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Getting the Story in China:
American Reporters Since 1972

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"Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." Thomas Jefferson

"Today, in countries all over the world...it is the sub-category of 'freedom of the press' that is the lever opening societies to other freedoms such as those guaranteeing religion, speech and assembly." Marvin Kalb

"The potential for stories [in China] was limitless; the ability to get them and write them was quite the opposite." Edward Farmer

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During China's Communist years, especially from 1980 to the present, American reporters who believe in their right to seek information, have operated within a system which suspects and hinders their work. Beijing's view of journalism is wholly different from that of even the most suspicious Western democracy. During this period there were times of what the Chinese call "tightening and loosening:" of intimidation of reporters, followed by relative relaxation, succeeded by harassment.

In addition to the harassment, one of the endemic dilemmas for American reporters in this atmosphere is official lying. In 1979 an editor at the Chinese Communist Party's leading newspaper People's Daily told me: " Lies in our newspapers are like rat droppings in clear soup: they are both obvious and disgusting. "

Such lying, which remains persistent, is a central problem for American reporters in Communist societies and never more so than in China. Yet, in May 1989, I saw a column of Chinese journalists from the Communist Party's official newspaper march into the crowds in Tiananmen Square holding a banner 25 feet wide and bearing the words " Don't force us to lie." And for three weeks, the longest continuous period of press freedom since Mao's triumph in 1949, papers all over China carried stories which would not have disgraced a British or American reporter; stories, moreover, on a sensational and sensitive subject - urban demonstrations against the commanding heights of state power. After the Tiananmen uprising had been crushed, on the night of June 3-4 1989, the reporters and editors who wrote and commissioned those stories would pay for their courage and professionalism with their careers, their liberty, and in some cases their lives.[1]

The brief liberation of our Chinese colleagues, and the open cooperation of Beijing's citizens, brought home to American reporters how severe were the normal restraints on our work.

About a week before the Tiananmen killings I did a brief broadcast for one of the major American television channels, all of which were anchoring their morning shows from Beijing. The anchor asked me if I could answer three questions in exactly one minute. Her first question was "Why is all this happening?" I replied that many problems had been building up in China - corruption, political persecution, no openness. " And what's happening right now?" I said that all over China, in dozens of cities, not just students but all sorts of people, including journalists and even police, were calling on their leaders to be more responsive. "Right. Last question: what's going to happen next?" "Whatever happens here in Tiananmen," I said portentously, "I can assure you China will never be the same again."

The interviewer listened for a moment to her mobile phone. " New York says to tell you that you give great bite. "

This little story illustrates some big things: the enormous resources Western media can pour into China reporting when it catches their attention. The low level of expectation of Western television editors when it comes to explanation. The unusual atmosphere of journalistic freedom during Tiananmen. And the inability of experienced China-watching reporters to foresee the violence about to crash into Tiananmen and the vast following purge, the qingcha or ferreting-out, well-described by the BBC's James Miles in his The Legacy of Tiananmen, which would sweep over China for the next eighteen months. What was unusual about Tiananmen was the freedom of opportunity for Americans to report. With the usual official obstacles absent, many of us believed we were witnessing the birth of a society in which, for the first time since 1949, we could truly get the story.

THEMES

I am interested in the obligations of Western journalists working in a country which expects its own journalists to speak for the Party and regards foreign reporters as, at best, awkward, often as "unfriendly," and at worst as spies and "black hands." Why they are so distrusted is easily understood: in 1985 Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, whose death in 1989 set off the Tiananmen uprising, reminded Chinese journalists of their duty: " I think it can be said that the party's journalism is the party's mouthpiece and the mouthpiece of the people themselves....everybody will naturally and

necessarily hold the same opinion on the basic issues and it would be unnatural to obstinately express '"different voices.' " [2]

As the journalist and historian Dai Qing has explained, Chinese reporters pay " great heed to the intention and spin the leaders want to give [a] particular story. ... Whether anything resembling 'news' is left in China after such treatment by this bureaucratic machine is a good question." This, Ms. Dai points out, has had a curious effect on Chinese readers. " If a news article boasts that 'the general situation is fabulous,' then the reader figures that the real situation must be awful; if so-and-so's novel or story is bombarded with criticism, then its content and story line must be valuable and enchanting. This sounds crazy; but it's the only way to intuit our press with any intelligence. " [3]

American reporters therefore face a predicament, about which three observations are fundamental: "The person who sets out to be a China reporter needs to know something about China," and "The potential for stories [in China] was limitless; the ability to get them and write them was quite the opposite. Those who have not lived and worked in China, a country where a street map, a telephone book, or a home address can be treated like a state secret, have no idea how hard it is there to travel, to send messages, to establish personal networks, to gain introductions, to decipher dialects, to conduct interviews, or to verify anything." [4]

The third observation is by Liu Binyan, China's leading investigative reporter: " I believe that only 300 people know for sure that 30 million people starved [to death between 1959 and 1961]. " [5]

ROADMAP OF PAPER

In the course of this study I glance at the history of modern American reporting on China. Following mention of the 1972 post-Nixon euphoria of American reporters I move to their growing awareness of the controls and strictures imposed on them by the Chinese state. Then come personal accounts of their China careers, from 1980 through periods of tightening and relaxing control to the reimposition of official threats and surveillance in late 1999. After an analysis of the importance of secrecy and deception to the Chinese state and of the problems this presents to American reporters, I note that these reporters have ignored Chinese writers' recent scrutiny of previously taboo subjects. I examine some American criticisms of American journalists in Tiananmen, focusing especially on the Shorenstein Center's long study. Finally, I

reconsider Beijing's preoccupation with the power of the press and the possible significance of American reporting in China.

CHINA REPORTING BEFORE 1972

American reporters in China for the past near-century have had a sense of mission and responsibility: to bring home the China story and to help transform China into a more modern, even democratic place. This is the legacy - "to change China" - of the 19th century missionaries. Even though many reporters deny it, many of them have pursued this goal.

Foreign journalism in China, as we recognize it today, began with my earliest predecessor, George Edward Morrison, "Morrison of The Times," at the turn of the century, for whom a major street in Peking - as it then was - was named. I will note briefly the phases through which American reporting moved until 1980. These phases are frequently described as oscillating between journalists liking or even loving China and taking sides in its various internal struggles, and enmity; both attitudes are often criticized as a departure from the ultimate professional requirement: objectivity. I agree with Ben H. Bagdikian, ex-assistant managing editor of The Washington Post, who writes in his autobiography, "Practically everyone in the journalistic process, from owner to reporter, claims that personal values do not influence the news, but I think that is clearly untrue." [6]

Beginning in the early years of the century with Thomas Millard of the China Press and later Millard's Review, American journalists acted as advocates for this or that side or interest in China. "Millard used journalism as a tool to spread his ideas about American expansion in the Far East and at the same time to advance the interests of China in Washington against those of Great Britain and Japan."[7.]

A product of the School of Journalism of Missouri University, which in the 1920s and 1930s sent over forty graduates to China, Millard embodied what Edgar Snow - also a Missouri man - said were the values of his origins: " anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, pro-independence, pro-equality-of-nations, pro-Republican, pro-self-determination, and pro-American." [8] Peter Rand, an authority on the history of China reporting, says of Millard, " He wanted to influence American policy. All China Hands since then have entertained this desire...." [9] One might add they favored the underdog.

Millard and his early colleagues saw Chiang Kaishek and his Nationalists [KMT] as bulwarks against Japanese expansionism and champions of national stability.

But the next wave of Americans, of whom Edgar Snow would be the star, including Arch Steele, Tillman Durdin, Harold Isaacs, Agnes Smedley, and Snow's wife Nym Wales, became increasingly anti-KMT. (Edgar Snow himself participated in the student demonstrations of the 1930s.) Snow scored a world-scoop with his Red Star Over China, which included Mao's manipulative account of his own life. Although Mao demanded and received the right to approve the text of his interview, and as shown below Snow altered the manuscript to please critics in Moscow, the book still provides an unrivaled flavor of life at Mao's guerrilla headquarters.[10] By the early Forties, the earlier group was joined by distinguished reporters such as Theodore "Teddy" White who worked for the pro-KMT Henry Luce, who altered his critical dispatches, and Christopher Rand. They found the Nationalist government, to which they had considerable access, weak and corrupt. Once Snow had been to Mao's guerrilla stronghold at Yanan, the Communists seemed increasingly attractive to the Americans: honest and eager to fight the Japanese. When Zhou Enlai came to represent the Communists at Chongqing, China's wartime capital, he charmed foreign reporters, even though they were occasionally shocked by his lies. At no time in that early period did any of them know that Mao was terrorizing his critics and financing some of his operations with opium. [11]

During the anti-Japanese war many reporters simply supported "China," and President Chiang Kaishek and his wife appeared often on the cover of Time. Harrison Salisbury of The New York Times summed up the pre-1949 years: "Just as the puritan image of the Communists stemming out of [Snow's] Red Star influenced many, so the image of the Nationalists given by Luce, and his journals , Time and Life, influenced many Americans as well. "[12] But even if readers' politics predisposed them to the Snow or the Luce view, the emotional content of the reporting in each case fed the American sense of a special responsibility for China and an expectation that it could be changed. Feeding stories to the foreign reporters also suited both sides in the civil war. This use of the foreign press for internal Chinese purposes has continued in the Communist period.

In the civil war between the KMT and the Communists, 1945-1949, once again Mao's forces were seen as the underdog and received an increasingly favorable American press. Jack Belden's China Shakes the World is the most notable example. Yet by the time the Communists entered Peking in 1949 no American reporters were there to witness their triumph. Thereafter, hostility to China, now Communist, built up in the American press during the Korean War. One of the journalists active in the years before 1949 noted that "one must distinguish between American journalists' attitudes toward revolutionaries 'before and after they achieve power.' " [13]

Then came a long dry spell for American reporters. Apart from Anna Louise Strong, who acted as a propagandist for the Communists, as did Edgar Snow after his carefully controlled trips between 1960 and 1970, American journalists were almost wholly shut out of internal reporting and coverage of China was hostile.[14]

THE NIXON VISIT AND THE PRESS

In 1972 there began a brief honeymoon between the US press and China when President Nixon traveled to Beijing and the press was dazzled by its limited access to a truly big story and the skill of its handlers. "The total effect of this hostmanship, " said Fox Butterfield of The New York Times, " is like a powerful tranquilizer, enough to make otherwise rational and intelligent people suspend disbelief. "[15] Reporters in that golden daze tended to write what their Chinese minders told them, as did the authors of the numerous "I Saw China" books, such as John Kenneth Galbraith and Shirley MacLaine, although there were others, such as the Belgian diplomat Simon Leys, who saw through the carefully devised facade.[16]

As I relate below I was no exception to those travelling in the golden daze. In October, 1979, I wrote my first long piece for The Observer (London. Entitled “Back to the Land of Little Red Lies,” it recalled my first trip to China in 1972, during the Cultural Revolution, when I slowly became aware how much of what I was shown and told was designed to deceive and impress. I admitted in the article that in 1972 people like me, grateful for what we took to be genuine access, "humbly helped to insert the rings in our own noses." "We wanted to deceive you, " the ex-guide told me. " But you wanted to be deceived."[17] Beginning about 1980, when they were permitted to work in China for long periods, American reporters became less starry-eyed and more cynical. Official Chinese visitors to the West often express indignation that the foreign press is so negative about China. The Washington bureau chief of the official New China News Agency told me in October that if the dissidents Wei Jingsheng and Wang Dan received the Nobel peace prize his agency would not interview them "because we disapprove of these people. You interfere with us by praising them. " On the same day, a Chinese colonel visiting the United States told me after hearing my views on China that "You have hurt the feelings of the Chinese people." [18]

Such visitors are especially surprised because the Chinese Foreign Ministry uses the traditional modes of "barbarian handling," inviting reporters to expensive meals and treating as "old friends" those who produce favorable stories or, when critical,

avoid responsibility by citing anonymous "envoys" or academic specialists, usually in the United States.

REPORTERS' CONSTRAINTS

Nonetheless, the Western "China story" is indeed an often negative one, although reporters are on the lookout for examples of the free market at work and other signs of lessening of state authority. Those who speak Chinese and represent the few British and American papers willing to invest the resources, travel through the countryside looking at the society behind the press conferences in Beijing. Part of the negativism arises from the bonds encircling the foreign press. Until recently Western reporters had to ask for permission to travel outside Beijing and when they did they had to stipulate why they wished to do a story elsewhere, whom they hoped to see, and for how long. Just outside the major cities were signs stating "No Foreigners Beyond This Point." Occasionally foreigners, such as John Burns of The New York Times, were expelled for crossing into forbidden zones. Entire areas such as Tibet and Xinjiang were out of bounds except under stringently controlled surveillance. As I note below, in November 1999 some American reporters have been threatened with the removal of accreditation for attempting to report on the Falun Gong, the religious movement with millions of members, just declared a criminal conspiracy..

REPORTERS' WORK-LIVES

All foreign reporters have worked in this encumbering climate which is marked by "tightening and loosening." Many journalists in the first wave after 1980 had been taught Chinese in university. Those in the first wave, including reporters like myself who had visited China in the early 1970s, was soon disillusioned by the tight controls imposed on them by the regime and by what they perceived as the oppression of the population. (I relate my own experience more fully later in this section.)

This disillusioned group soon overlapped with what Jim Mann of the Los Angeles Times, who went to Beijing in 1984, described as reporters who initially believed that "China was improving" until we encountered Democracy Wall, the Spiritual Pollution Campaign, the sacking of [Party General Secretary] Hu Yaobang, and eventually Tiananmen. We saw China with the wraps off, and then we never thought of it the same way again." [19]

James Miles has reported from China for 15 years, mostly for the BBC. "I would say there's been a significant change in the decade since Tiananmen in terms of the freedom of reporters to travel, meet people and interview officials and Chinese

academics. This is partly a result of a more sophisticated understanding of media handling techniques acquired by the authorities. Waibans [official handlers] are now far less in evidence in Beijing at least. The authorities clearly feel relatively comfortable now about the kind of things said by the official Chinese academics who are regularly quoted by the Western media, so probably feel little need at present to interpret interview restrictions too strictly. Much more information about social trends and economic conditions is now available in the official press. But it remains almost as difficult to confirm the accuracy of what is published. Trips out of town are easier to make, and journalists often do so with little if any contact with waibans. But of course there remains the paramount problem of China reporting which is getting access to distant rural and minority areas, as well as getting reliable information about elite political goings on. I would say on the latter score that we are as much in the dark as we were a decade ago -- perhaps more so given that there does not now seem to be the same kind of group of liberal insiders as there was in the 1980s who saw the foreign media as a useful conduit for airing news about ideological struggles and the personalities behind them. I now see far less in the way of scoops based on access to confidential documents than I saw a few years ago. The shifting news agenda towards more economic reporting and less politics (editors are getting bored with dissident roundups) makes it less necessary for journalists to engage in the kind of furtive contacts with dissidents that some undertook earlier in the 1990s. There is also now much more information about the dissident community coming from groups outside China, which gives greater freedom to report on this aspect of things without taking the risk of meeting dissidents themselves. " [20]

Steve Mufson of The Washington Post arrived in China in the early Nineties. "We weren't China hands. We were just reporters who had done long tours in other countries. This was good for story strategy. I'd been in South Africa where I saw 25,000 people jailed in one swoop in a small country. So I was interested in people who were stuck with oppression. For a while in South Africa there was hope among foreign reporters and then there was a feeling that nothing could ever change. This missed the activism in the townships. It may be that someday reporters in China will look back and say "Ah, that was the beginning of the change. But I think that mobility and some village democracy are less monotonous and maybe more important than the shuttling back and forth of people to jail." [21]

Patrick Tyler, who represented The New York Times in Beijing from 1993 to 1997, sums up what must have been a typical experience of that period. " I remember being impressed with Deng and his pragmatism. I arrived in China as Beijing was making the bid for the 2000 Games. They let [the dissident] Wei Jingsheng out. [Foreign Minister

] Qian Qichen said in late '93 that China would engage the Red Cross on access to prisoners. Jiang Zemin said he was going to try to meet Clinton's conditions in Feb.1994. Then there was a big backlash of some kind in the party and a hard-line current ascended and Li Peng's voice grew stronger. This all happened in my first 12 months and it deeply impressed me about the swings in the leadership circle. Most restricted subjects were Taiwan, religious persecution, Tibet, anything that undermined the public image of Politburo members, including corruption, the historical image of the Party as a progressive force in history, the army, etc. Secrecy is important to them because the Party was built on it; it is intrinsic to the operation and survival of the organism; it comes out of the legacy of the early revolution which tends to regard competitive ideas and ideologies as a threat to survival." [22]

Mary Kay Magistad reported from China for National Public Radio from August 1995 for four years. " China's system of controlling journalists is -- on paper -- one of the most restrictive in the world. But good foreign correspondents realize fairly soon that they should adopt a Chinese attitude toward the rules -- that they are flexible, and that you get away with what you can. According to the rules, every foreign correspondent in China should "apply to the appropriate authorities" every time they want to do an interview. Want to talk to old age pensioners? Laid off workers? Get a person-on-the-street reaction to a news event? In each case, you as a foreign correspondent are somehow supposed to (a) know who the appropriate authority is and (b) wait for that person to "process your application"-- which could take weeks, and often results in you being told "no." Obviously, no one operates like that. In Beijing, most foreign journalists go directly to the people they want to interview. There's always a risk, when doing interviews on the street with a microphone and/or television camera, that police will move in, detain you and make you write a "self criticism," acknowledging that you engaged in this "illegal activity" without consulting the "appropriate authorities."

“But few foreign correspondents or camera people seem fazed by that. One cameraman I know has something like 15 self-criticisms in his file. It's gotten to the point where the Public Security Bureau official just sort of sighs when he sees this guy coming, hands him a sheet of paper, and says the equivalent of: "you know the drill." Person-on-the-street interviews are usually fine, as long as the subject is innocuous and it's not a particularly sensitive time (i.e. near a major Party-related anniversary, a high-level strategic visit -- such as Clinton's, or the annual National People's Congress or other significant Party events). In that way, the "squeeze" on foreign correspondents, and on dissidents and other "trouble-makers" is episodic. Most of the time, it's not all that difficult to operate. Oddly enough, even the most high-profile dissidents' phonelines were not cut

off, even though they were most surely bugged. Many dissidents were willing to do on-the-record interviews by phone, knowing they were bugged. If journalists showed up at these same dissidents' homes, however, they'd almost certainly be detained. What seems most secretive for the PRC is military information, and information about groups or issues considered a threat to continued Communist Party rule (ex. China Democracy Party, Falun Gong, top-level corruption). It is my perception that, over time, people on the street and in the countryside in China have become increasingly more willing to talk to journalists. Certainly, that has been my experience. There seems to be a higher level of frustration and disgruntlement, and less fear that there will be serious ramifications for talking to foreigners. Obviously, some such fear still remains; I speak in relative terms. Compared to three or four years ago, it is easier to engage and talk at length about sensitive issues, and more likely that people will express discontent."[23]

My own experience in China was longer than that of most of my colleagues, lasting from 1972 to 1991 - when I was told I could not return - although at no time was I based in Beijing. From 1993 to 1997, I represented The Times of London on the edge of China, in Hong Kong. Until 1991, representing The Observer, also of London, I travelled from London to China for six weeks to several months at a time. It was a great advantage not being stationed in a bureau; I ignored most of the regulations hemming in reporters stationed in China, rarely asking for either permission or favour. I never travelled with an official minder and arranged my own journeys. Travelling on trains and local buses gave me the chance to speak with ordinary Chinese, especially if the train or bus was jammed full and one swayed next to the same little group for long hours. I heeded several rules most reporters followed to avoid immediate expulsion: I accepted no documents or letters except from people I knew very well or occasional Tibetan monks. I did not enter military zones and usually turned back when I saw a sign warning foreigners not to proceed past that point.

On the other hand, I disregarded the regulation stipulating that reporters stationed in China should not travel to "minority areas," that is regions lived in by mostly non-Han peoples, such as Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet. In all such areas I was invariably approached by local or national security officers who asked me why I was there. On such occasions I followed my most important rule: to always identify myself at once as a journalist. Sometimes I was told to leave a particular place, sometimes I was simply warned not to "make trouble." Occasionally I was detained for a few hours and interrogated; at such times I was invariably asked to write down what I had been doing in the place where I had been stopped, which I always did and signed. When asked to express regret for having broken the law, which was never specified, I said I would write

this down but would indicate that it had been dictated to me. The request was then dropped.

No matter where I was in China, as was the case with all reporters, my phone calls were tapped - I could often hear the equipment or breathing - and I was often shadowed. In Beijing I was followed for years by a car bearing the same number plate and carrying four plainclothes officers. If I was talking with a Chinese friend it was common for him or her to point to the ceiling to remind me of hidden microphones. These friends were often visited by security officers immediately after our meeting and were ordered to explain what had been said. For ten years I was occasionally visited by the same security man from the Foreign Ministry who would ask me for my views on China and where I intended to go next. He would display his industry by reading to me from his notebook every detail of my movements of the previous few days. It was he, with satisfaction, who told me in early September, 1991, " You are no longer welcome in our country, " although he gave me no explanation, other than to say "You know why, think about it, " when I asked him for a reason.

Thus ended years of often disturbing experiences in China. In 1972 I was one of a small group of visiting American academic China specialists. Our first afternoon in Canton we were taken by our "minders" to a "typical" workers' apartment house to meet a "typical" family, including two grandparents, parents, and two children. They lived in three rooms, very well equipped with excellent bicycles, television, radio, a carpet, fine bedding, and a simple but good kitchen and bathroom. They told us the building dated from before "liberation" in 1949 and had bars on the windows because in the pre-Communist days there were thieves.

The next day, during a very early stroll on my own, by chance I passed the same building and the father of the family, who I later realised was an exceptionally brave man, beckoned me in. I was now in a bare shabby flat. When I asked him why they were now in a different flat he told me that where we had met had been equipped by "them" or "the higher-ups." The building was only three years old, he added, and the bars were in the windows because there were thieves about.

Seven years later I learned from one of my guides from 1972 that I had been guided through a succession of Potemkin scenarios. Closed schools and universities were opened for our brief inspection and factories pretended to be producing goods for us to observe and report. People actually in jail, or the “ox-pen,” were released to assure us that they were leading normal lives. During the trip itself there were enough incidents like

the one in the Canton worker's flat to make me deeply suspicious but some of my companions convinced me to keep my doubts to myself because it might ruin the chances for others wishing to visit China; it was made plain as well that if I expressed negative feelings in America it would help the anti-Communists.

In Tibet in 1985 I ate five evening meals in the Lhasa flat of a married Chinese couple, both officials, who introduced me to a succession of other Chinese who spoke openly and disparagingly of the failure of Beijing's policies in the region. My host offered me a packet of allegedly top-secret documents which he claimed would confirm rumors of a massacre of Tibetans in Lhasa by the Chinese army. I declined this packet. When I returned to Lhasa a six months later and went to the flat where i had been entertained and to the offices of my hosts and their friends there was no sign of them and others there said they had never heard of them.

Soon after Tiananmen, in early June 1989, I returned to London for medical treatment for the injuries I had suffered at the hands of the armed police during the killings. The minister at the Chinese embassy invited me to lunch and asked me in detail what i had seen. He was particularly interested in my account of the morning of June 4 outside the Peking Hotel, near Tiananmen Square, when I saw the army shoot down people who had come there looking for missing students and then shot down the ambulance doctors and nurses who came to help the fallen. After I had full briefed him, the diplomat told me that none of what I had recounted had happened. " We have other information, " he told me. " You have been misinformed."

Occasionally, the Chinese authorities used muscle on foreign reporters. At about midnight on June 4, 1990, almost 365 days to the hour since I had been beaten up, the Armed Police stood four reporters, including myself, against a wall and pressed their rifles to our heads, briefly convincing us that we were facing a firing squad. Ten feet away a Japanese woman reporter attempting to capture this scene had her wrist broken by a club-wielding policeman. Her American journalist husband had been forced to his knees by a policeman who forced his rifle-barrel into the reporter's mouth while he watched his wife being beaten. Suddenly, the soldiers ran back to their truck and drove off.

During most of my time in China I had an arrangement with my editors in London that would be professionally unacceptable outside the Communist world: I almost never identified a source, either by name, occupation, or even location. If I was told something of interest by a female doctor in Datong I might transform her into a male electrician in Nanjing. But I look back on the years 1985 to 1989 as a relatively open

period and on the six weeks before June 4, 1989, as a time of normal reporting by any standard; not only my Chinese colleagues dared to write the truth, but the people of Beijing spoke openly and enthusiastically to reporters.

BUT SOME WESTERN PUBLISHERS....

Some Western newspaper proprietors ensure that criticism of China will be restrained. Of these the most well-known is Rupert Murdoch whose positive views of China in the interest of his commercial interests there are a matter of record. After dropping the BBC from his Star television network in Hong Kong and selling the extremely profitable South China Morning Post, Mr. Murdoch observed that he didn't wish to irritate Beijing because of the opinions of some of his newspaper editors. He blocked the publication of Hong Kong ex-Governor Chris Patten's East and West - despite a contractual obligation with Mr. Murdoch's publishing house HarperCollins - because, he observed later, he saw no reason to anger the leaders of a country where he was an investor. During Mr. Murdoch's visit to Beijing in December 1998, President Jiang Zemin congratulated his guest for presenting China objectively and cooperating with the Chinese press, while Mr Murdoch expressed his admiration for China's achievements in all respects over the past two decades.

As the East Asia editor of Mr. Murdoch's The Times for five years, I observed the impact of the paper's owner on how it covered or did not cover China. Mr. Murdoch, however, is not alone. At the Fortune-sponsored CEO's meeting in Shanghai in September 1999, Sumner Redstone, chairman of Viacom and a prospective buyer of CBS, said at a news conference, "Journalistic integrity must prevail in the final analysis. ..that doesn't mean that journalistic integrity should be exercised in a way that is unnecessarily offensive to the countries in which you operate."[24]

STATE SECRECY

As I will show below, even those reporters who say their work is getting easier emphasize that "secrets" or "national secrets" are the most frequent reasons foreign journalists are given for why they are not going to be told something. [25]

The reason, I believe, that Beijing is so distrustful of foreign journalists is its fear of being understood. [26] Liu Binyan observes: "In Chinese cultural tradition we honor the written word: characters are sacred to us. ...In the popular imagination, characters have such great power that shamen, or witches, were once able to write a few characters on a slip of paper and stick it to a door, and people would think they were warding off evil

spirits. The Chinese Communist Party's superstitious belief in the power of the written word, in the power of propaganda, reaches astounding levels. Obviously it aims to control the people's minds to such an extent that no dissent exists, so that the common people will think exactly as the Party does. " [27]

Attempting to breach this secrecy, foreign reporters may make trouble for themselves but can endanger their Chinese contacts. This is less serious now than ten years ago. Many Chinese will tell foreigners what they think - as long as they are not identified. But from this eagerness to converse some travelers to China these days, especially academic ones who have friends in research centres, assume that Chinese are now free to speak their minds. The regime, however, distinguishes between discussions in private (and, as I will discuss below, domestic written criticism) and collective political action. Recent visitors to China who have tried to make contact with politically active Chinese, as opposed to favoured academics or cab drivers (notoriously free with their opinions), found most of them either in prison or under close surveillance.

Reporters usually are more skeptical than occasional visitors. This is vital in China where secrecy and lying remain the greatest obstacle to journalists' work. Indeed, during the Tiananmen demonstrations of 1989 foreign reporters noted the unusual degree of openness among the residents of Beijing when they discussed their antipathy to the government and their support for the students. Even more striking, for several weeks, as the reporter Linda Jakobson has shown, was the honest official press coverage of the demonstrations.

But Tiananmen was unique. Normally, discovering the facts in China is an arduous, often mysterious task, even for Chinese. One of China's most persistent investigators of Party history is Dai Qing. She spent time in jail after Tiananmen but continues to investigate political secrets.

"There is a tremendous thirst for this in China. You foreigners, with your free press, will find it hard to understand this great thirst because you are so flooded with newspapers and books. ...you should imagine living in a dark room with all the shades drawn. If one shade goes up - just a crack - the light that enters is suddenly *very interesting*. " [Italics in original.] [28] While the official lying makes life difficult for foreign journalists, it is intolerable for Chinese. Hannah Arendt summed up the effect of lying: "It has frequently been noted that the surest result of brainwashing in the long run is a peculiar kind of cynicism, the absolute refusal to believe the truth of anything, no matter how well it may be established.. In other words, the result of a consistent and total

substitution of lies for factual truth is not that the lies will now be accepted as truth and truth be defamed as a lie, but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world - and the category of truth versus falsehood is among the mental means to this end - is being destroyed."[29]

There are few corners of life beyond the family or close friends where Chinese can be certain about the truth. Some secrets about the Communist Party, and even about the Chinese people themselves, the Party keeps close and even intellectuals prefer not to probe, although, as I note below, some writers now unravel these matters in the unofficial press. When secrets do come to foreign reporters they are difficult to corroborate - until the regime itself decides they should be revealed; even then many facts remain shrouded. The Jesuit Sinologue Father Ladany told me long ago,"Even when the Party tells the truth it is lying. " Party leaders think of themselves as an elite who decide what other Chinese need to know. One of their fears is that if the Party's record were made public, many of those who sacrificed for the cause would feel they had wasted their lives. Professor Michael Yahuda of the London School of Economics says, " They are claiming to be more open. But since history is the basis of their legitimacy they can't admit their errors. What they do reveal, these little nuggets, are replete with sins of commission and omission, designed to serve the current approach." [30]

SOME SECRETS

China's size makes keeping such secrets easier than in a small country. Much of the media are state-controlled and until recently it was almost impossible for most Chinese to travel even short distances. Su Shaozhi, ex-Director of the Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought Institute, told me, "China is a very big country. I knew the famine was very big because I was in touch with higher levels. But the government was able to keep the real number secret. The Party is good at this. Look at 1975 - two dams burst in Hunan province killing 230,000 people and it was only admitted fifteen years later. At the time The People's Daily didn't publish the news."

Here are a few examples: when and where was the Party founded - in 1921 in Shanghai, with Mao present - or in 1920, in Beijing, by intellectuals whose names were expunged from history for almost forty years?[31]

How about the great famine of 1959-61? How many died - 16 million (this was grudgingly admitted only in 1981), twenty million, thirty? Liu Binyan says, " Since I was in the countryside during the famine, I should have known the number, but, before 1984, even I didn't know how many people had died of starvation. In 1984, by chance I

found out that perhaps 20 million had starved; a few months later I heard another figure: 30 million. Five years later I heard 43 million. " [32] Jasper Becker, the Beijing correspondent for the Hong Kong newspaper South China Morning Post, has made a comprehensive study of the famine in his book Hungry Ghosts: China's Secret Famine. [33] "This was the worst famine in human history, " Becker says. "Forty million died. In 1981 Mao was blamed for the Cultural Revolution but was exempted from blame for the famine. That would have left his whole legacy as amounting to nothing."[34] But in 1961 Premier Zhou Enlai assured Edgar Snow that while there were food shortages, no one was starving; Snow - who admitted that in reporting on China he "leaned to one side" - dutifully reported this: "There was no visible starvation and the population was in good health and working condition." [35]

Tiananmen, another secret, is still known, officially, as "the events,"' and the "counter-revolutionary uprising,"' when trouble-makers, it is alleged, egged on by an international conspiracy, attacked the State and slaughtered soldiers and policemen. In the confusion, it is said, a few innocent people were killed, none in the Square itself. President Jiang Zemin has dismissed it as "much ado about nothing," although he oversaw the closing off of the Square in the Spring of 1999 to ensure that there would be no manifestation of grief or outrage about what had happened there a decade before. How many people were killed by the army and the armed police in and around the Square on the night of June 3-4 ? Dozens? Hundreds? A few thousand? Were they armed? How many soldiers and police died? A small group of parents of the dead, organized by Professor Ding Zilin, whose son was shot dead, have collected about 160 names under the most arduous conditions. Professor Ding manages to communicate with reporters despite constant police surveillance. [37]

"The man who publishes the truth about Tiananmen will rule China," a ministerial-level official told me several years ago. This simple statement was so dangerous, although it was on the record, that the man who uttered it was compelled to state publicly that he never made it. His caution explains the metal fence around the Square for weeks before June 4 1999 and the wave of arrests of those suspected of taking advantage of the uprising's tenth anniversary.

A final secret: one of the twentieth century's most shocking kidnappings was the seizure in Tibet in 1995 of the eleventh Panchen Lama, a small boy recently identified by the Dalai Lama as Tibet's second highest-ranking religious figure. Beijing "discovered" a second child, one of whose first public acts was to pledge allegiance to the Chinese state and to the Party. The kidnapped child, together with his entire family and some senior monks, has never been seen again. The official spokesman's reply to foreign

reporters' questions about his whereabouts is that the Chinese government does not know the address of all of its citizens. This scandal has never been mentioned in the Chinese press.[38]

FROM INNER TO OUTER: SELECTIVE DISCLOSURE

Foreign reporters working in China must keep in the forefront of their minds that for two millennia the purpose of History was praise or blame, to instruct on who was a worthy or unworthy emperor, mandarin, general, wife, widow, or even child. Such designations could be revised later; in China since 1949 the Line has shifted with the demands of the Party. The ultimate categories are nei and wai, inner and outer, what is permitted and forbidden, party and non-party, Chinese and foreign. Thus Dazhai commune, held up to foreigners and Chinese as a model of Maoist striving and austerity, was later "revealed" as a fraud, its heroic leader, Chen Yonggui, disgraced, and his son exposed as a rapist . Marshal Lin Biao, once Mao's "closest comrade-in-arms," was subsequently accused of attempting to assassinate the Chairman and described as having been a bad person for forty years. For many years the great threat to reporting was the concept of "State Secret," defined as anything not officially made public.

American reporters know that if a leader is alive and in power, his or her personal life is neibu, internal, and will be discussed with journalists only very discreetly. If this leader falls, however, no aspect of his sexual life is too private to mention. As soon as Jiang Qing, Madame Mao, was arrested after her husband's death in late 1976, scandal about her proclivities was commonly discussed with Western journalists. The same thing happened after the detention of Politburo member, ex-Beijing mayor and Party Secretary Chen Xitong. After his expulsion from the Politburo in 1995, and from the Party in 1997, for monumental peculation amounting to an alleged $2.2 billion dollars-worth of municipal funds, no detail of his sleazy private life was kept from the public. Until Chen was brought down, there was very little reporting on him in the Western press apart from his role in urging Deng Xiaoping to summon the army on the night of June 3-4 1989.

Mao Zedong is still officially hailed as a Great Marxist and a Great Revolutionary, who went bad in his final years. 70 percent good, 30 percent bad was the verdict of the 1981 official evaluation "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China. " But his ex-comrades (some of whom were also his near-victims) now freely "confide" to foreign journalists that Mao was an opium addict who specialized in very young women in his old age.

Most Chinese are aware of the truth behind many of the lies. Indeed, the nomenklatura's te-quan or special privileges - special shops, films, books, residences, trains, planes, cars, and trips abroad, together with their intermarriages and specially favored children, the "Red Princes," are notorious.

ESPECIALLY SENSITIVE MATTERS

A fact of work-life for American reporters is that some lies are believed by almost everyone. Tibetans, Mongols, Manchus, and Muslims, whose ethnic and cultural differences and historical experiences make them distinct from the Chinese or Hans, are regarded by almost all ethnic Chinese as culturally inferior and lucky to be included in the great Chinese family. This national myth permits persecution in so-called minority areas when their inhabitants demand autonomy. Only after Tiananmen did some intellectuals come to believe that the Chinese army might be shooting innocent Tibetans. But even most dissidents, including Wei Jingsheng, insist that Tibet has always been part of China and have no patience with scholarly research which suggests the opposite.[39]

Usually, reporters are allowed to visit the minority areas only with permission, and then usually in guided groups; in Xinjiang and Tibet meeting local people off the official program, interviewing them properly and following up what they say is nearly impossible. [40] Those reporters who visit Tibet with official permission may quote the occasional complaint from an anonymous monk but they have no opportunity, on guided trips, to sit in a monastery for several days and wait for real conversations to develop. Even more difficult is investigating the scale of Chinese military and economic power in the minority areas. Occasional articles, such as a recent three-part analysis of the Tibetan situation in both a mainland journal and the leading Communist newspaper in Hong Kong, say little new but astonish because of the little they do say and, in a disguised form, admit.[41]

INTERNAL EFFECTS OF LYING

Perhaps the biggest lie is insisting that while the Party makes mistakes, only the Party can correct them. But as Father Ladany and Dai Qing warn, this means covering them up. It may be true that the man who told the truth - about Tiananmen, say - would rule China. But the entire lie is so big, starting with the birth of the Party itself, that if it were thoroughly punctured the system would explode. If the verdict on Tiananmen were reversed embarassing questions would be asked about how it came about that almost the

entire top tier of the regime, Jiang Zemin and his favourites, came to power precisely because Deng Xiaoping had chosen them to restore order after the nationwide uprising of the 1989 Spring.

The internet is a recent tool for piercing some of the official secrecy. [42] Adept Chinese can use search engines to examine subjects normally off-limits in China. Such knowledge, some claim, will destroy the state's monopoly on information. But the intensely nationalist educational system immunizes many citizens against heterodox ideas. Most Chinese intellectuals, including many resident abroad, are convinced that the US deliberately bombed Beijing's Belgrade Embassy in May, 1999 and are equally convinced - as the Chinese government has also expressly alleged - that NATO's attempts to stop the killing of Albanians in Kosovo were acts of American-directed Western imperialism which might lead to foreign intervention in China on behalf of Muslims and Tibetans.

How does a society based on lies function? Orville Schell, dean of the University of California School of Journalism, has asked: " Are there oases in the memory hole for Party higher-ups....How do they arrogate any area where some truth prevails, allowing the government to function?" [43] A striking revelation in Dr Li Zhisui's memoir, The Private Life of Chairman Mao, was how much the leaders lied to one another. Yet the existence for years of Reference News, a digest of the foreign press prepared for officials, indicates that the senior leaders expect the facts. After years of discussions with Chinese intellectuals Princeton University's Perry Link suggests " There's a strong pull to get to the bottom of this. But the digging undermines the culture, you're chipping away at something precious. It's like getting pushed away by the core of a magnet. Soviet dissidents find it easier. Chinese like to stay within the system."[44]

THE NEW PROBERS

Nonetheless, a full picture of the state's great wall of secrets in 1999 must include the growing number of Chinese writers seeking ways around and through it. Foreign reporters, including myself, have given either no or negligible attention to the post-1989 push by Chinese writers to probe hitherto taboo subjects.

Geremie Barmé of Australian National University has an unrivaled mastery of the minutiae of the Chinese literary scene. Along with economic reform, he pointed out at an October 1999 Harvard seminar, the deregulated publishing market encourages wide-ranging political and social critiques. As long as they avoid political action these writers can challenge the Party on many fronts, such as official corruption, cronyism, the

expansion of the gap between rich and poor, media freedom, and even democratization. The development of democracy in Taiwan, Mr. Barmé says, is now included in discussions of Chinese modernity. Many of these writers, before and after Tiananmen, have suffered at the hands of the security forces. "They were emotionally and intellectually determined to see the one-party state weakened and undermined no matter what the cost. For them the marketplace was a welcome ally in their quest. They would prefer an enfeebled party-state that permitted direct resistance if it meant that the new dominant market might well make that resistance little more than cosmetic. " [45]

Some writers, Mr. Barmé observes, have turned their attention to local history, so that even the 1959-1961 famine has fallen under the spotlight. He gives as an example "the journalist Lu Yuegang's work on the state-induced famine in Fenghuo village, Shaanxi province." [46] From such local investigation other writers, including Yu Jie, author of the hugely popular book Fire and Ice, have moved to polemic. Enraged by the adulation of Mao by the ex-Red Guard Zhang Chengzhi, Yu writes "Statements like this absolutely horrify me...What has Zhang Chengzhi got to say about the 30 million people who starved to death during the so-called three years of natural disasters? How does he react when contemplating the countless tormented souls of those who hanged or drowned themselves or were beaten to death...?" [47] Other attacks are even more daring - and have been largely unnoticed by foreign reporters. In 1997, the artist Ai Weiwei published a composite three scenes: the White House, Hong Kong, and Tiananmen. "In the foreground of each image," Barmé writes, "...the artist's hand is seen giving the finger to each of these iconic scenes. " Accompanying the images is an essay including these words: "The history of modern China is a history of negation, a denial of the value of humanity, a murder of individuality. It is a history without a soul.... " [48]

Barmé concludes that "the proliferation of ideological stances and cultural possibilities - albeit hamstrung and distorted- ...allowed for an unprecedented opportunity for debate and dissension in the history of the People's Republic. The lack of adequate public institutions that could provide avenues for constructive change and wide-ranging practical reform meant that the transformation was not neatly discernible or particularly dramatic, but it was continuing apace nonetheless." [49]

Mr. Barmé suggested during the Harvard seminar that such writing in an authoritarian society is what Vaclav Havel, in a 1978 essay, calls "the art of the impossible...." He noted as well that Havel's writings are quoted by the new iconoclastic writers. Some Chinese, therefore, increasingly demand the restoration of a basic human right: the accurate

memory of times gone by. Barmé's succinct rejoinder to my observation that Western reporters appear unaware of this development was "They don't read enough."

THE SHORENSTEIN STUDY OF TIANANMEN REPORTING

The shortcomings of Western reporters in China certainly included not knowing enough. But overall they have been good at keeping their eyes open. Never was this more plain than during Tiananmen, in the spring of 1989. The paving stones in the square were scarred by the tanks and armored personnel carriers on the night of the 1989 killings. By October 1990, when the Asian Games opened in Beijing, those ground-in reminders of death had been smoothed away by the Party's stone masons. Millions of flowers formed the Chinese characters for "Beijing Welcomes You," and the walls of any building tourists might glimpse had been whitewashed. But Beijing remembered. An elderly woman street-crossing sweeper remarked to me "Because of the Games, this city is like donkey dung: clean and shiny outside, but inside it's still shit."

The memory dispose-all down which the tread marks had been dropped had not worked on the old woman, and it still wasn't working on June 4, 1990, the massacre's first anniversary, when the tinkling of breaking glass could be heard over the walls of Peking University, ringed that night by the Armed Police to make sure the students didn't get out. The sound was of little glass bottles - 'Xiaoping"- a play on the name of senior leader Deng Xiaoping, in whose dishonor the Tiananmen demonstrators had broken bottles in the Spring of 1989.

Bearing in mind the vast and micro-managing official apparatus devoted to hampering and blocking their efforts, based on a view of the press reaching back to Mao's early pronouncements, the success of Western reporters in China and more specifically during Tiananmen in the Spring of 1989, is notable. It is therefore disturbing to read the criticism of them in some American studies of China-reporting. Of these the most comprehensive is the Harvard Shorenstein Center's report "Turmoil at Tiananmen: A Study of U.S. Press Coverage of the Beijing Spring of 1989." The report, published in 1992, was the first in a series intended to investigate how media coverage of international crises affected the public and policy-making. It aimed as well to discover what "lessons " could be learned from this interaction. The report, unusually, was commissioned by the Ford Foundation and was the product in part of an 86 -member discussion panel composed of academic and media representatives. Many of the former were China specialists; few of the latter were. It was an achievement of the media, the report notes, to make this international crisis immediate for a global audience, especially because the

major American television companies broadcast daily from Tiananmen Square. This also gave the media, the report contends in its introduction, a "new role and responsibility in international affairs. "

Although it is put in the form of questions, the report's conclusion is apparent in its introduction: "Did the media, foreign and Chinese, help bring China to the brink of...change? Next time the dissent rises to the surface, will the media be an ingredient in whether or not that change will occur?" It describes the coverage as " a wobbly prism" which brought out " the best and worst in both media ." [50] The Shorenstein study takes a view opposite to that of Harrison Salisbury of The New York Times. " [W]hen you have an event of the magnitude of Tiananmen, to stand by and simply jot down notes and then go off with your word processor to write a story in which you've divorced yourself entirely from those events is an unnatural act... It would be much better, for my money...to declare your prejudices and say: ' This is the way it seems to me tonight, and I know that I am excited.' That is the kind of reporting that people can understand and accept..." [51]

"Turmoil," by contrast, takes a lofty view, usually expressed as "We think...." Yet few of those appearing at the workshop were reporters and even fewer had been in Tiananmen. The report describes the Tiananmen journalists as working under intense, confusing, and dangerous conditions...As the Pulitzer Prize and other awards granted to such coverage attest, it was, for some journalists, their finest hour." [52]

But the students were "favored" by the journalists, the report contends, instead of being " a subject of neutral scrutiny." (Although Marvin Kalb, the Shorenstein Center's director, writes in his introduction that the journalists "had no ax to grind.) The Government's view should have been more fully explored, it is suggested. Actually this was widely done, beginning with the extensive analysis of the People's Daily's April 26 editorial which condemned the demonstrations, and which was understood to be the voice of Deng Xiaoping.

Despite what the report says about the students favouring Zhao Ziyang, most of those I reported said he was perhaps slightly better than the rest of the leaders, but only slightly. On May 28, my paper, The Observer, headlined my story " Zhao Ziyang is Finished. " The Shorenstein report notes, accurately, that there were varying estimates of how many died during the night. In my report on the morning of June 4, I said that thirty eight were confirmed dead and "More than 150 are thought to have died...." The Shorenstein report admits "The China coverage was somewhat hampered by the fact that the conservatives in the Chinese government refused to talk to the press and the only

officials who did talk, even surreptitiously, to the press, favored the reformist faction."[53] The report takes reporters to task for not realizing that Chinese media coverage - which was openly sympathetic to the students - was incorrectly viewed by many Chinese people "as a signal that officials condoned the movement." [54] It claims that this was "concluded" by Linda Jakobson. Ms. Jakobson did not conclude this. She merely says it was the opinion of Harvard's Andrew Walder.[55] People in China, Ms. Jakobson said, "have grown accustomed to continuous change in policy and they are wary of ferocious political campaigns. They know that the official version of the 'counter-revolutionary rebellion in Beijing,' the one that the media is putting out, is what they are supposed to think." [56] What Ms. Jakobson herself witnessed in "many a home" was that people kept the clippings from the May 1989 papers, " so that not even my children will forget, " as one friend explained. When people saw Premier Li Peng being scolded by students on live television it "made a lasting imprint on the minds of hundreds of millions of viewers across the country." [57]

The report is correct in its criticism of television reporting from Tiananmen; live and immediate, its pictures were often accompanied by inadequate analysis which often gave audiences a misleading impression. But the report's authors seem not to have grasped the force of the observation by Amanda Bennett of The Wall Street Journal: "In hindsight, sure it's clear there was a struggle and [Party boss] Zhao challenged [Senior Leader] Deng and lost. But in China, all is so couched, so murky, I'm not sure what a responsible journalist could have made of it at that point...The power struggle came out in little teeny pieces ---there was no way to get at it at the time...The story is the crowd. The story takes over. " 58

MORE CRITIQUES OF TIANANMEN REPORTING

The Shorenstein Center's report is not the only skewed view of American reporters' activities during Tiananmen. Professor Carolyn Wakeman of the Graduate School of Journalism of the University of California has recently written, " Deeply shaken by the slaughter of innocents [in Tiananmen] whose cause had for weeks drawn their support, reporters who witnessed the bloodshed and interviewed survivors understandably found a simplified narrative irresistible. The dramatic story of heroic students prepared to sacrifice their lives for American freedoms validated the deepest cultural assumptions and most cherished political values of reporters and editors. It appealed to broad media audiences never before interested in China. ...The bold erection of the Goddess of Democracy statue in Tiananmen Square seemed a jubilant triumph rather than a foolhardy provocation." [59] Such assertions, she says, kept "notions of China's menace and its ruthlessness potent." [60]

This kind of criticism is usually confined to discussions of reporting on China. It is far less likely to be focused on reporters who work in other countries with repressive regimes - one thinks of the former Soviet Union or South Africa - notable for their gulags, frequent executions, detention of political dissidents, and oppressed ethnic populations. Those who report on them in critical terms are rarely taxed with being negative or with having "agendas."

PROSPECTS

During the last two or three years the incubus of Tiananmen has grown somewhat lighter - although in the run-up to the tenth anniversary the government went to great lengths to block off the Square. The limited discourse that occurs, the occasional somewhat revealing articles, and the chats with professional Chinese contacts, are seen by friends of China abroad as "loosening up" and "relaxing, " and critical reporters are told to concentrate on such progress. But foreign reporters remain alert for returns to "tightening," which in November, 1999 was indeed the atmosphere. The bureau chief of The New York Times wrote in November that the suppression of the religious sect Falun Gong "left no doubt that [the government] intends to wipe out all organized traces of the movement - even if that requires jailing thousands of people who never saw themselves as enemies of the state. " This determination resulted in traditional pressure on foreign reporters, especially if they interviewed Falun Gong spokesmen secretly. Some reporters were threatened with the removal of credentials and on November 10 the China Foreign Correspondent's Club complained of official harassment to the Foreign Ministry. [61] Foreigners working for Chinese news agencies also feel the heat. Within a Beijing news magazine, for instance, a foreign sub-editor noticed that "On a couple of occasions all the news team would disappear for a 'meeting' and would remerge a few hours later murmuring about Falun Gong. It transpires these meetings were to encourage any practitioners to come forward and repent or to encourage friends and family to do the same. By the end of the month- long campaign (resorting to stories about 12 year old who felt breathless when they practised Falun Gong) most of my colleagues were utterly fed up with the whole thing. However most were of the opinion that it was harmful in some way but they weren't quite sure how. "[62]

It would be foolish to deny that nothing changes in China, that the secrets are somewhat easier for reporters to crack - although we now look back, ironically, at the pre-1989 years as a golden age. It is apparent too that reporters have failed to notice the vigor of the non-official press in pinpointing some of the regime's most sensitive secrets.

Many Chinese and foreign journalists know that the Party can make terrible mistakes and do terrible things....but that it can only concede this about some of the past. Advocates of systemic change remain an imperilled species. A prisoner already serving a ten-year sentence received an extra eight years not long ago for attaching tiny slips of paper bearing the words " Long live freedom" and "End tyranny" to the legs of locusts and flying them out of his cell window. [63]

Xu Liangying, now almost 80, a physicist and academician, has campaigned for political freedom since the 1950s and in recent years has sent petitions to the regime calling for the release of political prisoners. In 1957, when Deng Xiaoping was Party Secretary General, Professor Xu and members of his family were detained for twenty years. During that period he recalls that he was sustained by a portrait of Albert Einstein bearing the words " Great spirits have always encountered opposition from mediocre minds."

We China-journalists, whether it is our intention or not, have been compiling an archive of the lives of the Chinese under a system of mediocre minds which, like Lenin's, Stalin's and Brezhnev's in the Soviet Union, caused millions to die before their time, blocked the spiritual and cultural development of generations, and kept China poor and backward. Some day this archive may form part of the evaluation of one of China's shortest dynasties.

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ENDNOTES

1. For an informed survey of the Chinese press during the Tiananmen period, see Jakobson, " Lies in Ink, Truth in Blood." For the subsequent purge see James Miles, The Legacy of Tiananmen, ch.1, "Rivers of Blood."

2. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), 15,April 1985, pp.K1,K4. Party-imposed responsibility, already in existence in the Communist guerrilla areas before the Maoist victory in 1949, stipulated that reporters must act as "leaders of public opinion, " a Leninist notion. Mao had declared that writers generally should portray society's "bright and dark" sides. For the Soviet press and the subsequent reforms under Gorbachev, see Ellen Mickiewicz "Russia."

3 Media Studies Journal, Winter 1999,p. 80.

4. Edward Farmer, in Lee, Voices: pp.255, 257.

5. Ibid.,134

6. The oscillations before 1950 are discussed in Mackinnon, China Reporting. See also Harrison Salisbury on communicating excitement, below. Harry Harding has outlined the ebbs and flows of positive and negative reporting after 1972 in "From China, with Disdain."

7. Lee, Voices, 205.

8. Ibid.,p. 206

9. Rand, China Hands, p. 24.

10. For Snow's manipulation by Mao, see Edward Farmer in Media Studies Journal, Winter 1999, p.137.

11. James C. Thomson quotes a reporter of that time: " ... as one put it, 'in China, and later Vietnam, we knew all the seaminess of the right-wing groups; but we knew nothing of the seaminess of the revolutionary side." Mackinnon, China Reporting, p. 6 On the Communists' opium trade, see Chen Yung-fa, "The Blooming Poppy Under the Red Sun: The Yan'an Way and the Opium Trade, in Saich and van de Ven, eds., New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution.

12. Salisbury in Lee, Voices p. 221.

13. James C. Thomson, in Mackinnon, China Reporting, p.6

14. There were a few exceptions. In 1956 Edmund Stevens and Philip Harrington of Look magazine and William Worthy of the Baltimore Afro-American visited China for a few weeks. In the 1960s the Toronto Globe and Mail, favoured by Mao because Canada had broken an American embargo on grain sales to China and because of his affection for the Canadian doctor Norman Bethune, provided a Western perspective on China. For an attack on American reporting in this period, see Greene, A Curtain of Ignorance. Greene rivaled Snow in his pro-Beijing bias.

15. Butterfield, China: Alive in the Bitter Sea, p.29.

16. Some distortion was too much even for the Chinese. In 1979, when Shirley MacLaine told Deng Xiaoping at the White House that she had met a physicist who told her he was happy labouring in the countryside, Deng - who had also been internally banished during the Cultural Revolution, replied that she had been lied to. Jim Mann in Media Studies Journal, Winter 1999, p.103.

17. The Observer, Oct. 28, 1979, p.9. This mass credulity is fully described in Hollander, Political Pilgrims, "pp. 278-346. Nor was credulity the only reason. Orville Schell concedes that on those early trips "...one fear above all predominated....that if one uttered or wrote 'incorrect' thoughts one would never again be allowed back...most of us who have written about China capitulated to this fear." Quoted with ellipses in Hollander, p. 352 Later, Schell notes that in early articles for The New Yorker he omitted moments in China in 1975 which had puzzled him. " ....I was so soundly

criticized - not only by some people on the trip who were just unreconstructed Stalinists, but also by the Chinese,who jumped on any visitors for any sort of errant skepticism....The threat that was always hanging in the air was that if you said 'bad' things about China, or were 'unfriendly,' the Chinese would react unfavourably and cut things off." Media Studies Journal, Winter 1999, p. 95. I was the subject of just such pressure in 1972 during a trip to China ; some of those who warned me of the adverse results of my critical remarks are now senior academics.

18. Personal communication.

19. Remarks at George Washington University conference, Oct.9, 1999.

20. Personal communication.

21. Remarks at George Washington University conference, Oct.9, 1999.

22. Personal communication.

23. Personal communication.

24. Quoted in my "Misfortune in Shanghai," New York Review of Books, Nov. 4, 1999.

25. China, of course, is not the only country where governments wrap themselves in secrets. See for example, Moynihan, Secrecy.

26. This fear is breaking down when it comes to Western scholars. At a conference at George Washington University in October, 1999, Professor Elizabeth Perry of Harvard noted the increasing ease of access granted to some Western academics to previously closed Chinese documentation on contemporary matters such as trade unions, and the growing collaboration with Chinese academics.

27. Liu in Lee, Voices, pp. 133-134.

28. Quoted in Perry Link, Evening Chats in Beijing, p. 148.

29. Bok, Lying, pp.149-50.

30. Personal communication.

31. See Schwarcz, Time for Truth is Running Out.

32. Lee,Voices,134

33. Another detailed source is Roderick MacFarquhar, The Origins of the Cultural Revolution,pp.1 ff.

34. Personal communication.

35. The Other Side of the River, p.615. On several occasions the official Chinese press has advised American reporters to emulate Edgar Snow. For anyone who has followed Snow's career and read his articles and books, this advice is fraught with dilemmas.
Which Snow? The one who helped subvert the legitimate government of China between 1925 and 1938, consorted with guerrillas with rifles and subversive students? Or is it the Snow, of whom we now learn from the decrypted Venona documents showing Moscow's influence on the American Communist Party and the Left generally in the 1030s and early 1940s? In these documents we read of Moscow's criticism of Red Star as "vicious Trotskyist propaganda" and its instructions to its tame American reviewers to hammer the book. We read too of Snow's plaintive letter to Earl Browder, secretary of the American Communist Party: "Some weeks ago I voluntarily wrote to my publisher, asking them to excise certain sentences from any new edition of my book - sentences which I thought might be offensive to the party. " Harvey Klehr et al., The Soviet World, p.337.

The doctored edition omits Snow's earlier statements, which were accurate, about Soviet influence on the Chinese Communists. Or, does Beijing want reporters to be like the Snow who, in the Sixties, denied there were political prisoners in China while confiding to his diary that he was doing his best to take sides. In May 1962 he wrote to an American friend in China about the famine, and " the absence of concrete information," wishing " to answer the Alsops and others on the famine starvation reports....Do try to get me a few FACTS." Quoted in S. Bernard Thomas, Season of High Adventure, p. 308 See also Edward Farmer on Snow's swallowing of Chinese "whoppers:" Media Studies Journal,Winter 1999, p.139 Snow had slipped over the line from point of view to bias.

37. See her report and other testimonies and statistics in Human Rights in China, Massacre. The Harvard University Shorenstein Center's report "Turmoil at Tiananmen; A Study of U.S.Press Coverage of the Beijing Spring of 1989," on the media and Tiananmen contains much information. I discuss this report below. I reviewed a selection of Tiananmen books in the New York Review of Books, "The Empire Strikes Back," Feb.1,1990. Despite Beijing's insistence that no one was killed in the Square itself I was a witness to such killing immediately under the portrait of Mao which hangs over the Tianan Gate into the Forbidden City and reported it in The Observer [London] on June 4, 1989. Jan Wong of the Toronto Globe and Mail, in her Red China Blues, and Nicholas Kristof of The New York Times in his China Wakes (co-author Sheryl WuDunn), saw people killed in the Square.

38. Details of this kidnapping can be found in Hilton's The Search for the Panchen Lama; my review, The Spectator, September 25, 1999. I discussed the possible consequences of this kidnapping with the Dalai Lama, New York Review of Books, June 10,1999.

39. See my interview with Wei Jingsheng in the New York Review of Books ,March 5, 1998.

40. Dru C. Gladney points out that although Chinese repression in Xinjiang is more violent than in Tibet, "Unlike Tibet, Xinjiang has never been regarded as a Shangri-la that has eluded Western penetration." There is therefore little Western editorial interest in the region unless a bomb explodes there. Media Studies Journal, Winter 1999, p. 133.

41. See BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, FE 3525,3537,3541, May 1999.

42. See the comprehensive article on this by Ian Buruma in The New York Review of Books, Nov. 4, 1999.

43. Personal communication

44. Personal communication

45. Barmé, "The Revolution of Resistance," p.6 See also Barmé "The Silence and the Clamour of Censorship in China Today," in Wakeman,ed., "The Limits of Control."

46. Barmé, "The Revolution of Resistance," p. 23, ftn. 18.

47. Barmé, In the Red, p.353.

48. Ibid.,p. 363.

49. Ibid,p. 362.

50. Berlin, "Turmoil," p. 210.

51. Lee, Voices, p. 227.

52. Berlin, "Turmoil," p. 196

53. Ibid., p. 203.

54. Ibid.,p. 208.

55. Jakobson, "Lies in Truth, Truth in Blood," p. 14.

56. Ibid.,p.12.

57. Ibid., p.10.

58. Berlin, "Turmoil, " p.109.

59. Media Studies Journal, Winter 1999,p. 61

60. Ibid., 60. Professor Wakeman cites Jay Mathews of The Washington Post who had been briefly in Beijing during the Tiananmen killings, although he did not see them. In an article accusing the foreign press of exaggerating the severity of the Tiananmen events, Mr Mathews, writing in the Columbia Review of Journalism, Sept.-Oct.. 1998, pp. 12-13, states "As far as can be determined from the available evidence, no one died that night in Tiananmen." Professor Wakeman omits this sentence from her article. See my exchange with Mr. Mathews in the Nov.-Dec. issue of the Review. Richard Gordon, a photographer and producer of the film "The Gate of Heavenly Peace," wrote a similar critique of Tiananmen reporting in "The Limits of Control," edited by Professor Wakeman. Criticism from a different and better-informed perspective is in Jane Macartney's "The Students: Heroes,Pawns,or Power-brokers? in The Broken Mirror, Hicks, ed., pp. 2-23.

61. Eric Eckholm,The New York Times, Nov.4, 1989, p.1.
This is an extract from the newsletter of the Foreign Correspondents Club of China, November 1999. "Our ever-charming ... minders in Beijing have been up to some of their most unpleasant behaviour in years against reporters trying to cover the latest protests of that 'devil sect' Falun Gong. Five correspondents from AP, the New York Times and Reuters were summoned for questioning and had their press accreditations and residence permits seized, although they were eventually returned. Some were threatened with unspecified consequences - expulsion, perhaps - if they persisted in contacting Falun Gong practitioners. Others report close, intrusive surveillance by plainclothes operatives upon leaving the diplomatic compounds... such tactics will do little to boost China's image in the outside world.

Club president Jaime Flor Cruz ... sent a protest letter to Zhu Bangzao at the Foreign Ministry and Zhao Qizheng at the State Council. Sun Yuxi at the Foreign Ministry called for a meeting ... to discuss the letter. Jaime says Mr. Sun told him the government considers the secret Falun Gong news conference (Oct. 28) an illegal activity, and reminded him that foreign journalists working in China are subject to Chinese law. He also said since the FCC is not officially registered, 'I suggest you stay away from such (Falun Gong) activities.' Jaime reiterated that we are duty-bound as journalists to report all sides of the story.... For many, press cards, residence permits and visas are due to expire at year's end in what one Foreign Ministry handler has called a switch to a new system. Others have been told that clips, on paper or tape, depending on the line of work, will have to be submitted when renewing press cards. There's also talk of new, nebulous, regulations. In short, the already difficult task of covering China seems headed for new troubles."

62. Personal communication.

63. Asia Watch, Detained in China and Tibet, p. xvi.

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