diversified press landscape. The problem with both kinds of arguments, however, is the lack of quantitative data on which to base them on. While implicitly arguing in terms of quantity, no study has yet provided objective and reliable information on the actual output of newspapers with regard to political content.

This thesis seeks to fill this gap by applying a quantitative method to analyze newspaper content, thereby answering the question whether media commercialization has led to a diversification of political newspaper content or not.