China’s major media organizations have recently stepped up their efforts to reach a wider international audience and provide more information about China to the world. China Central Television (CCTV) launched an Arabic channel in July 2009 and a Russian-language channel in September, adding to its existing Chinese, English, French, and Spanish-language channels. The People’s Daily and the New China News Agency also are moving on plans to set up new bureaus abroad and in other ways to improve their news gathering operations. These efforts are heating up the competition among China’s media outfits to get more information out to foreign audiences. China Radio International (CRI), for example, until now China’s main international broadcaster, offers news and other content to users of the iPhone, a popular product of America’s Apple Inc.

Compared with domestic transmission, sending information to international audiences cannot be expected to generate much advertising revenue. Media organizations, therefore, rarely initiate such services on their own. In a country like China, where the major media companies are under strict governmental control, there is inevitably some particular government objective behind any move to send more information abroad. Why, then, has China begun making this extra effort in recent years.

One immediate factor is the Tibetan unrest of March 2008. At that time, the Chinese government prohibited foreign media from entering Tibet and blocked access to information on the uprising. Media organizations outside China had to rely mainly on fragmentary information released by the Tibetan government-in-exile in India, with the result that news reports by international media were much more critical of China than Beijing had expected. According to people involved in the Chinese media, at a conference on crisis management held in China right after the Tibetan unrest it was strongly recommended that in the future the government provide information promptly whenever a “serious incident” occurred. When similar ethnic unrest erupted in the Xinjiang region of China in July 2009, the government set up a press center in the locality and gave access to foreign correspondents, thus appearing, at least outwardly, willing to cooperate with the international media.
and other domestic media organizations, furthermore, reported on the incident far more promptly than at the time of the Tibetan unrest.

A longer-term factor is more heavily economic. China’s rapidly progressing integration into the global economy and the increase in trade friction since it joined the World Trade Organization in 2001 have created a growing need for China to add its voice to world opinion. As the scale of China’s exchange with the world continues to expand, the idea that world opinion is (unjustifiably) led by European and American media has become more and more a preoccupation for the Chinese government and people. That perception has contributed to a general consensus on the necessity to get more information from China out to the world.

What, precisely, has China been doing to send out more information, and what results can be expected? There is growing unease among media people in some parts of the world that China, with its one-party rule, might invest huge funds to “buy” world opinion. This paper begins by outlining the Chinese government’s media policy and its campaign to globalize its media output. Then, based on a field study I conducted in Beijing in November 2009, it examines current efforts being made by China’s major media organizations and considers some of the effects those efforts could have both within China and abroad.

**CHINESE GOVERNMENT MEDIA POLICY**

Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese media have been seen as the “throat and tongue” of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). All media organizations come under the guidance of the Central Propaganda Department of the CCP. Concerning daily operations, broadcasters are under the jurisdiction of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) within the State Council (national government), while print media organizations come under the jurisdiction of the General Administration of Press and Publication. At one time, the *People’s Daily*, the New China News Agency, and CCTV received government funds and issued reports as instructed from above.

**Shift to “Indirect Control” and Partial Acceptance of Criticism**

Direct government control of the media was gradually loosened, however, following the program of economic reforms (“reform and opening”) that were started in 1979. With the introduction of commercial advertising, all the media organizations saw an increase in advertising revenue as a proportion of income. Commercial newspapers, including evening papers (*wanbao*) and
local papers (*dushibao*), proliferated and flourished. Whereas in the past the central role of the media was to spread propaganda, now they were driven by necessity to respond to the wishes and needs of readers, broadcast audiences, advertisers, and sponsors. The government media policy, too, has shifted from “direct” to “indirect” control. In the old days, government authorities frequently told the media what to report and how to present it, but that approach does not encourage any rise in circulation or audience ratings, so it puts a damper on potential advertising revenue. When government controls began loosening, the media were able to use their own discretion to a greater degree, but at the same time the authorities became even more watchful about reporting that was seen as problematic. The media found themselves more frequently instructed not to publish or broadcast this or that report. In any case, the media enjoyed considerably greater freedom, even if it was still limited, than before the reforms coming at the end of the 1970s.

Has it become possible today for newspapers, broadcasters and other media in China to criticize the government for its actions? If we consider that not just the *People’s Daily* and other party organs but even relatively progressive newspapers like the *Southern Metropolis Daily* in Guangdong province and the *Beijing News* in Beijing carry no articles critical of President Hu Jintao, the Chinese media clearly do not have functions similar to those of Western media. On the other hand, CCTV’s popular news program “Focus” (“Jiaodian Fangtan”) often airs attacks on questionable actions by local government officials.

A Chinese media scholar who once worked with the *People’s Daily* comments, “The media in China cannot criticize areas of government that are on the same level as the medium.” In other words, national-level media cannot criticize national government, but they are permitted to criticize regional or local government. The same applies to criticism of the CCP. The central government wants to prevent any local government corruption from leading to an attack on the national government. As part of its basic media policy, therefore, Beijing allows the media to denounce local government actions to some degree, and even encourages such criticism from time to time. But there are also many cases when, having been attacked by the state-level media, a local government files a complaint with the central government; this suggests that in actuality, criticism against local governments is held in check.

**Levels of Control**

In the Chinese government’s media policy, the level of supervision and control varies by media organization. The New China News Agency, CCTV, and other state-oriented media organizations, and of course party organs such as
the *People’s Daily*, are kept under the firmest control. Control over commercial media organizations, such as evening or local newspapers, which are not subsidized by the government, is rather lax. By type of media, television and radio are kept under the strongest control, followed by newspapers, magazines, and the Internet in that order. Recently, a series of measures have been enacted to impose stronger regulation of the Internet, but it still operates with comparatively greater freedom than the other types of media. In fact, tighter regulation should be seen as a reaction to the rapidly growing influence of the Internet as a new and potent form of mass media in China.

Another trend in China’s media policy that has become more conspicuous over the last few years is represented by the well-known slogans “neiwai you-bie” (differentiate between inside and outside) and “neijin waisong” (controlled inside, relaxed outside). The idea is to exert tighter control over domestic media and thereby prevent destabilization of society while relaxing foreign media reporting. One immediate factor contributing to this way of thinking was the 2008 Summer Olympics held in Beijing, an occasion when a great many media people from “the outside” would be descending on China, the “inside.” Determined to make the Olympic Games a success, the Chinese government in January 2007 changed some rules and began allowing—in principle—foreign media to gather news in China without special permits from the authorities. Originally, this window of relatively free news-gathering was to remain open until the middle of October 2008, but later it was decided to keep it open indefinitely. In another example of the way “differentiate between inside and outside” is conceived, in January 2006 Li Datong, editor of the weekly *Freezing Point*, was dismissed from his post because of an essay that was published in the weekly. Afterward, no media organization in China would interview Li or publish anything written by him. Overseas media, by contrast, freely interviewed him, wrote articles on the incident, and published his manuscripts.

Will the same “inside-outside” distinction color the way China disseminates information overseas? That is, will the tone and content differ, depending on whether it is reported at home or abroad? And if so, to what extent? These questions are critical in any attempt to predict how the Chinese drive to send more information abroad will develop.

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1 The weekly *Freezing Point*, published under the umbrella of the *China Youth Daily*, is an official organ of the Communist Youth League. The issue involved carried an article by a university professor criticizing China’s history textbooks. The texts in question, he said, offered only the one-sided view that the Boxer Uprising of 1900 was a war of justice. The authorities ordered the weekly to suspend publication, and its editor Li Datong was dismissed. About one month later, *Freezing Point* was allowed to recommence publication, on the condition, among others, that it would carry a refutation of the professor’s position.
Gathering Momentum to Send Information Abroad
The Chinese government’s enthusiasm for distributing more information overseas was clearly evident at the World Media Summit, the first of its kind, held in Beijing October 9 and 10, 2009. Using the catchphrase, “Strengthen exchange and cooperation and promote win-win development,” the New China News Agency cosponsored the summit with the News Corporation, BBC, AP, Reuters, Kyodo News, Google Inc. among others. It was attended by executives of more than 170 media organizations worldwide, including Keith Rupert Murdoch, chairman of the News Corporation. A joint statement issued at the close of the summit says in part, “We hope that media organizations around the world will provide accurate, objective, impartial and fair coverage of the world’s news events, and promote transparency and accountability of governments and public institutions, and thus facilitate the mutual understanding as well as exchange of views and ideas among peoples from different countries and regions.” That China, a country under one-party rule with considerably less freedom of speech than most Western countries, would host such a media summit was itself a surprise to the European and American media. It was even more surprising that such words as “objective, impartial and fair” news coverage and promotion of “transparency and accountability” were incorporated into the joint statement.

At the meeting, on the other hand, there was almost no discussion that openly raised questions about freedom of news reporting and freedom of speech in China. The only exception might be Murdoch’s assertion with regard to copyright that users should pay for content, and one or two other comments, perhaps. This gave the impression that the major Western media organizations, enthralled by the huge potential media market in China, gave priority to business over journalism. In its strategy to get more information out to the rest of the world, Beijing apparently is seeking first to remove anything negative from the news coverage of China by the foreign press.

In his speech at the opening ceremony of the media summit, President Hu Jintao called for the sound development of the global media industry through mutual cooperation among media organizations across the world. The summit “reflects people’s concerns about the challenges the global media industry is facing, and demonstrates the willingness of all media to enhance exchange and cooperation and seek common development,” he said. Regarding the theme of cooperation, he called on the world’s media to uphold the ideas of “equality and mutual trust, as well as mutual benefit through win-win cooperation.” They should “keep a balance between competitiveness and cooperation” and “share successful experiences.” On news reporting, he urged the global media to uphold the “social responsibility to promote the true, correct,
comprehensive, and objective communication of information.” As for freedom of speech and freedom of reporting, President Hu talked about the importance of the media’s role in “guaranteeing people’s rights to be informed, to participate, to be heard, and to oversee.” The Chinese government, he said, supports the domestic media to deepen exchange and cooperation with its overseas counterparts in such areas as news coverage, human resources, information technology, and business matters; it also safeguards the legitimate rights and interests of foreign news organizations and reporters in accordance with China’s laws and regulations.2

Most conspicuous in that speech by President Hu was his stress on international cooperation among media organizations. Most certainly he was motivated by the determination to acquire for China both the management skills and state-of-the-art technology used by foreign media, but he also wanted to reduce criticism of China by other nations. The Chinese government has recently been urging the domestic media to strive to become first-class international media outlets. Apparently it is for that purpose that Beijing judges it urgent to acquire the advanced technologies of the Western media.

Another noteworthy feature of Hu’s speech was his emphasis on the “correct and objective communication” of information and the people’s right to know, as well as his guarantee of the rights of the foreign media in China. The circumstances of the international media summit inevitably necessitated the use of certain diplomatic language, but the substance of what he said, nonetheless, indicated a momentous change from the long-held position of the Chinese Communist Party that propaganda is more important than objective reporting. This new position can be seen as China’s compromise for the sake of expanding exchange. Opinion is divided among Western observers as to how far his true intentions were reflected in the speech, and whether his remarks were broadly in line with the position of the party leadership or whether they were President Hu’s personal views. Be that as it may, in order to distribute more information abroad it is necessary to enhance exchange with the media in other countries, for they are the target of information distribution. The future prospects of China’s campaign to become a world-class media center will depend on whether Beijing gives priority to propaganda over exchange, or vice-versa.

In this connection we should take note of a speech3 given before a group of state media journalists on Journalist Day, November 8, 2009 by Li

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2 People’s Daily, October 10, 2009.
3 Li Changchun delivered this speech at a gathering to celebrate the Journalist Day and to present awards to outstanding journalists.
Changchun, who is number five in China’s leadership hierarchy and Politburo Standing Committee member in charge of ideology and media control. Li’s comments can be seen as coming much closer to China’s real intentions than Hu’s address to the foreign media.

Concerning the “right to know,” which Hu had stressed, Li said, “We give top priority to positive propaganda and to strengthening the ‘supervision by public opinion’ [yulun jiandu; referring to media criticism of government that conveys the voice of the people] together with improvement and progress; and we guarantee the people’s right to be informed, to participate, to be heard, and to oversee.” Immediately after this, he touched on globalizing Chinese media, saying that China “will combine domestic and overseas propaganda and actively seek to develop world-class international media . . . We will also strive to build an overseas information distribution capability that will enhance both our country’s socio-economic development and its international status, give China a stronger voice, increase its international influence, and create an environment of world opinion favorable to China’s socialist modernization program.”

Li then mentioned five specific duties of the media, including “coordinating the large national interests on both the domestic and international front; supporting the enhancement, improvement, and advancement of overseas propaganda; and endeavoring to create an environment of world opinion favorable to our country.” He called on the media to “take initiatives to actively struggle for favorable international opinion,” and to “strengthen exchange and cooperation with foreign media organizations in news coverage, human resources, information technology, and business matters and borrow their ship to go out to the sea, and make use of their platforms to broadcast our own news information to the world.” On international news reporting, he called for untiring efforts by the media to strengthen their ability to gather and report important international news, disseminate China’s voice from the Chinese perspective, and amplify the influence of its news propaganda in the world.

Li urged each media organization to defend against political schemes by Western media aimed at westernizing and dividing China; make effective use of new media, such as the Internet and cell phones, to spread news propaganda; and to work to help positive public opinion exert a stronger influence on the Internet.4

That Journalist Day speech, compared with President Hu’s media summit speech, put considerably more emphasis on “propaganda” than on “exchange.” It is not clear whether this indicates a difference between public

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face and true feelings or reflects different positions among the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. Precisely because Li’s speech was made by the country’s chief of media management, it is logical to conclude that the real focus of the Party’s drive to send more information abroad is on the “propaganda” aspect.

EFFORTS TO SEND OUT MORE INFORMATION

To investigate what the major Chinese media organizations have been doing to respond to the central government’s drive to send more information to the world, I conducted an on-site study in Beijing in the middle of November 2009. The media organizations I surveyed are the People’s Daily, New China News Agency, China Central Television, and China Radio International. I also interviewed several people related in other ways to the media. Below, I give an overview of each and describe what each media organization has been doing to increase the information sent to the world from China.

People’s Daily

The People’s Daily, official organ of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, goes back to the People’s Daily founded in June 1948 as the organ of the CCP’s North China Bureau. The paper came into being as a result of the merger of the People’s Daily newspaper of the Jinjiluyu region (present-day Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan area) and the Jinchaji Daily. In August 1949 it became the organ of the CCP Central Committee, and after the founding of the People’s Republic of China it was increasingly widely read as learning material by workers at offices and factories. It boasted a circulation of 6 million at its peak. With the diversification of the media following the economic reforms (“reform and opening”) of 1979, the circulation of the People’s Daily itself fell to as low as 2.3 million, but its parent newspaper company branched out into other business operations and published several other papers: Global Times and Beijing Times for the general public; Securities Times, International Finance News, and China Auto News for business readers; and weekly newspapers and magazines, such as China Economic Weekly.

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5 China’s drive for overseas media expansion received international attention partly because of a report dated January 2009 in the South China Morning Post, an English newspaper published in Hong Kong, saying the Chinese government had pledged 45 billion yuan (nearly $6.6 billion) to three media organizations—People’s Daily, New China News Agency, and CCTV—each to receive 15 billion yuan. For my on-site survey, most of those I interviewed said 45 billion yuan was an “impossible” amount, and the funds actually made available by the government are presumably much lower.
and *Auto Club*. In July 1985 it inaugurated *People’s Daily Overseas Edition*, initially targeting mainly overseas Chinese in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, and students studying abroad. Partly because of that it does not have many non-Chinese readers even today. The *People’s Daily Online* was founded in January 1997 to provide information in English and Japanese, as well as Chinese (in both traditional and simplified Chinese characters).

I interviewed Yin Shuguang, deputy director-general of the External Relations Department, and Liu Xueyuan, chief researcher of the Media Development Strategy Research Group, as well as officers from the *People’s Daily Online* and the International Department. Liu Xueyuan first explained the guiding principles for improving overseas information distribution, admitting that the *People’s Daily* has been geared to domestic readers and has not paid enough attention to overseas readers. He said they will “maintain the large national interests on both the domestic and international fronts” and strive to be a first-class international publication combining both domestic and overseas propaganda. In the process, in addition to conventional print media they will make more active use of new media including the Internet. Liu noted several measures intended to help send more information overseas:

- Institutional innovation based on the rules of the market economy
- Strengthening news-gathering ability through more overseas bureaus, etc.
- More articles to meet the needs of readers
- Utilization of advanced technology
- Establishment of authoritative brands

Specifically, he said, they increased the number of pages in the weekday edition from 16 to 20 beginning in July 2009, putting greater emphasis on news of daily affairs, international news, and news specials. Organizationally, they set up the Media Development Strategy Research Group in September 2008 to conduct research on world media trends. In June 2009 the Foreign Affairs Department was reorganized into the External Relations Department to improve the environment for lively exchange with overseas media.

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6 The foregoing overview of the *People’s Daily* is based on the *People’s Daily Online* website http://www.people.com.cn/.
The Chinese government believes it is important not just to provide more information on China but also to convey Chinese views of overseas news. In response, the People’s Daily first raised the status of its overseas bureaus and required that whenever something newsworthy occurred, the bureaus must submit copy on the event within 48 hours. In line with the greater number of pages in the weekday edition starting in July they increased the pages on international news from two to three, and more space was given for comments expressing Chinese views on major international news. The People’s Daily also plans to increase the number of its reporters stationed overseas, expand fields for them to cover, and dispatch special correspondents to help cover international events like the Copenhagen global warming conference in December 2009. It also requests its foreign correspondents to submit videos made in the course of news gathering. Reportedly it has begun airing such video clips on the People’s Daily Online.

Of course the easiest way for people in other countries to get information about China is the Internet, and the People’s Daily has been working on its websites for some time. In 1998 the People’s Daily Online, which is the Internet division of the People’s Daily, launched an English site, followed by Japanese, French, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic sites—a total of six foreign languages. In 2009 the “People Forum” on the English site was renewed. The People’s Daily Online has also been widening its international collaboration. One project was a joint book publication with Japan’s Hitotsubashi University, and another was an interview with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev done with the cooperation of a Russian newspaper company. It founded a subsidiary company in Tokyo, its first overseas outlet, reportedly to promote localization in Japan, and its news editing center was moved from Beijing to Tokyo. China Radio International has long played the leading role in sending information overseas in foreign languages, and now the People’s Daily Online has set about doing the same thing, centering on the Internet.

When I asked about the costs of these projects, Deputy Director-General Yin said that although they could not finance everything themselves, the People’s Daily made it a policy to rely mainly on itself for its development. He emphasized the importance of developing media marketability, saying that the government subsidies are very small. Concerning the Hong Kong newspaper report of the government pledge of 15 billion yuan to the People’s Daily, he said there was no truth to it. Asked how the effects of sending more information abroad could be measured, he replied, “That’s a really hard question. We’ll just have to try and see,” which had the ring of a commitment to give whatever time is needed to change the environment of world opinion.
New China News Agency

The state-run New China News Agency (NCNA) was established in November 1931 in Ruijin, Jiangxi province, one of the earliest press agencies set up under the Chinese Communist Party. Originally named the Red China News Agency, it was renamed New China News Agency in 1937. Ever since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, NCNA has been engaging in reporting at home and overseas as the leading news agency of the Chinese state. It is described as having four functions: the “ears and eyes” and “throat and tongue” of the Party and the people; the news agency of the state; a news gathering and distributing agency; and worldwide news agency.\(^7\)

Wu Jincai, NCNA’s deputy chief editor in charge of overseas news distribution, was extremely busy during my stay in Beijing, and so I could not interview him. What I have to say about the agency here is based on written materials by Mr. Wu that were provided to me by the agency.\(^8\)

A central feature of NCNA’s effort to increase information sent abroad focuses on improving the distribution of video news. In international news reporting, China has lagged behind in the area of video news partly because NCNA is not well equipped to transmit high-quality video news quickly and cheaply, compared with the Associated Press, Reuters, and other syndicates that have been working with video from early on. One of NCNA’s priorities for broadcasting international news within China is to phase out purchase of news and videos from foreign news agencies and do more and more of the gathering and editing of international news by themselves. If, as they hope, they can eventually set up one hundred or more news gathering centers over-

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\(^7\) The foregoing overview of NCNA is based on the Xinhuanet http://www.people.com.cn/.

\(^8\) Wu Jincai, *Xinhuashe dianshi xinwen yewu de shijian yu tansuo* [The New China News Agency’s Television News Service: Practice and Exploration].
seas and become able to sell news overseas, then they will not only strengthen information distribution overseas but will also be able to start earning a profit. NCNA has been providing audio-related services since the 1990s, and it launched a major news gathering operation with video capability for television at the time of the devastating earthquake in Sichuan in May 2008. NCNA President Li Congjun said in June that year that NCNA had little choice but to undertake a large expansion of video news reporting if it ever hoped to “compete with the three major Western news agencies and change world opinion from the perception of ‘strong West and weak China.’” In September that year a business roundtable conference sponsored by NCNA drew up a “2008–2015 Plan,” which calls for further acceleration of video news expansion. The plan is premised on tremendous quantitative and qualitative growth for NCNA over three to five years; this is to be accomplished by remodeling the forms and methods of video news reporting—covering major happenings, important international events and incidents, specials, and economic affairs—and expanding into the overseas TV media market and the new media sector in cooperation with domestic broadcasters.

NCNA knew that expansion into the TV media market would be a huge undertaking, requiring new and better facilities, upgraded personnel training, and much more. For that reason, it decided to embark upon the online video news broadcasting business first. In December 2008 it launched an online video news service on a test basis, offering audiovisual versions of “Insight” and other commentaries in addition to general news. An English version of this service was also under consideration. The online video news service formally started in March 2009, and at the opening ceremony President Li urged the staff to work as quickly as possible to increase the total number of hours of first broadcasts (not reruns) to eight hours a day.

Since the opening of the online video news service, NCNA’s video reporting has changed in several significant ways:

1. News scripts are being prepared more quickly. Previously, even for events, it usually took one to two days to get the news script ready. That time has been reduced to about one hour on the average.
2. The volume of video news and first broadcasts has greatly increased.
3. The volume of news copy generated by the staff of domestic and overseas branch offices has risen very significantly. During the test period of the online service, the number of scripts created by domestic branch offices and used together with news footage averaged 37 a day (more than 35 minutes long). If those coming out of the head office are count-

ed in, the total number went as high as 40 a day. The number of scripts, along with news footage, produced by overseas branch offices that were actually broadcast was 33 a day in September 2008; this shot up to 307 (taken together, nine hours running time) a day in January 2009.

4. Programs are more diverse.

5. There are more instances of collaboration with other television broadcasters. Heilongjiang TV’s satellite channel\textsuperscript{10} began airing the New China News Agency-produced “Insight” and “News Today” programs as they were, without changing anything. When these programs were first broadcast daily in July 2009, this satellite channel’s ratings rose quickly. NCNA set out to prepare new programs to be aired in cooperation with other regional television broadcasters.

As NCNA stepped up production of its own news items, it gradually reduced the amount of video news it bought from the AP. Nearly 80 percent of the content of its 45-minute international news program “Zhengdian Baodao” was previously bought from the AP, but that percentage has been going down. NCNA’s goal is eventually to stop purchasing content for this program altogether.

In July 2009 NCNA started an English-language television news service, transmitting video news content to television stations in and outside China, as well as for websites, cell phones, and indoor and outdoor screens. The total number of minutes of first broadcasts (not reruns) was 90 minutes (including 40 for major news reports and 15 each for culture and economic news). NCNA is planning to increase the length to 180 minutes by the end of 2009 and to 360 minutes by the end of 2010.

NCNA also plans to improve its Chinese-language news service, which targets Chinese-language television media organizations in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other parts of the world. In March 2009 it signed an agreement with the Eastern Broadcasting company (ETTV) in Taiwan to form an equal joint partnership. Its video news broadcasts are aired on ETTV’s economic and Asia channels.

In addition, NCNA has placed its New Media Program Office and New Media Program Center in charge of production and promotion of programs for cell phones and the Internet. In September 2009, the New China News

\textsuperscript{10} Provincial television broadcasters in China each possess one satellite channel that broadcasts nationwide. Originally started to solve television reception problems in remote regions, satellite channels are now an important source of income for some go-ahead provincial broadcasters because they can collect advertising fees from across the country.
Agency Mobile TV was founded in a tie-up with cell phone companies China Mobile and China Telecom, and it provides television programs including live broadcasts.

In TV news, as well, NCNA plans to use its powerful news-gathering networks to move ahead of CCTV and other television broadcasters in both news-gathering and stories. Specifically, centering on news programs including relay broadcasts, it intends to increase first broadcasts to 8 hours a day by the end of 2009, to 16 hours a day by the end of 2010, and to 24 hours a day by the end of 2011. To that end, it has been training staff in satellite relay broadcasting. In May 2009, it broadcast a 12-hour live news program produced in cooperation with Heilongjiang TV to mark the first anniversary of the Sichuan earthquake. In October of that year, NCNA aired a 22.5-hour relay broadcast to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the National Day of the People’s Republic of China. This was distributed to the nation’s 16 provincial television broadcasters’ satellite channels as well as to the AP, the Internet news websites Xinhuanet and Sohu.com, the New China News Agency Mobile TV, and NCNA’s Chinese- and English-language news channels.

These moves by NCNA to expand into television are intended, among other things, to encourage competition in the television business within China, which has been long dominated by CCTV. Given the enormous influence of TV, however, NCNA’s entry into television will probably play an important role in China’s current drive to project more effectively its views to an international audience.

CCTV

Next let us look at CCTV, the only national television network in China. Its original name was Peking Television. It started broadcasting in 1958 and was renamed China Central Television in May 1978. Serving as the “throat and tongue” of the Chinese Communist Party, the national government, and the people, CCTV has many functions that include news broadcasting, social education, culture and entertainment, and information services. It has 19 channels, including general, economic, drama, sports, and others. As the only television network in China to have all its channels broadcast nationwide, CCTV has seen a phenomenal rise in advertising revenue since the economic reforms (“reform and opening”) that took effect in 1979, and its yearly

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11 For the outline, I referred to CCTV.com website http://www.cctv.com/. The data on that website for the yearly turnover were too old, and so I used the figures in Taiwan’s Central News Agency report dated September 26, 2009.

12 It was divided into CCTV-E and CCTV-F in 2007.
turnover is an impressive 23 billion yuan (approx. 300 billion yen).\textsuperscript{11}

CCTV’s earliest channel for overseas broadcasting was CCTV-4, which started in 1992. Broadcasting in Chinese, it targets overseas Chinese and people living in Hong Kong and Taiwan. CCTV then launched its English channel, CCTV-9, in 1997, and started CCTV-E&F\textsuperscript{12}—which broadcasts in Spanish and French each for 12 hours a day—in 2004, and it launched its Arabic and Russian channels in July and September 2009 respectively. With these channels, CCTV broadcasts in all of the six United Nations official languages. It is also aggressively moving into the Internet service market. Many television programs can be viewed via computer at the CCTV.com website (http://www.cctv.com/), and programs are also being made available for cell phones.

I had visited CCTV several times before on research missions, and each time I was able to arrange interviews in accord with my previously submitted requests. But this time, my requests for interviews with the people responsible for the Arabic and Russian channels and with those in charge of the foreign-language channels as a whole were denied. CCTV’s international affairs office clerk told me that those people were unwilling to be interviewed. I asked a number of CCTV staff members why they had declined, and they gave two reasons.

For one thing, the Arabic and Russian channels had just begun, and therefore they did not yet have a well-formed comprehensive plan. As for the foreign-language channels as a whole, the preparations for a major reform in 2010 were under way. To sum up what I heard from them, the Arabic and Russian channels were begun hastily under instructions from the government. The budget was only a few tens of millions of yuan a year, and they had gathered 30 foreign specialists to form the staff for each channel. Basically their broadcasts are translations of CCTV’s programs and they do not possess their own content yet. With regard to the English channel, preparations are being made, they said, to make it a 24-hour television news channel, like CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera, starting in 2010, and so “the time is not yet right” to announce it officially.

The other reason relates to CCTV’s organizational situation. On February 2009, a big fire caused by flames ignited by fireworks broke out at a 44-storey

\hspace{1cm} China Central Television
hotel attached to CCTV’s new building. Ignoring police orders to stop, CCTV personnel had, illegally, instructed that several hundred fireworks be set off. Twelve people were detained, and CCTV president Zhao Huayong was forced to retire. The succeeding president was not chosen from within CCTV but sent in from the Central Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party. CCTV personnel have since become very cautious about making comments to foreign media. This strongly suggests that CCTV’s overseas information distribution will likely become more propaganda-oriented.

**China Radio International**

Finally let us look at China Radio International, the radio station in China that targets overseas audiences. Founded in 1941, CRI broadcasts in 49 foreign languages and 10 minority languages within China, which comes to 59 languages. As of the end of 2008, they were broadcasting a total of more than 1,520 hours a day. During 2008, CRI received more than 2.7 million letters and e-mails from audiences in 161 countries and regions around the world. It also has been setting up FM and MF radio stations overseas. With broadcasts begun in Kenya and Laos in 2006, CRI had 21 FM and MF stations overseas as of the end of May 2009. It also has four radio channels for foreign listeners in China. On the Internet, you can hear broadcasts in 59 languages on the CRI Online site (http://gb.cri.cn/). This is in addition to the Internet radio service “InetRadio,” launched in 2005. Broadcasts for cell phones started in 2007. For news-gathering activities, CRI has 30 branches in Tokyo and other cities in the world.\(^{13}\)

At CRI, I talked mainly with Deputy Editor-in-Chief Ma Weigong. He first introduced me to a new service that allows the users of the Chinese version of iPhone to view CRI news. Apple, an American giant in the IT industry, sells this Chinese version in a tie-up with a Chinese cell phone company. Access the “m.cri.cn” site via iPhone, and you will see a list of headline news items on display. By clicking on a particular news item, you can see its content. It may be accompanied by moving images and sound. In June 2009 CRI began

\(^{13}\) For the outline of CRI, I referred to the CRI Online website, http://gb.cri.cn/.
providing this service through five English channels for news, travel, Chinese-language learning, and so forth.

For CRI, which has long specialized in overseas broadcasts, broadcasting in foreign languages is its forte. In 2009 CRI made great strides in expanding its Internet services. Until then it had broadcast in 53 languages, but in 2009 that number reached 59, with the addition of Ukrainian, Belarusian, Greek, Dutch, Icelandic, and Norwegian. Services in those six languages are provided only via the Internet. Two more languages were slated to be added in 2010. CRI’s focus of broadcasting seems to have shifted to online services, which cost relatively less than radio broadcasting.

According to Ma, a basic principle of broadcasting to a foreign country is to do it in the language of that country. He proudly declared that of all many media organizations in China, CRI has the greatest influence on overseas information distribution, citing the nearly 2,000 people competent in foreign languages who work with his company. He firmly insisted on the importance of understanding and having respect for other cultures in broadcasting overseas. It is no good, he said, to take the condescending attitude of “we are giving you the privilege of hearing what we have to say.” He spoke of something that once happened concerning postings on the electronic bulletin board at the Japanese language site. Initially, Japanese posted critical and abusive opinions of various sorts, such as, “This site will be forced to close by the authorities.” People working under Ma came to him asking what they should do. He instructed them to leave things as they were. Not long after that, postings on the bulletin board began to grow more friendly.

As part of my research on the Internet in China I myself viewed the “China-Japan Friendly Relations” section of CRI’s Japanese site over ten days in April 2006. While there were many favorable postings from Chinese that said, for example, “I really want to see good relations between China and Japan,” I was surprised to find unabashed and critical statements from Japanese, such as, “It’s a deep irony to see such wide disparity between the rich and poor in communist China,” and “Let’s talk about the increasingly militaristic China, constantly increasing its military budget and ceaselessly creating friction with neighboring countries.” What surprised me even more than the content of those postings was that, despite their caustic criticism, they were left undeleted.

14 For details, see the July 2006 issue of the Kazankai Foundation’s monthly Toa [East Asia].
Of course they might have been deleted if someone other than Ma had been in charge. But still, CRI, pioneer in overseas broadcasting, has shown itself to be more mature than the People’s Daily, New China News Agency, or CCTV. Ma concluded by saying, “The most important thing in overseas information distribution comes down to the acts and behavior of each and every one of the Chinese people.”

GROWING INFLUENCE OF THE INTERNET ON CHINESE MEDIA

So far we have seen how China’s major media organizations have been striving to go global. Next I want to discuss the way media researchers assess these efforts, but before that, it is useful to outline how the influence of the Chinese media within China has changed with the spread of the Internet. The full-fledged use of the Internet is said to have started in China in January 1995, when China Telecom Corp. Ltd., a major Chinese telecommunications company, connected a 64Kbps international private line from the United States to Beijing and Shanghai. According to Internet penetration surveys conducted twice a year by the China Internet Network Information Center (established in the Chinese Academy of Sciences), the number of Internet users in the first survey in 1997 was 620,000, and this increased phenomenally to 338,000,000, or 25.5 percent of the entire population, as of the end of June 2009. As for the content of Internet use, the largest number of respondents cited music (85.5 percent), followed by news (78.7 percent), moving images (65.8 percent), and blogs (53.8 percent). Thus we can see that the Internet is being used partly as a substitute for conventional media functions.16

The Research Center for Social Development of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences conducted a survey in five Chinese cities in 2005, half of the respondents being Internet users and the other half non-Internet users. The statistical data are somewhat dated, but in response to a question asking them what media they used to get news, 90.8 percent of non-Internet users said television, 76.8 percent newspapers, and 13.4 percent the Internet; among Internet

16 Http://www.cnnic.cn/.
users 81.4 percent said television, 67.3 percent newspapers, and 67.0 percent said the Internet, showing that Internet users go to the Internet at about the same rate as they read newspapers to obtain news. When asked what media they turned to less frequently because they used the Internet, 43.2 percent of Internet-user respondents said radio, 32.5 percent television, and 29.8 percent newspapers, indicating that the Internet has been encroaching on the conventional media.\(^{17}\) Considering that the survey was made five years ago and that the Internet penetration rate in China is even higher now, it can be presumed that the use of the Internet as a major medium has progressed even farther.

China’s major Internet portals like Sina, Netease, and Sohu, themselves do not gather news, however. Basically, they purchase news on a yearly basis from existing news media such as the state-run People’s Daily Online and Xinhuanet and local newspapers like the Southern Metropolis Daily and the Beijing News. Why is it, then, that they are much more widely used than People’s Daily Online and Xinhuanet, not to mention the major conventional media?

One reason is the diversity of their content. The major Internet portals provide abundant information not only on current affairs but also on fashion, gourmet food, travel, and so forth, and users can even play online games there. It is easy to access only those things that interest you. Another reason is the comparative freedom of those sites. What you write about current affairs in the sites’ forums is less likely to be deleted than it would be on the People’s Daily Online or Xinhuanet.

Among the advantages the Internet enjoys over the conventional media, one is related to the editing of news items. Almost all the headline news on the front page of the People’s Daily or CCTV’s nightly news program “Xinwen Lianbo,” for example, concerns President Hu Jintao and other political leaders. Only a very small portion of the general public in China is interested in such news. Editors for Sina, Netease, and other such sites, on the other hand, can choose from among news items purchased from conventional news organizations those items most likely to interest people, and they can select as headline news whatever seems most interesting. Another advantage is the possibility of interactive communication among users on the Internet. A third advantage is the speediness of the Internet compared to printed media. A person related to the Sina site says it only takes one second to upload an article from the New China News Agency.

While initially Internet users were almost all young and male, now, thanks to these features, more and more different people, young and old, male and

\(^{17}\) For details see the July 2006 issue of the Kazankai Foundation’s monthly Toa [East Asia].
female, are using the Internet. Today, people aged 30 or older make up more than one-third of users, and women are a very large 47 percent. That the Chinese people as a whole are shifting their main means of obtaining information from conventional media—newspapers, television, and radio—to the Internet is an important element in predicting the success (or failure) of China’s campaign to globalize its media output.

SOME CHINESE VIEWS ON THE EXPANSION OF THE MEDIA OVERSEAS

In my recent field survey I interviewed three media specialists regarding the Chinese media’s overseas expansion. One of them is Zhan Jiang, professor in the Department of International Journalism and Communication of Beijing Foreign Studies University. Another is Li Datong, former editor of Freezing Point, who was relieved of his post because of an article it published that was critical of the government view of the Boxer Uprising (see page 188). Li is still affiliated with the China Youth Daily Media Research Center. The third person is a media researcher who asked not to be identified. I call him “Mr. C” here. In my interviews with these people I asked them about their views on three points: 1) the current status of the Chinese Communist Party’s media policy; 2) the current status of China’s media; and 3) how far China’s campaign to internationalize its media reach can achieve what it is intended to do.

Current Status of CCP Media Policy
Zhan made reference to a difference of opinion over media policy between the innovative and conservative factions within the CCP leadership. As a case in point, he cited a marked divergence between President Hu Jintao’s speech at the October 2009 media summit and the speech given by Liu Yunshan, director of the Central Propaganda Department of the CCP, at the July 2008 meeting of leading members of the department. Whereas Hu spoke of the foreign media’s positive role, Liu said, speaking of the Tibetan unrest, “In our struggles for favorable international opinion we revealed the Western media’s fabrications and distortions, and in so doing we influenced world opinion.” As evidence of the presence of the innovative group, he pointed out that since 2007, the Central Propaganda Department has not ordered a domestic media organization to suspend publication, as it did at the time of the Freezing Point incident. When an outcry over child slave labor at brick factories erupted in

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18 See http://www.cnnic.cn/.
Shanxi province, Henan Television broadcast the scandal in contravention of a Central Propaganda Department ban on criticizing the affairs of another province (so-called yidi jiandu, or critical cross-territorial reporting), but with President Hu’s support the report was accepted. The ban thus became invalid, Zhan said.

Li Datong’s viewpoint was starkly different. He argued insistently that never once has government control over the media let up, and that there has never been any difference of opinion within the CCP leadership over media policy. The party’s basic policy of media control, he went on, is determined according to the “level of adverse impact on the government.” Namely, whenever something erotic, grotesque, or nonsensical or criticism of low-level regional leaders comes up, the government leaves it alone if it is not a direct threat to the CCP or party personnel. But any open questioning or criticism of CCP leaders or any attempt to overthrow the government is firmly suppressed, Li said.

It is also possible that the difference between Zhan and Li stems from their different perceptions of the world. President Hu indeed seems to be something of an innovationist but he has not shown the determination needed to push reforms even at the risk of head-on confrontation with the conservative faction. That position is undoubtedly not acceptable to “radical” reformists like Li.

Speaking from an historical point of view, Mr. C gave his opinion that the current Chinese government has no fundamental ideology. Ideology was critically important to Mao Zedong, less so to Deng Xiaoping. The present government leadership is no longer so concerned about it. Apart from whether more ideology leads to better government, which is a whole different matter, the loss of ideology has undermined the ability of the Chinese government to “mobilize” the people. The government may play its pipes but the people will no longer dance to them. Mr. C is convinced that whatever media policy measures the government comes up with, they are not going to work. Zhan, also, in fact, suggested that the Central Propaganda Department, even though it touts the primacy of ideology, actually acts in the interest of economic benefits for its own large bureaucracy. There are many cases in which leading Department bureaucrats have taken bribes from corrupt local officials and quashed any scandal before it was reported in the media. Partly for that reason,

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20 In May 2005 the Central Propaganda Department announced a ban on “critical outside area reporting.”
some media organizations with a strong sense of good journalism are said to truly detest the Department and its bureaucrats.

**Current Status of China’s Media**

In Zhan’s view, media reporting may be controlled, but opinions are being expressed with increasing vigor in local newspapers, Internet sites, and elsewhere, in great part because now Internet users can post their opinions without using their real names. And because there are media organizations that are willing to challenge the Central Propaganda Department’s ban on “critical outside area reporting,” they have helped to push the ban into ineffective limbo, with the support of the innovative faction within the CCP leadership.

Li was strongly critical of the *People’s Daily* and the other major media organizations for failing to stand up against political pressure from the authorities. The way Li sees it, the Chinese public are losing trust in government-led media organizations, notably the *People’s Daily*, New China News Agency, and CCTV, and their audiences are rapidly dwindling. The *People’s Daily* has a circulation of more than two million, but most copies are sent around to government agencies. Even female workers at sex establishments, Li said, are sometimes required to subscribe to the newspaper. Since being removed as editor of *Freezing Point*, Li has served as an outside advisor to the CCTV news channel. At a review meeting on the reporting of the Sichuan earthquake of 2008, he was the only one who voiced strongly critical observations on CCTV broadcasts covering the earthquake.

Li Datong, on the other hand, was very positive in his views of Internet media functions. Readers of Internet news can post their thoughts about items they have just read, which makes it possible to calculate the impact of the audience response to each one. News items that attract many postings draw large numbers of readers when the follow-ups appear online. In other words, a new situation is emerging in which Internet users determine what news items are important.

Mr. C observed that while television still has great influence, the Internet’s impact has been growing while newspapers and magazines are struggling to keep their place, especially since the onset of the current financial difficulties. Government-oriented newspapers like the *Guangming Daily* and the *Economic Daily* are having a hard time whereas the *Global Times* and the *Beijing Times*, both of which, though operating under the *People’s Daily*, have a strong commercial character, are faring well. This, he said, is a symptom of
the tendency now for the commercial media to grow stronger while the official media grow weaker.

**Getting China’s Voice to the World—Can It Succeed?**

According to Zhan, the government’s drive to send more information abroad is the product of different dreams by sparring innovative and conservative factions sharing the same bed. The innovative faction sees the drive as strengthening international exchange, thereby compelling China to comply more closely with international rules. The conservative faction regards the drive as boosting China’s overseas propaganda, a chance to buy world public opinion with money. When I asked Zhan which group’s view would prevail, he replied, “Half and half, I think, but aside from news items unrelated to China, it is extremely difficult for the media to make objective and fair reports.”

Li said he was almost sure that efforts by China’s media organizations to expand overseas would end up being a waste of money. If the Chinese people no longer trust the *People’s Daily*, the New China News Agency, and CCTV, why should people elsewhere be expected to trust them? Li added that if every Chinese media company made it a policy to “differentiate between inside and outside” and tried to send as objective and fair reporting as possible overseas, in the long run this would have a beneficial effect on their domestic reporting as well. If Chinese news reporting overseas was good enough to achieve world-class standards, at some point media people in China would naturally demand domestic reporting of the same quality.

Looking back on the history of Chinese efforts to send information out to the world, Mr. C concluded that even after sixty years of trying, China still has not succeeded. Since Chinese leaders themselves do not know how to remedy the situation, the news sent abroad has grown only in quantity. Mr. C thinks China’s leadership is desperate to change this. The government has made it possible now for the *People’s Daily*, the New China News Agency, and CCTV—in addition to CRI, once the only one to broadcast overseas—to participate in international broadcasting and publishing. But Mr. C is not convinced they will succeed. He thinks that perhaps their basic thinking is too deeply colored by the paradigm of “external propaganda” and will remain barren of new ideas. NCNA, for example, is “internally professional and externally amateur,” and for the current NCNA president, highly conservative in his thinking, to order an expansion into television, remarked Mr. C, is a pipe dream. He was also critical of CCTV’s foreign language channels for “merely translating domestic news reports” and recommended producing content that would sell abroad. Television dramas, for example, would attract more audiences and would increase income as well, hitting two birds with one stone.
CONCLUSION

We have examined the Chinese government policy regarding media expansion overseas and recent developments surrounding the Chinese media, and we have considered the opinions of specialists regarding the current status of the media and its prospects. It is particularly interesting to note the different perceptions inside and outside China. To some in other parts of the world, China’s aggressive media drive appeared almost threatening. At the world media summit in October 2009, for example, it looked as if China was winning over the major Western media companies. Media specialists in China, on the other hand, have been unruffled and dispassionate as they observe these developments. It is true, as noted, that media companies in China that cannot respond to what the public wants at home cannot be expected to attract audiences in the Western world. But it is also a fact that Chinese television dramas are gaining audiences in Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries. Chinese television is likely to have a certain level of influence in developing countries that do not have much freedom of speech and press. The question is, how much propaganda is China willing to remove from its news reporting. CCTV’s English-language 24-hour news channel will start broadcasting in 2010. That channel will be an important clue to its prospects for the future.

Spurred by the rapid development of the Internet, Chinese society as a whole is being prodded toward greater democratization of information, and under these new conditions it will be increasingly difficult to maintain the time-worn propaganda-centered reporting style, whether at home or abroad. That kind of reporting no longer has any substance. It may take time, but I think China has the determination to take the necessary steps leading from propaganda-centered reporting overseas to more active international exchange. In due course, it will begin to ease control over domestic reporting.

(Translated by Takechi Manabu)