

Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China

In most liberal democracies, commercialized media is taken for granted, but in many authoritarian regimes, the introduction of market forces in the media represents a radical break from the past, with uncertain political and social implications. In Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China, Daniela Stockmann argues that the consequences of media marketization depend on the institutional design of the state. In one-party regimes such as China, market-based media promote regime stability rather than destabilizing authoritarianism or bringing about democracy. By analyzing the Chinese media, Stockmann ties trends of market liberalization in China to other authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the post-Soviet region. Drawing on in-depth interviews with Chinese journalists and propaganda officials as well as more than 2,000 newspaper articles, experiments, and public opinion data sets, this book links censorship among journalists with patterns of media consumption and the media's effects on public opinion.

Daniela Stockmann is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Leiden University. Her research on political communication and public opinion in China has been published in *Comparative Political Studies*, *Political Communication*, *The China Quarterly*, and the *Chinese Journal of Communication*, among others. Her 2006 conference paper on the Chinese media and public opinion received an award in Political Communication from the American Political Science Association.





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Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China

DANIELA STOCKMANN





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To my parents

"It takes an awful long time to not write a book."

Douglas Adams





Contents

List of Figures

, e	
List of Tables	xiii
Acknowledgments	XV
Abbreviations	xix
List of Chinese Newspapers and Other Media Sources	xxi
1 Propaganda for Sale	I
2 Instruments of Regime Stability and Change	23
3 Types of Newspapers in China	50
PART I. THE PRODUCTION OF NEWS	
4 Boundaries for News Reporting on Labor Law and the United States	77
5 Selection and Tone of News Stories	104
6 Discursive Space in Chinese Media	132
PART II. MEDIA CREDIBILITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES	
7 Media Credibility and Media Branding	161
8 Newspaper Consumption	180
9 Media Effects on Public Opinion	203
10 Media Citizenship in China	222
11 China and Other Authoritarian States	237
12 Responsive Authoritarianism in Chinese Media	254
Appendix A: Notes on Data and Research Design	263
Appendix B: Notes on Case Selection and Generalizability	268

ix

page xi



x	Contents
Appendix C: Experimental Treatments	271
Appendix D: Data Coding, Statistical Models, and Robustness	
Test Results	274
Appendix E: Additional Tables and Figures	291
References	305
Index	325



List of Figures

1.1	Scatterplot of Media Marketization and Political	
	Liberalization. Source: Freedom House and IREX,	
	2005-2008.	page 9
1.2	The Impact of Media Marketization on the Production of	
	News and Media Credibility in China.	14
2.1	Positioning of Newspaper Types When Demands between	•
	Citizens and the State Converge.	33
2.2	Positioning of Newspaper Types When Demands between	55
	Citizens and the State Diverge.	34
3.I	Number of Officially Licensed Newspapers, 1979–2009.	<i>J</i> 1
<i>J</i> .	Source: Chinese Journalism Handbook.	56
3.2	Newspapers in Beijing as Perceived by Local Media	, ,
<i>J</i> ·-	Practitioners. Source: Interviews by the Author, 2005.	71
3.3	Newspapers in Chongqing as Perceived by Local Media	/
J.J	Practitioners. Source: Interviews by the Author, 2005.	72
5.T	Average Tone in News Reporting on Labor Law in	/ -
J•=	Chongqing Times, Chongqing Daily, and People's Daily.	
	Source: Labor Law Computer-Aided Text Analysis, 2005.	109
5 2	Comparison between Google China Searches and Newspaper	10)
J.2	Reporting in Chongqing.	114
<i>5</i> 2	Relationship between Newspaper Type and Tone of Articles	114
3.3	on the United States as Open and Closed Topics Change in	
	2003. Source: United States Computer-Aided Text Analysis,	
	1999 and 2003.	I 2.4
6 т	References to Social Stability in Headlines of the <i>People's</i>	124
0.1	Daily. Source: Renmin Ribao Full-Text Archive.	T 4.0
- -	Trustworthiness of Official and Nonofficial Papers. Source:	149
/.1	BRS 2002.	- (-
		165
7.2	Expertise of Official and Nonofficial Papers. Source: BRS	-/-
	2002.	167
		X



xii	1	List of Figures
7.3	Perceived Effectiveness of Labor Law among Control and	
	Treatment Groups. Source: Labor Law Experiment, 2009.	178
8.1	Timeline of Events in Beijing.	189
8.2	Development of Readership in Beijing (Raw Data).	
	Source: BAS 2004.	195
8.3	Relationship between Commitment and Newspaper Use	
	among Average Beijingers Before and After Press	
	Restrictions. Source: BAS 2004.	196
8.4	Development of Readership of Official Papers among	
	Readers in Beijing (Raw Data). Source: BAS 2004.	198
8.5	The Average Beijinger's Use of Newspaper Types Over Tin	ne
	(Among Readers). Source: BAS 2004.	198
9.1	Effect of Exposure to Official and Nonofficial Papers on	
	Perceptions of Labor Law as Attention Changes.	
	Source: LLM 2005.	209
9.2	Effect of Exposure to Official Messages on Positivity toward	rd
	the United States as Attention Changes. Source: BAS 2004.	215
10.1	Regional Advertising Income in China, 2005. Source: Chin	a
	Advertising Yearbook.	224
10.2	Media Marketization and Media Credibility Across Region	ıs,
	Residuals. Source: China Regional Media Data, 2007.	227
II.I	Media Marketization and Diversity of Information in	
	One-Party and Other Authoritarian Regimes, Bivariate	
	Scatter Plots. Source: Media and Authoritarianism Data,	
	2001–2009.	247
11.2	Media Marketization and Media Credibility, Residuals.	
	Source: Media and Authoritarianism Data, 2001–2009.	251



List of Tables

5.1	Average Sensitivity of Articles on Labor Law.	page 106
5.2	OLS Regression Results for the Tone Surrounding the United	
	States in the People's Daily and Beijing Evening News.	123
9.1	Ordinal Probit Results for Perceived Effectiveness of Labor	
	Law among Frequent Readers.	210
9.2	OLS Regression of Attention on Positivity toward the United	
	States as Exposure to Official Messages Changes (Among	
	Readers).	214
10.1	OLS Regression Results for Media Marketization on Media	
	Credibility Across Chinese Regions.	228
II.I	Fixed and Random Effects Regression Results for Media	
	Marketization on Diversity of Information as Regime Type	
	Changes.	248
11.2	OLS Regression Results for Media Marketization on Media	
	Credibility.	252

xiii





Acknowledgments

My father escaped from East Germany in the fall of 1965. Without a single word to his family, he went "on vacation" to Hungary. He had made contact with a group of anarchists and had planned to cross the border to Austria. After spending hours squeezed into a hidden compartment of a VW station wagon he safely arrived in the West where his dream was to study medicine and play American Rock'n Roll music.

Had I grown up in East Germany, like my father, I probably wouldn't have shown much interest in Leninist political systems. But because I grew up in West Germany stories about my father's escape and life in East Germany triggered my curiosity about what it meant to live under authoritarianism. By way of many detours this eventually led to my interest in Chinese politics.

This book, then, is about the relationship between people living under authoritarian rule and the state. Its focus is on the Chinese media as an example of how political communication works under authoritarianism, particularly single-party states. As I discovered while doing research for this book, many other authoritarian states have followed a strategy similar to China's by introducing market forces into previously tightly controlled state media.

When I started this project I was convinced that the introduction of such market forces had diversified and liberalized the Chinese media. My initial plan was to examine how *commercial* liberalization of the media could contribute to *political* liberalization and possibly democratization; but the more data I gathered, the more evidence I found that the reverse was the case: while market forces brought about greater space for news reporting, this space turned out to the advantage of the regime, under the condition that institutions tighten the leash on the media when necessary. Overall, the balance between liberalization and control promoted regime stability rather than diluted it.

I do not claim that these conclusions are "objective." My goal in writing this book has been to examine the empirical facts in order to obtain answers to the questions raised by market liberalization of media in authoritarian regimes. However, my standard to evaluate the empirical evidence has been

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xvi Acknowledgments

significantly shaped by my own training and personal experiences on three continents – North America, Asia, and Europe. On each of these continents I was fortunate to have an amazing number of colleagues and friends who listened to my ideas, raised interesting questions, and gave feedback on my work. Rather than listing all of them individually here, I prefer to thank them in person. Instead, I want to use this space to express my deepest gratitude to those whose guidance and feedback have laid the foundation for the approach laid out in this book.

One of the best decisions I ever made was to continue my studies of political science in the United States. At the University of Rochester I took my first course on Chinese politics with Melanie Manion. This was an eye-opening experience. Melanie encouraged me to dare to ask the big questions that allow us not only to better understand China and Chinese politics but also the broader political science discipline. I admire her courage and honesty and strive to meet the same high standards of quality in my research as she embraces in her

At the University of Michigan I have encountered an extraordinary scholarly community open to diverse ideas and approaches. Michigan has the reputation of focusing on quantitative methods, but I have experienced it as a place that encourages the choice of research methods depending on the question that is asked; the emphasis is on obtaining the right answer to an interesting question, not the method itself. Among the larger Michigan community my special thanks go to my dissertation committee members Ken Lieberthal, Mary Gallagher, Don Kinder, Mark Tessler, and Iain Johnston.

As my dissertation committee chair, Ken has guided me through the process of transforming an initial idea into a feasible research project of substantial interest to a broad range of people. His tough questions were the ones that should be asked before a dissertation is finished and have tremendously improved the overall argument of the book. I have always admired Ken for his ability to capture big trends in China as a whole without losing sight of its diversity.

In a similar way Mary encouraged me to see the bigger picture, not only inside China but also of China in comparison to other countries. Working with her helped me see state—society relations in a new light. I am particularly grateful for her offer to add questions to the Survey on Labor Law Mobilization (LLM) and her continuing support on all aspects of scholarly life well beyond graduation.

Don reminded me at a critical point that our purpose as scholars is not to seek evidence to support the conclusions we want to draw, but to instead let rules about research design and methodology guide our judgment of what constitutes trustworthy evidence. His comments inspired me to think creatively about solutions to problems associated with research design and about how political communication in authoritarian contexts differs from democratic ones.

Mark's feedback helped me to view this project in a broader context comparing China with other authoritarian states. What struck me in particular was how many issues were similar in China and the Middle East, while they



Acknowledgments xvii

ultimately led to different outcomes during the Arab Spring. Mark's friendly reminders to look into generalizability helped unravel how the specifics of regime type explained this puzzle.

Working with Iain on various projects has been an extremely pleasant and enriching experience. With Iain I share a fascination for the Chinese language and I learned much from his profound knowledge and insights on how language figures into public opinion and foreign politics. Without his offer to share questions on the Beijing Area Studies (BAS) survey this book would only tell part of the story.

In addition to my academic training in the United States, my experiences in China have significantly shaped the content of this book. From 1997 onwards I have made almost yearly trips to China. These many visits, during which I was affiliated with the School of Communication and Journalism at Peking University, have laid the groundwork for this book. For generous support during fieldwork in Beijing and Chongqing I am grateful to the Harvard-Yenching Institute and the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan. For sharing data or data reports I am grateful to Barbara Gedde, Jason Brownlee, Mark Frazier, Ku Lun-wei, Deborah Cai, Yu Guoming, Jonathan Hassid, Xiao Qiang, CTR Market Research, AC Nielsen, the HuiCong Media Research Center, and Kaiyuan (CPCR).

At Peking University I was fortunate enough to be taken under the wing of Chen Changfeng, who embraced me as one of her own students. As my *daoshi* she opened my eyes to the key approaches and academic discussions in communications in China. I am especially grateful to Changfeng for always taking me seriously despite my simplified explanations of this research in Chinese. Through her I also came across many new friends within the broader communication and journalism community, and my conversations with them have greatly refined my understanding of China. One of them, Zhang Jie, deserves separate mentioning here.

Over many years now Zhang Jie and I have been engaging in an ongoing discussion about research methodology developed abroad and its application to China. By asking me to present my work to her colleagues and students at Communication University of China, Zhang Jie shed light on different Chinese scholarly perspectives on my research, often perceiving the research methodology applied in this book as distinctively "Western." In contrast to some of these perspectives, I do not see the scientific methods applied in this book as incompatible with a Chinese view or as preventing researchers from understanding China. In my opinion, social science research methods are aimed at understanding attitudes and behavior of human beings. In this book I show that readers in China turn out to act just like audiences in other countries once we adjust the methodological tools to the specifics of the Chinese environment. That does not mean that there is not anything distinctively Chinese about China. Of course there is, just as any country is ultimately special and unique from all others. However, I do not believe that social science research methods prevent us from understanding these differences.



xviii Acknowledgments

Three Chinese scholars whose works are exemplary of such an approach and served as an inspiration for this book are Shen Mingming, Tang Wenfang, and Shi Tianjian. I am thankful to Mingming for providing me with the opportunity to collaborate with the Research Center for Contemporary China, where I learned how to adjust concepts and measures developed abroad to the Chinese context in practice. As I started writing, I was glad to meet Wenfang and TJ. Their encouragement to pursue this research and explore new avenues for social science inquiry came at the time when it was most needed. I am deeply saddened that TJ passed away before he could see this book's publication. In his own work, TJ found the right balance between employing sophisticated social science methods while also stimulating substantive scholarly discussions among China scholars, Americanists, and comparativists alike. He was a true Confucian scholar and greatly revered among the Chinese scholarly community.

Back in Europe, I discovered that such successful communication between area specialists and the broader political science discipline requires reaching out to different scholarly communities. In most European countries, Chinese studies developed as a separate discipline, with university structures that foster separation rather than integration into the social sciences. When this research grew from a dissertation into a book at Leiden University, I profited tremendously from discussions with these two distinct communities, each of them providing space for scholarly development within an extraordinary collegial atmosphere.

With its stronghold in the study of political parties, my Leiden colleagues in political science inspired and helped form my ideas about the analytical framework as "Downs with Chinese characteristics." Conversations with my colleagues from Chinese studies made me more aware of the norms that guide the decisions of research in the social sciences and how they shape my understanding of China. While at Leiden University I have also had the help and assistance of a large number of suberb research assistants from Leiden, Communication University of China, Harvard, and Cornell University. I thank Wang Mingde, Li Zheng, Jin Xi, He Yewen, Zhang Yunqing, Song Yao, Cao Manwen, Ai Dan, Cai Jingyi, Zhou Moli, Cheng Yuan, Li Ang, Jin Yanchao, Sun Jia, Zhang Qian, Zhai Peng, Andrew Miller, Marat Markert, Andrew Wagner, Emily Zhang, and Roelof Lammers.

This book, then, grew out of my ongoing journey "commuting" between three continents. The people who had to endure the most during my constant travels are, of course, family and friends. Fortunately, I can say that it was my family's own "fault" that I took this road. My parents Connie and Claus taught me how to find my own path in life and triggered my curiosity for exploration. I am also grateful to my parents-in-law Erika and Gerhard Hoppe for being truly interested in my ideas and for having the life-changing idea to go to China. My deepest thanks goes to my husband Carsten for making me laugh every day since we started this journey together.

Berlin July 2012



Abbreviations

BAS Beijing Area Studies Survey

BBS Bulletin Board System (chat forums)
CATA Computer-Aided Text Analysis

CCP Chinese Communist Party

GAPP General Administration of Press and Publication
GPS Random Sampling according to the Global Positioning

System

ISDN Integrated Services Digital Network KMT (in Taiwan) Kuomintang or Nationalist Party

LLCATA Labor Law Computer-Aided Text Analysis

LLM Survey of Labor Law Mobilization

MAELEZO Information Services Department of Tanzania

MCT Media Council of Tanzania

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

PD Propaganda Department

PPS Random Sampling according to Probability Proportional

to Size

PRC People's Republic of China PRI (in Mexico) Institutional Revolutionary Party

RCCC Research Center for Contemporary China

RMB Renminbi

SARS Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

SMS Short Message Service SOE State-Owned Enterprise

SPPA State Press and Publication Administration (now General

Administration of Press and Publication [GAPP])

USCATA United States Computer-Aided Text Analysis

WTO World Trade Organization

xix





List of Chinese Newspapers and Other Media Sources

English	Pinyin	Chinese Characters
21st Century Economic	21 Shiji Jingji Baodao	21世纪经济报道
Report		
Beijing Daily	Beijing Ribao	北京日报
_	Beijing Yule Xinbao	北京娱乐信报
Beijing Evening News	Beijing Wanbao	北京晚报
Beijing Morning News	Beijing Chenbao	北京晨报
Beijing News	XinJingbao	新京报
_	Beijing Shangbao	北京商报
Beijing Times	Jinghua Shibao	京华时报
Beijing Youth Daily	Beijing Qingnianbao	北京青年报
Business Times	Caijing Shibao	财经时报
Business Watch Magazine	Shangwu Zhoukan	商务周刊
Caijing Magazine	Caijing	财经
Chengdu Business News	Chengdu Shangbao	成都商报
Chengdu Evening News	Chengdu Wanbao	成都晚报
China Daily	Zhongguo Ribao	中国日报
China Economic Times	Zhongguo Jingji Shibao	中国经济时报
China Newsweek	Zhongguo Xinwen Zhoukan	中国新闻周刊
China Radio International	Zhongguo Guoji Guangbo	中国国际广播电台
	Diantai	
China Times	Huaxia Shibao	华夏时报
China Womens' News Daily	Zhongguo Funübao	中国妇女报
China Youth Daily	Zhongguo Qingnianbao	中国青年报
Chinese Business Paper	Huashangbao	华商报
Chongqing Business News	Chongqing Shangbao	重庆商报
Chongqing Daily	Chongqing Ribao	重庆日报
Chongqing Economic News	Chongqing Jingjibao	重庆经济报
Chongqing Evening News	Chongqing Wanbao	重庆晚报

(continued)

The list includes newspapers mentioned at least twice in the text.

xxi



xxii

List of Chinese Newspapers and Other Media Sources

(continued)

English	Pinyin	Chinese Characters
Chongqing Labor News	Chongqing Gongrenbao	重庆工人报
Chongqing Morning News	Chongqing Chenbao	重庆晨报
Chongqing Times	Chongqing Shibao	重庆时报
Chongqing Youth Daily	Chongqing Qingnianbao	重庆青年报
Economic Daily	Jingji Ribao	经济日报
Economic Observer	Jingji Guanchabao	经济观察报
Financial News	Jinrong Shibao	金融时报
Fujian Daily	Fujian Ribao	福建日报
Global Times	Huanqiu Shibao	环球时报
Guangming Daily	Guangming Ribao	光明日报
Guangzhou Daily	Guangzhou Ribao	广州日报
-	Huaxi Dushibao	华西都市报
- .	Jiankangbao	健康报
=	Laodong Wubao	劳动午报
Legal Daily	Fazhi Ribao	法制日报
Legal Evening News	Fazhi Wanbao	法制晚报
Liberation Daily	Jiefang Ribao	解放日报
Lifestyle	Jingpin Gouwu Zhinan	精品购物指南
Nanfang Sports	Nanfang Tiyu	南方体育
New Women (Paper)	Xin Nübao	新女报
New World	Xin Shijie	新世界
People's Daily	Renmin Ribao	人民日报
People's Liberation Army Daily	Jiefangjunbao	解放军报
Reference News	Cankao Xiaoxi	参考消息
Science and Technology Daily	Keji Ribao	科技日报
Shanxi Evening News	Shanxi Wanbao	山西晚报
Soccer News	Zuqiu	足球
Southern Daily	Nanfang Ribao	南方日报
Southern Metropolis Daily	Nanfang Dushibao	南方都市报
Southern Weekend	Nanfang Zhoumo	南方周末
Tianjin Daily	Tianjin Ribao	天津日报
_	Titan Zhoubao	体坛周报
_	Wenhui Bao	文汇报
Workers' Daily	Gongren Ribao	工人目报
World News Journal	Shijie Xinwenbao	世界新闻报
Xinhua News Agency (Xinhua)	Xinhua She	新华社
Xinmin Evening News	Xinmin Wanbao	新民晚报
-	Zhongguo Jingyingbao	中国经营报