

## MASTER'S THESIS

### The canary in the coal mine: Beijing News and the crisis of Chinese journalism

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**The CANARY IN THE COAL MINE: *BEIJING NEWS* AND  
THE CRISIS OF CHINESE JOURNALISM**

**LI KE  
M.Phil. Thesis**

**HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY**

**2014**

**The Canary in the Coal Mine: *Beijing News* and  
the crisis of Chinese journalism**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Philosophy**

**Principle Supervisor: Professor Colin Sparks**

**Hong Kong Baptist University**

**September 2014**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of Mphil at Hong Kong Baptist University, and has not been previously included in a thesis or dissertation submitted to this or any other institution for a degree diploma or the qualifications.

Signature: Li Ke

Date: September 2014

## Abstract

Based on three-month ethnographic fieldwork among investigative journalists in *Beijing News*, this dissertation is about the transformation of printing journalism in a time of crisis. This study explores what specifically constitutes the crisis of Chinese printing journalism in general and investigative journalism in particular, and how they respond to the crisis. Existing western debate of newspaper crisis predominantly revolves around the rapid technological and economic change. Rooted in the 'liberal-pluralist' political economy of communication, however, my dissertation suggests that we also need to take the political factors into consideration when discussing the crisis of traditional media in China-an authoritarian country without media freedom. I argue that the crisis of Chinese printing journalism is not only the shrink in circulation and advertisement revenue and the technological impinging on traditional way of producing and distributing news, as their western counterparts; but also the increasingly narrowing space for critical coverage that Chinese political and investigative journalists appreciate and expect. The three facts-political control, economic recession, and technological innovation-are interwoven together and profoundly shape the Chinese printing journalism.

Under such situation, Chinese newsroom is under transformation. Taking an approach of sociology of news, my paper also examines how *Beijing News* and its investigative reporting team reshuffle the organizational structure to overcome the crisis. On the one hand, the reorganization is aimed at adapting to and

adopting new technologies to gain a toehold in the new editorial and business model; on the other hand, it is a rearrangement of its strategy in overcoming the political constraints and carrying out critical reporting. Different from the opinion from Tech-Utopian or Tech-Determinism who suggests that technology will completely reshape the structure of newsroom and journalistic practice, I argue that organizational tradition and culture make the complete redefinition impossible. Based on the reform strategy what I called a combination of 'convergence' and 'de-convergence', I suggest that *Beijing News* successfully keeps a balance between 'embracing the online world' and 'keeping its tradition of pursuing for original and investigative journalism'. The well-established organizational routine should not be deemphasized in discussing the reconstruction of traditional newsroom at least for two reasons. Firstly, the professional routine overcomes the potential negative impact of new technology on quality journalism. Secondly, what strategies are adopted in the newspaper transformation is closely relevant to its structural and cultural feature. As a canary in the coal mine, *Beijing News* sets an example for many other printing newspaper around the country with difficulty in addressing the crisis, coming from whatever political, economic or technological aspects.

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## Introduction

The introduction of new communication technologies inevitably raises questions about the extent to which existing media work will be changed accordingly (Lasorsa, et al. 2012; Pavlik, 2000 & 2001; Steensen, 2010). This is particularly true in the case of journalism and news work (Deuze & Marjoribanks, 2009; Lasorsa et al. 2012). During the 20th century, audio, visual and digital innovations have not by themselves redefined what it means to be a journalist in the professional sense (Lasorsa, et al. 2012), but have helped to change how journalists think about and experiment with their work. Journalists' adoption and adaptation to the new technology is also shaped by socio-cultural constraints and considerations (Boczkowski, 2002 & 2004). In the similar vein, scholars in recent years have begun to discuss the extent that the Internet, has affected the newspaper industry in a macro sense, and newsroom structure and journalistic practices in a micro sense (e.g., Deuze, 2003, 2005; Phillips, 2010; Phillips et al., 2009; Dickinson et al., 2013).

According to many scholars' views, although technological inventions did change the traditional media dramatically, it is not in such a quick and radical fashion (Mosco, 2004). The 1990s saw several predictions of "the end of journalism" (Bromley, 1997; Hardt, 1996). Until now, however, the newspaper is not dying out. Some scholars tend to be optimistic. They believe there will be always a need for news and journalism, although the ways in which journalistic news is financed, distributed and consumed are being altered profoundly (Picard,

2013). Whether optimistic or pessimistic about the future of journalism, undeniably, newspaper industry is in the midst of a historic restructure, and such pressure was forced by several reasons. Simplest put, however, it is because on the one hand, new technology redefines the tasks of journalists and newsroom; on the other, it reshapes the business environment of media companies. First and foremost, almost all media today are conducted as commercial enterprise and they are increasingly depending on advertising revenue, subscriptions and newsstand sale as the major form of revenue. However, such economic pattern is under crisis. On the one hand, it was widely believed that new technology has transformed the advertisement investment strategies, which have shifted the spending from traditional media to the Internet. Therefore, the loss of a large proportion of advertisers poses an irresistible threat to traditional media organizations (Sparks, 2003: 307); on the other hand, newspaper circulation and newsstand sales are also in decline as the public are now fleeing newspapers that once aggregated large audiences in some markets. Those news consumers turn to free news on the Internet (Dickinson et al.,2013; Machesney, 2003; Sparks, 2003). Second, Internet changed the ways news is produced and distributed. The scholarship shows that user-generated-content has increased speed of news flow and redefined the news immediacy. Journalists find themselves in increasingly time-pressured working environment, which expects to capture everything live. Newsrooms also bring digital technologies into the news production process, which profoundly changed the organizational structure and long-established

working routines.

The pace of how new technology impacts traditional media is different, and some countries are affected more rapidly than others. However, in order to survive, news organizations must be innovative to adapt to the increasingly converging media world. While there have been many attempts to tease out changes in the newsroom organization and journalists' daily practice, the research tends to take place in U.S. and U.K. The experience of journalists and newsroom in other countries has attracted little research interest. In fact, since the second half of 2011, Chinese newspaper begins to experience the circulation and advertisement recession as their counterparts in western countries. The economic change forces news room to reorganize its structure and working routines to meet the ends of market competition with Internet. As is shown in US and other advanced countries, this technology-driven restructuring process is profound and far-reaching, and it is taking place very rapidly indeed. For that reason, I use the term 'crisis' to describe the situation. While the crisis has already exerted a long-lasting effect on newspaper industry in American and other western countries, it is only in its early stages in China<sup>i</sup>.

However, in China, an authoritarian country without press freedom, it is over-simplified to consider technology as a determining role in the shaping of Chinese newsroom and journalists. Existing western scholarship inevitable places emphasis on either technical development or economic change when discussing the crisis of traditional media. I would like to suggest here that we can't

accurately analyze the crisis of Chinese newspaper and the impact of technology on traditional journalism while being blind to political and social milieus which Chinese journalism takes shape. I will not deny the importance of new media technology in current news organization's upheaval and transformation; nevertheless, this relatively narrow focus might be justified-at least in Chinese context. The reason is evident and understandable, the enduring problem trammeling Chinese journalism has been its lack of press freedom since the inception of strict party-state control (Lee, 2001). Therefore, the crisis of Chinese traditional media is not only resulted from new technology and new technology facilitated commercial pattern, but also the precarious and increasingly unfriendly political environment. We should firstly understand what the crisis of Chinese newspaper is and then possibly analyze how such crisis produces and how news organization responds to it. Borrowing the theoretical framework from what Lee (2000a) called 'liberal-pluralist' or 'political' political economy, which particularly emphasizes that Chinese media should always consider the political logic and market logic, my thesis argues that the crisis of Chinese newspaper is by no means the economic recession, characterized by circulation decrease and advertising shrink; the crisis is also the increasingly narrowing space left for carrying out the reporting that Chinese political and investigative journalists appreciate and expect. Such crisis is definitely caused by political intervention, with little relevant to technology development. The tightened political environment further dampens Chinese journalists' enthusiasm of doing a

professional job-carrying out objective coverage which illuminates civil interest and contributes to the social development. The economic crisis leads to the unstable and unsatisfied income of printing journalists. The deteriorating political environment results in journalists' disappointment about the work they are engaged in. In the digital age, the economic crisis, allying with political crisis, further complicates the difficulties news organization and individual journalists are facing. The complexity is particularly obvious in the realm of Chinese investigative journalism, which receives the tightest political control and is most vulnerable to the economic crisis. As a result, the three factors--political, economic, and technological--are interwoven together and profoundly shape the current Chinese investigative reporting practice. Based on the case study of *Beijing News*, my discussion of Chinese newspaper in a time of crisis could be therefore seen as a harbinger of the series of problems that the broad industry will need to address in the near future<sup>ii</sup>.

Journalism has never been static. It has constantly evolved to fit the parameters and constraints of the particular forms in which it has been conveyed and to meet the requirements of the business arrangements surrounding them. Many traditional media "felt obliged to pay astronomical prices for adapting to and adopting new technologies to gain a toehold in the new editorial and business model"(Sparks, 2003: 308). The political-economy perspective is useful to provide a broad picture of the crisis traditional media is facing with; however it is useless to understand how news organizations react to the crisis. I agree with

the idea that it is essential to recognize that “the organizational structures shape the ways technologies are adopted and that such shaping leads to reciprocal effect”(Boczkowski, 2004:11). This mutual shaping and dynamic of practices can only be fully understood by studying journalists in context. Therefore, combining political-economy perspective with media sociology, my paper will link the larger political economy of Chinese society to day-to-day practices of Chinese investigative journalists in *Beijing News*. The core object of my study is explicating what the crisis of Chinese printing newspaper in general and investigative reporting team in particular is and how the newsroom-experimenting with organizational reshuffle-responds to the crisis they are suffering from.

The ethnographic method allows me to clear up the analytical fog that is inevitable in macro political-economy analysis, because it connects changes that are happening “on the ground” (micro-level) to changes that are “potentially historical”(macro-level)(Roudakova, 2007). I has paid attention to the down-to-earth journalistic practice happened in the process and within a newsroom. I hope to demonstrate in my thesis that such an approach would be particularly helpful in untangling the complexities between media-political-economic relations without sacrificing their dynamics or frequent negotiations and contradictions. Placing special emphasis on the interplay between micro and macro levels of analysis that I intend to give the “*processual* approach” its particular advantage (Roudakova, 2008; 2012:268).

Chapter one of this thesis examines two approaches to the

political-economy of communication: 'economism'/'Radical-Marxist' and 'politicism'/'Liberal-Pluralist' (Lee, 2000a). I agree with Lee's argument that Liberal-Pluralist seems to be more appropriate to analyze Chinese media, whether in the era of media-reform last century or in the period of emerging economic crisis currently. Western scholars predominantly give privilege of 'economic' factors in their analysis. They are particularly inclined to look at "how production, distribution, and consumption of economically based resources impacts on media industry and criticize the capital and economic function of media productions"(Lee, 2000a: 27). However, the dominant radical-Marxist approach, which emanates from the United States and Britain, is "oddly insensitive to (authoritarian) political and legal determinants of news production" (Schudson, 1991, quoted from Lee, 2000a: 27). While, in China, both the economic development and media practice are inseparable from the state. The ignorance of political factors can't provide a full-blown picture of broad state-capital relationship impinging on Chinese media.

Chapter one also reviews the debates about the nature of Chinese journalism in general and investigative journalism in particular in the past twenty years, which mainly revolved around the relative importance of political power and market liberalization. Some emphasize the economic factors while others stress the political aspects. One characteristic of all of these discussions is that they took place in a period of rapid economic expansion and of rapid media expansion. Therefore, while there were crisis that provided support to one view

or another, the fact was that the situation never really came to the point where there was a decisive pressure from one or the other force. There is now changing happened both in the economic and political realm. Specially, economic conditions are becoming much more pessimistic for Chinese printing journalism and Xi's regime has changed the political landscape significantly. This provides an environment where it is much easier to test the relative merits of different theories(Radical Marxist or Liberal Pluralist). My thesis is just an attempt to develop the political economic approach in this particular Chinese context<sup>iii</sup>.

Chapter two introduces the history of *Beijing News*. As the case my thesis focuses on, *Beijing News* experienced the splendid economic boom while political ebb and flow in the past ten years. The brief introduction *Beijing New's* history provides me background for later analysis and also qualification for choosing it as my research object.

Chapter three is about a comparison between the economic crisis of American printing newspaper and Chinese printing newspaper. Based on series of data demonstrating the shrink in newspaper circulation and advertising and staff scale of newsroom, the chapter is aimed at providing an introduction about what the economic crisis of Chinese newspaper means and how the trend impinges on *Beijing News*. Different from American printing journalism, the most salient feature of Chinese newspaper is they experienced the crisis later and in a less dramatic form, which probably left time for newsroom to make adjustment.

Chapter four concerns with the issue of how new leadership exerts political

control on traditional journalism and how such political impinges on investigative reporting practice. I also make an attempt to relate the unfriendly political environment to the crisis of Chinese newspaper. Previous studies have invariably emphasized either the political control mechanism or journalists' activity to resist such control. However, an obvious omission is a *processual* discussion of how the political meddling of media influences the news organization and individual journalists in-between the daily practice. My thesis uses this chapter to bridge the analytical gap. I argue that the new steps taken by Xi's leadership indicates the increasingly tightened political control over traditional media. The unfriendly political environment is a major if not the most important factor resulting in the plight of Chinese printing journalism and particularly investigative journalism. The political control not only produces many obstacles for newsroom and journalists to practice the critical and investigative journalism they appreciate, but also causes the economic problem for newsroom and individual journalists. Specifically speaking, for newsroom which resorts to the investigative reporting as its selling point, to decrease or even to abandon such type of reporting under the political pressure take a toll on its market competitiveness and newspaper attractiveness; for individual journalists, the killed coverage by propaganda department leads to the deduction of income, which is largely based on how many reports are published and how many words are build on each coverage. In the long run, the difficulty to realize the professional ideal and the unstable and unsatisfied economic condition, interwoven together, dampen the confidence

and enthusiasm of newspaper and individual journalists-which definitely is the crisis characterized Chinese traditional journalism.

Chapter five is devoted to illustrating the new policy of current leadership over Internet and the possible impacts on traditional journalism. In line with the CCP's newly emphasis on strengthening the Party's ideology, it is also ramping up its management over Internet information. In addition to further experimenting with the pervasive and intrusive information censorship, which however should be seen as the first step in the reassertion of party control over ideological arena. The greater significance in the long run would be a proactive effort to re-orient the terms of public discourse on the Internet. I explain in this chapter how Chinese current leadership shifts the focus of such proactive effort from dealing with opinion and discourses to guiding and appeasing the public emotion. According to the Party's material, the new strategy is useful in cleaning the online cacophony that challenges the Party's ideology.

In this chapter, I am attempting to suggest that the new wave of crackdown over critical speech and negative emotional outpouring undermines the capability of traditional journalism to carry out investigative reporting. There is fruitful scholarship articulating that the expansion of online public debates and the public discontent have had a positive effect on Chinese investigative journalism. However, in this chapter, I suggest that the interaction between online public discourse and offline traditional reporting has been cut off under the current tightened Internet control. It is also a crisis for traditional journalism,

because Internet-facilitated online discourse provides news clues and political protection over traditional journalism, which is however gradually disappearing nowadays.

After systematically illustrating what the crisis of Chinese printing journalism is and how such crisis closely relates to the Chinese political-economy, Chapter six explores the organizational adjustment in the early 2014 in response to the emerging crisis. Drawing on the literature of what is generally called the 'sociology of news work' and based on my three-month participant-observation in *Beijing News*, the chapter tries to link the macro-level political-economy perspective to the day-to-day practice of journalism. In a simplest way, the chapter asks a question: how *Beijing News* and its investigative journalism reporting team manage the on-going economic, political and technological change. As a canary in the coal mine, *Beijing News* sets an example for many other newspaper around the country unable, unwilling, or perplexed to address their crisis-either economic or political or both.

# Chapter one: Political economy of Chinese journalism

## 1.1 Political Economy of Communication

Nearly all variants of social and political theory hold that “the communication system is a cornerstone of modern societies”(McChesney & Schiller, 2003). In political terms, “news coincides with, reinforces, or interfered by the definition of the political situation”(Murdock, 1973: 172). The communication system may serve to “enhance democracy, or to deny it, or some combination of the two”(McChesney & Schiller, 2003). In economic terms, the communication system, as part of the ‘cultural industry’ and similar to other industries, has emerged and evolved as “a central area for profit making in modern capitalist societies”(Murdock, 1973: 172). Media corporations are interlocked with other major corporations. News, therefore, is also influenced by capitalist class. Revolving around “the dual role of communication system in the economic and political realm”, a number of scholars-for decades-took a political-economic perspective to analyze the capitalist media (McChesney & Schiller, 2003).

Growing out of Marx’s political economy, the political-economic perspective deals with “the larger ‘political’ and ‘economic’ conditions of the media as well as with the interactive impact of politics and economics on the media’s structure, operation, content, and ideology”(Lee, 2000a: 26). Relating news production to the economic structure of news organization within a political context, the

argument of political economists in general runs as follows: journalism is driven by market forces but are at the same time constrained by politics or 'public intervention'(Golding & Murdock,2000; Mosco, 1996; Edward & Chomsky, 1998; Calabrese & Sparks, 2004). In this regard, "news was assumed to take shape at the whim of either conservative government or big business, both of which constrain it"(Zelizer, 2004:77). A political economic analysis stresses that the reasons for lousy journalism are not derived from "morally bankrupt or untalented journalists", but from "a structure that makes such journalism the rational result of its operations"(Mcchesney, 2003). In addition, developing an analysis concerning the duality of communication system, much scholarly efforts emphasize the relationship between communication as a private business activity, and the broader and necessary social and political duties that communication system must perform. On the one hand, "communication system is clearly has a range of features in common with other areas of production and are increasingly integrated into the general industrial industries"(Golding & Murdock, 2000:70); on the other, however, it is equally clear that "the goods they manufacture-newspaper, advertisement, television programs and film-play a pivotal role in organization the images and discourses through which people make sense of the world" (Golding & Murdock, 2000: 70).

While theoretically acknowledging the dual identity of communication system in theory and originally looking at the interplay of politics and economics, the specific research tends to examine only one side, focusing solely either on

politics or economics, or accentuate one side of political economy over the other side. The relatively emphasis of one factor-economy or politics-has led to the development of two different approaches under the political economic framework: “economism” versus “politicism” (Staniland, 1985, quoted from Lee, 2000a:26) or what Lee (2000a, 2001a) called “liberal-pluralist” political economy versus “radical-Marxist” political economy. “The liberal-pluralist political economists of communication, focusing on critiques of the state and the social meanings of media, tend to be more ‘politicalistic’”(Lee, 2000a:27). By contrast, “the radical-Marxist political economists of communication, underlying the critiques of the capital and economic function of media industries, are more ‘economistic’”(Lee, 2000a: 27).

The dominant western study of political economy communication, which is radical-Marxist oriented, has been wary of the negative effect of media commercialization on serious journalism but insensitive to political and legal determinants of news productions (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 1999; Schudson, 2005; Lee, 2000b). Put simply, the political economy approach deals with “the production side of the communication process by examining the growth of the business and its links to the wide political economy”(Mosco, 1996: 74). Mosco (2008; 2009:28) has defined political economy as follows:

“Specifically, political economy has tended to give considerable attention to describing and analyzing capitalism, a system which, in short, turns resources like workers, raw materials, land and information into marketable commodities

that earn a profit for those who invest capital into the system.”

Following his explanation of political economy, Mosco (2008) suggests that political economists of communication regards “public communication systems more in the realm of ‘cultural industries’”, and therefore pays attention to “media, information and resources as resources and charted the ways they are packaged into products for sale.”

In the same vein, Garnham suggests that major modern communication systems are now “so evidently key institutions in advanced capitalists” that scholars’ attention should be paid to “the institutions of industrial production”(Garnham, 1995; 1998). Garnham points out that political economy of communication is about examining the historical and theoretical relationship between “the ownership and control of the capitalist press, the capitalist cinema, and capitalist and state capitalist radio and television” and “wider capitalist society, capitalist economy and the neo-capitalist state”(Garnham, 1995; 1998).

Studies conducted in this strand have been based on the assumption that the dynamics of the “culture-producing industries” can be understood primarily in terms of their economic determination (Curran et al, 2005: 13). Economic control, therefore, is the critical factor in determining control over media productions (Murdock, 1982). Political economists’ in favor of economic forces shaping media production could be well presented by several scholars’ reputed structuralist view of ideology. Burdock, Golding and Garnham, for example, argue that,

“Instead of starting from a concrete analysis of economic relations and the

ways in which they structure both the processes and results of cultural production, they start by analyzing the form and content of cultural artifacts and then working backwards to describe their economics (Murdock & Golding, 1977: 17).”

Similarly, Garnham (1993:502; 1995) also claimed that,

“Political economists find it hard to understand how, within a capitalist social formation, one can study cultural practices and their political effectiveness-the ways in which people make sense of their lives and then act in the light of that understanding-without focusing attention on how the resources for cultural practice. Both material and symbolic, should be made available in structurally determined ways through the institutions and circuits of commoditized cultural production, distribution, and consumption (Garnham, 1993:502; 1995).”

One of the principal themes in North American research draws from political economy’s general concern with concentration (Mosco,1996:93). In the U.S., a handful of multinational corporations control the vast majority of the media market, with detrimental effects on media production (Bagdikian,1992:27-54; McChesney, 2004:57-97). Therefore, scholarship focuses on “how horizontal concentration(integrating across sectors within and outside the general communication industry)”and “vertical concentration(integrating different companies within a specific industry sector for controlling more and more of the process of production)”influence media production (Mosco, 1996:94). North American political economy research has also been particularly strong in

combining its analysis of business and the state in the international arena. One of the more significant themes in the realm is “the transition from America’s post-war hegemony to a world communication order”(Mosco, 1996:94)., which is achieved by transnational business. Such expansion is to serve the respective nation’s ambition of reshaping the continental and global structures. Their chief theme is the capitalist mode and relation of production, as particularly embodied by the military-industrial complex and multinational corporations that manufacture cultural hegemony, betray the ideals of democracy, and distort the “public sphere” (Bagdikian, 1992; DuBoff, 1984; Mosco, 1990; Schiller, 1982).

In a short, what do the dominant western scholars mean by the political economy communication? The current scholarship entails two main dimensions. First, it addresses how media and communication systems influence, reinforce, or challenge class and social relations. It does this with a particular interest in “how economic factors influence politics and social relations” (McChesney, 2004: 43). Second, the line of inquiry is keen to analyze the impact of structural factors on the production, distribution, and consumption of communication product. It looks specifically at “how ownership, support mechanisms (e.g. advertising), and government policies establish media systems and communication technologies” influence media behavior and content (McChesney, 2004:43). Political economy of communication cannot provide a comprehensive explanation of all communication activity, but it particularly analyzes the economic impact on communication system well. Experimenting with a ‘top-down’ approach,

dominant western political economists seek to “redress the existing problem of resource inequity and cultural distortion resulted from unhampered economic dynamics of advanced capitalism” (Lee, 2001: 85).

Putting substantial consideration into the question of capitalism, ‘economic’ political economy of communication (or radical Marxist political economy of communication) are inclined to treat the role of the state either tangentially or one-sidedly (Lee,2000a:36). Several reasons could be identified underlying the pervasive ignorance. One reason-with scholars’ optimistic perspective-is “taking democracies for granted as political censorship of the media in the liberal state is more invisible than totalitarian or authoritarian countries”(Lee, 2000a:12).Modern capitalist society is absent of direct coercion. Therefore, some scholars are very optimistic in assuming that “the existing social and class relations are a given and a benevolent ones, which is also the best of all possible worlds” (McChesney, 2004:43; Schudson, 2005: 178). The other reason-with the pessimistic perspective-is imagining that corporate ownership and commercial organizations “necessarily compromise the democratic promise of public communication”(McChesney,1997). While the relationships between capitalism and democracy have always been complex and variable, some scholars suggest that the increasingly important position of market forces in shaping societal development possibly “sap the vitality of formal political systems of Western nations, by rendering them more reactive than proactive”(Furevitch & Dahlrge, 2005: 377; Hertz, 2001).

Occasionally, there is scholarship of radical Marxist economists on the state, but it tended to be one-sided that consider state only as “a regulator and policy-maker”(Smythe, 1960). Nevertheless, a fundamental problem facing government in advanced capitalism is that “the state has to promote the interests of capital even as it appears to be the independent arbiter of the wider social or public interest”(Mosco, 1996:92). Mosco has suggested that,

“although one of the central goals of the political economy tradition in North American is to understand the relationship of government or the state to the communication business, the challenge here has been to explain the role of the state without suffering the extremes of viewing it as either an independent arbiter of a pluralistic field of pressures, or, alternatively, as the instrumental and dependent arm of capital (Mosco, 1996:92).”

In an exceptional case, Herman and Chomsky’s work incorporates most of central factors of political economy but goes to the extreme of “political conspiracy”(Herman & Chomsky, 1988). They provide a propaganda model of the mass media to describe mass media function as arousing mass support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity. Herman and Chomsky argue that “journalism inevitably serves the established and recognized powers and news organizations inevitably become profit-making corporations that reflect the status quo” (Zelizer, 2004:77). It is inevitable because the news is produced by a relatively concentrated industry of several profit-making corporations, whose profits largely come from advertisement and news

resources predominantly come from officials. Herman and Chomsky is on the correct philosophical side of this issue. After all, the government and business elites do have privilege in getting access to the news. Yet, by solely focusing on these strategic interventions, they overlook “the contradictions in the system” (Schudson, 1989a) and “other compelling social mechanisms that mutually constitute rhetorical tendencies”(Mosco, 1996:92).

In the realm of political economy of communication, there is in fact much wider debate. While there are some writers, such as Robert Picard(Picard, 2004)who argues that market concerns now determine operation of content in the media industry, restrict their concerns purely to economic issues, there are others, standing on the opposite side, pay more attention to politics. “Liberal-pluralist” political economists, focusing on critiques of the state, tend to be more political (Lee, 2000a).“Political” political economists suggest that the variations in democratic systems and cultures around the world (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), the fast pace of social, political and technological change, and the issue of the political communication should be a central place on the research agendas and in the intellectual inquiry of political economy scholars (Furevitch & Dahlrger, 2005:383). The political communication is by no means static and thus it is important. The basic contours of society, politics, power, culture, journalism and the media landscape are “in many ways fluid and evolving as historical circumstance changes”(Furevitch & Dahlrger, 2005:391). Consequently, an understanding of the communication process required a systematic perspective,

including “media institutions and professionals, political institutions, parties and political advocates and the surrounding socio-political environment that interact and impact upon each other” (Blumler & Gurevitch,2000: 104).

Although radical political economists have ever criticized liberal pluralists’ overemphasis on political concern that conceal the impact of economic organization of media industries on media content(Golding & Murdock, 2005), economic determinism has been increasingly recognized as a serious deficiency. They gradually admit that within market societies, there are various institutional forms and constitutional regimes for the press(Schudson, 2005).Political economy “would benefit from a greater emphasis on the political, calling for attention to the constitutive as well as the reactive role of the state in the communication industry”(Mosco,1996: 200). After four decades later, Murdock and Golding(2005:65), for example, admit that,

“the history of the modern communication is not only an economic history of their growing incorporation into a capitalist economic system, but also a political history of their increasingly centrality to the exercise of citizenship, which we can define in its broadest sense as the right to participate fully in social life and to help shape the forms it might take in future”.

Two key areas where state intervention has been markedly extended in recent years have made it a mistake to conclude that the state now plays a less and less important role in organizing communication in contemporary capitalist societies: “the reorganization of surveillance and the expansion of government information

management” (Murdock & Golding 2005: 69; Lyon, 2003: 89; Golding, 1990:95). Notwithstanding, Murdock and Golding still argue that analysis of “production is still central to understanding the differential distribution of social networks and cultural competencies”(Murdock & Golding 2005: 70).

Beyond the debate between “liberal-pluralist” political economy and “radical-Marxist” political economy, in a broader sense, some scholars call for giving liberal conceptions “a decent burial”, because the traditional of old theories “bear little relationship to contemporary reality” (Curran, 1991; quoted from Lee 2000a: 28). Particularly it should be cautious when applying the western-oriented political-economy analysis to other countries, because the United States and Britain where large number of scholarship tends to emerge have not experienced the economic, political or cultural upheaval, which however dominates most other countries. The instability could create dynamics that have far-reaching influence on media productions. For example, “dictatorship, wrenching economic change, huge urban migration, and drastic regime changes are deeply rooted in and often violent social conflicts over ethnicity, nationality, religion and class and so on”(Downing, 1996). Taking China as an example, the state power and market power exist “in a pretty fuzzy way that it is difficult to clearly differentiate between market-dominated systems and state-dominated systems”(Ma,2000:23; Schudson, 2005). Lee (2000a, 2001b), who tends to be most sophisticated, suggests that in the first place, the radical-Marxist is useless in analyzing Chinese media system, while liberal

pluralist seems to better fit Chinese conditions, where “the state takes a dominant role in shaping the distribution of power within society and the direction of economic policy” (Lee, 2000a: 36); in the second place, Lee(2000a:36) also admits that in transitional countries like China, “both approaches-liberal pluralist and radical Marxist- may coexist side by side, uneasily and paradoxically, under some circumstances”.

Therefore, if we shift our focus from the capitalist system to the contemporary Chinese ‘socialist’ system, we find that the latter leads itself very well to a balanced political-economy analysis (He, 2000a). In current China, politics and economics are too closely interwoven to be separated. On the political side, the party-state emphasizes the development of economy, while “it is still in power and still hegemonic”(Sparks, 2010). Just as Sparks(2010) has suggested:

“The emerging socialist market economic order, although clearly market oriented, is characterized by continuing political intervention one the one hand and has developed in a corporative way that closely tied to the political system on the other hand (Sparks, 2010).”

Because of this unique mesh of politics and economics in China, and because of the ambiguous and ambivalent relationship between politics and economics, political economy analysis of Chinese communication system has attracted substantial scholarly attention.

## 1.2 Political economy of Chinese communication system

### 1.2.1 History of Chinese media reform

In the late 1970s, media reform-characterized by the introduction of commercialization-was introduced to China. The process peaked in the early 1990s, enabled by Deng's Southern Tour that called for accelerated capitalist development in China. According to this, the SPPA announced a landmark policy in late 1992 that required all major newspapers, apart from a few party organs, such as the *People's Daily*, to achieve financial independence by 1994 (Zhao, 2000b). Before the economic reforms in the late 1970s, the Chinese news media-working as the Party's mouthpieces-were tightly controlled instruments of political indoctrination and mass mobilization. Therefore, the radio and newspaper then were used by the Party to propagate its goals and promote changes in the attitudes and behavior of the people (Chang, 1997; Cheek, 1989; Lynch 1999; Nathan, 1986; Zhao, 1998). Before the reform, national power was totally centralized in a unified "Party-state-military-economic-ideological" complex in which a small corps of senior leaders atop the pyramidal structure made final decisions. This power structure rested on state coercion, breed cults of personality, and monopolized ideology and mass media (Lee, 1990b). In such condition, mass media were the "loyal servants and an arm of the ruling Leninist party, the state, but not of the people" (Schudson,1989a).They were used by the state commandism and served predominantly as tools of officialdom, and therefore ignored the needs and interests of readers (Polumbaum, 1990).

State-endorsed marketization has brought new phases to the Chinese media industry. First and foremost were the significant changes in the financial structures of Chinese media system. Since the economic reforms started in the late 1970s, state subsidies have been gradually reduced or terminated to media organizations except for a handful of party organs. Without financial subsidy, media organizations had to generate revenues and shifted to profit-making operations (Chan, 1993; Zhao, 2000a; Pan & Chan, 2003). In order to compete for the market, media need to address more specialized audiences (White, 1990) and therefore the media content genres became diversified (Lee, 1990a). One immediate and dramatic change after the launching of the reforms was the soar of information. Apolitical news, such as sports, celebrity stories and literature supplements boomed. The increasing variety and liveliness of cultural and entertainment material overshadowed explicitly propagandist content, stimulating a proliferation and plurality of new symbolic forms in news narratives (Zhao, 1998). Newspapers and televisions expanded explosively and particularly there was a sudden boom in the number of local newspaper. For example, in 1979, when the reform started, there were sixty-nine newspaper published in China, and seventeen of them (amounting to 24.6 percentages) were published in Beijing. All other newspapers were published in provincial capitals, while few newspaper scattered at the sub-provincial levels were insignificant in the statistics. The percentage of newspapers located in the capital declined from 19.1 percentage in 1980 to 17.4 percentage in 1981, to 15.2 percentage in 1982 and to

5.2 percentage in 1984(Wu, 2000: 47-48, 51-52)(see figure1.1, quoted from Wu, 2000: 47-48); The era of reform saw an astronomical growth in television sets, audience, revenues and program genres(Yu, 1990). The number of broadcasting stations in China doubled between 1980 and 1985, from 106 to 213, and the number of television stations more than quadrupled, from 38 to 202(White, 1990: 94).The increase was particularly evident in city-level and county-level televisions (see figure1.2-4)(White, 94-98). All information seemed to prove that controls over none official media at the local and provincial level, and the dissemination of nonpolitical information were relaxed.

The profound changes initiated by marketization can also be found at the organizational level. As the media become commercialized, the flow of cash into media organizations and the development of advertisement have encouraged new practices and reshaped journalist's culture (Ma, 2000). In the positive side, journalists were no longer paid uniformly according to their administrative ranks, and instead, individual merit and journalists' contribution to the media organizations were appreciated and closely linked to their salaries. Previously, media-as the government institution-were operated within the administrative structure. Accordingly, newsmen received the wages from the government according to the bureaucratic hierarchy instead of individual capacity and performance. After the reform, "flexible wages" or "bonus", as the professional incentives, has been frequently distributed to news workers. Such incentives, targeting at good news coverage, page design, exclusive news stories,

encouraged news workers to enhance their working self-initiative and capacities (Ma, 2000; Chen & Lee, 1998). Stimulated by the incentives, journalists in 90s “gave more emphasis on the urgent need to improve reporting skills and standards of professionalism, rather than belaboring how the system held them back that their counterparts in early 80s century concerned”(Polumbaum, 2008:5).

Nevertheless, the media commercialization, emphasizing advertisement and sponsorship, has propagated the paid journalism. Political and commercial bodies paid journalists for the favors from news coverage. In return, journalists were willing to receive material benefits for publishing promotional material in the name of news or features(Zhao, 1998:77).The benefit provided to journalists or news organizations could be “cash, gifts, reimbursement of receipts for personal expenses, personal favors such as job, housing and education arrangements for family members and relatives, house renovations” and so on (Zhao, 1998: 77). Over the years, paid journalism has developed as a systematic phenomenon, which shifted from the individual to the collective, from passive to active, and from commercial sectors to government bodies (Chen & Chan, 1998; Zhao, 1998). Journalism corruption has become “not an aberration, but the vary way the system worked, deeply embedded in the government itself” (Zhao, 1998: 73). Under the context of “no money, no reporting”, government officials have allegedly bribed journalists to boost their images or to persuade journalists from covering some problems(Zhao, 1998:73). The persuasive journalism corruption

led to the loss of government credibility among the people, which urged government to issue regulations and guidelines and launch a campaign against journalistic malpractice.

If the changes of Chinese media in the economic domain are profound, its changes in the political field are much more complex to generalize. A quarter century after the economic reform, the media, however, were still struggling in the paradoxical situation-the economic liberation without political freedom. The Party-state still plays a formidable role in the Chinese media system, which seems to show no signs of loosening the medial control(Zhao, 2001, 2004a).For example, the Party's Propaganda Department-as the institution of directing media control-is still powerful and vibrant(Brady, 2006; Hassid, 2008); hard news stories-related to political and economic issues-are still under the supervision of propaganda department(Zhao, 1998; Lin, 2006); nation-wide ideological campaign among journalists and newsrooms are frequently launched by the central Party and local government; "political ban"or"directive of news reporting" are imposed on media when reporting major event; journalists who insist to touch the political minefield will be jailed; and newsroom that assigns the unacceptable news will be shut down and so on(Zhao, 1998, 2008). Pattern of political communication has not been changed, although there has been change in the content of propaganda in the media; Political control over media has not been changed, although there has been change in the Party's control strategies and mechanisms. Lots of Chinese renowned investigative journalists have

suggested that, whenever and wherever the authority has never loosened the control over media. What is more, controlling the media-as the Party's media management concept-has never been substantially changed. What has changed is merely how to control media, what contents produced by media should be controlled, and what contents should be propagated by media under different leadership.

### **1.2.2 Political-economy of Chinese media reform**

The characteristic of Chinese media system-blending of commercial and state-controlled factors- is so peculiar, evident, and profound in China that debates about the nature of Chinese journalism in the 1990s have revolved around the relative importance of political power and market liberation. Whether the participants have recognized it or not, they are engaged in a debate about the balance of politics and economics, which is precisely what political economy of communication all about.

Standing on one pole, there are those like Zhao Yuezhi who stresses very heavily the economic dimension of media development, particularly as mediated through class relations and media conglomeration(Zhao, 2000b,2001,2003,2004b,2009). Zhao's analysis largely centers on how the fusion of Party state power and capital power, achieved by state-engineered media conglomeration and incorporation of private and foreign media capital, serves the interests of the country's political and economic elite, while suppressing and marginalizing opposing and alternative voices. Rooted in the analytical

framework of 'economic' political economy, Zhao claims that China's media reform in the context of post-revolutionary China is a twist of developmental path *within* the country and its world-wide economic ascent in the era of neoliberal globalization *outside* the country. To serve China's market-oriented economic developments, media are pushed by the state for conglomeration and capitalization *within* the country and mobilized to champion Chinese nationalism *outside* country in its rising in the global symbolic arena. Within the country, media conglomeration, serving as the means to control chaotic free competition and limit the proliferation of minor papers, helps the party maintain its control (Ma, 2000; Branaman, 2009). In a much broader sense, Chinese media system is also in the nexus of world-wide economic rise and nation building. However, China's domestic economic developments and spectacular rise in the global hierarchy of economic power are at the cost of social justice and equality, which leads to the dramatic social stratification and class polarization on the one hand and mounting domestic social conflicts on the other. China's lower social classes call for making redistribution and social justice on the Chinese state, propelling it to fulfill its socialist promises *within* the country. Nevertheless, such voice is counteracted or even overshadowed by the voice of rising denationalized middle class in championing Chinese nationalism and bolstering the state power and legitimacy *outside* the country in the broader global symbolic arena. As China is further integrated into the global order of capital, members of China's increasingly middle class are bolstering the legitimacy of the Chinese state for

maintaining its economic privilege gained from the economic reform on the one hand, and waging struggles for China's territory integrity and national dignity to articulate their nationalism on the other. Such historically specific re-articulations of class and nation will continue to strengthen the state's capitalist order, while inevitably weaken its socialist promise and sacrifice the interest of China's lower social classes (workers and farmers)(Zhao, 2008).

To highlight the state's articulation with rising urban middle class, Zhao (2008) further points out that commercialized media outlets, the Internet, and mobile phones-the fruits of China's market reforms and the very means of China's re-integration into the global order of capital-have been largely used by overseas Chinese or the educated urban youths instead of the farmers and workers inside China. Media productions are used by the rising national or transnational middle class to express the multifaceted discourses of bourgeoisie nationalism to defend the Chinese state's sovereignty rather than empowering the lower class to release their misery or resentment. The intellectual property what middle class owns while the lower class lacks, Zhao suggests, is one of the central questions facing political-economy today. Following the same vein, some scholars (Branaman, 2009; Pei, 1994) even try to completely put Chinese media system into the analytical framework of Marx radical political economy. They argue that the capitalist base of Chinese media system has caused many commonalities with American media system, such as pro-capitalist ideology, the influence and constraints of advertisers on news sourcing and media secularization and

conglomeration. Therefore, Chinese media system is experiencing a transition towards U.S. media system (Branaman, 2009). The higher the level of marketization will lead to the greater the degree of media's self-liberation (Pei, 1994: 155).

Lee (2000a, 2001b) calls for serious caution for such New Left analysis, represented by Zhao (see also Branaman, 2009, Wang, 1998), which considers the rising global capitalist domination-with an emphasis of consumer culture and market fetishism-as the first enemy of popular-democratic journalistic practice. Lee negates New Left radical analysis in its overemphasis of capitalism and ignorance of powerful state in repressing media freedom. In addition, some radical writers merely accentuate market's erosion of democracy while deemphasize any relationship between the market and democracy or press freedom. I concur with Lee (2001b:91)'s trenchant critique that "how can market-oriented media contribute to the decline of democracy that democracy or public sphere in China does not seem to exist at all?" Therefore, it seems inappropriate to completely apply western radical Marxist analytical framework, which is economic oriented and concentrated, to the Chinese context, where socialist market economy has developed in such a way that closely tied to the political system.

On the other pole, there are those such as Brady (2005, 2006, 2008, 2009) who emphasizes the continuing importance of political pressures. They have a "lingering sense that China is still totalitarian in the classical sense that society

consists of atomized individuals marshaled only by the ruling parity into a state of constant mobilization”(Sparks, 2009; Brady, 2006:73). State traditionally maintains power by means of promulgating ideology (Brady, 2009). Therefore, the modern propaganda system, designed and established by the central Party and government, consists a complex multi-layered grouping of bureaucracies with many overlapping functions so that to construct popular consents on the one hand and to make sure the Chinese media still “sing as one voice” on the other(Brady, 2008:30). Similarly, other scholars such as Liebman (Lieberman, 2005: 8), argues that “Chinese media is an arm of the Party State and one of many Party-state institutions helping the authority to solve problem and expand authoritative influence”. Such analysis-considering Chinese media merely as a propaganda tool of the Communist Party- is still keeping in line with Mao’s cardinal doctrine of media. The strict control the central state maintains over all Chinese news outlets can successfully stifle the flow of news about any protest, riots, or potentially destabilizing government actions (Esarey, 2006; Hassid, 2008). While attention to the Party’s control mechanism should be appreciated, it is clear and no doubt that contemporary China bears little relationship to the totalitarian model (Sparks, 2009). The news media system in China is in a state of great flux, which is far from a monolithic and unified propaganda machine. Instead, it is practiced in a way characterized as “a multifaceted creature undergoing a process of rapid transformation, with different parts of the institutional body straining in different directions” (Zhao, 1998: 10).

According to Polunbaum(1990), four overlapping themes stood out in scholars' discussion of political constraints: the dilemmas of serving the Party and serving the people (Lee, 2001a), formal and informal control mechanism (Geremie, 1999; Link, 2002; Lynch, 1999), obstacles to covering and publishing human interest and investigative stories (Bandurski & Hala, 2010;Tong, 2011), and lack of journalistic initiative and autonomy (Polunbaum, 1990; Xu, 1994; Lin, 2010). Before the media reform, China's commandist media system is built upon one cardinal principle: the media are instruments through which the party can propagate the party line and party policies of its revolutionary struggle (Pan, 2000a). After the reform, theoretically, the media are supposed to cater to the readers' content preference. However, in an authoritarian country without press freedom, the media cannot be entirely operated according to the market principle. Journalists are expected to serve as bridge between the Party and the people. In theory, Journalists need to serve "upside" to the Party by informing the government with people's concerns and social problems and "downside" to the people through conveying the truth and fact (Yu, 2006; Zhao, 1998). Practically, however, officials and readers, standing in the opposite side, have different preference with news content. Officials prefer the media to report on active facet of government and guide the public opinion. Readers are particularly interested in human interest stories, breaking news of accident and disasters, and criticism of wrongdoings (Palunbaum, 1990). Consequently, readers and officials, as the two masters, coexist in such an uneasy way that accordingly pulled

Chinese journalists in two directions-people orientation and official orientation. A fairly strong ideological dissonance and professional dilemma about what they desire to report and what they have to report exist among Chinese journalists(He, 2000b; Burgh, 2003).Journalists are inclined to see themselves as scrutinizing government, representing the people to the government and vice versa. They also have developed an attitude toward professional ethics (Lin, 2010). However, during the news-making process, constrained by political authoritarianism, organizational conservatism, and individual secularism, they have to work as the transmitters of the political line of the government or the cultural prejudices of their commercial masters. The dilemma of “believing in one thing but forced to comply with another” has terribly disturbed many journalists, especially the mid-career and mid-ranking journalists, who benefit from their high-ranking positions in the established power structure(He, 2000b). For them, “to carry out their journalistic work according to the convention of the public discourse as defined by the Communist ideology is a habit, a routine, a ritual and a job” (He, 2000b). Despite the deviant ideas they have and the dissonance between their professional ideal and party ideology they suffer, they will not speak them out because such action may jeopardize their career and promotion.

Scholarship in this realm of discussing political management over media also contributes to the evolving of media control strategies (Polumbaum, 1994). There is no doubt that the state maintains draconian control over media. However, state control of the media has moved from expedient instructions to the

sustained and systematic efforts with a mixture of restrictive measures (Chen & Chan, 1998; Peng & Winfield, 2005). Instead of passing laws about the media, which would inevitably invoke touches upon the question that whether or not the National People's Congress should guarantee press freedom in the constitutional level, the state has opted to authorize relevant government departments to legitimate its preferred media structure by administrative 'regulations' (*tiaoli*), which only require approval by the State Council, China's cabinet. The state retains its power in appointing media chief editors on the grounds that major media outlets are still organizationally affiliated with the CCP and government institutions, the state retains its power in appointing media officials. As I will discuss later, the Chinese state has also established a comprehensive system of managing journalistic credentials, such as ideological training and campaign. In addition to the systematic and institutionalized control strategies, there are a lot of improvisational actions to control the news coverage not to challenge the Party red line. Those improvisational actions from different bureaucratic levels of propaganda department arrive at newsroom every day in the form of political bans and reporting directives on news stories and reporting angles. To be sure, contemporary Chinese media control is "highly uneven over time, space, and type of unit" (White, 1990). There is no longer such thing that "central government could effectively control media in different provinces and cities" (Sparks, 2009). Furthermore, the cycle of intermittent control and relaxation has been a constant feature of Chinese politics and of the party press.

Sometimes, the political control will be loosened, while sometimes will be tightened. However, in general, the time span of this cycle has obviously shortened, and the scope of controls has been intensified in recent years (He, 2000a: 115).

Although the emphasis on 'economic' or 'political' factor is powerful in explicating some aspects of Chinese media, the issue in China is far more than one of emphasis. In the post-communist country, there are no neat and clear divisions between what is "political" and what is "economic": the two are inextricably linked together (Sparks, 2000: 42). The development of the market with the vibrant state power is not external to each other, instead structurally coexisting between the two (Ma, 2000: 27). Therefore, deploying the theoretical lens of either the liberal pluralist or the radical Marxist cannot put the Chinese state-market regime into focus. For example, Stockmann(2012)has suggested how the simple dichotomy between economics and politics possibly conceals the real picture, which tends to be much more complex. In Stockmann's book, she has explained the particular configurations of media commercialization in China, which is closely related to the political power, have worked to the advantage of the Chinese Communist Party, most notoriously in strengthening the stability and thus the durability of the one-Party state. She also explained in what way the Party-State has successfully co-opted the market mechanism to maintain the even strengthen its control over news and public information.

The interwoven Party political control and market commercial forces-as part

and parcel of China's unique approach to development in post-Mao-should be and have been well captured by scholars in their study of Chinese media in last century(Chu, 1997; Hao et al, 1998; Zhang, 1993; Zhao, 1998). In discussing the interplay between media commercialization and state control, much of the writings-within the "state-versus-market" framework-depict China's journalism reforms as a process involving the two contradictory forces and tensions between "constraining forces" of political control and "liberal force" of market economy (Lee, 1995). In a nutshell, the argument ran that the economic needs of the media in building and retaining a mass audience would inevitably conflict with the demands of the party for detailed control media output (Sparks, 2010). The contradiction could be found in a series of articles with a contradictory title, such as "ambiguities and contradiction: issue in China's changing political communication"(Lee, 1994), "Dancing beautifully but with hands cuffed"(Lin, 2006), and "Commercialization without independence"(Chan, 1993). Those clusters of scholarship provided clear explication of multiple forms of conflicts, struggles, and negotiations created by the "state-led" and "market-oriented" reform strategies. The large number of scholarly discussions in the 1990s also revolved around a question haunting in the academic and professional field of Chinese journalism after the media reform--whether and how the media commercialization brought profound changes to the political landscape of Chinese media. Large amount of literature was narrowly limited to two points of argument: on the one hand, the breathtaking speed of commercialization pushed

the Chinese journalism to get rid of propaganda model and spare no efforts to draw larger audiences. By and large, commercialization and media proliferation have opened a rift in the Chinese government's control over news media. The competition for audiences provided media "a strong motivation to break a news story before the propaganda authorities can implement a ban on reporting it" (Shirk, 2011: 23). An equally important side of the story, however, was the harsh political environment that Chinese journalists still suffer. The media autonomy was still discouraged and substantial control over media content was still exerted to make sure that the latter would not contradict the party line. Thus, Chinese journalists were described as "dancing in shackles" (He, 2004; Lin, 2006) and investigative journalists were described as "conditional watchdogs on a party leash" (Zhao, 1998, 2000a). Caught between commercialization and control, journalists play a cat and mouse game with the censors, a dynamic that is vividly depicted in the literature (Shirk, 2011; He, 2003).

There is much more doubt, however, over the supposed contradiction between market and state control. After three-decade commercial development, media marketization seems not to propose any challenge to the tightly-controlled political communication as some scholars have conjectured (Freedman & Shafer, 2011; Lynch, 1999; Sparks, 2008; Zhang, 1993). What is worse, in some newsrooms, marketization has not triggered any systemic conflicts with political control, but preempted pressure for political reform in China-the media are not only subjected to the Party line ,but also to the party-market alliance for

achieving the maximum economic gains ensured by the Party (Lee et al, 2006, 2007). The Party also provided media and journalists with financial incentives to comply with CCP requirements for censorship and the dissemination of propaganda (Esarey, 2005). Stockmann(2012:6), in his latest book, adds to this trend of discussion as it examines the circumstances under which marketization of media benefits authoritarian rule and the mechanisms that tie state, media, and audiences together. While the media market potentially promotes the media to overstep boundaries of reporting, one-party regimes are at home with maintaining the capacity to enforce press restrictions with the help of news control institutions. Furthermore, considering the interplay between pull and push political and economic forces, it should not be neglected that political leaders are able to take advantage of market mechanism through its power. Therefore, the metaphor “tug-of-war”-assuming a game in which each contestant vies to pull the other to its own domain-to conceptualize the dual dynamic driving the Chinese media seems not inclusive. Two forces, sometimes are competed with each to shape landscape, sometimes however are colluded together to give pressure on media.

### **1.2.3 Political economy of Chinese investigative journalism.**

One of the most striking developments in Chinese journalism during the period of media reform was the rise of investigative reporting-news that exposes government corruption and social problems (Zhao, 2000a). Unlike the Anglo-American sense of investigative journalism, which is expected to function

as a watchdog in maintaining democracy and thought of taking an adversarial stance to the power, the rules of Chinese investigative journalism were rooted deeply within the political and social context it was born in-an authoritarian country with the tradition of political control over media (Ma, 2000; Branigan, 2010).

Chinese investigative journalism grew out of the Party's ideological tradition of 'criticism' and 'self-criticism', late developing as 'supervision by public opinion' or 'supervision by the media' (*yunlun jiandu*). In the Party's official media theory, media were seen as expressing the public opinion, which in turn was equated with the collective voice of the people (Zhao, 2000a). Those phrases described a political mechanism peculiar to China, through which the Central Party could identify the social problems and policy deficiencies, supervise the cadres and local governments, and discipline the delinquent officials (Zhao, 1998). Since Chinese journalists were used as the 'mouth-piece' of the Party, how can the central leadership get the 'negative' information from the media? Actually, journalists in China had the dual responsibility of writing notorious propagandist material for public consumption on the one hand and writing 'internal reference materials' for restricted circulation within the upper level circle of Party leadership on the other (Grant, 1988). The 'internal reference materials' had several characteristics: first, they were almost by definition investigative, negative, and involve sensitive and controversial stories such as crime, political corruption, and scandals; second, in most cases, only senior journalists, who were regarded

as the “mouth, ear, eye, and nose” of the party, were eligible to write such reports; third, those stories were published “in the internal publication system”, which followed “a strict hierarchical pattern”(Lin, 2010). Therefore, while the system was designed to help government officials solve social problems by keeping them informed about the problems, its unique information-dissemination ruled out the public attention and participation.

Just as scholars have pointed out, a number of factors in the broad political economy of the Chinese media have led to the growth of investigative journalism since the 1990s. These include commercialization and growing market competition among news outlets catering to the urban audience, the emergence of a new generation of enterprising and well-educated journalists, and journalists’ growing sense of the liberal watchdog model, coupled with the party-state’s anticorruption imperative and political agenda of maintaining legitimacy and defusing and containing social tensions (Zhao, 2008). First and foremost, media market competition became harsh in the mid-1990s. To gain financial support, Party organs launched their weekly appendix or metropolis newspapers. It was not rare that more than two metropolitan newspapers competed within a small geographical region, targeting at similar readership and advertisement (Tong, 2011:37). Against such backdrop, the Chinese media welcomed the new genres of journalism that could produce innovative news contents to attract different advertisers and readers. A predictable consequence of the intense market competition was that both journalists and newsroom felt

more obliged to concern the consumers. Investigative journalism-as the commercial strategies- was introduced to cater to the public's taste. Secondly, although commercialization has brought more financial freedom, the commercial imperative, practiced in then chaotic market order, also lead to sweeping corruptions. It emerged in the mid-1980s and, like a virus, swept every part of the country's media system, political institution and also state-owned enterprise(Zhao,1998). The widespread corruption stirred up people's dissatisfaction and steadily eroded popular support and credibility for the regime, which in turn promoted official to realize the necessity of media's watchdog role and importance of critical reporting. Therefore, investigative journalism was favored by the CCP. Through practicing media supervision over lower governments, local cadre, and local business managers, the Party expected to legitimize economic reform and to consolidate the Party's leadership. In such condition, media outlets also have become less willing to produce 'internal reference materials' but instead were eager to publicize their traditional investigative role and strengthen the public nature of their work. Two reasons could be identified under journalists' eagerness towards investigative journalism: the first one was journalists also felt increasingly urgent to address the growing problem of social injustice, corruption, and the wrongdoings of the powerful brought by the rapid marketization without democratization; the second one, relating to the economic concerns, was that the circulation of 'internal reference materials' generated neither public credibility nor commercial revenue (Zhao,

2001). Therefore, in the early 90s, the idea of 'supervision by media' was systematically promoted at both the official and media industry level in the early 90s. Accordingly, investigative journalism-as an organizational innovation within the traditional Party press structure-emerged and flourished in China and mainly applied to reveal hidden problems facing the Chinese society.

In the 1990s, some national party media took the lead in setting up special units to pursue 'supervision by media' and investigative journalism gradually became institutionalized practice in China. *China Central Television*, as a pioneer, launched two televisions the *Focus* in 1992 and *News Probe* in 1996, both of which were dedicated to exposing corruption and government wrongdoings. *China Youth Daily*, the flagship newspaper of the Chinese Communist Youth League, in 1995 established another notable investigative venture, *Freezing Point*. Such innovative journalism practices were soon widely mimicked and followed by many other media across the country, such as *Da He Daily* in Henan Province in the 1995, *Caijing* Magazine-a biweekly business and financial magazine launched by Hu Shuli in 1998, *Southern Weekly* and *Southern Metropolitan Daily* in the *Southern Daily Group* in Guangdong Province and so on (Tong, 2011; Zhao, 2000a).

Although Chinese investigative journalism also exercised oversight over the political and economic powers through exposing wrongdoings of individuals and organizations, by no means should it was equivalent to the 'Fourth Estate' in the Western sense of investigative journalism. The reasons were as follows: first,

despite being critical and revealing the “truth”, investigative reporting in the 1990s aimed at depicting a picture of “justice beating the evil side”, which was used to demonstrate the determination and capacity of the ruling CCP to punish the wrong-doers and to enhance the public’s confidence in its rule (Zhao, 2000a); Second, media supervision, together with administrative supervision and legal supervision, was an integral part of the party’s internal supervisory mechanism at every level, which should be integral to the party-state system of policing and controlling society rather than independent of it. In a sum, in sharp contrast to the Western liberal ideal of independent and even adversarial relationship between political power and watchdog journalism, Chinese investigative journalism, in its fancy, advocated a “constructive” approach and was closely connected to the Power (Bandurski & Hala, 2010; Cho, 2007). Therefore, Understanding China’s watchdog journalism requires the recognition that a quarter century of commercialization of Chinese media did not push the newspaper towards assuming a role adversarial to the state. Therefore, the emergence and mature of investigative journalism exemplifies how the government and media have learned to co-exist under the common goal of exposing local corruption and social problems.

Due to the paradoxical background of the Chinese media reform in 1990s-economic liberalization without political democratization-Chinese media system is full of contradictory and conflicting elements, including the fusion of Party control and market forces, the co-existence of Party organ and non-Party

organ media, the operation of non-Party organ media under the guidance of 'market principles' and 'political correctness', and service to 'political authorities' and to 'the public' at the same time, and so forth (Tong, 2011:25-28). Among these contradictions, the rise and boom of investigative journalism is "the most contradictory element" of the Chinese authoritarian media system. According to Tong (2011:28), the origins and practices of Chinese investigative journalism contradicted to its Western counterpart in two aspects:

"one is the authoritarian nature of the Chinese media system nurturing the investigative journalism in reality and the liberal and democratic political and social setting that investigative journalism should be born in; the other one is the expected function of Chinese investigative journalism as a tool of the ruling party to regain its legitimacy in particular and the adversarial nature of investigative journalism that rivals the power in general."

The paradoxical background that nurtured Chinese investigative journalism and the contradictions embedded in Chinese investigative journalism have led academic discussions to fall into several groups of dichotomous analysis. On the one pole, Chinese investigative journalists are considered in the realm of "lapdog on party leashes" rather than independent watchdog of civil society (Zhao, 1998, 2000a; Brady, 2008), because they avoid the most sensitive political and social issues, and their targets are limited to low-ranking officials (Zhao, 2008:253). Moreover, although a small number of Chinese journalists continue to challenge the mouthpiece/lapdog role and push the boundaries of what is politically

acceptable to publish, they do it out of fierce competition for audience and advertising revenue rather than their professional desires. Media are permitted to report problems on the premise that all issues under criticism already have a positive resolution. If occasionally there are brave editors teasing higher authority or criticizing social problems, it is actually *Xinhua News Agency* that have already announced the order to report such sensitive matters and the political correctness has been guaranteed (Brady, 2008:80).

In the other pole, however, scholars realize the actual situation of journalistic practice as complex, which is interwoven with news organization culture, local media ecology and broad political economy on the one hand and evolving over the time on the other. Therefore, they take sociology of news into the big political economic picture to discuss the specific practice of investigative journalists in the Chinese context (Sather, 2008; Tong, 2007, 2011, 2013; Tong & Sparks, 2009). Different from seeing Chinese investigative journalists as the agents of the CCP, scholars standing in this pole consider them as professional agencies. They believe that although inherent limitations from broad political atmosphere are still trammeling Chinese investigative journalists, Chinese investigative journalists illuminate a vigorous picture of investigative reporting (Chan, 2010; Cho,2010; Polumbaum & Xiong, 2008). Many examples could be found that investigative journalists have confronted powerful vested interests but still exposed significant social issues with political taboos. Having carried out those reports, which central Party and government believe in the necessity to conceal but journalists stick to

their responsibility to reveal, corresponding journalists, chief-editors and news organizations even paid a painful price for such practices. For instance, in May 2001, editor-in-chief Jiang Yiping and Qian Gang, and news director Zhang Ping were removed from the position by Guangdong Propaganda Department because of an in-depth coverage of the crimes of Hunan gangster Zhang Jun, which epitomized the widespread violence tolerated by the local government. *Southern Weekend* was blamed for damaging the party's efforts at good governance. In the 2003, then chief editor of *Southern Weekend* was again replaced by Zhang Dongmin, a cadre from the Guangdong Propaganda Department, because of violating propaganda discipline to reveal information about SARS. At that time, several journalists resigned or went on strike to protest excessive party involvement in newspaper operations. However, these actions turned out to be vain which cannot impede the party's intervention of *Southern Weekend's* reporting practice. In March 2004, chief editor of *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, Cheng Yizhong was dismissed, arrested and detained for five months, because of the famous case of Sun Zhigang's death. It was ironic that investigative reporting of Sun Zhigang was widely spread and the irrational laws resulted in the death of Sun was changed, however, the chief editor approving the investigative reporting going to the jail (Pan, 2009). In extreme circumstances, the Propaganda Department cancels the license of a newsroom or shut down several pages in a newspaper. For example, in 2003, *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century World Herald* was closed down for a series of controversial articles, including one

feature story of Li Rui, a former secretary of Mao Zedong, who advocated democratization of the CCP leadership structure. In 2006, *Freezing point*, a supplement in *China Youth Daily* was shut down since it published an opinion piece discussing how Chinese textbook manipulated historical facts to boost patriotism (Lin, 2006). Although Chinese media system has little hint for developing towards the western liberal model, Chinese journalists have been heavily influenced by Anglo-American ideas of independent and 'impartial' journalism (Zhao, 2011). By criteria of professionalism put forward by Hallin and Mancini(2004) in their path-breaking work *Comparing Media System-autonomy, consensus on standards of practice distinct to the journalistic field, and an ideology of public service*, it does make sense to talk about a form of professionalism in existing China's media system (Hallin, 2011: 22). Holding a different perspective, Burgh (2003) disagrees that Chinese investigative journalists adopts foreign models or could be an instance of 'westernization'. On the contrary, he pointed out that Chinese investigative journalists appear to be striving to realize roles as literati or intellectual, which is traditional to Chinese culture and aimed at enlightening its people and serving the country. Such analysis is problematic because Chinese journalists need to adapt their proactive to the Chinese context, where journalists are forced to place political compliance above professional values and goals if they are to keep themselves and their organization safe (Tong, 2007). Chinese investigative journalists' craft, although always negotiated with political pressure, does not mean that it has not

attempted to incorporate the professional criteria of western counterparts into their practices. To be concluded, it seems too confident to argue that the considering current Chinese investigative journalists in the sole propagandistic dimension or western professional dimension will miss its whole picture. Despite government attacks, Chinese investigative journalists have become increasingly unruly (Hassid, 2008). However, practices of Chinese investigative journalists are always keeping political safety above professional pursue in the country without press freedom.

Chinese investigative journalists are in a precarious situation. For investigative journalism, it presents a picture of alternating appearance of opportunities/progress and harsh situation/setbacks. For news organizations that are committed to the investigative reporting practice, they are also unstable in a sense that some of them insist while others gave up. The practices of Chinese investigative journalism benefits from the organizational choice of journalists values in a given local social-political context within the authoritarian media system. Therefore, the ever-changing face of Chinese investigative journalism exactly reflects how such practice has developed through constant negotiation between individual journalists, news organizations, and local political economy as well as the broader Chinese political economy. First, the political climate in China is on the swing all the time. The cycle of intermittent control and relaxation has been a constant feature of Chinese politics and the party press (He, 2000a). Therefore, progress and setback appear alternatively in the realm of Chinese

investigative reporting. State-media conflicts will become intense probably because of the increase of severe social grievance, the changes of political leaders, or the power struggles within the central leadership. For instance, the media experienced the plight during the five years between the Sixteenth and the Seventeenth Party Congress due to the emphasis of positive reports of media to build the social harmony by then party leadership. Generally speaking, when the political control loosens, Chinese journalism is a picture of remarkable progress and opportunities; when the political control tightens, it will experience setbacks and draconian periods, and some news organizations will even abandon the investigative reports. Secondly, within the same domestic environment, the path of news organizations targeting at investigative reporting shifts with time. Even if in the harsh time, some news organizations tend to facilitate the investigative practices, some others, however, tend to strain its control over news coverage. For example, in Tong (2013)'s ethnographic study, *Southern Weekend*, *Southern Metropolitan Daily* and *Da He Daily*, as the leading pioneers of investigative reporting, started almost simultaneously while developed along different trajectories after 2000s. *Southern Weekend* experienced its golden age from the mid-1990s to 2000. In 2002, however, it suffered a rapid decline in the quantity and quality of its reports (Bandurski & Hala, 2010). *Dahe Daily* launched the practice of investigative journalism in the 1996, however, gradually giving up its commitment to this kind of reporting in the early 2000s due to the increasingly tightening political climate and the more conservative organizational

culture. *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, initiated in the same year as *Dahe Daily*, persisted in investigative efforts even if facing the growing unfavorable political and economic situation (Tong, 2013). Therefore, despite of the same domestic environment, investigative journalism in the different news organizations and different provinces follow different developing path. Such variations originate from a triply-structured process of transformation in which interaction appears between individual journalists and news organizations, news organizations and factors in the local social context, and between locales and national social contextual factors (Tong, 2013). In a word, Chinese investigative journalism needs to engage in an ever-adjusting process to look for an appropriate position in a given local and national social context.

Just as I have mentioned above, Chinese investigative journalists are engaged in a constant war to find a balance between ‘making sure not to irk the political authority and ‘carrying out the reports that could annoy the powerful’. Therefore, many tactics were used by investigative journalists and news organizations to evade the controlling mechanism, to overcome the political constraints, and to meet their professional standards at the same time, such as “playing an edge ball” (He, 2000b), “guerrilla tactics” (Tong,2007,2011; Cho,2007) and “improvisational or none-routine activities” (Pan, 2000b, Pan& Lu, 2003).

### **1.3 A combination of political economy and media sociology**

Political economy of communication is uniquely positioned to provide

quality analysis of big pictures. It is sophisticated to address the nature of the relationship between communication system and broader social structure of society. This is however both its strength and its weakness (Schudson, 2000). With a particular interest in how economic factors and government policies influence media behavior and content, the specific link between the larger political economy of society and day-to-day practice is opaque in many circumstances in the analysis of political economy of communication. According to Schudson (1997: 10-11):

“Political economy of news is vulnerable to become a rather simple-minded notion that there is a ruling directorate of the capitalist or political powers that dictates to editors and reporters what to run in the newspaper, while being indifferent to the observable fact that reporters initiate stories and make their own decisions about what stories could be reported and how to report.”

To address the theoretical challenge, my thesis will make a coherent connection between particular empirical concerns that I drew from media sociology to the supporting theoretical foundations of political economy of communication. I will link the down-to-earth journalistic practices in a micro sense to the current political economy environment in a macro sense that journalistic practices heavily embedded in to look at how the macro factors influence the micro practices and how the micro agencies react to the macro structures.

Much work in sociology of news focuses on the news-making process and

the activities of news workers embedded in particular news organizations (Tuchman, 1978). Despite of focusing on people, this paradigm of journalism research has provided a wide-ranging research setting that targets “people and the interactions among them, the organizations and institutions in which they reside, and the structures by which their lives proceed” (Zelizer, 2004: 47). These micro studies are absolutely essential to a proper understanding of the network of individuals engaged in journalistic practice, but they offer only one half of a full analysis. The other half requires detailed investigation of the wider political-economy that shapes everyday action. It requires looking at how complex broader settings influence journalists’ practices and their patterned interaction with organizations and institutions that journalists are deeply rooted in.

With these premises bearing in mind, sociological inquiry of news has emerged as germane to the study of journalistic practices operated in the media organizations. Through a series of studies of journalists over decades and across countries, media sociologists have concluded that the organizational environment is the predictive of journalistic role orientation and behavior pattern. What journalists do in the news-making process is not random and automatic, but a habit, a ritual, a routine and a job, conditioned and programmed by the process of socialization in the newsroom (He, 2000b; Tuchman, 1978; Schudson, 1989b). Previous studies from media sociology scholars do provide us detailed analysis of how the organizational factors, such as working routines, informal

norms, requirements and guidelines, economic constraints, media ownership, newsroom structures and bureaucratic hierarchies, and political orientations have influenced journalists' perception and actions, news making process and finally news content. The fundamental concern underlying organizational approaches to news is the emphasis on constraints imposed by organizations (Breed, 1955; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Gieber, 1964; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Schudson, 1989b; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1972, 1973) despite the private intentions of the individual actors (Weaver et al 2007), and the inevitability of "social construction" of reality in any system (Tuchman, 1978). Concerned with the study of media institutions, journalists' practice and their relationship with broad social political environment, researchers working in this field have developed at least four different foci of study: institutional structures and role relationships; the political economy of media institutions; professional ideologies and work practices; and interaction of media institutions with the socio-political environment. In spite of different focus, researchers working in this area share the assumption that political, organization, and professional factors will impinge on the process of message production (Curran et al,1987: 64).

Borrowing the theoretical lens from political economy of communication and sociology of news, I will interpret the crisis of Chinese traditional journalism in general and investigative journalism in particular as a process in which certain practices are questioned, challenged and modified and certain new strategies are designed, implemented, and justified. In a broader theoretical framework, the

activities and justifications for the activities occur on a daily bases *within* media organizations, but the *outside* political, economic, and technological changes, what collectively known as social change, are vital for the internal adjustments *within* newsroom. In the political side, in 2013, president Xi Jinping, as the new generation of Chinese leadership, came to power. There is no doubt that the new leadership will implement new governing philosophy and adopt new strategies dealing with Chinese communication system. How the new leadership deal with media is closely related to the ever-changing phases of Chinese journalism. In terms of economic change, Chinese newspaper began to experience the shrink both in circulation and advertisement revenue since the second half of 2012. Newspaper began to feel necessary to make organizational reshuffle and adjust business strategy to survive the increasingly narrower profit margins that squeezed by the Internet, which snatched advertisers and readers from printing journalism. Regarding to the technological change, news organizations, all around the world are experiencing some kinds of adaptation to the digital environment, which has produced profound influence on redefining professional journalists' role and practices. However, as a particular mode of social change, I suggest that China's journalism crisis is unique in that they taking place within the general framework of the authoritarian country without media freedom. Therefore, different from western countries, where explain the crisis of newspaper merely as the technological enabled economic depression. Chinese media is evolving in what Lee called the "commandist media system", within which journalists carry

out their news-gathering and reporting activities (Pan,2000a:71). Even if discussing the crisis Chinese journalism is facing, we still can not only put emphasis on economic and technological factors while being blind to the political factors. To elaborate this thesis, I interpret evidence from field work in *Beijing News* in general and its investigative reporting team in particular, which is a liberal newspaper based in Beijing, with an expertise in investigative reporting and with an excellent performance in circulation and advertisement revenue. As I have mentioned above, much of my description will fall on the adjustment of journalistic routines and organizational structure, while closely connected to the ever-evolving political and economic texture that Chinese journalism takes shape.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The aim of my thesis is to understand what the crisis of Chinese newspaper is, how they closely relate to the political, economic and technological transformation in China and how news organizations react to the crisis. Therefore, my specific research questions are:

1) What specifically constitutes the crisis facing Chinese newspaper and investigative journalism?

1a) Is it the economic crisis brought by new technology siphoning of readers and advertisers? In addition to the new technology factor, are there any other factors that could attribute to the economic crisis of newspaper?

1b) Is it the political crisis caused by the tightened control over news reporting? If it is, how the political control influences the practice of newspaper journalists and investigative journalists.

1c) Is it the pressure to adopt or adapt to the converging media environment? In other words, how the rapid change of technology influences well-established newsroom culture and journalistic practice?

2) How Chinese printing newspaper in general and investigative journalism in particular respond to the above-mentioned crisis?

2a) How Chinese newspaper, investigative journalism team, and journalists response to the economic crisis?

2b) How Chinese newspaper, investigative journalism team, and journalists response to the political crisis?

2b) How Chinese newspaper, investigative journalism team, and journalists response to the technological impact?

3) How the organizational culture and journalistic tradition function in the newspaper's transformation in the crisis time?

3a) Does the crisis completely redefine the organizational structure and well-established journalistic working routine?

3b) Does the strategy used by newsroom and journalists in response to the crisis has a relationship with its particular organizational culture?

## Chapter Two: Methodology

Studying the Chinese newspaper in a time of emerging crisis could be successfully accomplished ethnographically. Rooted in the qualitative or naturalistic paradigm and based on my field-work in the newsroom, my study intends to provide an understanding of individual and organizational adjustment and adaptation to the broad political-economic crisis and interpret how the crisis and organizational adjustment mean for the subjects working in the natural setting.

Kirk and Miller (1986:9) suggest that ethnographic research is “a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language and on their own terms”. In the similar vein, “studying journalism ethnographically is driven by grounded questions that try to see the world through the news worker’s point of view, tracking primarily the complete decision-making process” (Zelizer, 2004:45). Thus, unlike experimental researchers, who often analyze and divide journalists (the variables they identify and measure) from the scholars’ view, ethnographers “place emphasis on examining how journalists behave when they are absorbed in genuine life experiences in natural settings and how journalists actually construe their own experience “(Merrigan & Huston, 2004: 257).

Methodologically, ethnography is aimed at producing a thick and naturalistic description of people and their culture through direct observation and extended

field research (Silverman, 1997, 2001). In conducting ethnography, scholars typically triangulate data to ensure plausible interpretations, which means using a combination of participant observations, interviews, archival documents and content analysis. By using some form of triangulation, scholars have opportunities to “compare interpretations of what things mean across more than one data source or data collection strategy”(Merrigan & Huston, 2004: 239).Therefore, my ethnographic research is grounded in information collected from participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Through participate observation, I acquires first-hand information. I also employ in-depth interview and document analysis to supplement my observations.

In the first place, my data is largely drawn from my participant observation in *Beijing News* since the late December 2013 to the March 2014. In theory, ethnographic observations usually involve researchers investigating a particular communication phenomenon by going out ‘into the field’ to observe people, interacting with them as they ordinary do in the process of carrying out everyday activities(Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Frey et al 2000; Patton, 2002). In practice, my role in the field was participant-observer, becoming fully involved in the social situation being studied. In this role, “the researcher attempts to become a full-fledged member of the cultural group in order to understand how it influences its members”(Frey et al 2000:268). Participant observation is therefore characterized by a period of intense social interaction between the research and the subjects, in the milieu of the cultural pattern (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975).

Accordingly, I went to the newsroom every day, engaging in the reporting practice, participating in the editorial conference, going out with journalists to conduct interviews. In addition to the at-work interaction, I conducted causal interaction through having lunch and supper many times with journalists. I kept a daily diary about how I went about my assignments and activities, how journalists interacted with each other, how journalists interacted with editors in the office, how weekly editorial conference proceeded, how journalists told the joke about 'stupid' officials in their eyes and how they complained when the reporting was killed by the authorities and so on. Particularly, I focus on whether and how journalists use new technology to carry out their reporting in the news-making process and how journalists react to the organizational reconstruction the newspaper is going through.

"Ethnographic study would be jejune without reference to other methods," such as in-depth interview and document analysis (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004:58). Firstly, Participant observation tends to be focused on the present situation of a concrete case while failing to construct the evolution of the case from its very beginning or ignoring to link the practice at given points in to the broad political, economic, social, industrial contexts. What this suggests, more importantly, is that any study of the media production and practice must recognize the impact of various social structures. Secondly, how to prove what I have observed in the field is historically significant rather than trivial or improvisational. Therefore, to obtain rich information about the particular practice in which one is interested in,

and better explore the relationship between micro-level daily practice I have observed and mezzo-level organizational culture and macro-level political-economy, I have conducted semi-structured, open-ended, and in-depth sometimes repeated interview with key informants. If participant observation allows me to see “what the members do and say in their setting”, interviews with key informants help me to “describe what members report about their activities in the setting and how they make sense of those actions and interactions” (Merrigan & Huston, 2004: 231).

To be sure, both participation observation and naturalistic in-depth interviews are typically used to understand particular social phenomena by “developing ‘intimate familiarity’ with research objects” (Frey et al 2000: 273; Hermanns, 2004). Cultivating the closeness and faithfulness could pave the way for making plausible interpretations. Although as a researcher and intern journalist, three-month in the newsroom is tight for me to develop a very close relationship with interviewees, it is enough time for me to build and maintain trusting relationship with informants in order to facilitate full and honest discourse. The trustfulness is established through either my contribution to their daily work or private communication off-work. For example, given that most of journalists are not good at reading English, I help them a lot to find English material and reporting; I help journalists to buy the train ticket in the Spring Festival through my personal relationship, when the train tickets are difficult to buy; I offered to stay on duty during the Spring Festival Holiday when most of

journalists have went back home, which helped me to win the journalists' trust and favorable impression; and I often had lunch and supper with journalists through which establishing the familiarity with journalists. The objective advantage for me to conduct the research in the *Beijing News* is the relatively small scale of the news organizations. All the journalists and editors, including the chief editors of each department and the newsroom, are working in the same floor. Investigative journalism team has fourteen front-line journalists and editors, who work in the same area, is convenient for me get familiar with them as soon as possible.

To be specific, I interviewed rank-and-file journalists of investigative reporting team where I did participate observation, editors of the team, journalists who has ever worked in the team, editors in the news organization's editorial panel and managers of the newspaper between January 2014 to March 2014. At the same time, I performed snowball interviews, especially among working journalists, executive editors, managing editors, and working journalists. In aggregate, twenty-four journalists and editors have been interviewed during my study, which includes 12 front-line investigative journalists from *Beijing News*, 7 editors or chief-editors of *Beijing News*, 2 managers (coming from different department) of *Beijing News*, and 3 journalists from *Southern Metropolitan Daily and Southern Weekends*. In order to protect the confidentiality of those correspondents, I replace their real names with informant #1, #2, #3 and so on. Every interviewee has been numbered accordingly in my study. However, when I

writing up the thesis, some interviewees are not shown in the thesis.

For each interviewee, I developed two sets of interview questions: one set is a group of standardized questions: individual backgrounds and working experience, routine working procedures, working principles for journalism they think highly of, their opinions on journalism and investigative journalism in the ideal sense, their viewpoints of being an investigative journalists in China, if they are satisfied about the current profession, and gratifications and difficulties they face in their work and so on. I took interview notes for each interview and indexed my notes by location and date. If participate observation is appropriate for collecting data on naturally occurring behaviors in their usual contexts, in-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individual's personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive issues are being explored. Overall speaking, there are different working routines journalists follow and different career path they have experienced. However commonalities also emerge. They are the most reflective journalists who have strong social consciousness, they favor fact over preconception and they show the resentment against the political control.

The interview was conducted at two stages: at work and off work. At work interview mainly provides me the definition of what journalists are doing and how journalists think of their job within a particular newsroom structure. I particularly paid attention to journalists' and editors' opinion about online discourses and their perspective about the employment of social media in the

daily life and journalistic practice. The casual conversations with editors and journalists are another source of data, which is an extraordinary finding for me. I have spent a lot of coffee breaks, lunch time, and supper time with journalists and editors. Such relaxed gathering and casual meeting, despite of sometimes with the presence of the chief editors, has resulted in many confessions about job disappointment and expectations, anxiety about the future of printing journalism, criticism about political control over media, complaints about the political ban on specific news topic and so on.

Finally but by no means insignificant, my research benefits a lot from document analysis. The document I encountered in my field work in the first place helped me gain background knowledge needed for understanding *Beijing News's* development and specific culture. Secondly, it provides me some credible, confidential and updated information about the Party's policy about traditional media and Internet. Thirdly, it also supplements my ethnographic evidence and helps me understand how participants are making sense of their situations.

Three types of archival documents are included: one is inner-circulated official documents arriving at the newsroom or privately owned by some journalists who have expertise in reporting political policies; the second one is formal document produced by the news organizations; for example, the proceedings of editorial conference, the plan of organizational adjustment, the historical record of *Beijing News*, the collection of annual best coverage, and the interview of annual best journalists and so on; the third one is journalists'

self-expression about daily work on the virtual space.

Inner circulated official documents I got access to in the newsroom provided a lot of credential material to explain the new policy issued and practiced by the current central government, which made up the dominant evidence of Chapter five. The document produced by *Beijing News* was very important part of my ethnographic study because they helped me to better understand how organization work on a day-to-day basis and the distinctive organizational culture and professional assumption attached to those textual resources. Although it is true that “documentary resources are not transparent representations of organizational routines, decision-making or professional diagnoses”(Atkinson & Coffey, 2006:58), they construct and share particular kinds of representations according to their own conventions which the collective organizational work largely dependent on. In addition, my thesis was also concerned with the self-presentation of individual journalists. It helped me to explore the journalists’ notions about the changing role and status of their profession. To be sure, being self-serving pieces of writing, they have limitations that should not be ignored, that is they are full of strong emotional tendency and they might have highlighted certain negative or unpleasant aspects of their journalistic experience in China. Nevertheless, those aspects-one sided and sometimes sentimental-would be important for me to understand their inner feelings, reflections and even dissatisfaction about being an investigative journalists in China. What is more, it would facilitate me to get a more complete picture of Chinese

journalism.

“Writing up and presenting what has been observed, heard and experienced is an essential feature and, at the same time, a challenge in ethnography” (Lüders, 2004: 228). Researchers need to transform the observation data to available linguistic resources written by authors, and to give a meaningful summary of their observations and recollections after the event. There is not always a clear distinction between the records of information as the actual database for ethnographies and the production of ethnographic reports on the basis of such records. In particular, there are no recognizable answers to the question of “how best to record the information gained and collected in the ethnography”(Lüders, 2004: 228), “what information they should contain and what structure they should have in order to serve as a basis for analysis”(Lüders, 2004: 228). The openness on the one hand encourages researchers to bring their subjective initiative into the project, but on the other hand proposes the challenge to researchers that how to make sure the rhetorical construction will not threaten the empiricism. Therefore, how to analysis the data collected from ethnography is also crucial for researchers.

In general, there are several principles involved in the data analysis of ethnography. Firstly, it should be an ongoing process that occurs throughout the course of a study. Unlike quantitative researchers, who collect all there data before making sense of them; naturalistic researchers “make sense of data as they are acquired, and acquire more data after making sense of earlier data”

(Frey et al 2000: 281). Secondly, researchers must learn to reduce the collected data in some way. It is impossible to present the large amount of data acquired from naturalistic inquiry, so the data must be reduced to the manageable amount. The reduction has two layers of meanings: “physical deduction and conceptual deduction”(Frey et al 2000: 281). The former means “selecting material that is most useful to include in the analysis”, and the latter means “using a conceptual scheme to help sort and categorize the data”(Frey et al 2000: 281). In other words, two factors will be taken into consideration when naturalistic researchers analyze the data: one is the serving the content development revolving around core argument and the other one is serving the theory development derived from the ethnographic study.

During my period of field work, the collection, analysis, and reduction of data are closely revolved around my research questions, which actually are slightly changing with the proceeding of my field work. I kept diary everyday to record the detailed scene, conversation, and information gained in my daily contact with journalists. According to my research proposals, which is written before I entered the field, I categorized the information into five groups: the autobiography of journalists, editors and managers I have met in the field; the information relating to the working routines and any practice related to the daily work; the information related to the organizational restructure addressing the political, economic and technological challenge; the policy issued by official department that could affect the practice of journalists and newspaper; the

subjective opinion, complaints, dissatisfaction revealed by journalists and editors in our casual contact after-work. My data has always been grouped, analyzed, and reduced to adapt to the requirement of research questions. During the process, I have talked with my supervisor timely to quickly modify the existing research questions according to the research object and the data gained from the field work.

When I wrote the thesis, I gradually determined to make a political-economy analysis. I designed to discuss what constitutes the crisis of Chinese newspaper and the newspaper deals with the crisis. The crisis, learned from the field work, comes from increasingly draconian political control, the impact of technological innovation and the shrinking advertisement and circulation. Therefore, in my endeavor to construct the integral content, the data is accordingly reduced and analyzed revolving around the three perspectives. Unproductive information has been deleted in order to obtain systematic description on the three themes. Furthermore, my data analysis is directed toward theory development.

I gradually determined to make a political-economy analysis. Therefore, the data analysis is also directed toward theory development. Specifically, the data will be aimed at analyzing how political and economic factors influence the organizational reshuffle and the adjustment of journalistic practice. Data relating to the political pressure and journalist's reaction to the political pressure will be grouped and analyzed as 'politics' and data relevant to the economic change and organization's response to the economic challenge will be grouped and analyzed

as 'economics'. Throughout the analysis, the theoretical concern underlying the phenomenon and information acquired from the field work is important for data deduction and arrangement.

My ethnographic study was a case study. The case-study approach enables me to gather specific data at the institutional and individual levels, and especially, to scrutinize the news production process from inside through observations and in-depth interviews. My research focuses on *Beijing News*, a print news organization in Beijing in China. Several reasons could be identified with respect to choosing printing newspaper and *Beijing News* as the object of my research. In terms of selecting newspaper, since it is the most tightly regulated form of media in China when compared with other media types such as broadcasting and the Internet. Therefore, the interaction and conflict between macro political control and micro journalistic practice will be more dynamic and evident. Print media also "makes an ideal candidate for analysis as any significant institutional changes in print media are likely to prove less temporary than other media types which constantly evolve according to changes in technology" (Lin, 2008).

Regarding to targeting at *Beijing News*, there are some good reasons. In the first place, co-established by two news organizations in two different places-*Guangming Daily* in Beijing and *Southern Daily Group* in Guangdong province- it is an 'avant-garde' newspaper practicing the policy of running a trans-regional newspaper. The trans-regional types of management endows *Beijing News* with distinctive features, for example the advantage in dodging the

political control. Second, *Beijing News* is one of the country's top five profit-making newspaper and therefore is of tremendous importance in understanding the economic downturn the printing newspaper in China is faced with. If one newspaper with excellent performance in the circulation and advertisement revenue is experience the economic difficulty, we can only image how other newspapers with mediocre economic performance looks like. Third, considering investigative reporting and editorial as the flag-ship products and selling points, *Beijing News* has an excellent team of investigative journalists. Last but not least, *Beijing News* has not attracted the scholars' attention and there is no existing academic research about the newspaper. We have a good knowledge of the model of liberal newspaper in China *Southern Metropolitan Daily* and *Southern Weekend*, for example their working routine, organizational structure, how they strategically manage their relationship upwards to the Party and downwards to the people; however, little scholarship until now is provided to understand *Beijing News*, which is the same as or even more liberal than *Southern Metropolitan Daily* and *Southern Weekend*. Furthermore, compared with newspaper located in Guangdong province, where is the 'frontier' of reform and opening up policy and thus values economic development, the *Beijing's* newspaper-situating in the capital and political center-pays special attention to political policies.

In communication studies, there is a strong tradition in researching media producers. Since the end of 1960s, media sociologists conducted participant

observation inside newsrooms to explore journalistic working routines and norms (Fishman,1980; Tuchman,1978), taken-for-granted work values of story choosing (Gans, 1979), decision-making process of news selection (Berkowitz, 1997) and ideological bias involved in news production (Gitlin, 2003) shape or influence what the news is. These studies, usually known as ‘sociology of news’ demystify the ‘news-making’ process and series of influential factors surrounding it, making it visible to people outside media circles. The original studies have become standard references in this area of research. Also the methodological approaches of these studies, which is “a strong emphasis on observation in the newsroom combined with qualitative interviews, document study, and content analysis”, has set an example for later research (Hjarvard, 2012:88).

In the past twenty years, scholars also have conducted newsroom observation and interviews in Chinese news organizations in different era, such as *Beijing Youth Daily* (Zhao, 1998), *ShenZhen Special Zone Daily* (He, 2000a), *Hang Zhou Television* (Durgh, 2003), *Southern Metropolitan Daily* (Tong, 2011), *CCTV* (Zhu, 2012), *Xinhua News Agency* (Xin, 2012). There studies reveal how newspaper managed to achieve the balance between being the Party’s mouthpiece and being a reader-oriented, popular, and general interest newspaper (Zhao, 1998; He, 2000a); how Chinese media and journalists manage the tension between economic reform and political control through improvising certain strategies beyond the official line (Pan, 2000b) or through nurturing the organizational culture supporting investigative reporting (Tong, 2011). The

existing scholarship throws light on the tensions, contradictions, and sometimes collaborations between market logic, party logic and professional logic existing in the Chinese media, most of which is financially profitably, operationally semi-autonomous, and yet ideologically dependent. While the 'hybrid status' of Chinese media is well explored, it lacks the consideration of new technology. It could be understandable, because the impact of new technology on Chinese traditional media began to emerge in 2011. Therefore, my discussion of printing journalism in general and investigative journalism in particular could bridge the academic gap.

### Chapter Three: Brief introduction to *Beijing News*

In November 2003, *Beijing News*, as the first example of trans-regional newspaper promoted by Chinese government, was co-invested and run by *Nanfang Daily Group* and *Guangming Daily* (a nationally distributed central party organ). *Guangming Daily* accounts the 51% market share and *Nanfang Daily* accounts the 49% market share. The *Beijing News*-under the slogan of “responsible for reporting everything”-committed itself to “guard the interests of the country and people, appeal to rationalism, check against administrative power, pursue truth and virtue, defend public justice, and expose the ugly and evil” (Cao, 2013 : 213). The then editor-in-Chief of *Southern Metropolitan Daily* (a daily tabloid newspaper belonging to the giant *Nanfang Daily Group*) Cheng Yizhong, also serves as the editor-in-chief of *Beijing News*. According to Cheng, “the value orientation of the newspaper should be concerned about the people’s interest and empowering the people”(Cao, 2013: 214). Such value orientation has put Cheng and journalism practice he has advocated in direct conflict with actually existing bureaucratic culture, which centers on the use of news media for guiding public opinion in a political-correct direction and serving economic construction and social stability. 165 journalists and staff from *Southern Metropolitan Daily* were introduced to *Beijing News* in its establishment. Particularly, benefited from the participation of 54 talented *Southern Metropolitan Daily’s* journalists<sup>iv</sup>, *Beijing News* from the very the beginning

cultivates a professional culture and a liberal editorial orientation that has committed to push the boundaries of what is politically permissible.

Before 2014, *Beijing News* is an 80-page daily newspaper, with a self-proclaimed estimated daily circulation of 800,000 (*Beijing News Official Website*, 2003). It possesses nearly 30 percentage shares of circulation in Beijing's newspaper market, ranking second only to *the Beijing Evening Newspaper*, which occupies the 33 percentage shares of circulation (CCMC, 2013). More than 60 percentage of circulation comes from the subscription<sup>v</sup>(*Beijing News*,2009). The paper gained an instant commercial success. Circulation climbed from less than 500,000 the whole year in 2005 (CCMC, 2006), ranking six in Beijing's newspaper market with a less than two percentage market share, to daily circulation of 648,000 in 2008, ranking four in Beijing's newspaper market with 17.96 market shares (Sohu Media, 2013), and to daily circulation of 800,000 in 2013, ranking two in the market with 30.61% market share (CCMC,2014) (see figure 3.1). In general, Beijing's Newspaper retailing competition is highly centralized on *Beijing Evening Newspaper*, *Beijing News* and *Jinghua Times*, which account for 87.92% market share in total. With respect to the subscription market, *Beijing Evening News* and *Beijing News* account for 58.22% market share and *Beijing News* fell behind 2.14% of *Beijing Evening News* (CCMC, 2014).

It created an economic miracle in the Chinese newspaper by earning a profit in the third year of its operation. The initial investment of *Beijing News* is 15 million (Zhang & Shen, 2013).Its profit margin increased spectacularly with a 20%

annual growth rate from 2003 to 2010 (Luo, 2009). For example, profit margin increased from 30 million in 2007 (Sohu media, 2013) to 50 million in 2008 (Luo, 2009).

*Beijing News* has cultivated a group of loyal readership. Among the newspaper's readers, more than 50 percentages have subscribed the newspaper for five-year old and above ("A review of Chinese newspaper", 2013). *Beijing News* is targeted at the so-called "three-high" readership: high education (with the bachelor degree and above), high income and high consuming ability (*Beijing News*, 2009). The reader's profile is as follows: 78 percent of the readership is between the ages of 17-44; 57 percentages are with college education and above; dominant readers are management personnel or officials; and the reader's average monthly income is 4000RMB and above. All of them indicate that the readership belongs to the urban resident strata with relatively high consuming power ("Reader structure", 2010).

According to the survey of subscriber's satisfaction towards newspaper, reader satisfaction of *Beijing News* is higher than that of other major commercial newspaper in Beijing. 44% *Beijing News's* subscribers show "very satisfied" about the newspaper and 52% subscribers show "satisfied" about the newspaper. By comparison, there are 35%-40% subscribers of *Beijing Evening Newspaper* and *Jing Hua Times* show "very satisfied" about the newspaper content (CCMC, 2013).

Since its establishment in 2003, *Beijing News* has experienced burgeoning

advertisement revenues, which has nearly tripled from 4.5 million to 18.9 million. In accordance with *Beijing News's* readership, the advertisement focuses on the brand and product with high commercial value, such as housing property, car, education, tourism, financial product and fashion and luxuries, all of which in turn bring about high advertisement incomes.

Compared with the consistent excellent performance in overcoming economic competitions, *Beijing News* experienced ebb and flow in resisting the political pressure. In retrospect, *Beijing News* experienced four-time setbacks. In 2003, Editor-in-Chief Cheng Yizhong was imprisoned because of the investigative story condemning the country's detention law in the case of Sun Zhigang. Sun was a college migrant worker who was taken into custody when he found job in Guangzhou city, Guang Dong province, because he did not bring a residential permit with him. Without the residential permit, individual was considered as illegal resident in the city different from his/her registered permanent address. Sun was beaten to death in custody at the Guangzhou Detention Center. *Southern Metropolitan Daily* took the lead to expose the official malfeasance. On 25 April, 2003, titled by "The abnormal death of Sun Zhigang, who was detained in the asylum", the report was framed against the irrational detention and repatriation system. Established in 1982, the system was an administrative process, based on which the police in China could detain people if they did not have a residence permit or temporary living permit. Police also has the right to return them to the place where they could legally live or work. In general, the

asylum was used to detain migrant workers, vagrants, beggars, petitioners, and criminals. Coverage of *Southern Metropolitan Daily* is just questioning the constitutional basis of detaining the migrant workers who merely intend to find jobs in the new city despite of without the residence permit or temporary living permit. Reporting has caused a national outrage and mounting public pressure that forced the central government to quickly abolish the regulation controlling the movement of migrant workers in the late 2003. Although the coverage has attracted wide-spread attention and led to the unjust regulation abolished, the chief editor Cheng Yizhong who agreed the publication of news coverage was dismissed from the position and jailed in prison. Cheng's dismissal was conjectured as criticizing China's constitution, which is the minefield or redline that Chinese journalists by no means could touch<sup>vi</sup>.

In 2005, the second generation chief editor Yang bin and deputy chief editor Li Duoyu were compulsively dismissed because of the investigative reporting on Dingzhou Event in Hebei province. In the case, six farmers were killed and forty eight others were injured in the process of illegal land expropriation for sake of building power plant. The violent treatment against farmers who protected their land turned out to be permitted by the local officials. On 12 June, 2005, titled by "200 young men dressed in uniforms and armed with hunting rifles and swords assaulting Dingzhou, killing six and injuring forty eight", the investigative reporting of *Beijing News* targeted at the collusion between government and businessmen. The coverage also criticized the illegal land

expropriation prevailing around the country, which was in the name of boosting the economic development however at the cost of peasants' interest. In theory, according to the central government's land expropriating system, expropriating the farmers' land for the sake of economic transformation from agricultural economy to the industrial economy should make large number of compensation for the farmers. However, there are huge discrepancies between what central policy regulates and how local government executes. The collusion between businessmen and government leads to grabbing the peasants' land however providing meager compensation. Investigative reporting of *Beijing News* further questioned the unhealthy pattern for promoting economic development in the local areas and central government's overemphasis on the rise of GDP. The reporting perspective definitely challenged the bottom line of the CCP. After the reporting came out, the high-ranking officials of Hebei province were dismissed and punished. However, the chief editor Yang bin and deputy chief editor Li Duoyu of *Beijing News* were also removed from the position.

What was worse, the punishment over *Beijing News* did not stop at firing two editors. After this turmoil, *Nanfang Daily* was required to transfer the management and editorial to *Guangming Daily*. As a result, nearly one-third of journalists, coming from *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, left the newspaper. Meanwhile, journalists working in *Guangming Daily* were encouraged to work in *Beijing News*. Four experienced journalists in *Guangming Daily* were assigned by Central Propaganda Department to serve as *Beijing News's* deputy editor-in-chief.

The flourish of investigative reporting in *Southern Metropolitan Daily* and *Beijing News* is largely benefited from Guangdong government's protection, which has the liberal and open minded governing tradition (Lin, 2008). Dismissing the *Southern Metropolitan's* editorial management was a great deprivation for *Beijing News*, because it is equal to remove the Guangdong 's protection over the newspaper. Without the protective umbrella, *Beijing News's* capacity to dig out sensitive issues will be definitely weakened<sup>vii</sup>. The crackdown provoked the walkout of almost 100 journalists protesting the firing of chief editors, which however failed to prevent the Propaganda Department's tightened control over *Beijing News*.

The third-time crisis happened in 2010, when the chief editor of *Guangming Daily* was replaced by the deputy director of then State Administrative of Radio, Film and Television. The replacement was resulted from *Beijing News's* review of "top ten cases influencing constitution in 2009" on 4 January, 2010. The review, relating to the specific constitutional provisions to the ordinary people's daily life, discussed the deficiency of some constitutional provisions and questioned the capacity of constitution in protecting ordinary people from authoritative power. This coverage again touched the bottom line of the Party that the constitution is not allowed to be discussed by media, let alone being challenged by journalists. As a result, the director of then SARFT was directly assigned to *Beijing News* to censor the news coverage. The newly appointed chief editor of *Guangming Daily* established a censorship group in *Beijing News*, responsible for approving the

reports before publishing and evaluating the reports in everyday editorial conference. The censorship group shared the same office space with journalists, which seriously interfered the journalists' autonomy. The political control over *Beijing News*, coming directly from the central government, once again tightened.

In 2013, *Beijing News* experienced the fourth political crisis. *Beijing News* was completely independent from *Guangming Daily* and *Nanfang Daily*, and taken over by Bureau of Newspaper and Publishing of Beijing. 46 percentage market shares, equivalent to three billion RMB, were transferred to Bureau of Newspaper and Publishing of Beijing. Consequently, the newspaper was degraded from ministry (central) level to bureau (provincial) level. Such degradation is resulted from over-brave investigative reporting and will in turn lead to newspaper's fewer possibilities of getting access to the central-level political resources and less capacity to cover sensitive issues<sup>viii</sup>. At the night before takeover ceremony, informant#14, acting chief editor of *Beijing News*, expressed her nostalgia and her concern about the newspaper's future:

"Eight years ago, Cheng Yizhong, led a group of elite journalists establish *Beijing News*, which has been famous for its most critical reporting and commenting on social problems. The newspaper followed the blood of Southern journalists, who distinguished themselves with professional standard. Eight years later, will the new leader, who is probably more conservative and pro-Party treat the newspaper well?<sup>ix</sup>"

The degradation of *Beijing News* indeed weakens its ability to carry out some coverages. Informant#11, the investigative journalists in the team, explained to me that the important strategy to interview local officials, especially the county-level and town level officials who know little about *Beijing News*, is telling them *Beijing News* is a central-level newspaper that could attract the central government's attention. The central-level status could force the officials feel intimidating and thus dare not to ignore the journalists' interview. After the degradation, *Beijing News's* capability to getting access to the central-level political resources is weakened and local official's fear of its interview and coverage also declined.

## **Chapter Four: Economic Crisis of Chinese Newspaper and *Beijing News***

As U.S. markets turned out to be the eye of the hurricane during the recent newspaper crisis, I will first compare the essential components of the market to the Chinese situation in order to better understand the different facet of challenges the Chinese newspaper industry faces. In U.S., traditional journalism platforms such as print and television are largely supported by advertising, and secondarily by audience revenues (mostly subscriptions). In 2012, print advertising fell for a sixth consecutive year, and not just a little-it dropped \$1.8 billion, or 8.5%, in a slowly improving economy (Pew Research Center, 2013a). Print newspaper advertising revenue was just 45% of what it was in 2006 (Nienstedt & Lis, 2013:43). Compared to the advertising plunging, circulation of newspapers shrank at a much smaller pace. It has lost 15 percent from 2005 to 2009. Thanks to the increase of newspaper price, the shrink in the circulation does not significantly influence the circulation revenue. In general, they fell by 6 percentage (Nienstedt & Lis, 2013:44). In 2012, the Sunday newspaper circulation in American even raised 0.6%, which brought newspaper organizations a modicum of optimism for the first time ever since the deep recession that began in 2007 (Pew Research Center, 2013b). U.S. publishers also cut their editorial staff by saving the expenditure. Employment of full-time professional editorial staff,

which peaked at 56,900 in 1989, had fallen by 29% by the end of 2011 (Pew Research Center, 2013c). In 2012, the newsroom workforce remained below 40,000, which was for the first time since 1978 (Pew Research Center, 2013d). From 2003 to 2012, the American Society of News Editors documented a loss of 16,200 full-time newspaper newsroom jobs while Ad Age recorded a decline of 38,000 magazine jobs, which includes all jobs for the entire consumer magazine sector. Such job cuts continued in 2013 and early 2014. Since the fall of 2013, there has been a dramatic and conspicuous migration of high-profile journalists to digital news ventures (Pew Research Center, 2013e).

Compared to the American newspaper, Chinese newspaper got less into trouble. Chinese newspaper began the economic recession later than U.S. and advertisement retreating from printing newspaper was less dramatic. Starting from 2011, Chinese newspaper's circulation and advertisement revenue began to decline. According to the Blue Book of Chinese Media, the newspaper advertisement fell by 7.5% in 2012<sup>x</sup>, which turned out to be the hardest hit since the records starting from 1978 (see figure 4.1) (Zhang & Zhang, 2014). Printing advertising losses continues in 2013. The advertisement revenue decreased by 8.3% in first three quarters of 2013. The amount of advertisement published on the newspaper decreased by 18.6% in the first half of 2013 ("Newspaper advertisement drop", 2013), which suggests that corporations are shifting their advertising dollars to other platforms. Among China's top thirty cities with respect to newspaper advertisement revenue, twenty-seven cities declined in the

advertising in 2013. Only three cities left-Xining in western Qinghai province, Gansu in western Lanzhou province and Ningbo in costal Jiangsu province-increased in the advertising. There are eighteen cities whose advertising decrease is more than ten percentage (“Newspaper advertisement revenue”, 2013).

In contrast to the plunge of newspaper advertising, there is a burgeoning Internet advertisement revenue and sustainable growth in television advertisement revenue. In 2012, Internet advertisement revenue surpassed printing media, next to the television advertisement income (see figure 4.2 & 4.3, quoted from DCCI, 2011). The Internet advertisement market scale in 2013 is 100 billion, increasing by 37% compared with the 67 billion in 2012 (Yiguan Company, 2013). In the first half of 2013, television advertisement revenue increased by 11.3% (“The shrink in newspaper revenue”, 2013).

Regarding to the newspaper circulation, newspaper begins to experience the decline in 2012. The retail sale of Chinese newspaper drop by 3.60% in 2012 and further decrease by 11.51% in 2013 (See figure 4.4) (Tian, 2013a; Zhang & zhang, 2014). The shrink in newspaper retail revenue is particularly evident in Chinese costal eastern province (Tian, 2013c). Compared with the drop of newspaper retail revenue, the subscription remained relatively steady over the past two years (Tian, 2013a).

In a time of nation-wide newspaper economic downturn, *Beijing News's* newspaper market can't get rid of dipping. Since the second half of 2011,

Beijing's Newspaper market began to experience the decline both in circulation and advertising (Tian, 2013b). For example, circulation revenue in the second half of 2013 drop by 8.84% compared with first half of 2013 and drop by 11.3% compared with 2012 (See figure 4.5, quoted from Tian, 2013c). The shrink in circulation revenue should be largely attributed to the decrease of retailing revenue, since the subscription revenue of 2013 stayed close even for nearly two years. In 2013, advertisement revenue of Beijing's Newspaper decline nearly 10% compared with 2012 ("Newspaper advertisement revenue", 2013).

Just as I have mentioned earlier, *Beijing News* achieved an economic miracle. From its establishment in 2003 to 2008, its circulation kept 20% growth for five consecutive years. It made a profit three years after its establishment. In 2008, the advertisement revenue arrived at nine billions, increased by 33% compared with 2007. In 2009, impacted by the economic crisis, advertisement revenue of Beijing's printing media dropped by 25%. However, *Beijing News* achieved 17% growth. In 2010, *Beijing News* experienced a remarkable increase in the advertisement revenue and circulation revenue, which was considered as the peak of the newspaper. Advertisement revenue-with a total number of 1.44 billion-increased 32% and circulation increased 11.93% (Dai, 2010). Nevertheless, since 2011, *Beijing News* began to experience the economic crisis. Its advertisement revenue suddenly increased insignificantly. Especially in 2012 and 2013, the advertisement revenue increased less than 1%. Considering the growing problem of currency inflation, the advertisement revenue was indeed

declining (see figure 4.6, summarized from my interview). Dai Zigeng, president of *Beijing News*, admitted that the advertisement revenue of 2013 in fact slid 4%. Dai said, he felt the economic pressure from 2012 and such pressure became evident in 2013 (Dai, 2014). Considering that *Beijing News's* advertisement revenue has been growing with a rate of more than 20% in the past nine years, 4% decrease causes the big shock in *Beijing News*. The consistent excellence in advertising in the past nine years highlights the steep decline of 2013, even if the number seems not dramatic.

To be concluded, the main concern of this chapter is with the undergoing economic changes of Chinese newspaper industry. As the U.S. newspaper market has been the focus of recent discussion-whether professional or academic field-concerning the ongoing newspaper crisis, it begins with a brief examination of shrink in advertisement revenue and workforce in American newspaper. Compared with American newspaper industry, the economic downturn of printing journalism arrived later in China. Until 2011, Chinese newspaper began to suffer from the decline of newspaper circulation and advertising. Furthermore, it is less steep in the newspaper's loss of advertising and circulation. However, in the nation-wide poor performance of newspaper advertising revenue, *Beijing News*, which has ever achieved an economic miracle and was famous for its remarkable increase in the advertisement and circulation revenue ever since its establishment, can't get rid of advertising dip. Although different from American newspaper, there is no such thing in China that newspaper is entirely

independent from political power, almost Chinese market-oriented newspapers are increasingly obliged to conduct as commercial enterprises. The primary function for any function of a commercial medium, whether it is cultural, political, or social, is that it should be “an economically viable venture”. “Unless the economic condition is met, it has no long-term future”(Sparks, 2003: 307). Therefore, in a similar fashion and in the economic realm, question emerges in Chinese newspaper industry as how to regain the lost revenue or how to create new business to compensate for the loss. The question becomes particularly tentative in China for at least two reasons. In the first place, Chinese newspaper is at the very beginning of economic changes, which leaves newspaper more time to adapt to compared to the United States. Although the economic downturn seems not as dramatic as the United States, it by no means insignificant. Some news organizations have shut off before making an adjustment. Some others are groping for new strategies to react to the emerging economic challenge. In the second place, the economic challenge is largely resulted from technological innovation and its absorption of readers and advertisers. However, the technology changes rapidly. Therefore, the rapidity of technological innovation makes the newsroom difficult to make adjustment and adaptation. At the same time, it exacerbates the difficulties for scholars to speculate which reform strategies are useful to help printing journalism survive the economic challenge within short-time span. My following chapters will focus on the organizational reconstruction of *Beijing News*, which in my opinion as the Canary in the Coal

Mine produces the quick reaction to its shrink in advertisement and circulation revenue.

## Chapter Five: Political Control over traditional Journalism in China

Taking a *processual* perspective and rooted in the journalists' daily practice, the chapter will explore the relationship between the increasingly tightened political control over media in Xi's regime and the crisis of printing journalism. Existing scholarship, most of which is drawn from case studies, either focuses on political control mechanism or journalists' resistance against the control. However, those studies, attentive to particular cases in one time point, invariably neglect the on-going negotiation, contradiction and tension between control mechanism and journalists, and the various impacts of political control on journalism in journalists' daily practice. In this chapter, I will explain how political control not only leads to the shrink of the space for critical coverage, but also results in the economic loss of news organizations and individual journalists. The political and economic pressure working together poses the crisis for printing journalism.

Exemplified by *Caijing* magazine's muckraking on the SARS epidemic and *Southern Metropolitan Daily's* reporting on Sun Zhigang case, 2003 witnessed the peak of Chinese investigative reporting practice. *Caijing* magazine broke the political ban on SARS epidemic and insisted to publish its in-depth investigation of the disease from all angles through dispatching reporters to Beijing hospitals, research labs and government agencies. *Caijing's* coverage has forced the

government to shift from “cover-up of SARS to full disclosure”(Hu, 2011). Journalists then have expected that government could learn that suppression of the news media and of reporting the truth could be detrimental to public welfare. In the same year, *Southern Metropolitan Daily* broke the story of the death of Sun Zhigang. *Southern Metropolitan Daily* took a lead in voicing opinion questioning Sun’s death and framing it against the ‘detention system’. The story, which immediately spread to the Internet and was widely reported by media outlets, created a national uproar. Eventually, the detention system was abolished. Because the issue was dominantly framed as ‘the rule of law’, ‘arbitrary administrative power’ ‘police brutality’, and ‘the basic civil rights of individual citizens’, Sun’s report was considered as the landmark in Chinese investigative reporting history.

The two cases seemed to be a signal that the political control in China became loosened. They also illuminated the hope for Chinese journalists to bring about social change. However, the optimism was short-lived. Since 2003, the party-state ramped up its control of the news media, which since then has never loosened. Hu Jintao’s leadership-under the slogan of ‘establishing the harmonious society’-was marked by an overriding emphasis on social stability. Hu’s vision of building harmonious society was primarily aimed at achieving balanced and sustainable development. Desire for harmony was obviously a response to the accumulating disharmony. Chinese rapid economic development was “bifurcated along rural-urban divide, which was further compounded by

income gaps within the rural economic condition and profound ethnic and regional difference”(Zhao, 2008: 76). The uneven development brought about poverty, unemployment, income disparity, sharp conflicts between the rich and the poor, rampant government corruption, abuse of power, violations of individual right, environmental degradation and also various kinds of social crisis. As a result, in the past few years, the collective resistance to the social problems has dramatically increased both in scale and intensity. It is estimated that in just fifteen years the number of mass incidents has increased ten times—from 8700 in 1993 to 180,000 in 2011 (Yu, 2013).

In response to the accumulating resentment, Hu applied rude measure to minimize social unrest. Building harmonious society was not achieved by political reforms to solve those unintended social problems in nature, but by repressing the resistance of unprivileged and keeping it silent on the surface. In line with Hu’s governing strategy, the leadership has tightened control over societal elements that could destabilize society. For example, incidents of social unrest were being carefully handled and contained at the localities, and foreign elements that could subvert Chinese regime were closely monitored (Lye,Wang,& Zheng, 2005). Local citizens who have come to Beijing to petition central officials about their grievances with local officials will be jailed illegally in detention centers on the outskirts of Beijing. According to some reporting, in the Hu’s second term, the investment used for repressing the destabilizing factors (including dissents, collective protests, individual petition and criminals) has been

higher than military budget. Since 2009, the expenditure invested in preserving social stability has risen for three consecutive years to more than 7690 billion yuan. Building the 'harmonious society' was less about developing a certain kind of society but more about fighting against those who could challenge the status quo. In such situation, ideological controls over media have correspondingly become stricter and investigative reporting targeting at exerting oversight on the functioning of government agencies and revealing social problems were particularly discouraged. The coverage of sensitive issues was strictly restrained: "some of them were completely avoided, some were to be reported in a brief without extensive investigation, and some were reported according to Xinhua 'general copy' only" (Zhao, 2008: 25). The imperative of controlling the exposé stems from the fear that it might stir up serious popular dissatisfaction and destabilizing social activities. The strident expression of grievance-in a collective manner-will not only threaten the economic development, but also challenge the Party's rule. Nevertheless, China's leaders are "too nervous to risk ceding the tight control of investigative reporting"(Shirk,2011: 7). Therefore, throughout President Hu Jintao's rule, the propaganda department has engaged in a highly crackdown of political journalists and the regime has created a generally repressive atmosphere for the Chinese news media (Hassid, 2008; Sausmikat, 2006).

In January 2013, Journalists from *Southern Weekend* went on strike to protest against political censorship, which was resulted from the forced change

of New Year's Special Editorial by propaganda officials without imparting editors. *Southern Weekend's* New Year Editorial is the newspaper's tradition, which is published in the New Year's Day that calls for solving several salient social problems featuring last year. Titled Dream of China, Dream of Constitutionalism, the New Year Editorial of 2013 appealed to realize the constitutional protection of civil rights. However, the discussion of constitutional issue on the newspaper is not yet allowed by the Party. Judged as offensive coverage, propaganda officials of Guangdong province, bypassing the *Southern Weekend's* editors, directly revised the editorial and turned it to the unctuous praise of Chinese Communist Party. Such direct interference by propaganda department ignited the outrage of journalists in *Southern Weekend*. In fact, journalists' backlash against censorship peaked in the New Year's Special Editorial case, however accumulated gradually because of propaganda department's frequent and direct intervention and censorship since 2012. According to *Southern Weekend's* journalists, at least 1034 reports had been killed in 2012 (Qian, 2013). After the turmoil, a lot of journalists left *Southern Weekend*, making the reporting team nearly collapsed. What is worse, in 2013, propaganda department continued to exert untempered intrusion of media freedom, attempting to bring the 'liberal tradition' of *Southern Weekend* and *Southern Metropolitan Daily* to heel. Censorship team was established by officials from central propaganda department and Guangdong provincial propaganda department to take charge of checking and approving every report. Members of censorship team sit in the middle of journalists in the

editorial room, staring at journalists' and editors' work every day<sup>xi</sup>. In the end of 2013, another group of journalists left the *Southern Weekend* and a lot of journalists left the *Southern Metropolitan Daily*<sup>xii</sup>.

The unrest of *Southern Weekend* and *Southern Metropolitan Daily* in 2013 could provide us a glimpse of the continued tightened policy over Chinese printing media after Xi taking power since November 2012. To enunciate the question more clearly, this chapter will look at the issue of how new leadership exerts political control on traditional journalism and how such political control impacts on investigative reporting team and investigative journalists. Previous studies have given a heroic description of how Chinese journalists push the envelope to uncover wrongdoings and how news organizations-with a commitment to investigative journalism-have mastered the high art of navigating the Chinese media control system (Tong, 2007, 2011; Tong & Sparks, 2009; Zhao, 2008). Just as Tong and Sparks (2009) have suggested many cases from 2004-2007 could be cited to approve "the vigor of the investigative journalism in China, which confronted powerful vested interests and exposed major social abuses". However, such sparkling cases are in fact rare in the twenty-year history of Chinese investigative reporting. Because of their scarcity, those cases will be highlighted in scholars' research. With a focus on case study, the dominant scholarship, in fact, fails to discuss how the political intervention and censorship in the macro-level influence the micro-level journalistic practice in *process*. While acknowledging the importance of analysis focusing on landmark cases, I suggest

here for an approach that foregrounds *processes* rather than isolated cases in studying the interplay of micro-level journalistic practice embedded in the newsroom and macro-level political and economic settings that journalistic practice takes shape. While those cases, such as Sun Zhigang and SARS, are momentous in illuminating the persistence, enterprise, and boldness of Chinese investigative journalists in pursuing stories that may embarrass some of those who wield power, they tend to be static and isolated from historical trend. The interplay between journalistic practice and political censorship however is often dynamic and undergoing constant changes. It is true that Chinese investigative journalists negotiate strategically with sources, editors, and propaganda officials in the interests of illuminating important public issues and drawing attention to problems. It is also true that ‘galleria tactics’ or ‘improvisational actives’ are skillfully used by Chinese investigative journalists to test the Party-line and skirt the political censorship (Tong, 2007; Pan, 2003). However, it is undeniable that they are also perturbed by the external constraints on their autonomy which could hold them back. Therefore, the whole picture of Chinese investigative journalists sketched in their daily practice is a mix of setbacks and disappointment as well as achievements and satisfactions.

Compared with the case study, the advantage of *processual* approach lies in that “it forces researchers to accept the untidiness and dynamism of media-political relations while still trying to discern some logic behind those relations”(Roudakova, 2012:411); for example, in what way the political

censorship and directives on news reporting, which actually arrive at newsroom everyday, gradually erode the passion of journalists and newsroom to pursue the sensitive issues in the long run, how and when journalists and newsroom are increasingly unwilling to pick their battles against the unfavorable political environment they face while they have ever took pride in their strong social consciousness, whether and how journalists' perspective of professional gratifications has profoundly changed, how we know the change is of historical significance rather than a unique adjustment to a particular situation, and how we relate the change of journalistic practices and outlook to the broad political system. An obvious omission of existing literature is the discussion revolving around the interplay between macro-level propagandistic tradition and on-going journalistic practice embedded in the news organizations. While discussion the interplay between journalistic practice and political domain as dynamic is important, because the interplay is in fact a process that could be observed in daily life rather than fixed state of 'political domination' or 'media resistance against or adaption to the political domination'. If we freeze the process, we can view some particular cases and locate the driving forces. However, those particular cases are actually the temporary results of the game(the interplay between politics and media) at that moment. When we view the game as a dynamic process, we could see that it constantly changes from one mode to another, depending on the strength of the contesting forces.

What is more, there is much more to be said about the relationship between

the political control and mass media practice a daily basis beyond the dominant analytical framework. The dominant scholarship tends to be heavily concerned with the negotiation between the Party and mass media in the realm of politically-sensitive reportings. In the simplest way, the current literature explains well how political control could prevent media from reporting sensitive issues and how media find themselves engaged in a war against censorship to carry out the sensitive issues. While this relatively narrow focus might be justified, “there is clearly more to be said about the political control impacts upon Chinese journalists and Chinese news organization than this dominant approach is prepared to recognize” (Sparks, 2009).

Examined in a down-to-earth process, this chapter is about the story of news organizations and journalists in daily practice. In telling the stories, I do not intend to compare which one-setbacks of investigative reporting/pessimistic attitude of investigative journalists or progress of investigative reporting/optimistic attitude of investigative journalists-is more predominant, but to depict the process of how the political control has tramelled journalists’ daily practice. I will also try to link the limitations and fragile state of Chinese investigative reporting today that resulted from political control to the broad picture of crisis of traditional media in the digital age. Such crisis, in a micro sense, could be seen and felt everyday in the newsroom when journalists talked about their disappointment about being an investigative journalist in China, when one after another journalists decide to leave the profession, when the well-designed

page arrangement has to be adjusted because some well-prepared coverage has to be cut, and when the shrinking newspaper retails occur because of the lack of investigative reporting. To achieve such object, this chapter will begins with an introduction of new phase of political control over traditional media after Xi came to power. Simply put, the new phase is a continuous tightened control over critical reporting. It should be noted that such unfriendly political environment is closely related to the emerging crisis of Chinese printing journalism in general and investigative journalism in particular. It further turns out that the political control not only affects the quality journalism as many scholars have well recognized, but also affects-in a direct or indirect way-the economic benefit of news organization and individual journalists. Different from media in western countries, which largely attributes the depression of newspaper to the downturn of circulation and advertisement revenue, the crisis of Chinese newspaper is partly about the struggle for free media and largely comes from political undermining of printing media.

## **5.1 Ideological control over media in China**

After the reform and opening-up policy, Chinese society has experienced considerable economic success; however, there has been no change in the political structure in China. The Communist Party is still “in power and still ideologically hegemonic” (Sparks, 2010). It is not difficult to understand that state

needs to maintain an existing political order by strengthening the perceived legitimacy of current system (Lynch, 1999). China is not an exception. Chinese political elite is “schizophrenic about modernizing legitimacy”(White,2005; quoted from Zhang, 2011: 10). In the Mao’s time, the Party-state derived its legitimacy largely from what Mao called gun (military weapon) and pen (ideological propaganda and thought work) (Brady, 2009). Since the economic reform in 1978, the goal was fulfilled by means of either performance-based legitimacy or promulgating ideology (Brady, 2009). Specifically, after cracking down the 1989 protest movement, the CCP has stressed to promote economic growth on the one hand and strength its leading role in media and ideological field on the other (Zhao, 2008). Such strategy-under a slogan of ‘seizing both hands and making both hands strong’-is employed by post-1989 leadership to maintain its political power. While the military alert to safeguard the country has been replaced by promoting the country’s economic rise and national prosperity, CCP’s emphasis on propaganda or thought work in Chinese term has never fading its color. What is more, there has been widely shared observation that CCP’s reemphasis on ideological control is a defining feature of post-1989 leadership. Lee (2005:241) in his article has clearly suggested that very few political regimes in history have been more conscious than the People’s Republic of China of the vital importance of ideological indoctrination and thought management among its people. Even fewer could match the extent to which it has exploited mass media to achieve such goals.

Although Mao's communism ideology has gradually faded out, CCP-in a name of different themes and types-has never gave up its ideological and moral doctrines(Zhao, 2011). In the post-Mao era, "communism, nationalism, and developmentalism were closely interwoven in the ideological hegemony and mobilization of the CCP"(Lin, 2006). The party in different leadership also articulates different versions of Marxism and Socialism, such as 'building socialism with Chinese characteristics' during Deng Xiaoping's reign, 'development the Party around the theme of three representativeness' in Jiang Zemin's time, 'constructing the harmonious society' under the leadership of Hu Jintao, and the newest ideological slogan 'working together to fulfill China Dream' proposed by Xi Jinping.

The forging of ideological hegemony is largely relied on Chinese communication system, which in retrospect was established and organized along the "Leninist concept of the press as the party's collective organizer, agitator and propagandist"(Hood, 1994; Zhao, 2011: 273). In the pre-reform era, the media were called the 'throat and tongue' of the party. Their sole purpose was to "mobilize public support by acting as loudspeakers for CCP policies"(Shirk, 2011:7). After the media reform, while actively encouraging the media to operate on market principles instead of relying on government subsidies, "the CCP resists a redefinition of the role of media, which is still regarded first and foremost as promoters of the party's agenda"(Qian & Bandurski, 2011: 39). Consequently, the Party continues to integrate the Chinese media system with its programs of

providing moral guidance to the population and engineering economic development and social change (Zhao, 2012). Experimenting with the ideological control, the party obviously feels safe enough to entrust commercialized papers with the task of getting the propaganda messages across (Brendebach, 2005). CCP's instinctive and strenuous efforts to shape public opinion by controlling content makes the country still stand close to the bottom of world rankings of freedom of the press. According to the Freedom House, Chinese press was assessed in the rank of 181 out of 195 countries in 2014(Freedom House, 2014).

In general, the current effort to control over media is sustained and systematic, which is implemented by a mixture of restrictive measures, including legal limitation, policy directives, administrative rules, mini campaigns and normative guidance (Chan, 2010; Shambaugh, 2004; Li, 2013). Since the media reform, on the one hand, CCP resorts to administrative and structural mechanism to achieve the macroscopic management over media, for example setting up the administrative departments and formulating media rules and regulations (Chen & Chan, 1998). On the other hand, CCP strictly regulates the media content through issuing reporting guidelines and instructions. The Central Propaganda Department of the Communist Party is the most important institution for monitoring media personnel and controlling the content of television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and film. The government controls the entry to the media market by requiring every publication to have a license and by limiting the number of licenses (Zhao, 1998). Most of newspapers, although financed

themselves by advertisement revenue, remain as part of media groups headed by an official publication and subordinate to a government or CCP entity. The licensing and supervision mechanism make news organizations dare not veer too far way from the general direction of the upper level. In addition to managing the media institutions and organizations, CCP also emphasizes to invest heavily in ensuring journalists' loyalty to the party through a national registration system and ideological training sessions that newsmen are mandatory to participate (Brady, 2002, 2006). Fundamentally, controlling the media institutions and newsmen working in the media institutions is aimed at maintain the Party's ideological hegemony among its people. Given that the main job of journalists and media institutions is producing media content that will be consumed by ordinary people, monitoring, censoring and manufacturing the content of the mass media therefore is the most direct and efficient way to achieve such hegemony (Esarey, 2006; Hassid, 2008) The Central Propaganda Department, with assistance of local branches, determines standards of acceptable and avoided topics. In an explicit manner, they will issue the specific political bans and reporting instructions specifically for the press. In an implicit way, they will set the overall tone of reporting sensitive topics, without clearly indicating the specific points to be highlighted or prohibited. Sometimes, in a form of documents, the political bans and guidance will be directly transmitted from propaganda authorities to news organizations. Sometimes, especially when emergencies or breaking news occur, local propaganda department or central

department will directly phone the news organizations to inform them of what should be avoided and what should be prioritized. The propaganda department's power to determine what is and what is not acceptable news coverage lies at the heart of China's effective control mechanism. The Propaganda Department intentionally demarcates the boundaries of the acceptable coverage in such a fuzzy way that professional journalists with decades of experience can be shilly-shally in deciding whether and how to report some politically-sensitive news stories. Although propaganda department sends out outlines or guidance about the current unacceptable topics, it lacks the clear guidelines on every single story. It is this uncertainty about how far they can push coverage without facing a harsh and arbitrary punishment that keeps many reporters and editors from being too aggressive in their coverage (Hassid, 2008). If the journalists and publications still go too far to write the offending articles, journalists will be fired and jailed and news organizations will be shut off. He (2003:208) has argued that the direct coercion-in such forms as imprisonment, exile, purge, and unemployment-has become the main means of silencing media and safeguarding the supremacy of the Chinese version of communist ideology. In short, existing scholarship has provided us a comprehensive knowledge of the CCP'S media control regime (Brady, 2008; Esarey, 2006; Lynch, 1999; Timothy, 1994). In the following parts, I will concentrate on newest innovations and preoccupations within that regime after Xi came to power in the late 2012, of which scholars haven't opportunities to make a systematic explanation until now.

### 5.1.1 Ideological control and organizational adjustment

During Xi Jinping's reign as party general secretary, the renewed emphasis on ideology is still evident. Such trend is clearly demonstrated in the Xi's speech in the National Conference on the Publicity and Ideological Work in 2013:

*"Ideological field has always been an extremely important part for the Party's work. Journalists should make contributions to the achievement of 'Chinese Dream'. I Called for journalists' initiative to lead the opinion in the politically-correct direction. Journalists should propagate the positive information to the masses and sing up the Party's mainstream melody. Therefore, unity, stability, encouragement and constructiveness should be the focus of the Party's propaganda and ideology work."<sup>xiii</sup>*

Along with the CCP's role in re-emphasizing the ideological field, the state's role in media has expanded dramatically. After Xi coming into power, several new actions have been taken in the operational level to further tighten the control over traditional media. Firstly, the state has strengthened its structural management over media in the era of the large-scale expansion of media industry, particularly targeting at incorporating the boom of Internet-based media productions and distribution into its control parameter.

Generally speaking, state's regulation of media in the institutional level is reinforced through establishing new government agencies or restructuring the old agencies. China's Central Propaganda Department (CPD) was established in

1924 and destroyed in the period of Cultural Revolution. CPD was re-reestablished in 1977 after the Chinese cultural revolution, from which its authorities were expanded gradually. Through controlling significant symbols spread by newspaper, television, books and other communication forms, the role of propaganda system in overall is “planning and guiding China’s ideological work and then controlling public opinion”(“Agencies responsible for”, 2014). By monitoring content, CPD is primarily ensuring China’s publishers, in particular its news publishers, will not print anything that is inconsistent with Communist Party’s political dogma. To effectively manage the media field, in the very beginning, CPD established the special subdivisions-Bureau of News, Bureau of Television and Radio, and Bureau of Publishing-to take charge of the specific types of media productions respectively (Brady, 2008). In the 1981, the Bureau of Television and Radio was transformed into the Ministry of Radio and Television under the State Council, which later evolved into the State Administration for Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) in 1998(Zhao, 2008). SARFT is an executive branch under the State Council that directly controls state-owned enterprises engaged in the television, radio, and film industry, including satellite and Internet broadcasts in China(Zhao, 2008). In 1987, the Bureau of Publishing and Bureau of News was combined into the State Press and Publications Administration (SPPA), responsible for licensing, overall planning, regulation, and market discipline of print media and audiovisual publications, including newspaper, periodicals, books, and audio and video records (Zhao, 2008). In 2000, the SPPA was renamed as the

General Agency of Press and Publication (GAPP) and also upgraded from a deputy ministry-level agency to full ministry level agency (Zhao, 2008). Because all publishers in China, including Internet publishers, are required to be licensed by the GAPP, the agency also has the legal authority to screen, censor, and ban any print, electronic, or Internet publication in China.

Previously, GAPP and SARFT were responsible for censoring the culture products that fell under their respective jurisdiction. As soon as Xi came to power, in 2013, the GAPP and SARFT were integrated as the State Administration of Press, Publication, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT). It will be responsible for planning and supervising the development of the press, print, and digital publication, and the radio, film and television industries. Such incorporation was thought as a crucial innovative step in Chinese communication system since its targeting at further facilitating the state's management of all inclusive media productions, especially those produced and disseminated on the Internet. The minister of Chinese Cultural Ministry Wu Cai confirmed that the institutional reconstruction is deeply rooted in the current trend of media convergence in the digital age<sup>xiv</sup>.

Regarding to the organizational combination, informant#1 remarks that: "the merger is predominantly designed for combining commercial success with enhanced political control<sup>xv</sup>." He suggests that in the first place, the SAPPRFT is designed to boost the development of Chinese culture industries and elevate the global influence. The merger will bring expectations that the new authority will

play a role in boosting the industry by spurring innovation in the information age. Chinese media is facing the accelerating challenges brought by the rapid changes in digital information technologies. More modern communication systems with a well integration of new media and traditional media outlet are expected to establish to compete in the information age. Consequently, traditional media is expected to develop into a comprehensive news service now owns news, magazines, TV stations, websites and other media outlets or owns some of them (Long,2013). The burgeoning lucrative markets, represented by Internet broadcasting and Internet media company, have attracted the state's attention to make full use of plenty of profit-making opportunities in the media and cultural sector. On the one hand, and to control their imperative to mount a frontline confrontation with the party on the other.

However, achieving the economic success can not relieve CCP's uneasiness about media's potential to undermine the Party's ideological hegemony. Therefore, the reconstruction is also a react to the possibilities of mounting frontline confrontation with the Party brought by the new communication technology. Informant#1 believes that in the political side, it should not expect that this merger will lead to any form of liberalization or deregulation; exactly the opposite side, this merger will further tighten the control over media productions<sup>xvi</sup>. Three changes that is benefited from this merger could be predicted, which will facilitate the better management over the different media and culture sectors. First, given that news from print media and TV program from

broadcasting could be disseminated on the Internet, the new institution with its all inclusive nature is a timely reaction to the emerging converged media productions and service; Secondly, according to informant#1, the combination intends to clarify the duties in the nebulous and controversial section between GAPP and SARFT. Previously, due to the lack of administrative consistency and coordination between SARFT and GAPP, some policies released by the two departments are incompatible. For example, certain content was allowed by SARFT to be published in the form of radio, film or television programs whereas banned in the printing form by GAPP, or vice versa<sup>xvii</sup>. Therefore, the merging of GAPP and SARFT is believed to be conducive in coordinating the resources of each sector and increasing institutional efficiency. In addition to clarifying the unclear division of work between the two institutions, the new body may reduce the overlapped licensing and supervision procedures. Therefore, the merging of GAPP and SARFT-under a set of unified working principles and routines-should be conducive in coordinating the resources of each sector and increasing institutional efficiency, which would in turn benefit the state's management over almost all of the media productions to ensure that they do not go beyond the parameters of acceptable political discourse.

## **5.2. Ideological control on Chinese journalists**

Along with the Party's ramping up its control over media on the

administrative level, it reemphasizes the control over media personnel. Through a national registration system and mandatory participation in ideological training sessions, which is in fact interlocked together, the Propaganda Department monitors journalists' loyalty to the Party (Esarey, 2005). In order to shape the ideological orientations of Chinese journalists, CCP habitually launches series of campaigns of indoctrinating journalists with the party's media theory and propaganda disciplines (Zhao, 2008). Such training program is compulsory, because it is closely linked to government certifications of newsmen. Fresh journalists could get the journalist license only after finishing the training courses, and present journalists have to renew the journalist license every five years through taking the coursework. The journalist license is crucial because there is no journalists in China could work without it. Dated back to 2003, CCP has launched a nation-wide mandatory training program for journalists. In January 2004, journalists who had successfully completed the training program were issued new nationally registered press card (Zhao, 2008; Hassid, 2008). At that time, CCP claimed that the press card will not expire; nevertheless, journalists need to renew the card every five years. Ten years later in 2014, however, CCP and SAPPFRT organized the nation-wide examination for all newsmen working in the traditional media, which is the first time ever since the founding of the People's Republic of China. Journalists-whether junior ones or freshmen-have to pass the examination, otherwise, their journalist card will be deprived. China, not only has been the only state in the world to formally license journalists, but also

the only one arrange the national unified examination for journalists. According to the GAPPRT, the goal of the test is to educate and lead news workers to uphold the Marxist journalistic ideals, to better serve the people, socialism, the work of the party and the country. In September 2013, the SAPPRT required that all news organizations should hold at least three-time-training course before the examination. The training program should be based on the two textbooks and five CDs compiled by the Propaganda Department. The textbook *Being A Journalist in China* includes six parts: <socialism with Chinese characteristic>, <media policies and regulations>, <journalistic ethics>, <rules of news coverage> and <news reporting norms and preventing fabricated news>. It also contains 600 questions that provide the database for the examination.

Obviously, the examination is the new action taken by the current leadership, who desires Chinese journalists to be keenly attuned to propaganda priorities and proscriptions. Organizing journalists' national examination is by no means an isolated and indiscreet action, which intends to be in line with an important official report, made by the Central Committee of CCP and passed by the Third Plenary Session of the 18<sup>th</sup> CCP Central Committee in November 2013 earlier<sup>xviii</sup>. The report demanded that professional thought of newsmen should be enhanced to meet the ends of the Party's publicity work in the new era. Based on the central cadres' news policy, the Central Propaganda Department accordingly designs the training session and examination to re-indoctrinate the Party's ideology among Chinese journalists.

Titled “Be a good scribe of the Chinese dream”, the introduction of training books wrote “news and newsmen must shoulder the historic mission of realizing the Chinese Dream” (GAPPRFT, 2013). Similar to the ‘harmonious society’ proposed by predecessor Hu Jintao, ‘Chinese dream’ is the new slogan evoked by the new head of the ruling Communist Party Xi Jinping in his first weeks in power. The new doctrine ‘Chinese dream’ was obsequiously used by Party journalists and government officials to toe the Party line. Although Chinese market-oriented media are not active to promote the phrase in their reporting, they hardly escape the Party’s indoctrination of the slogan upon them. Consequently, examination is designed to promote such mandatory indoctrination among Chinese journalists. Informant#12, the deputy chief editor of investigative reporting team said, compared with former training programs, this time is paying much more attention to the current Party’s policies and perspective on media than Marxism ideology and propaganda theory<sup>xix</sup>. Informant#13, editor-in-chief of investigative team in *Beijing News*, confirmed that the examination, with a reemphasis of the Marxist ideology on journalism and the Party’s principle of media, was probably the government’s signal to strengthen its supervision over media<sup>xx</sup>.

There were a lot of funny things happened when journalists were discussing the review materials. In most cases, they were satirizing the discrepancy between what the Party claimed the training program should be and what the training program in fact was: the Party claimed that the training program was to strengthen their professional practices, nevertheless it was essentially aimed at

indoctrinating journalists on Marxist ideology and the Party's perspective on Chinese journalism. The journalists also mocked the difference between the Party's viewpoints of the role of journalists and journalists' own understanding of their roles. For example, the chapter <the difference between Chinese journalism and western journalism> in the textbook suggests, there is no uniform definition of journalistic professionalism. Different from western countries, the predominant role of news media in China is to be the ears, eyes, throat and tongue for the party and the people. Therefore, the professionalism of Chinese news media emphasized to be loyal to the Party and adhere to the Party's principle of the journalistic professionalism rather than the freedom of the press in the western sense. To further legitimize the point, the textbook adds that "modernization could be fulfilled through various methods, and there is not a normalized model that every country should follow. Modernization is not westernization, and definitely not Americanization (GAPPRFT, 2013)". There are some of the questions Chinese journalists can expect to be quizzed on when they take the exam: 'What is the essence of the Chinese Dream?' 'What is Marx and Engels's perspective on newspaper reporters?' 'What is the most significant difference between China's news ethics and western news ethics?' 'What is the ultimate mission of socialism with Chinese characteristics?'. Because journalists are too accustomed with the ideological color penetrating throughout the book, it is not worth wasting time to express the resentment. They prefer to read it loudly in the newsroom and arouse their partners' scoff at propaganda arbiters

and they laugh together.

Despite the examination is directly linked to journalists' gain or renewal of the press card, which in theory is the certification that journalists must have to work legally in China, and despite journalists are not confident to pass the exam given that too many materials should be memorized to prepare the exam, journalists are not active to prepare the exam at all. When discussing the questions related to the Party's policies and regulations on the media, journalists just guess the answers randomly and laugh out loudly altogether. When journalists found that they could only guess the right answer of less than 20% questions, they often complained-in an unserious and humorous tone-that they will fail the exam and have to leave *Beijing News* in 2014. Investigative journalist Jia Peng, who is peculiarly humorous and good at telling jokes, has summarized the mystical rules of right answers after scanning the question database. What he found could be abstracted as one sentence: the Party will be the right side and others will be wrong unless they are in accordance with the Party. Jia imparted his skills of guessing the correct answers: in terms of multiple choice (only one is correct among the four options), if the Party is among the four options, then the Party will be the correct answer; if People is among the four options, then People will be the correct answer; if the Party and People coexist in the options, the party will be the correct answer. In terms of choosing all correct answers, the Party and People will be the correct answers. Jia also pointed out two scoring points in the essay questions which he believed were the material emphasized

most: one was that the Party has never done propaganda work, because news in China differed from western countries; the other one was the Party was always right and the people will be right only when they were in line with the Party. According to journalists' analysis and summary, I concluded two points that stands out in the Party's ideological brainwashing this time: one is the Party tries to build up its ideological hegemony in front of its people-both ordinary people and news workers; the second one is the Party intends to legitimize the 'propaganda function of Chinese media' through emphasizing the difference between China and western countries. It is regretted that the two points the Party making strenuous efforts to promote not only can't convince journalists, but also can't persuade journalists to follow.

The day before the examination, informant#8, investigative journalist in *Beijing News*, showed the picture of new training books with intact package in the newsroom and complained that she had no time to prepare the exam because of the business trip for interview. Colleagues comforted her that it does not matter because they remember nothing even if scanning the books. In fact, nearly all the journalists either review the question database the night before exam or skip the textbook roughly. Despite there are no journalists could be exempt from the examinations, the playful culture attached to journalists' discussion of exam does release energy directed at the mocking of power and authority. In most circumstances, journalists' talk around the exam is funny and playful, yet it delivers a sobering message of dissent when they are unwilling to

but have to review the tiresome exam materials. Journalist expressed widespread aversion to the central authority's insistence on absorbing Chinese journalism into its propaganda parameter through the centripetal force exerted by the Party's ideological indoctrination.

The exam score has been announced in the late April of 2014. Because I have left the newsroom, I can not get the information about the score the journalists gained. However, it does not matter for failing the exam because journalists are permitted to take make-up examination one more time. Many journalists believe that the exam is just a warning issued by the new leadership to journalists that they should follow the rule of the Party and they are not free to report on whatever they want. What the Party stressed is the training process rather than dismissing the journalists through the examination. As long as journalists and newsroom seem to be serious to prepare the exam and as long as journalists take the exam, the Party will not be too strict to fail a lot of journalists.

### **5.3 Political ban and directives on news reporting**

The Central Propaganda Department (CPD)'s control over media relies largely on determining what is acceptable and what is proscribed news coverage. However, the boundary of state control is far more elastic than formal lines of authority and rules of supervision might suggests. Rather than rigid pre-publication censorship, vague guidelines, changeable instructions, and

responses after the fact lie at the heart of China's effective regime of news control (Hassid, 2008). In other words, the boundary for permissible reporting is not set in stone (Cho, 2007). The nebulous controlling regimes come from two reasons: in the first place, it could be understandable in light of China's vast territory and population, in which the political control over media varies greatly across time, place, and situation and depending on circumstances and personalities (Polumbaum, 2008: 7). In theory, CPD will issue notices informing journalists and editors what stories can not be covered and what ideological standpoint should be emphasized in certain news stories. Bans on coverage of 'riots', 'calamities', 'environment problem' 'food safety problem' 'protests of poor people, peasants and unemployed workers, and other marginalized people' are regularly issued by Central Propaganda Department (Tong, 2011). In practice, political taboo about the news stories happened in the specific place will be announced by the corresponding local propaganda departments. Secondly, in addition to the political ban, which tends to clearly indicate the prohibition of news reporting, different layers of propaganda departments also impose reporting directives. The political directives are equivocal, which fail to point out if the news could be reported or not and if all the news angels are allowed to articulate in the news coverage. Reporting directives normally run as follows: the XX news story is recommended not to report; there should be no commenting about XX news issues; XX news stories should not be featured on the front page and so on. For example, in the case of sexual abuse of children by school teachers

in Chinese rural areas which frequently happen in recent two years, the political directive suggests that news coverage should not be highlighted in the front page; in the case of 'the dead university student, Huang yang, poisoned by his roommates', the political directive indicates that the news could be reported, however doing interview and editorial commenting are not allowed. Journalists are confused how news could be reported without any interview? Does the reporting directives actually amount to banning the coverage<sup>xxi</sup>?

Although compared with political ban, which completely prevents any reporting activities, news with reporting directive is possible for journalists to cover, by no means it could be reported without restrictions. The difficulty for journalists to carry out the stories with political directives is journalists need to speculate how far they could push the coverage from the vague guidelines. In the absence of specific orders or mechanisms preventing reporting, journalists are in a process of estimating the potential side effect that the story could produce and are willing to tread into sensitive areas. Chinese journalists usually describe their calculation of sensitive points that potentially provoke the Party as "Playing an edge ball" in the Ping-Pong game. Aimed at hitting the very edge of the table where seems almost out of bounds but still remains a fair hit, "playing an edge ball" should be the most breath-taking situation in Ping-Pong game. Although such risk could help player earn point, it requires a lot of skills to control the ball accurately hit the very edge and to prevent the ball from flying out of the boundary. In the similar way, Chinese journalists are also considered as Ping-pong

players who master well in reporting the sensitive issues in the very edge of the Party's bottom-line, which seems to almost touch the Party's red lines but remains politically safe. When conducting their professional practices, journalists push the envelope by taking calculated political ventures and toeing on the boundary of what is permissible by the state (He, 2000a; Lin, 2008).

Previous studies have shed light on various expedients and tactics employed by Chinese investigative journalists and news organizations to carry out the news with political directives. For example, journalists find themselves engaged in the guerrilla war against political censorship in their daily practice (Sather, 2008, Tong, 2007, 2011; Wang, 2010). Several tactics are helpful for journalists to win the guerrilla war, for example, framing news as single incidents or aberrations rather than phenomena that looked at the root problem of social systems (Cho, 2007); providing constructive suggestion instead of sharp criticism when covering the social problems and official wrongdoings; revealing journalists' viewpoint of standing in political alignment with the government in the news coverage, sometimes frankly, more often in subtle ways and so on (Tong, 2007). In short, in those clusters of literature, articulation of journalists' strategies in testing the political parameters to fulfill journalistic ideals has provided a vivid picture of the brave and intelligent Chinese investigative journalists, and also the vigor of news organizations which are strongly committed to investigative journalism.

A close scrutiny of existing scholarship however discloses the polarized discussion about how investigative journalists and their newsroom operate

confronting tough political environment. On the one pole, just as I have mentioned above, journalists and newsrooms are successful in covering stories with politically sensitive theme. Successful investigative reporting brings in financial and professional returns with little political costs. On the other pole, journalists and newsroom's aggressiveness and persistence of revealing what central Party and government intends to conceal, paid a painful price for those practices.

However, the polarized discussion is less helpful in explaining much more situations in which journalists' endeavor is killed by political power in-between the news making process. Sometimes, news is banned when it is well prepared and coming to the market soon; Sometimes, news is banned when journalists are writing the reports after collecting information; Sometimes, news is banned when journalists just arrive at the spot after long-time travel. In any case, time, money, effort, and resources have been spent in the process of doing investigative reporting. Furthermore, compared with the polarized cases-successful examples of skirting political censorship or tragic examples of being defeated by political power-in-between situations happen more frequently in the down-to-earth news making process. There is little examination-with a dynamic and ever-evolving perspective-to explain how the Party-state meddles in Chinese journalism and how the political intervention impacts upon news organization, particularly in the day-to-day conduct of news work.

By nature, the investigative reporting is bestowed with an unambiguous

social mission-serving as watchdog on power and illuminating the veiled facts and problems that should be known by the public. However, for a newspaper, the most obvious question is the budget burden when the newsroom needs to be completely self-sufficient and needs to make a good profit. Chinese market-oriented newspaper is not an exception. Although I do not deny that money and resource should be devoted to provide coverage and analysis important to society and people if the newspaper is heavily concerned with investigative reporting, such interest appears to be subdued in their daily practice when newsroom as a financially self-reliant entity is facing the emerging economic problems. Previous scholarship all highlights that the content of Chinese investigative reporting and its news-making process should be considered in the political-dominance mode. Put concisely, discussion revolves around one theme 'politically-oriented stories should take political safety into consideration'. Clearly, the Chinese investigative journalists are still confined by the political system, probably even more severe than before. It is, however, far from the only political concern exists in the newsrooms' and journalists' daily practice. The influence of the market is getting increasingly stronger, as shown in the stories of *Beijing News* I prepare to tell in the next few parts. What current scholarship has ignored is that Chinese investigative journalists are not only harnessed by the omnipresent political constraints, but also frustrated by the precarious and relatively low income they earn. Although the newspaper and journalist's zeal for critical journalists, the mission of being a critic of social evils,

and promoting social reforms has not faded away, they must take the economic benefit into consideration in deciding how to practice their journalistic role, which is true for both the news organizations and individual journalists. Journalists have the trend to become more cynical about their profession in the face of the increasingly strong economic pressure. However, the economic pressure the newspaper and investigative journalists suffered from is closely interwoven with and largely resulted from the political constraints, because investigative reporting is a thankless job in China, which usually takes hard work but brings very few rewards. To be more specific, for newsroom, the economic pressure means the shrink in the readers and advertisement when the political intervention unfriendly bans the well-prepared coverage from coming to the market. For individual journalists, the economic pressure means the unstable and relatively low revenue, which is resulted from their reporting is killed by the propaganda department, which journalists' income is largely based on. Therefore, in calculating whether or not to carry out some stories, the newspaper and investigative journalists not only consider the political risk, but also or pay more emphasize to the question that if the news coverage could be published so that newsroom could increase the retail income and journalists could get payment. In the battle between 'working as critical political journalists' and 'maximizing profit', the economic impetus is increasingly stronger and sometimes outweigh the political interests when the two clashes.

### 5.3.1 Political intervention and newspaper's economic interest

According to the newspaper's working routine, the space or pages will be allocated in advance if reports are planned by investigative reporting team to publish. If the reporting is censored by propaganda department the day before the reports are coming out, the newspaper has to cut the reserved pages. Little time left for newspaper to change contents making up for the blank pages originally designed for investigative reports. Taking *Beijing News* as an example, during my field work period (from late December to March), nearly half of the news coverage, which has been already fully completed, was killed by Propaganda Department. They are vote-buying scandals in Hengyang city, Hunan Province, exposed on December, 28, 2013<sup>xxii</sup>; the stamped accident at the mosque (killing 14, injuring 10) in Guyuan city, Ningxia Province, January 5, 2014<sup>xxiii</sup>; the deadly explosion (killing 15, injuring 8) in Kaili city in Guizhou, January 10, 2014<sup>xxiv</sup>; the violent terror attack (killing 29, injuring 143) at the Kunming railway station, Yunnan Province, March 1, 2014<sup>xxv</sup>; and one villager assassinated in protecting his illegally occupied land in Pingdu city, Shan Dong Province, March 21, 2014<sup>xxvi</sup>. *Beijing News* has to cut the pages preserved for investigative reporting. However, investigative reporting is crucial for *Beijing News* to differentiate themselves and appeal to specific readership. Therefore, political taboo not only tremendously influences the political side of the newspaper-how much freedom it could gain, how many politically sensitive stories could be reported, and how far the news organization could go in pushing

the Party line, but also affects the economic side of the newspaper- how many pieces of newspaper fail to sell and how many readers will lose if investigative reporting is the selling point of the newspaper.

According to informant#18, the former chief editor of investigative reporting team:

“Investigative reporting is the *Beijing News’s* strategy to excel in the market competition, because it adds authoritative weight to the newspaper and becomes its major selling point. Locating the readership in the group of middle class, *Beijing News* has already attracted a group of loyal readers. They are young and middle-aged urbanities with bachelor and above educational background. They care about serious political and social issues, and thus appreciate *Beijing News’s* endeavor to insist the investigative reporting”<sup>xxvii</sup>.

Informant#15, acting chief editor of *Beijing News*, added to informant#18 ’s remark to further explicate the crucial role of investigative reporting for the newspaper in the escalating competitive market:

“*Beijing News’s* flagship products are in-depth reporting and commenting. Commenting is the soul of the newspaper, and investigative reporting is the essence of the newspaper. *Beijing News* needs the investigative reporting and commenting pages to fight over circulation and to expand its readership”<sup>xxviii</sup>.

Informant#14, chief editor of *Beijing News* said that,

“the newspaper will be sold out before the noon every time investigative

reporting appears on the front page. Without the investigative reporting pages, its retail revenues will apparently shrink. Within short time period, the circulation will not decrease sharply, because subscription accounts for the largest proportion of circulation. The decrease of subscription number could be detected only after a long period. Over time, however, the newspaper will become less attractive, and accordingly its subscription number will dramatically shrink. At that time, it becomes inevitable that the circulation will drop dramatically, which also turns out to be irresistible loss<sup>xxxix</sup>.

In addition to censoring news coverages, Propaganda Department often requires the newspaper to copy the official reports (*guanfang baodao*) from Xinhua News Agency in some stories. The official reports, are also known as propaganda tongue reports, are written on a basis of official documents, yet without any journalistic investigation by the news media (Tong, 2011). Informant#18 told me that, it is disastrous for *Beijing News* to use official reports to cover the news cases closely linked to the social problems or ordinary people's interest<sup>xxx</sup>. *Beijing News* builds its reputation through thoughtful editorial comments and investigative reporting, which is all the time in-depth and has the sense of social responsibility. It is *Beijing News's* mission to provide critical and independent coverage rather than imposing an ideology on the audiences that has attracted a group of loyal readers. If following the *Xinhua's* general copy in the long run, the newspaper will lose its feature and readers will consider *Beijing News* the same as other party-organ newspaper.

Investigative journalism is time consuming and expensive, which requires news organizations place social responsibility above profitability(Sather,2008). However, if the financially expensive practices of investigative reporting will create zero social and economic benefits because the potential to be forbidden by political power to publish, news organizations become increasingly reluctant to practice such types of reporting or they will be selective in illuminating the sensitive issues to cover. News organizations seem to be trapped in a deep ambivalence: on the one hand, they are clear that lacking the bold investigative reporting will undermine the quality of the newspaper and then result in the shrink in readership; on the other hand, they are hesitated to experiment with such reporting, because their efforts are very likely in vain considering that the reports will be censored by propaganda department. While such ambivalence is derived from political intervention, it is closely relevant to the newsroom's economic benefits.

### **5.3.2 Practicing 'self-censorship' out of economic concerns**

In addition to influencing the economic benefit of news organizations, political ban also damages the economic interest of individual journalists on the grounds that if the reporting could be published is closely linked to journalists' income. Although investigative journalists are not required to publish coverage every day, they need finish working quota in every month. For example, *Beijing News* expects journalists to finish two big investigative reporting (one pages or

more) or four small investigative reporting (half pages) each month to meet the minimum requirement holding the working position there. Given that investigative reporting is time consuming, the rule is negotiable to make sure that journalists will not be easily fired. Nevertheless, their salary is paid in strict accordance with the number of reports they have published and the number of words built in each reports. If news is banned, journalists in charge of the coverage only get very little salary as a comfort. Such cases, if happened frequently, will dampen the initiative of journalists to uncover the unknown social problems in the unknown areas that have not covered previously. The reason is understandable that news stories touching on new themes or news stories occurred in the new places provide little experience for journalists to speculate the central propaganda department's attitudes toward such issue and local propaganda department's supervision over investigative reporting. The first effort to broach a sensitive topic in the new realm or in the new place always takes a higher risk than those who wait others test the water before plunging in. In the long run, without the confidence to infer the maneuvering room, newspaper is forced to uncover the safe topic and journalists are unwilling to dig out the topic with the potential of being killed.

In theory, some self-generated topics in the unknown places that are intentionally dodged by journalists and newsrooms should be considered in the realm of self-censorship. To avoid excessive critical analysis or expressions, self censorship is a set of editorial actions, ranging from omission, dilution, distortion,

and change of rhetoric and emphasis by journalists, editors, and organizations (Lee, 1998; Tong, 2009). The practice of self-censorship helps newsrooms bypass political 'minefields', and at the same time increase the possibilities of the publication of the reports on highly politically sensitive topics.

Scholarship is fruitful in explicating how powerful and effective the self-censorship is in helping the government limit the reporting scope of Chinese journalists and how self-censorship has been practiced in journalists' news writing and editing process (Link, 2002; Hassid, 2008). However, two points are ignored in the large number of current literature. In the first place, self-censorship not only happens in the final stage of news-making, when journalists write up the coverage, but also occurs in the very beginning period when choosing and deciding news topics. Secondly, self-censorship is not only aimed at ensuring the political safety, but also out of economic concern. Clearly, investigative journalists are still confined by the political control-probably even more draconian than before though. Confused by the uncertainty of how far they can push the coverage without facing a harsh punishments, journalists and editors are experimenting with self-censorship to avoid being too aggressive in their coverage. However, the economic concern is getting stronger and stronger in practicing self-censorship, as shown in the stories of *Beijing News* and its investigative journalists. Self-censorship is so powerful also because journalists are uncertain about if the self-generated news topics will be killed after prolonged and expensive investigation, which will in turn damage the economic

condition of individual journalists and newsrooms. As the party's news control goes on and as the economic crisis escalates, journalists and news organization's mobility to carry out the fresh but sensitive stories may decrease. The notion of budget burden, which tends to be the most practical and thorny issue journalists and news organizations need to highlight for survival, may get more embedded in the definition of the once glamorous and ideological driven profession.

#### **5.4. Journalists' career choices: to stay or to leave**

Informant#14, the chief editor of *Beijing News* claims in a straightforward way that "the party's continuing master of the news media on the press and investigative journalists is an important factor resulting in the plight of Chinese printing newspaper in general and investigative journalism in particular"<sup>xxxii</sup>. Her idea was understandable that talented journalists are essential for the journalistic profession. However, the current problem is that external restrictions on the job autonomy has substantially weakened journalists' insistence on staying in the profession and dampened journalists' zeal for critical journalism. A lot of talented and well-educated journalists are increasingly bothered by the thought that "the power of Chinese journalists in exposing social problems has gone". It is true that journalists feel disappointed about the profession when their professional ideal can not be achieved because of the political constraints. However, journalists' dissatisfaction about their job is by no means merely

derived from such one aspect. Journalists also feel hopeless and helpless when they are faced with undesirable economic situation every day. As I have mentioned above, most investigative journalists in the market-oriented newspaper still receive low base salaries and are paid by the article, which makes them particularly susceptible to the political censorship of reporting. Investigative journalists in China can not belong to the high-income groups. The precarious political atmosphere further makes the journalists' income unstable, because journalists are uncertain how many reports could be published every month. Those investigative journalists are perplexed and frustrated by political constraints and economic dissatisfaction, which render them become more cynical and pessimism about the profession. In the following paragraphs, based on my in-depth interview of front-line investigative journalists in *Beijing News*, I will introduce the pervasive helplessness, hopelessness, and haplessness among them. On the one hand, confined by political censorship, their proudness of being a muckraking or revelatory model of journalists has been greatly impaired; on the other hand, their passion and willingness of sticking to the profession has been largely weakened by undesirable economic situation.

#### **5.4.1 Shrink in investigative journalism and journalists**

In recent years, there has been a decrease in the number of newsrooms which commit themselves to the investigative reporting; for example, *Dahe Daily*, *China Youth Newspaper*, *China Economic Times*<sup>xxxii</sup> no long take up investigative

journalism, which have ever engaged in. Even for the news organizations which still insist on such reporting genre, such as *Southern Metropolitan Daily* and *Beijing News*, there has been a dramatic shrink of coverage published each time. In the individual level, there has been severe loss of investigative journalists, who leave the newsroom and no longer work as journalists. There also has been a desperate lack of talents when young graduates are increasingly unwilling to work as journalists in printing newspaper or young journalists are not long for becoming an investigative journalists in China.

There is no single way of becoming an investigative journalists in China. Their personal background, educational history, and earlier career paths may vary greatly; whereas, commonality emerges when choosing the investigative journalists as their profession. According to informant#14, investigative journalists should be the most reflective journalists, who have strong social consciousness and ethical awareness. However unfriendly political environment has gradually overshadows the value of investigative coverage and stifles the ambition of young graduate or journalists to enter the field<sup>lxxxiii</sup>.

Recent years have witnessed the impressive decrease of investigative journalists. In 2011, China has three-hundred investigative journalists. Compared with 750,000 journalists in total, the number seems to be scarce. Scholar has pointed out that the number becomes lower in 2013 (Tian, 2013). Baopu, former investigative journalist in *China Central Television* and currently the CEO of one company, believes that there are only 10 front-line investigative journalists in

China, who constantly carry out *exposé*. Investigative journalists are refined to several well-known news organizations, *Southern Weekends*, *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, *Beijing News* and *Caixin magazine*. He also predicts that the gradual disappearance is the irresistible trend of Chinese investigative journalists (Tian, 2013). Although it is probably a little bit exaggerated that the number of investigative journalists in China is less than ten, it is true that the investigative journalists are sharply decreasing and the situation of investigative journalism is deteriorating. Cultivating a matured investigative journalists is not easy to accomplish, which usually takes at least three to five years. It is worthwhile to invest time and energy in cultivating the talented journalists because, for newspaper, the excellence of journalists is directly related to the quality of news coverage. Correspondingly, the loss of talented journalists will severely affect the newsroom. The problem of brain drain in the realm of Chinese journalism is largely resulted from the low job satisfaction among journalists, which includes both the disappointment about the unachievable professional ideals and the unstable income.

Journalists derive job satisfaction from both tangible rewards (such as salary and fringe benefits) and professional rewards (such as job autonomy and serving the public interest) (Chan et al, 2004). Journalists' job satisfaction will be dampened by the incongruence between their aspirations and the realities they counter. A decade ago, some scholarship points that Chinese investigative journalists suffer from low job satisfaction because they find it difficult to put

investigative reporting into practice (Chan et al, 2004). A decade later, a national survey of investigative journalists again show their disappointment towards the job and low loyalty to the profession. According to the survey, nearly forty-six percentage of investigative journalists indicates that they will leave the position within next five years. Nearly thirty percentages of investigative journalists are uncertain if they will stick to the work. Only ten percentages of investigative journalists believe that they will insist on. Contrary to investigative journalists' low degree of job satisfaction and professional loyalty in the market-oriented media, their counterparts, working in the party-organ media, show high satisfaction and loyalty towards the job. Particularly, they feel nothing wrong about ideological loyalty and commitment to the party-state and they are satisfied about the income (Zhang & Shen, 2012, 2013).

In fact, the scenario-leaving the job five years after working as investigative journalists-is no less trivial. Deputy Chief Editor of *Beijing News*, informant#15 comments that:

*"The thorny issue for investigative reporting in China is the lack of talents. Fewer journalists are unwilling to be an investigative journalist in China, which is particularly true for male journalists. Investigative journalism has been mostly a male profession, because it is dangerous and demands frequent business trip. In China, eighty-four percentage of investigative journalists are male, female journalists only account for sixteen percentage.*

*However, male is increasingly reluctant to become a journalist. Or perhaps,*

*male will chose journalist as the first job after their graduation, but they will leave the position when they are thirty-year-old, a time of five years after entering the profession. It is the plight facing all investigative reporting team in China. For example, in the early year of 2013, more than five journalists have left Southern Weekend, which leads to its reporting team nearly vanished<sup>xxxiv</sup>.*

Chinese investigative journalists do have a strong sense of collective journalistic professionalism, but they do not have a high collective feeling of belonging to the occupation or to the specific news organizations. The label “migrant”, a kind of self-mockery, is used by journalists to describe their weak consciousness of belonging to particular news organizations. The shaky sense of belonging is largely derived from the political intervention and poor economic benefit. Firstly, political censorship is the chief culprit. Engaged in investigative journalism is dangerous, risking and also difficult. Every time, journalists go to the news spot and spare no efforts to dig out the occurrence. When they have got enough information or even finished the report, the political ban comes to the newsroom and journalists endeavors are therefore in vain. Over an extended period of time, there is poorly developed sense of achievement and pride among Chinese investigative journalists; Secondly, most Chinese investigative journalists, working in the market-oriented newsroom, receive low base salaries. Their payment is decided by how many pieces of coverage they publish and how many words they build in each coverage. Experimenting with investigative journalism is

not only time-consuming and risky, but also poorly rewarded. They will receive meager income if the reporting cannot publish on the newspaper, whatever how much effort has been put on the investigation. Furthermore, when journalists do out-of-town interview, news organizations only cover the basic travel expense (including train ticket, air ticket or bus ticket) and hotel expense. It does not even cover the cost of taking a taxi. In most cases, journalists need to pay for themselves for the extra money beyond the reimbursement quota (The daily reimbursement quota of *Beijing News* is 300 RMB or 50 Dollars, most of which is used for paying the hotel fees). Therefore, if the coverage is banned, journalists not only cannot get income, but also put into a lot of their own money. Why take dangerous chances that will result in small or zero reward? While journalists appreciate genuine investigative journalism, which being a critic of social evils, their professional interest and ideal, appears to be subdued in the reality that the burdensome and dangerous work earns unstable and unsatisfied income.

#### **5.4.2 Talent Plight in *Beijing News***

What I have observed in *Beijing News* could also confirm the talent plight in Chinese investigative reporting. *BN's* investigative journalism team has eight front-line journalists, among which only one is female. In the very beginning of 2014, four leaves the position. Informant#6 and informant#2, disappointed with the tightly controlled media environment, turned to business; Informant#4, appreciating the stable income, left for party-organ *China Youth Daily*.

Informant#7, tired of frequent out of town interview, becomes an editor.

Informant#4 explains to me why he leaves the *Beijing News*:

*“The income of investigative journalists is unstable, because salary is closely linked to the numbers of coverage, the words built in the coverage and also the quality of coverage. The payment, in general, is ranging from 100RMB to 500 RMB per thousand words. If the coverage is judged as model reporting in the monthly editorial conference, the payment could be 1000 RMB per thousand words. The most profound influence of political ban for individual journalists is not ‘they can’t cover the unveiled truth’, rather’ their life got into trouble because of failing to publish the report’. Sometimes, it is incompatible between ‘achieving professional ideal (doing good investigative reporting)’ and ‘maintaining the basic life’. Taking an extreme case as an example, I spent two-month to investigative economic corruption of Zhou Yongkang<sup>xxxv</sup> and his son, during which I earned nothing because I published zero coverage.*

*After two-month investigation, I finished my investigation, which certainly has far-reaching influence, and thus I should have got the highest payment (1000RMB per thousand words). But I received little payment because the reports were banned by propaganda department. Although I was proud that I am the only person in China digging out the economic corruption of Zhou Yongkang, I earned nothing as long as three months, from the beginning of my investigation to the end of finishing the*

reports<sup>xxxvi</sup>.

In addition to journalists' dissatisfaction about the unstable income, a wave of disappointment towards the political intervention of investigative reporting prevailed in the *Beijing News*. Informant#3, an outstanding investigative journalist in the team, satirized his job as follows:

*“doing investigative reporting in China like finding died pests in the stinking rivers. Journalists' job is walking around the stinking rivers, finding out the dying or died pests, describing how the dying or died pests look like. As for the vigorous pests, it is impossible for journalists for inquiry. It is ironic that journalists sometimes are incapable to explain why the pests died, let alone questioning the origin of the stinking rivers that nurtured such many pests<sup>xxxvii</sup>.”*

Informant#5, investigative journalist in *Beijing News*, replied to informant#3 that, it should be biting the dying or died big pests and live small pests. However, Informant#5 also mentioned her depression when four colleagues leave the investigative reporting team: *“Journalists have gone. Who comes to check the authorities? The victim is not the privileged or powerful but ordinary people. If journalists are not welcome to supervise the authority, what am I doing here?”*

Although investigative journalists have not encountered outrageous punishment after cautious calculation of political boundary, they write more and more self-criticism as the routinized punishment of publishing any expose-style coverage. Carrying out “criticism and self-criticism” in the media is a manifestation of one of the CCP's “three great superior traditions” (the other two

are “speaking truth from facts” and “the mass line”) (Zhao, 2011). Writing criticism is the most common and the most mild punishment for journalists touching the news event with political taboo. Informant#16, the president of *Beijing News*, revealed that he has wrote more than one hundred self-criticism; nevertheless, he and the newspaper were still safe<sup>xxxviii</sup>. However, forced to write self-criticism, journalists feel pressure imposed by the Party-state, which seems to warn journalists to stop their practice. Sometimes, when it comes to exposure of social problem, journalists will recall the large numbers of self-criticism they have wrote and felt that their hands tightly tied. They show resentment against the unfavorable political environment that Chinese investigative journalism takes shape and gradually become tired of engaging in such practices under such political situation.

Generally speaking, three parts should be included in the self-criticism: confessing the mistakes of investigating the forbidden topic, describing the news-making process to indicate that the report was operated with professionalism, and guaranteeing to follow the Party’s propaganda policies and principles in the future.

Here is a short chunk of self-criticism written by informant#7, for his investigation of luxury government buildings in the late February 2014:

“In the period of ‘national conference’, which should have been the peaceful and cheerful days, I-in a moment of folly-wrote the investigative reporting about the economic corruption of government in Hailun city, Hei

Longjinag province. I felt guilty about my mistakes. Thus, I am waiting to receive the punishment from the Party...”

“Although my sin in the inquiry of official corruption, my investigation process has strictly followed the professional procedures. I am sure that what I have reported is verified many times from different materials and different informants...”

“I promise to relearn the Party’s media ideology and policies. I will strictly follow the Party’s media principles in the future....”

Although writing a self-criticism is effortless for journalists, they are unconvinced by the Party’s blame on journalists for their reporting, which assembles journalists’ courage and intelligence. While they feel increasingly impatient to the Party’s meddling in their daily practice, they can’t openly show the resentment against political intervention. In the long run, the depression and disappointment embedded in the heart renders journalists to give up the profession.

#### **5.4.3 Online journalism newsroom: shelter for investigative journalists**

If the crime culprit of the loss of journalists are unfriendly political environment that Chinese investigative journalism takes shape, the boom of online journalism-enabled by Internet technology- speeds up the trend that traditional journalists change the occupation. Regarding to the switching the career, there are limited choices provided to printing journalists: turning to

business, going to the magazines targeting at soft news, or transferring to other newspaper that could afford higher salaries. With the advent of online journalism room, it provides new opportunities and opens large numbers of job placements for traditional journalists. Compared to daily journalists, experienced investigative journalists are highly recognized and welcomed by online journalism newsroom. Online journalism has a prominent advantage over traditional media on the grounds of lighter working load and higher income. Recent years have witnessed a dozens of investigative journalists change their job from printing newspaper or magazine to online newsroom, where they are directly appointed at chief editor. There are many examples that famous investigative journalists or experienced editors turn to online newsrooms, such as Sohu.com, Sina.com and Tencent.Com, which are the places that most of investigative journalists choose to go after resigning from investigative team. Therefore, online newsroom is considered as the asylum of Chinese investigative journalists. Around 2010, a water-shed in the eyes of a lot of Chinese investigative journalists, because many of them leave for the Internet newsrooms (Zhang & Liu, 2013). For example, investigative journalists of *Southern Weekend* informant#20, becomes the chief editor of Tencent.com in 2010; Mengbo, deputy chief editor of *Beijing News* in 2003 and chief editor of comment desk of *Southern Metropolitan Daily* in 2005, becomes the chief editor of Sohu blog department in 2009; Chief Editor of *Beijing News* and *Southern Metropolitan Daily* Li Lie goes to Sina.com in 2011; in 2013, Lang lang, an investigative journalist from *21<sup>st</sup> Century of Economic Reporting*

based in Beijing, became the manager of Tencent company. In 2012, Jian Guangzhou, a ten-year investigative journalists of *Oriental Morning Newspaper* based in Shanghai, left for an Internet company. Before he left the investigative team, Jian posted an microblog, saying "News has died, goodbye" and so on. Informant#20 believes that, the reason underlying investigative journalists' quit is primarily the difficulty in China carrying out investigative journalism (Zhang & Liu, 2013). But a lot of journalists also point out that the unstable and relatively low salary is the equal important, or more important factor than political concern in pushing those investigative journalists, who already have children and family, to transfer to a high income job (Jing, 2011).

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I systematically introduced the new strategies initiated by the new leadership to further control traditional media. What is more, I attempted to connect political environment with crisis of Chinese newspaper and investigative journalism. My analysis proposed a new approach-with a focus on *process*- to discuss the impact of political control and the interplay between macro-level Party-state and on-going journalistic practice embedded in the news organizations. Existing scholarship, drawn from case studies in the fixed time point, invariably goes into a dichotomous analytical trap, focusing on either 'the Party's control mechanism' or 'journalists' resistance to such control'. However,

the media-political relation is actually a *process*, because there is no fixed time when political censorship and directive will come to the newsroom. Therefore, the interplay between journalists and political power is on-going throughout the news making process, starting from the news events occur to the publication of news coverage. In the process, various impacts brought by political meddling of reporting emerge, which are beyond the dichotomy between 'successfully skirting political censorship' and 'tragically defeated by political censorship'. The repercussion caused by political control is not only 'political' but also 'commercial'. It undermines the capacity of newsroom and journalists' to carry out the critical and professional reporting they have desired and appreciated. Beyond that, it also leads to the economic loss both for news organizations and individual journalists. For newsroom, whose flagship production is investigative reporting, the decrease of such genre of coverage has impinged on its market competitiveness and newspaper attractiveness. Investigative reporting could be particularly useful in helping newsroom differentiate itself from other publications and information on the Internet, which is particularly crucial to excel in the market in the digital era. For individual journalists, the killed coverage by propaganda department leads to the deduction of income, which is largely based on how many reports are published and how many words are build on each coverage. In the long run, the difficulty to realize the professional ideal and the unstable and unsatisfied economic condition, interwoven together, dampen the confidence and enthusiasm of newspaper and individual journalists-which

definitely is the crisis particularly characterized Chinese traditional journalism.

## **Chapter Six: Political control over Internet and investigative journalism**

In the last chapter I have introduced the new policy and activity initiated by the new leadership to control traditional media. I also discussed how the political control relates to the crisis of the printing newspaper, investigative journalism, and investigative journalists. This chapter I will explore how current central government takes further step to clean the cacophony of online information and its possible impacts on traditional media. In addition to continuing to censor the Internet, the new leadership, similar to its predecessors, is also proactively incorporating the Internet into its communication system (Zhao, 2011). However, the specific strategies are different. I suggest that no longer targeting at forcefully promoting their agenda and manipulating public opinion in favor of the party-state, the new leadership places the emphasis on gauging and guiding public emotions in its proactive effort to reorient the terms of public discourse on the Internet. Central to this goal is a concern for public sentiment, which refers to the cumulative emotional outpouring against the government triggered by the Internet-facilitated mass incidents. Being attentive to popular emotion is not new for the CCP's governance practice (Perry, 2013), but it is fresh to be reinvented and re-appropriated to manage public discourse on the Internet. Such

transformation-from public opinion to public emotion-is driven by the Party's gradual awareness that the thorny issue needed to be urgently solved is the 'public opinion crisis' on the Internet and its repercussion on the party-state authority. The public opinion crisis is largely resulted from ordinary people's emotional outpouring and resentment against the government in the case highlighting official corruption, negligence or malfeasance. In other words, it is emotional catharsis rather than serious discussion about particular issues that dominates the public discourse on the Internet. The emotional outpouring undermines the government's credibility and threatens the Party's rule. Therefore, authorities are adopting new tactics, shifting its management focus from manipulating public opinion to appeasing the sentiments. Previously, once news cases relevant to official corruptions and social problems characterized current China exposed on the Internet, they will quickly transform into a causes célèbre that sparked an emotional outpouring online, which in turn inspired professional journalists to follow up. Public discussion, despite of emotional expression, provides investigative journalists source, courage and protection to carry out a report. The interaction between online public debates and offline reporting has been well captured by scholars. However, what I intends to discuss in this chapter is how the interaction has been cut off after the new round of Internet management carried out by the new leadership.

After more than a decade of double-digit growth, with a penetration rate of 42.1 percent, the Chinese Internet had more than 564 million users by 2013

(CNNIC, 2013). The rapid growth of the Internet has brought profound changes to the Chinese political and social landscape, and thus attracted a substantial amount of attention from scholars. Internet has multiplied the amount of information available, the variety of sources, and the international reach of news (Shirk, 2011:2). The Internet also offers individuals the means to write and disseminate their own opinion, and even to organize online mobilizations (Tai, 2006; Yang, 2009a, 2009b; Zheng, 2007; Zheng & Zheng, 2009; Zhou, 2008). Those new features-enabled by the technological advantage of the Internet-are particularly significant for China, where citizens previously had little opportunity for unconstrained public self-expression or access to free and uncensored information (Xiao, 2011b). Thanks to the explosion of Internet information, Chinese people-better informed than ever before-are becoming more critical of the authorities. Many Chinese Internet users are characterized by their enthusiastic and outspoken participation in online discussions of Chinese current affairs (Hung, 2010).

In contrast to print and broadcast media, the versatile and dispersed nature of the Internet has challenged the state's well-established information controls. While the CCP has been largely successful in controlling the state-owned commercial mass media, managing online content has proven far difficult. Controlling the information available to Chinese citizens and controlling the public expression on the Internet become more difficult. Despite the explosion of Internet-based information and the rise of public opinion have shown that the

CCP and government can no longer maintain absolute control over information, the state, with the anxiety of Internet's potential to threaten the Party's political hegemony, is still invested heavily on information control.

Existing scholarship provided well explanation about how the state responded to the new challenges through various controlling measures, ranging from administrative(institutional) level, legal level, to technological level (Yang, 2009c; Cherry, 2005; Harwit & Clark, 2001; Tsui,2003). In the administrative level, as early as February 1994 when the number of Internet users was still insignificant, "the State Council issued the Safety and Protection Regulations for Computer Information Systems, which put the Ministry of Public Security in charge of ensuring the Internet security"(Zhou, 2006: 135-137). Since then, series of departments are established or incorporated into CCP's endeavor of information control, such as Administration of Internet Safety and Protection, Administration of Internet Information Service, The Bureau of Internet Information Management, and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (Ang, 2003; Cheung, 2003; Zhou, 2006). Some institutions take charge of controlling contents and information on the Internet, and some others are responsible for regulating the software or Internet service application. For example, The State Council Information Office is responsible for regulating the nation's websites engaging in posting news. China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology is responsible for regulating China's telecommunications and software industries. It also controls the licensing and registration of all

'Internet information services' or 'Internet content provider'.

Wary of the powerful influence of new media over public opinion, the authorities have made tremendous technological investment to control the content accessible to the Chinese people. One of the largest and most sophisticated Internet monitoring systems-working as the vigilant Internet police-has been built to delete online content judged as harmful to social stability or challengeable to CCP's authority (Mackinnon, 2010; Esarey & Xiao, 2008; Zhang, 2006).A software called 'Green Dam Youth' was compulsorily required to be installed on all computers sold in China to block dissident web sites (Yang, 2009d). If deleting the unacceptable contents works as the government's primary strategy to manage information, a less obvious however no less insignificant tactic employed to augment its censorship is neutralizing online critics through posting information endorsing the government's position on controversial issues. A group of technicians, trained and paid by the government, pretend to be ideological sound ordinary netizens on the Internet. They specialize in posting pro-government remarks and promotes the Party line when critical views against governments' position roars. Through hiring the paid web commentators, the government seeks to guide public opinion in a nontransparent fashion, because those commentators are disguised as ordinary people to participate in a debate with those venting their opposition online. It has been estimated that there were 250,000 to 300,000 paid web commentators active on the Internet in 2008 (King & Roberts, 2012). Local Propaganda and Youth League officials are particularly

keen to adopt this technique. Faced with critical views on controversial issues, the government does not foster an open dialogue with Chinese citizens to hear their voice, but to fabricate the impression that the strong tide of social opinion endorsing the government, to put social and psychological pressure to conform on people with critical views, and thereby to reduce the anti-government voices (Shirk, 2011; Zhao, 2012; Zheng, 2008).

With respects to legislative efforts, the government enacted regulation to require Internet users to employ their real names when registering for the blogging or miclogging service, so as to timely identify the content written by political activists or dissidents (Bandurski, 2008). Activists who are over aggressive and voice dissident opinion on the Internet will be jailed in a name of undermining national security (Brady, 2008; Lagerkvist, 2005; Michael & Mulvenon, 2002). Therefore, similar to print and broadcast media, the Internet in China is expected to be censored with unrivaled efficiency (Rosen, 2010). The logic underlying the expansive and draconian information management is making sure that the information reaching the public through commercial media and the Internet does not inspire people challenge party rule. The above-mentioned three tracks of Internet management, Internet software and application management, legislative regulation and information censorship, was identified as a “trinity control mechanism” by some scholars (Wu, 2009). Although those controlling strategies are designed and practice in a systematic way, they are considered as “passive censorship” (Zhao, 2004b). By virtue of political satire,

spoofing, and ironic uses of politically correct language, insubordinate Chinese Internet users have successfully challenged and eroded the political censorship over information (Esarey & Xiao, 2008, 2011; Herold & Marolt, 2011; Meng, 2011; Rosen, 2009, 2010; Gong & Yang, 2010). Consequently, Chinese Internet users can always use newly developed technology to make government control less effective. Empirical evidence could be found to support the argument that in spite of stringent government efforts to control Internet, there are great varieties of online political expression and activism (Cheung, 2011; Qiu, 2009; Yang, 2011).

The most important concern of Internet censorship is to prevent the undesirable demonstration or protest resulted from the free flow of information (Xiao, 2011a). For decades, the government has ruthlessly suppressed any organized dissent in China (Zheng, 2008). However, beneath the surface of the constantly increasing and intensifying control measures is a rising level of public self-expression and consciousness of right in Chinese society. Xiao Qiang even argued that the rise of online public opinion show that the CCP and government can no longer maintain absolute control of the mass media and information. The exponential expansion of the amount of information available to the public has produced an irreversible trend towards a more “participative citizenry”, which will lead to a “power shift in Chinese society” (Shirk, 2011:15).

Due to the online public opinion’s fast-growing influence, the party leadership has to pay attention to the deluge of public comment. Since President Hu Jintao’s second term, the government seemed to realize that shaping public

opinion through total control or repression seems strenuous but unproductive for the new technology environment. The speed and decentralized structure of online public opinion are too difficult to censor, if not impossible. The government therefore began to inject new tactics into the information management system. In 2009, the newly-established *People's Daily Public Opinion Monitoring Office*<sup>xxxix</sup> has published a report to advise Chinese authorities that rather than censoring the public opinion or influencing public opinion through pro-government information posted by paid commentators, it should follow the public opinion to learn more about the demands of the people (Ding, 2009). The report emphasized that Chinese netizens have formed a new group that could exert pressure on government. Therefore, Chinese government officials should be responsible to online opinion and learn to handle it in a way that will not intensify social conflict (Yang, 2011). The reports recommended Chinese government to actively publicize information in dealing with online protest or Internet mass incidents (Media opinion monitoring office, 2009).

It is true that CCP leaders have been investing heavily in mechanism to control Internet content. Especially during President Hu Jintao's second term (began in 2007), the party strengthened its efforts to manage the information environment (Shirk, 2011:3). However, beyond the image of the Chinese state as the world's most notorious Internet controllers, as recognized by scholars, the CCP has been proactively incorporating the Internet into its system of communication (Zhao, 2011; Nele, 2013; Mackinnon, 2011; Warren & He, 2011;

Lei & He, 2006). This point attracts much less attention from scholars. During Hu's reign, the party-state has started such efforts by setting up its own information opening system on the Internet, such as government portal website and official microblog account (Chen et al, 2006; Ian & Yep, 2005). Those policies are designed to increase communication between the government and the general public on the one hand and also increase the government's transparency and accountability on the other. However, the interactive function of official website or microblog seems under-developed in Hu's leadership. Government portal website or microblog-mostly used as the information bulletin platform-are considered top-to-down one way communication and thus attracted less attention from netizens. Many municipal e-governments in China are not often visited and many official microblog accounts are not followed by microbloggers (Zhang, 2002). Moreover, netizens are inclined to consider official microblog as the Party's propaganda tool. When Xi comes to power, new strategies were introduced to operate the government microblog, fading its straightforward propaganda orientation out. Meanwhile, new policies were implemented to manage the cyberspace.

In the chapter, I will elaborate how Xi and the current establishment-using new strategies-incorporate Internet into its propaganda system. I suggest that recognizing its limited ability to control what people should think and control what people should remark, the party shifted its focus to guide what people think of. Particularly, its introduction was a response to the crisis of government

legitimacy on the Internet when news stories circulated on the Internet and transformed into a cause célèbre that sparked an emotional outpouring and resentment against the official negligence or malfeasance. Instead of suppressing or neutralizing the online critics on the critical, sensitive, controversial political news, the new leadership turned to guide public emotion in the direction of politically correct. Government new policy towards new media will also affect traditional journalistic practice. The analysis in this chapter is preliminary in the sense that it is mainly based on government and party documentation and supplemented by journalists' analysis. Some government and party documents are secret, acquired during my participation observation in *Beijing News*. Some others are public information that could get access to on the Internet.

## **6.1 Beyond Internet Controller in Hu's regime**

In President Hu Jintao's second term, the state has strategically encouraged and subsidized the websites of major central propaganda organs to open online discussion room for deliberation. The most notable example is *People's Daily* web forum *Qiangguoluntan*. Hu Jintao chatted with netizens in *People's Daily's* 60<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary in June 2008, projecting an image of a central leadership listening to the voices and concerns of Internet users. Similarly, during the season of China's National People's Congress in March 2009, entitled "Premier, Please Listen to Me" , the website of *Xinhua News Agency* hosted a space for netizens to

send their concerns to then Premier Wen (Li, 2009: 13). In 2010, online bulletin board “Direct to Zhong Nanhai” was launched for sake of exchanging opinions with netizens.

Opening online discussion forum was considered as a more sophisticated strategy initiated by the Party to regulate emerging public debates. It fulfills a dual function: on the one hand, by hosting online forum for netizens to express their concerns, the party-state hopes to limit netizen’s online participation within the granted space. In other words, the party-state seeks to actively shape and define the real boundary of experimenting with public debates in the virtual community, and thus prevent people from participating in public dialogue beyond the boundary in the broad cyberspace (Jiang, 2010). Furthermore, the venting function of online discussion forum is expected to reduce the potential of off-line movement taking to the streets (He, 2006a, 2006b). On the other hand, the seemingly greater sense of freedom on the Internet articulates little relationship with the guarantee of individual rights and freedom in reality (Mackinnon, 2010).

Following this vein, in 2010, when microblog, replacing online discussion forum, becomes the most popular social media application in China, Chinese party-state actively incorporated microblogs into their administrative operation as a form of ‘e-government’. Microblog is designed as the key platform for officials to release information, interact with masses, and increase transformation. The first government microblog was opened by Yunnan

provincial government in November 2009. After that, numerous official microblogs have been launched and attracted extensive social attentions (Ma, 2012). By 2013, more than 258737 government microblogs has been set up (including 183232 government agency microblogs and 75505 official microblogs) (Xinhua, 2013). In addition to making official microblog a new trend of e-government, the central government also emphasizes to enhance the officials' media literacy to catch up with Internet current. For example, the State Council Information Office and Tsinghua University working together have trained hundreds of official spokespeople for central, provincial, and municipal government agencies to give press briefings (Shirk, 2011:21). The Central Party School organized training program among 'bureau-level leading cadres', which is focus on the understanding of the feature of information dissemination on the Internet and the skills of responding to netizens' sentiment outpouring on hot-button issues (China Digital Times, 2010).

In the last few years, accumulating online mobilization and public discontent have led to a decline in the credibility of the government and threatened the party-state's legitimacy. Facing the growing public opinion crisis, government microblog is primarily introduced to make government more responsible to public demands and online debates (Nele, 2013). However, mere existence of interactive design, such as commenting and replying tools, does not mean that direction interaction really takes place. According to scholars' research, Chinese government microblogs are rather static tools that do not contribute to direct

exchange between the party-state and ordinary people. Netizens' questions and comments are not provided feedback from government microblogs(Liu, 2013). They repeat the one-way and top-down information relay strategy with insignificant citizen involvement (Schlaeger & Jiang 2013). Government microblogs hence fail to adapt to the multidirectional dynamic and interactivity as expected. Meanwhile, most microblog posts are government messages and news, and only a few of them are public service messages and interactive messages, which indicate that government institutional microblogs are still functioned as online bulletin boards for the unilateral circulation of information (Liu, 2013). In addition to the information distribution, government microblog functions as an instrument for refuting and correcting false rumors and thus contribute to restoring the party-state's monopoly on information (Zheng, 2012, 2013). Survey among Chinese netizens about their perception of Chinese government microblog further confirms its functioning as state-centric model of online politics (Nele, 2013). 45.7 percent of people believed that official microblog is making a show with little tangible influence. 36.8 percent of netizens suggested that government microblogs did not facilitate interaction. Nearly all the correspondents complain the stilted and formulaic language of official microblog, presenting little difference between Party newspaper and television (Hu, 2011).

Compared with ineffective response of government to the public expression imbued with irrational emotion on the Internet, social protests and public

discontent towards social injustice have continuously increased in number. Because traditional media are still tightly controlled by the Party, the Internet becomes the first place to disseminate information related to official corruption, governmental misadministration, property and labor rights violations, the conflicts between the underprivileged and the powerful (Xin, 2010; Perry & Selden, 2003:49). Those issues, hitting what Chinese ordinary people concern most, could go viral quickly and transform into a cause célèbre that sparked an emotional outpouring on the Internet. Enormous numbers of Internet users will express their resentment and indignation at social injustices and the dereliction of the related government agencies. Netizens also release their frustration with the lack of effective institutional channels for dissent and redressing grievances (Yang, 2011). Although government microblog is designed to address public concerns and channel public dissatisfaction, it serves as information distribution platform and thus fails to achieve such object. Therefore, government is under questioned, criticized, decried and even abused by netizens. Such Internet-facilitated public opinion outpouring has undermined ordinary people's trust in government (Zheng, 2007). Dozens of 'online uprising' events have made microblog a place of venting public dissatisfaction with power abuse, political corruption and social justice (Lagerkvist, 2005; Xiao, 2004). In order to save the public opinion crisis and remedy deteriorative public credibility on government, Central government adopts new tactics to uphold its influence on the Internet. The new tactics are particularly designed to appease public sentiment on the

Internet. Specifically speaking, after Xi Jinping comes to power, government microblog shifted its focus from listening public demands and solving problems, which Xi's predecessors have attempted to do but failed, to appeasing "public indignation on the Internet" and leading "emotion of netizens". In a gist, Xi's strategy of managing online public opinion is dredging the negative emotions instead of redressing social illness exposed by netizens given that expressions of sympathy, anger and irony dominate intense online interactions (Yang, 2009b).

## **6.2 New Landscape in Xi's leadership**

### **6.2.1 Continued Internet control**

It is clear that under President Xi Jinping's leadership, the government will persistently rump up its efforts to monitor and censor online information. After Xi came to power, he has stressed the Internet security in many circumstances: "Internet security is a major strategic issue concerning a country's security and development as well as people's life and work. Without the Internet security, it is impossible to have the national security"<sup>xi</sup>. Furthermore, Xi urges to speed up legislative efforts to draft laws and regulations on managing online information<sup>xii</sup>.

Informant#1, the investigative journalist in *Beijing News* with an expertise in reporting political policies, introduced me the institutional adjustment of Xi's leadership, from which he believed the highlight of the new authority could be drawn. President Xi Jinping established and helmed three new high-level

committees after he came to power: In-depth Reform Committee, National Security Committee and Central Internet Security and Information Leading Group. The three newly formed central institutions indicate that reform, national security and Internet security stand the paramount issues concerned by the current leadership. The Central Internet Security and Information Leading Group is aimed at promoting Internet technology across various sectors on the one hand and addressing Internet security on the other. Similar to the predecessors, the current leaders also have a “deep ambivalence” toward the Internet: they are eager to reap the economic benefits but also wary of its political risks. However, different from former leadership, establishing a president-led and central-level panel specializing in Internet security should be considered as a strong signal of Xi’s intent to tighten its grip on online discourse and address sensitive cyber-security issues. Senior staffs who will work concurrently at the office while keeping other posts include its acting director, Li Keqiang, also the Chinese Premier, and Liu Yunshan, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau and the Director of the Propaganda Department. Since August 2013, Xi urged to develop a favorable and healthy cyberspace. Under the slogan of making cyberspace purified, the focus of Internet information management advocated by Xi is rectifying the chaos of the Internet full of rumors and public resentment against government and social problems<sup>xlii</sup>.

Xi’s particular emphasis on the Internet security inevitably influences China’s Internet policy. The new leadership clearly points out the bottom-line that

everyone can't step into when using the Internet and the objective that Internet governance intends to achieve. On August 10, 2013, policy of "Seven Bottom Lines of Internet Information" is issued by State Internet Information Office, which is regarded as a new round of campaign to keep a stricter supervision over online information. According to *People's Daily*, the seven bottom lines are: the bottom-line of insisting socialist system; the bottom-line of upholding national interest; the bottom line of obeying the laws and regulations; the bottom-line of protecting citizen's legal right; the bottom line of maintaining social and public order; the bottom-line of promoting social ethics and virtue; the bottom-line of disseminating facts and truth. The seven bottom-lines are described as "high voltage power lines" or "boundary of political mine-field" that anyone should not touch or step into" (People's Daily, 2013)<sup>xliii</sup>. The proposal of seven bottom-line of online communication is powerful. Because, on the one hand, it is the re-appropriation of the management over traditional media suited to the new media space. Previously, the authorities set the minefields for the traditional media that journalists should be cautious about reports on the news events. Meanwhile, the minefields are both visible and invisible that self-censorship is practiced by journalists to prevent themselves from being too aggressive. Currently, the bottom-line is also set for the ordinary people, who are the same as the traditional journalists that could also voice their opinion through the Internet platform. Previously, resorting to the practices of Internet filtering, blocking, and censoring, both the government and numerous websites employ

people to read and censor improper content manually (Xiao, 2011a). However, such management is all after *ex post facto*. The establishment of bottom-line is beforehand measures that force ordinary people to conform to regulation and stop them from posting any information challengeable to the Party's ideological hegemony. Just as the traditional journalists who will be punished if they insist to publish the politically-sensitive news, ordinary people will be arrested if they-regardless of bottom line-persist in posting the information challengeable to the Party's rule. What it more, the expression of bottom line is vague that it is difficult to judge what types of information will or will not violate the bottom line regulation. Such ambiguity may lead to the practice of self-censorship when ordinary people experiment with online communication. The arrest of some liberal and radical Internet commentators in the summer of 2013 is a case in point. On August 23, 2013, an Internet celebrity Xue Manzi was detained on charges of soliciting prostitution. Holding the American citizen, Xue was an active and critical commentator on hot-button political affairs and social problems on his microblog platform. The real reason for his detention was speculated as his radical opinion rather than prostitution. Making an example of Xue was a warning to others to restrain their online expression (Yang, 2014).

Along with the seven bottom-lines, the legislation speeds up to provide legal basis for punishing Internet users who post information deemed as 'rumor' or 'harmful to social stability'. On September 8, 2013, the Chinese Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's Procuratorate issued a judicial interpretation, stating

that people who post false information on the internet may face up to three years in prison if the posting is viewed more than 5,000 times or re-tweeted 500 times (Yang, 2014).

To further how its determinism of initiating the national campaign to sanitize Internet expression, six objects of online content management to achieve are announced by State Internet Information Office, an agency set up two years ago charged with guiding, coordinating and supervising online content management. According to Lu Wei, the leader of the Office, the six objects are as follows:

First, listening to the public opinion and appeasing the negative emotional outpouring against government legitimacy; Second, promoting the advanced socialist culture and upholding the truth, virtue and politeness; Third, fighting against the Internet rumors; Forth, speeding up enacting Internet laws and regulations; Fifth, safeguarding Internet security; Finally, developing Internet technology and booming the Internet industry (Xinhua, 2013).

Based on my analysis of current Internet policy, it seems apparent that the new leadership, the same as his predecessors, still has the deep anxiety about the Internet's subversive effect of facilitating mobilization that could turn against CCP rule. Therefore, the introduction of 'seven bottom lines' and 'six objects' is a clear sign of tightening the control over the country's Internet. However, the new central government shifts its Internet management attention from 'state's control over information' to 'self-discipline of individual Internet users'. The crude practices of blocking and censoring content will continue, more efforts may be

spared by the Chinese government on leading the Internet users to proactively give up the critical views and turn to post ideologically sound information. The establishment of 'bottom-line' and its legal basis could translate into an imagined surveillance force, intimidating Internet users to be careful about their voice when participating the communication in the virtual community.

### **6.2.2 Anti-public opinion leader on the Internet: the time of Big V has passed**

Internet cannot only amplify the play and influence of major news but can weaken the influence of party media in setting the agenda (Reese & Dai, 2009; Lei, 2011). At the root of these changes is the decentralization of communications, which allows Internet users to "choose their own agendas" (Qian & Bandurski, 2011:61). This point is also captured by CCP, who uses the analogy of 'microphone' to explain the ferment of public opinion on the Internet. Titled 'The microphone era', People's Daily commentary has repeatedly emphasized that 'in this Internet era, everyone now has a microphone in front of him so that could be an information channel and a principal of opinion expression (Lu, 2010). The large amount of information on the Internet has showed that there is no longer any hope for the authorities to maintain the monopoly of Information. However, the government's uneasiness about the potentially destabilizing effect of the Internet forced it to control as much as the dissemination of view. In order to make the control over information more effective, the new leadership puts the new emphasis on the public opinion

leaders on the Internet, who are mostly liberal and outspoken and have the profound influence in shaping the direction and tone of public debates about hot-button issues on the Internet. Compared with tens and thousands of grass-roots microbloggers, public opinion leaders are much smaller in quantity. However, the public opinion leaders on the microblog are powerful in setting the agenda in discussing hot-button issues, because what they said will attract huge attention from ordinary netizens and will be widely reproduced on the Internet. Targeting at preventing public opinion leaders from voicing negative comments, the new leadership finds an easy but effective way to control the public opinion of cyberspace.

According to the report given by public opinion monitoring room of People's Daily, four groups, including government microblogs, public opinion leaders, market-oriented media, and party-organ media, compete for news agenda on the Internet. Therefore, in order to grasp the news agenda on the Internet, the voice of party-organ media and government microblogs should beat the market-oriented media and public opinion leader, which are also entirely possible to release the different perspective from the former two<sup>xliv</sup>. The most salient feature of microblogging is the emergence of opinion leaders, which serves the role of a Gramscian 'organic intellectual' in directing ideas and challenging the official hegemony (Tong & Lei, 2013). Public opinion leader, also known as Internet Big V<sup>xliv</sup> or Internet celebrity, is famous for the popularity of their content on the Internet, especially in the platform of Sina microblog and Tencent

microblog. The 'celebrity' status is measured by the criteria established by government itself. According some internal-only circulated document, government made a list of three-hundred public leaders, which is based on number of followers (at least 100,000 fans), times of their opinion quoted by traditional media coverage and degree of radicalness of their perspective. The government also provides a profile of these three-hundred public opinion leaders. They are predominately male and between 40-60 years old. Nearly seventy percentage of them hold the master and above degree. A majority of public opinion leaders' work in the broad sense of media field, such as traditional media institution, film industry, book publishing industry, advertisement company and so on. They earned an annual income between ten-thousand to sixty-thousand RMB and thus could be regarded as middle-class in current China. The defining feature of online public leaders is they keep close contact with traditional media and thus they could express their opinion both on the Internet and on the traditional media<sup>xlvi</sup>. Big V has become the generic name for influential voices on the Internet, because Big V bloggers play an important role in mobilizing a movement by reproducing messages for wider attraction, adding comments to certain issues to resonate with a wide range of public, giving personal authentication to messages to churn up a wave of heated discussion, or being aggressive enough to articulate what others could not say in the face of political censorship. Some of Big Vs even have become more influential than certain state media organs (Buckley, 2013). Realizing the Big V's significance in setting news

agenda and to better control information on the Internet, the authorities have pursued a combination of ideological indoctrination and political offensive against Big Vs for the first time. For the obedient public opinion leaders, the authorities encourage them to promote the Party's ideology and guide their followers in the politically-correct direction; while for the disobedient public opinion leaders, the authorities have put pressure to conform on people with critical views through detaining some Big Vs as a warning bell. For example, the detention of outspoken Internet commentator Xue Manzi has made a point to all Big Vs on the Internet.

The ideological campaign targeting at influential (micro)bloggers on the Internet started from the Conference of Online Public Opinion Leaders, held by State Internet Information Office on 15 August, 2013. The conference requires Internet celebrities to take the social responsibility of spreading positive energy and complying with 'seven bottom lines' when they are posting information or expressing opinion on the Internet. Lu Wei, director of the State Internet Information Office, said that Big V-with large number of followers-has particular responsibility to tell the truth, protect state interest and maintain social order (People's Daily, 2013). At the same time, the Chinese government-in the name of fighting against malicious rumor-mongering online-has pursued a new round of crackdown against Big Vs. Complying with the new policy, a torrent of commentaries was carried out by *People's Daily* and *State-run China Central Television*. For example, entitled 'Be aware of Big V's potential to become big

rumors mongers', commentary from *People's Daily* warns public opinion leaders not to write provocatively about sensitive social and political issues.

According to Lu Wei, public space on the Internet is no longer regarded as virtual sphere but considered in the realm of real public space. Therefore, there is no difference between mobilizing online protest and taking to the street. Given that China has not formal Internet laws, incorporating the virtual space into the broad sense of physical public space makes a judicial breakthrough for the state's management over Internet, because it invests police detentions of online critical commentators, dissidents and activists with legal basis. After the wave of crackdown, according to the data provided by Internet Opinion Monitoring Room under *People's Daily*, microblog has ceased to be a raucous forum, with critical comments and emotional outpouring that could undermine the Party's credibility and hegemony. For example, the number of posts by a sample of 100 public leaders has declined by nearly 25% in September, 2013 (only one month after the Conference) and Internet rumors will be deleted effectively within 24 hours (Sun, 2014).

### **6.2.3 Cultivating Medium Vs and planting positive information**

Ever since the Mao Zedong era, the methods used by CCP leaders to inculcate political loyalty and ideological conformity have reflected an acute awareness that peer groups have a more powerful impact on individual attitudes than authority figures (Shirk, 2011:14). In Hu's reign, propaganda officials are

applying this insight to the management of the information environment on the Internet. The introduction of 'paid Internet commentators' is targeted at employing the ideologically sound peers to influence and persuade the people with critical perspective. However, the tricky is easily detected by the sophisticated Chinese Internet users. The ideological sound peers are not ordinary people who post pro-government information of their own accord, but the paid technicians who are forced to work as the loud speaker of the Party. The current authority still borrows the insights of 'peers' influence' into its shaping of the public opinion on the Internet. However, the task this time is undertaken by the medium Vs on the Internet. Medium Vs are verified accounts with moderate numbers of followers, less than Big Vs however far more than grass-root users<sup>xlvii</sup>. Although they are not as influential as Big V, Medium V's concerns and opinions about social and political issues could also attract attention from ordinary Internet users. Generally speaking, the medium V microblog users are professors, high-ranking editor and journalists, lawyers and experts. Because they are expertized in some areas, their idea could in-fact add authority to some cases when what they talk are fell into their own field. Therefore, the government cultivates the medium Vs to propagate the Party's line and support the Party's policy on controversial issues.

Compared with previous method-creating a wave of social opinion supporting the government through paid commentators, employing the medium Vs is a more transparent way to propagate the Party's ideology and influence

public opinion. The method is transparent in a sense that people who propagate the Party's ideology and support the Party's policy is no longer the anonymous person disguising the identity, but the verified account on the microblog. Ordinary people could clearly find out who they are and where they work. However, to some degree, promoting the Party's ideology through medium Vs is also an opaque and subtle way to influence public opinion, because ordinary people do not know that moderate Vs' activity is not spontaneous, who are following the Party's instruction to deliberately guide public opinion. One more important point is, planting positive online commentary and influencing public opinion through Medium Vs is more effective than paid commentators, because the formers are intellectual elites and experts, while the latter is just ordinary people. It is easy to understand that influential bloggers are more effective than ordinary people in playing the role of spokespersons for certain issues, because their professional identity gives personal authentication to the opinion they proposed.

In a short, the rise of microblogs has given prominent commentators a powerful platform, who can frame hot-button topics more eloquently and theatrically. Their opinion, enabled by the velocity and breadth of the transmission of information on the microblog, has the sweeping reach to the large amount of ordinary netizens, which is even and greater than the newspaper and televisions. Some big Vs are liberal and outspoken, who care about the hot-button issues closely relevant Chinese current social problems. The tone of

their commentary varies from earnest outrage to sarcasm to allusive irony. Offensive messages, written by Bigs V, could be widely reproduced and churn up a tide of public debates on the microblog. What is more, a big V microblogger can transform an otherwise obscure issue happened in a small-town area into a subject of hot topic attracting passionate national discussion, which in many times put pressure on the government. The growing public leaders, who frequently stands on the opposite side of the government, have challenged the hegemony of the Party's ideology through their liberal expressions. Clearly aware the power of Big Vs in shaping the trend of public opinion on the Internet, Chinese government the first time targets their control particularly at the group of big Vs. Cracking down some dissident Big Vs as the warning to the others, the current Chinese government has showed its determinism to solve the headache brought by Big Vs. In addition to cracking down the insubordinate Big Vs and stringing the expression freedom of Big Vs, the government is indoctrinating the medium Vs with the Party's ideology and requires them to shoulder the responsibility of proactively promoting the pro-government opinion and molding online expression. By virtue of new Internet management strategies, the new leadership expects that the positive voice of official microblog, allying with the voice of Medium Vs, could overwhelm the critical voice from Big Vs and ordinary Internet users. Xiao Qiang, as a scholar studying the Chinese Internet, estimates that this round of Internet governance, targeting at courting or intimidating influential people in the Chinese public sphere, is much harsher than ever before

(Buckley,2013).

## **6.2.4 Guiding public opinion and public emotion on the Internet**

### **6.2.4.1 Guiding public opinion**

On 25 February, 2014, Xi organized the first conference of the Central Internet Security and Information Leading Group. Xi called for innovative methods to spread mainstream values, stimulating positive energy and maintaining proper guidance of online public opinion. Xi said “we must be adept at guiding public opinion on the Internet. Doing a good job of guiding public opinion is a long-term mission”<sup>xlviii</sup>. The guidance of public opinion on the Internet became the *buzzword* of the new leadership’s policy over Internet.

‘The guidance of public opinion’ was not a creative idea in the realm of the Party’s media policy (Chan, 2007). It has been the centerpiece of propaganda work since the massacre of demonstrators at Tiananmen Square in 1989 (Qian & Bandurski, 2011:79). However, it is fresh on the grounds of introducing the idea to the digital media, as a response to the crisis of government legitimacy on the Internet. In the Mao’s time, highly conscious of the importance of public opinion, the CCP devoted a huge amount of resources to managing popular views of all issues(Pool, 1973). The core function of media is the arousal of public opinion in support of party line and policies, and the supersession of critical public opinion (Chan,2007).Different from ‘enforcing the idea what people should have’

'repressing the opinion what people should not have', 'upholding the public opinion of standing with the Party' and 'censoring the public opinion of standing against the Party', guiding public opinion is an in-between method, which is a more indirect, flexible and subtle way of influencing and shaping public opinion. 'Guidance of public opinion' developed a new interest in the attention management, including how to use the media to maneuver the angels that people think about hot-button issues and divert their attention towards accidents or social problems from 'questioning and criticizing the government' to 'showing the sympathy to the suffered and illuminating the hope for the better future after the tragedy'. If strategies used by former leadership in dealing with online public opinion are stipulating what could discuss and what could not, the guidance of public opinion tries to shift its concern away from 'confining the scope of legitimized topic' or 'repressing unacceptable public opinion' towards 'the initiation of attention and the creation of cognitions' in the earlier stage of public opinion formation (Chan, 2007). Therefore, through guiding public opinion, rather than paying attention to whether the widely-circulated information or opinion should be censored, the CCP begins to consider they could prevent Internet from rising any online public opinion unfavorable the Party.

Such transformation is achieved by the State's recognition that public opinion on the Internet is impossible to suppress and the suppression of public opinion by force could never achieve genuine uniformity of public opinion or consensus. New technology facilitates ordinary people to choose their news

agenda and thus weaken the influence of party media in setting the agenda. News events could become the 'cause célèbre' among ordinary people after the extensive discussion on the Internet. It is impossible for government to guide the public opinion without adequate responses to these 'hot spots' even if they are not on the news agenda of traditional media.

In the operational level, in 2013, the CCP, across all levels and administrative departments, are continuing to grapple with microblog (China digital times,2013). Beyond the increase of government microblog in number, government microblogs strengthen the cooperation and break the isolated condition between each other. In order to lead public opinion on the emergencies and sensitive issues, *People's Daily*, has allied itself with other Party-press and government organs to establish the 'Microblog National Team'. Microblog National Team will respond together when hot issues happened on the Internet to amplify the voices of the Party and thus overpower the voices of netizens. Previously, official microblogs work separately. They post or reproduce information according to their needs. Nowadays, the government requires that official microblogs should resonate with the Party's viewpoints through reproducing the information on the *People's Daily* and *Xinhua News Agency* when news related to emergencies or social problem ferment on the Internet. Such resonance could make the voice of the Party State prevail and thus overshadow the critical voice. The overwhelming voice of the Party could guide ordinary Internet users to discuss and comment the hot topics consistent with the Party's tone. According to the data provided by

People's Daily Public Opinion Monitoring Room, since August, 2013, regarding to the issues with great attention and heated discussion, Microblog National Team, which represents the government's response or explanation, has been louder than any cacophony on the Internet. With a figurative expression that 'Microblog National Team has recaptured the microphone on the Internet', Lv wei claims that the scenario that government is questioned, criticized, or even abused has been overturned.

#### **6.2.4.2 Guiding public emotion**

In addition to increasing government microblogs in number, government microblog makes adjustment in the aspects of 'what to post' and 'how to release information'. Instead of acting as the platform of information bulletin, promoting positive energy and guiding public emotion become the overriding duty of government microblog. Such transformation, still targeting at solving 'public opinion crisis', intends to reverse the passive situation of government that being criticized or abused on the social media.

The importance of gauging and guiding public emotions, both domestic and international, is emphasized repeatedly by Propaganda Department, ranging from Maoist era to post-Mao China. The overriding goal of emotion management is to make people *feel* sympathetic to the party's agenda (Perry, 2013). The goal further centers on a concern for 'public sentiment' that Perry (2013) called an umbrella concept that refers to the cumulative emotional and cognitive impact on ordinary people of party and government policies. The tradition of 'emotion

work' is modernized reapplied to manage the online public opinion.

As I have mentioned above, Chinese blog and microblog sphere is not only characterized by the liberal and aggressive opinion, but also emotional outpouring such as playfulness, sadness, resentment, grievance, and sympathy (Yang, 2009). Therefore, the public opinion crisis is not only because more social problems-skirting the political censorship-could be revealed on the Internet, but also because those problems have churned up a tide of public emotion and dissatisfaction, questioning the governing capacity, criticizing the official malfeasance or even mocking the Party's rule. To appease the emotion and rescue the falling government credibility, central and local government have showed responsiveness to the public opinion on the Internet-providing explanation or solving some problems that have drew greatest attention and triggered heated discussion. However, irrespective of the *de facto* efficiency of government's responsiveness to those issues, central and local governments tends to be inundated with emotional outpouring relevant to any emergencies, official corruption, and social problems. Therefore, dealing with some while leaving most fails to cool off public emotions and convey an image of a competent government that could solve social problems. Given that public opinion and emotion has resulted in the fall of government credibility and given that solving social problems cannot appease the public emotion, the new leadership beings to invest heavily with managing the online emotion.

The reinvention of 'emotion management' in the new communication

technology environment entails the incorporation of new elements suited to the new goals. According to the brief that ‘trouble caused by Internet should be solved on the Internet’, the Propaganda Department barks on Internet in general and social media in particular as more effective means of reaching a population than television and newspaper (Perry, 2013). Furthermore, Xi urges the propaganda cadres to respect the feature of the new mode of communication. Only to understand the attitudes and outlook of the intended audiences that the effective tactics and strategies to prioritize the Party’s ideology could be formulated<sup>xlix</sup>.

Specifically, the emotional regulation mainly relies on the official microblog. Previously, a prominent problem with official microblog that makes it increasingly disgusted in ordinary people’s eye was its stereotyped type of party writing. Microblog is a place full of ordinary people’s discourse; therefore, it is not surprise that conveying the Party line in a rigid official tone on the microblog incurs the ordinary Internet users’ aversion. However, releasing official information is inclined to be trapped in the traditional propaganda pattern. Central propaganda cadres realizes the need to dispense with their usual practice of responding to Internet mass incidence by posting official announcement, in favor of a new approach that actively enlisted the official microblog in a propaganda blitz intended to ‘guide public sentiment’ along lines congruent with state policy (Perry, 2013). Government microblog turns to disseminate lyric phrases or comments, which are warm, positive, and getting rid of using stiff

official tone. Those lyric phrases or comments are not about official response to any news events, but a comfort to grieving people.

A telling story is the revision of *People's Daily* microblog. Featured by the delicate rhetoric and inspirational writing, *People's Daily* microblog shows sympathy to the injured or dead in the emergencies or the abused in the case related to social inequality. In addition to writing warm words, *People's Daily* microblog also lights the candle and calls for praying for the heartbreakers when expressing its sympathy and regret to the emergencies and social problems. At the same time, it advocates all the Internet users to pray the bright future. Because of breaking the rigid propaganda tone, the *People's Daily* microblog has received widespread favor and attracted twenty-million followers.

The mobilization strategy used by *Peoples' Daily* in service to the cause of guiding public emotion could be demonstrated in some instances. For example, in the case of terrorist attack in Kunming, Yunnan Province, *People's Daily* writes several pieces of warm comments, such as 'let us pray for the loss of life. Please light the candle and turn off the light. Kunming, do not cry' 'Hope the decreased could rest in peace and Kunming will be always beautiful', and 'We are together with you, Kunming people' and so on. In the case of explosion happened in Kaili city, Guizhou Province, *People's Daily* again lights the candle and advocates to pray for the killed and injured. It should be noticed that, however, *People's Daily* has wrote nothing about how and why such terrible emergencies happen and how the government deals with the emergencies. Nevertheless, the ignorance of

key information related to the facts of the case does not cause the dissatisfaction of netizens, instead, successful guiding netizens to put the attention on praying for the dead and the injured rather than on the case itself. Similarly, when news stories related to social inequality or the abused power disseminated on the Internet, *People's Daily* microblog indoctrinated that "tomorrow will be better" to comfort the angry netizens. Particularly, *People Daily Microblog* came up with a catchy tactic that open a column entitled 'hello, tomorrow', which facilitates netizens to speak out their Chinese Dream and propagate positive energy. 'Chinese dream' is a new term within Chinese socialist thought proposed by Xi Jinping on November, 2012, just two weeks after he became China's new president and Communist Party general-secretary. Xi has described the Chinese dream as 'national rejuvenation, improvement of people's livelihoods, prosperity, construction of a better society and military strengthening'. Xi also encouraged ordinary people to achieve individual dreams and thus contribute to the revitalization of the nation. Yang (2013) comments that the idea of a Chinese dream is smart. Because, different from the totalizing ideology promoted by the Party-state, dream could reside in individual people's mind. The idea of Chinese dream could be broad in the national level as well as specific in the individual level. Xi Jinping's allusions to a 'Chinese Dream' of a strong party and nation articulates little conflict with ordinary people's own ideals and dreams(Perry, 2013). Therefore, although 'Chinese dream' is still symbolic resources to augment the Communist Party's ideological and political authority, it is no longer

represented in a top-down totalitarian and indoctrinating way. The phrase is therefore welcomed and used by journalists, government officials, and activists to describe the role of the individual in Chinese society. However, for ordinary people, a steady diet of ideological propaganda imposed by the regimes could depoliticize the public. (Shirk,2011; Pool, 1973:462).

According to Zhu Huaxin, the general secretary of Monitoring Room, since August, 2013, negative comments on the microblog have declined by 63%. The positive public opinion on the Internet has overwhelmed the negative voice, which could be measured in two aspects-one is the decrease of social problems exposed by netizens on the Internet and the other one is the decrease of criticism of or emotional outpouring towards government. Just as Lu Wei has suggested, Chinese microblog is no longer a place deluged with complaints, grievances and suggestions from ordinary people. What is more, the Party and the government have gained back the Internet microphone. They have recaptured the initiative in setting the tone of breaking news and sensitive topics (Sun & Li, 2014).

In short, rather than repressing the public opinion or providing official response to Internet mass incidence after the ferment of public opinion, China's new leadership is actively employing it and more importantly trying to shape it to their own ends. In essence, CCP has not gave up the ingrained habits of censorship and control when it comes to information, no matter how innovative and subtle strategies are used. However, shifting the attention from responding

to ordinary people's comments and demands to guiding public emotion, the rising of extensive public discussion and emotional outpouring towards particular cases is apparently averted.

#### **6.2.5. Mass-line on social media**

The same as predecessors, President Xi Jinping is savvy in building his image as warm leader and showing his closeness to ordinary people. What differentiates Xi from former leaders is Xi takes a great leap forward to using microblog to proactively cultivate an accessible leader image. After Xi took office, his image campaign is not only conducted with the help of television and newspaper, but increasingly carried out on the Internet and through social media.

Xi's predecessor Hu Jintao also sought to portray himself as being in touch with ordinary people on the Internet, which however was achieved by scheduled and occasional online chat session with netizens in particularly days, such as *People's Daily* 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary and National People's Congress season. Although Hu came to an online presence, such interaction-arranged in advance and rarely happened- was considered as a political showing and high-ranking official's visit to virtual chatting room of ordinary people. By comparison, Xi attempted to be presented online more frequently and in a more civilian way. However, Xi has not signed up microblog and he is impossible to post information about his work and his life as ordinary people. How does he achieve the object? The preemptive use

of microblog service has helped Xi to burnish his image as a warm leader and stay in touch with ordinary people. Previously, any activity or visit of Chinese official leaders will be reported by state-run traditional media, such as China Central Television and Xinhua News Agency, which definitely represent authoritative discourse and official ideology. However, after xi came to office, his casual visits or activities will be merely reported on microblog, which could be considered as a communicative platform for ordinary people. Even though information is still released by official microblog account, it is in the platform of ordinary people rather than state apparatus that makes Xi's campaign for an accessible leader get rid of official tone and authoritative stereotype. Replacing state-run media with social media, Xi's activity relating to mingling with public is considered in the realm of Xi's spontaneous and self-initiative willingness to concern about civilian life, rather than official arrangements' inspection similar to any other formal activities a country's leader should engage in. Experimenting with social media to build image, Xi has subverted the traditional image of Chinese officials, who are not known for mingling with the public other than at scheduled events, and has portrayed himself as a warm political leader being in close touch with ordinary people. What is more, Xi's proactive embrace of Internet makes it clear that the current leadership reorients its Internet management strategy in order to bring the 'mass-line' into the new media sphere.

A microblog account, called the 'Fan Club of Learning from Xi', appears on Sina microblog on November, 2012. The microblog account posted the

information about Xi's official trip information outside the capital in China and also photographs of Xi and his family members. Those activities are rare unusual in China where the private lives of officials remain shrouded in secrecy. Affectionate nickname 'Pingping' is used by the microblog when referred to Xi's mottoes and his favorite sports. When XI Jinping made his official out-of town trip to the Guangdong province on November, 2012, his every movement was chronicled by the microblog, which was always one step ahead of the news reported on *CCTV* and *Xinhua News agency*. Those Party traditional media will not make any mention of the trip until the visit has completed. Nevertheless, many media analysts conjecture that the microblog is not the work of real 'fans' and is definitely not from some ordinary grass-roots-level netizens. It appears more like a part of well-oiled propaganda effort, practiced either by the Party Central Committee's General Office or by Xinhua News' Agency's reporters (Richburg, 2012). Whatever its origin is, Xi Fan Club account has received the overwhelming praise from ordinary people.

Imitating western officials, who often attract public attention by dining at casual eateries, Xi ate steamed bun in an ordinary Beijing bun shop on 29 December, 2013. Without surrounded by heavy security, queuing up and ordering buns as common people, Xi broke the stereotyped security protocol. The videos and photos of Xi's bun shop visit-firstly posted by ordinary microblog users and then reproduced by *People's Daily*, *Xinhua News Agency*, *China Central Television* microblog accounts- quickly went viral on the Internet. The microblog

“President Xi lines up to buy steamed buns” receive unanimous positive comments from netizens and become the hottest issue on the microblog. President Xi continued his campaign to be seen as a warm leader by taking a stroll on Nanluoguxiang, a historic area of Beijing, on February 25, 2014. Xi’s casual visit is again reported by microblog rather than state-run traditional media.

Xi’s strategic employment of social media to cultivate its image has closely connected ‘mass-line principle’ with ‘gauging public emotion’. According to Public Opinion Monitoring Room of People’s Daily, Xi’s image as a warm leader has been widely spread on the Internet and highly appreciated by ordinary Internet users. Dissemination of Xi’s image and casual activity on the social media has made positive contribution to propagate the Party’s ideology and imposed pressure to the jarring voice of criticism and emotional outpouring against government. Employing social media to cultivate image of political leader is fawningly described as historical transformation by several printing media.

In a nutshell, Official and mainstream media are customarily utilized by CCP authorities for their own propaganda purpose and therefore represent official discourse; while social media is regarded as the platform empowering ordinary Chinese people with a voice. The immediacy of the postings about Xi’s visit on the microblog, which is even earlier than official media, created an illusion that ordinary people is closer to president Xi and ordinary people could get information faster than official media. In the similar vein, the unique information

about Xi's family life on the microblog also bridges the gap between high-ranking officials and ordinary people. However, informant#1 remarked that, this is still propaganda however practicing in a much cleverer and humanized way. It shows how Xi and the other newly elevated top leaders more respectful of digital technology than their predecessors. Xi's proactively heading for microblog is also targeting at eliminating the cacophony of Chinese cyberspace<sup>li</sup>. Therefore, posting Xi's activity relevant to ordinary people on the public communication platform rather than official media has benefited the authorities in two aspects: first, it facilitates Xi's promotion of himself as a warm leader; second, it is a preemptive action in alleviating the pessimistic sentiments on the internet.

### **6.3 The impact of the increasingly peaceful and clean cyberspace on investigative journalism**

The online uprising had a significant impact on Chinese society because there is still no systematic way for the public to participate in the debates about political and social issues that highly relevant to themselves. Since the traditional media remains under the tight editorial control of propaganda officials, the sensitive and controversial political news appeared firstly in Internet news forums (Lagerkvist, 2005).

However, microblog establishes itself as a vehicle for the expression of subjective opinion and extreme sentiment. Advocating the simplistic and

emotional nature of the discourse on the microblog sphere is very likely to create the radical idea about the news events and consequently veil the truth and facts (Leibold, 2011; Sustain, 2009). Therefore, information on the microblog needs the support of mainstream media to carry out investigations and make the public aware of the underlying social problems or policy deficiencies the case throws up (Xin, 2010). Professional journalists' involvement would also add the authentic presentation of citizens' voices (Guo, 2012). The coverage from traditional media could also amplify the pressure from public opinion on the Internet and accelerate the resolution of given incidence. In the process of journalistic practice, news events that are widely discussed by Chinese netizens could indeed influence the agenda setting of traditional media. The collaboration of traditional media and online discussions on the Internet help break China's Internet and media censorship (Yu, 2006).

Scholars have identified the process of mutual enhancement between traditional media and Internet-based new media in muckraking practice. The development of Chinese social networks, online chat forums, and blog/micoblog sphere has opened up the space for public deliberation (Reese and Dai, 2009; Yang, 2009: 216). Therefore, new media will initiate a news agenda and provide endless, primary source of story leads for traditional media (Tong & Sparks, 2009; Wang, 2011; Xin, 2010; Zhao, 2008). The explosive public opinion and the accumulating information on a particular social problem will provoke traditional media to break a news story (Nip, 2009; Gong, 2009; Bivens & Li, 2009; Reese &

Dai, 2009; Zhou & Moy, 2007). In turn, coverage from mainstream media could support online debates and more importantly justify the story discussed on the Internet. Only after being picked up by mainstream media can online information be legitimated and therefore generate genuine influence on society (Tong, 2011). Further discussions among netizens will be intrigued by mass media reports. Netizens probably go further to find more details by larger scale searching activities. The substantial online discussion also urges the traditional media to enhance its reporting standard and accountability. Consequently, a positive interaction between traditional journalism and public opinion on the social media is established in the process of revealing the official corruptions and social problems. There are many case studies have shown how the cooperation between online discussion and mainstream media coverage have exerted pressure on government to react. In some limited cases, such pressure could even alter government policies. For example, the collaboration between online mobilization and *Southern Metropolitan Daily* in reporting the arrest and custody death of migrant student Sun Zhigang in 2003 (Zhao, 2008; Yu, 2006); the synergetic effect of online discussions and *Southern Weekend's* and *Southern Metropolitan Daily's* coverage about pengshui poem scandal in 2006<sup>lii</sup> (Tong, 2011); the collaborative work between investigative journalism in *Caijing Magazine* and the online public opinion uprising in the case of Shanxi brickfield scandal in 2007<sup>liii</sup> (Tong, 2011); the cooperation between public opinion and *Southern Weekend* in covering the dead villager Qian Yunhui in 2010, who was

assassinated in revenge for Qian's relentless petition the government for better compensation of land acquisition; and the interaction between public debates and *Phoenix Weekly* in exposing the self-burning three villages in protecting the demolition of their home.

Moreover, some scholars also point out that the increasing amount of information and public opinion on microblogs could provide a protective tool for traditional journalists (Shirk, 2011; Tong & Sparks, 2009). The widespread information, the rise of common knowledge and the online emotional outpouring coalesce to make officials difficult to censor the information and enforce media blackouts (Shirk, 2011). Thus, tapping into public opinion on the Internet and investigating the topical social issues widely discussed on microblogs could help journalists to anticipate, circumvent, and even push the political boundary of what is permissible to report (Zhou, 2009). Journalists are also helping blur the boundaries between traditional and online media by opening their own microblog. It has become clear that the power of Internet and its interplay with traditional media are creating the public opinion in China.

Particularly, sprang up since 2012, microblog has empowered ordinary Chinese a new tool for holding corruptive local officials to account. A number of officials have been removed from their positions due to corruption or misconduct after investigations by disciplinary authorities. Different from traditional media's supervision over power, it is the Chinese's ordinary Internet users' revelation of their corruption on the Internet that makes those officials sacked. For example,

Zhou Jiugeng, a former real estate management official in eastern coastal city Nanjing, Jiangsu province, was sentenced to 11 years in jail for bribery. His corruption is revealed by an online photo showing his cigarettes with exorbitant prices, which is identified by netizens. Yuan Zhanting, mayor of Lanzhou, capital city of northwestern Gansu province was dismissed from position, which is resulted from netizen's discerning of his extravagant watch. Lei Zhengfu, a district head in Chongqing Municipality, was sacked within only 63 hours after his sex video with a female leaked to the Internet. All of them were exposed by Internet users who found the initial clues and even provided evidence for official investigation.

Regarding to the ordinary people's enthusiasm and wisdom in exposing official corruption, Chinese central government has fallen into a 'deep ambivalence' (Shirk, 2011:5). Monitoring the actions of subordinate officials could help central government keeps an eye on local power. The traditional media and ordinary people's supervision could further drive the local officials to become more accountable. However, on the other hand, frequent expose of official corruption could undermine public's credibility on government, which provides an opening for public pessimism and dissatisfaction to emerge. Trapped into the dilemma, current leadership decided to eliminate the microblog expose and control anti-corruption activity on the Internet<sup>liv</sup>. After a wave of Internet regulation since August 2013, which includes arresting public opinion leaders who are involved in the advocating the online protests, propagating the positive

information by official microblog to guide the public emotion, and deleting the inappropriate information with the potential to challenge the legitimacy, there is a striking shrink in exposure of official corruption and social problem on the Internet. Social media are no longer the platform for the abused or unprivileged to appeal for fairness and justness. The bottom-up online activism, empowered by the social media, is significantly weakened<sup>lv</sup>.

The government's control over virtual communication sphere takes a toll on traditional media, because the mutual enhancement between traditional media and Internet-based new media in exposing politically or socially sensitive issues are cut off. Previously, in the whole process, the formation of online public opinion and the offline mainstream working together, has carried out many influential investigative reportings. The online participation of the public has become an important force that mobilizes investigative journalists. The online and offline interactions could have great influence in exposing social problems and exerting pressure on government to react. However, when if the social problems are no longer discussed on the social media and the ferment of public opinion is carefully controlled by the government, the collaboration between ordinary people and professional journalists are cut.

## **Summary**

In a nutshell, in Hu's regime, the state played a more passive role in the

microblogsphere. Before 2012, despite the overwhelming liberal opinions on the microblog sphere, there is no celebrities arrested due to their aggressive and outspoken expression on the microblog. There have been detentions of some rights activists, but not on the basis of their microblog messages. Perhaps, the authorities then were still convinced that as long as it controls the activists and dissidents in the real world, it has removed the substantial challenge over the regime. Opinion leaders are free to have opinions on the virtue microblog as long as they don't transform the online mobilization to the off-line organized street protests in the reality. During Hu's reign, maintaining the social stability is the topic priority. A lot of manpower and material resources are invested in the realm of local security bureaus to control and suppress the mass disturbance. However, after Xi came to power, the current government realizes the ideological battlefield on the microblog. Gradually aware of liberal intellectual's potential to weaken the Party's hegemony, the government has tightened the control of the microblog sphere.

After examining public blogsphere in China, some scholars have pointed out its potential to promote a "democratic rehearsal" process (Baum, 2008; Dai & Reese, 2007; Yang, 2009c), which is not a revolution but an empowerment in a thousand tiny and everyday ways. It seems not clear if the public blogsphere could promote the gradual transformation of Chinese political system, however it is clear that the Internet has opened a small crack for competing viewpoints, which could undermine state control (Yang, 2009: 213). Empirical studies have

shown that different from mainstream television and newspapers, information on the blog and microblog sphere is largely divergent from party-state propaganda (Esarey & Xiao, 2011). Microblog also provides a vehicle for both comic criticism and emotional catharsis (Gong & Yang, 2010: 4). Particularly, public leaders have played an important role in forcing the Chinese government become more accountable through expressing opinion counter to the official versions and drawing followers' attention. The close involvement of traditional media has extended the online opinion to the offline field. The coverage from newspapers may add more powerful pressure on the government. In Hu's reign, the regime has not found an effective way to deal with the overwhelming liberal tendency in the microblog sphere, which has turned out apparently damaging the ideological hegemony of the Party. The tightening Internet censorship alone can not rescue the falling ideological hegemony and government credibility among ordinary people. The state has been compelled to pay far more attention to public opinion, which has resulted in the resilience of the Communist Party under the Xi's leadership to maintain its political power. Several new strategies are employed by the Communist Party to regain the ideological hegemony on the Internet. On the one hand, public opinion leaders are warned not to take a lead in shaping public opinion on the hot-button issues. On the other hand, proliferation of positive information, posted and reproduced by official microblog accounts, has replaced the radical emotion and criticism to help the government unify and guide ideology on the microblogosphere. The government's proactive

intrusion of Internet has also deeply influenced the practice of traditional media, particularly the investigative journalism. Previously, public's active participation in information dissemination and online discussion has benefited investigative journalism in three dimensions: first, it offers endless clues and primary sources for investigative journalists to look into, which broadens the range of news topics; second, it provides journalists motivation to break the propaganda taboo to carry the news coverage out. Because investigating those issues could cater to the readership, gain the public support and then gain the commercial benefits. Third, it gives journalists political protection and helps them push the boundary of what is permissible and what is forbidden. Because, wide-spread information and heated discussion on the Internet makes the central and local government difficult to censor the information. Nevertheless, when the social in general and microblog in particular are no longer a place for ordinary people to expose official corruptions, and social problems and critical opinion is diluted by the Party's promotion of positive emotion, the mutual enhancement between public and investigative journalists are largely undermined.

## **Chapter Seven: An Organizational Analysis: The Case Study of *Beijing News***

In the first few chapters, I have discussed what the crisis of Chinese newspaper means and how such crisis is closely related to the broad political and economic conditions. This chapter I will talk about the impact of technologies on the news organization and the response given by the news organization. Linking the macro-level political-economy analysis to micro-level media sociology, what I intends to highlight in the chapter is different from western countries where the paramount issue for most media is paying its way in a capitalist economy, organizational adjustment in Chinese newsroom is not only driven by the emerging economic crisis and technological impact; the adjustment is also a response to the increasingly tightened political environment. Therefore, the undergoing transformation in the newsroom is to accommodate both the economic and political pressure bearing down on Chinese printing journalism.

There has been particularly troubling for the newspaper industry. The problem is because readers, especially the younger people, are deserting newspaper for the immediacy and interactivity of the Internet, because news organizations have lost their “privileged position in delivering the world to their audiences”, and also because advertisers are increasingly attracted by the possibilities of “more accurately targeting audiences online”, which altered the

“business model of traditional news”(Freedman,2010:35). To what extent the undergoing technological and economic changes have reconfigured newsroom and journalistic practices remain a pertinent question (e.g., see Deuze, 2003, 2005; Lewis et al. 2010; Phillips, 2010; Phillips et al., 2009).

Political-economic explanations are well suited for us to understand the broad outlines of crisis printing newspaper and traditional journalism is facing. However, the link between the larger political economy of society and day-to-day practices in journalism, as Gramham Murdock has observed, “oblique”(1973:158). News is not only about how a dense inter-meshing of political, commercial, regulatory and cultural components shape its contour, but also what journalists make it. To better understand how a particular news organization, on a day-to-day basis, reacts to the economic crisis and technological impact, sociological analysis of newsroom is borrowed to explore the working mechanism-new established and old remained- in the digital age. When facing a changing environment, an organization may create new scenarios or repair the existing ones for new practices that will be more adaptive. This may involve any combination of the following: “changing the ways in which component units relate to the organization; adding or eliminating some units; changing the responsibilities of some units, and reshuffling journalists between different units”(Pan, 2000a). In essence, these activities involve “intra-organizational maneuvering and resource mobilization in an organization’s back region” (Pan, 2000a).

In the past thirty years, Chinese traditional media has faced two times of economic upheaval. The first one occurred in the early media reform period of last 90s when the government is no longer providing the subsidy to the media. The market competition has ever suddenly became harsh, because news organizations need to compete for the advertisers and readers to support themselves. The second one came out in 2013. The market competition again is turning intense because the development of Internet has taken away numerous advertisers and readers from traditional media. The year 2013 has been considered as a watershed, when printing newspaper in China has began to suffer from huge decline. To protect themselves from dying out, the traditional media therefore have to find a way to coexist with new media so that find the specific niche market.

My fieldwork in *Beijing News* could provide us a clear description about how *Beijing News*, underwent a wave of organizational restructuring in the end of 2013 and early 2014 as trying to position themselves better to compete in the digital age. The organizational adjustment includes, cutting the newspaper pages and rearranging the page content, establishing the online-version *Beijing News*, adjustment of investigative reporting team and introduction of ‘informant #12 Studio of Figure Stories’<sup>lvi</sup>.

Simply put, the principles and core consideration involved in the adjustment of *Beijing News* as follows:

“In essence, *Beijing News* intends to run a newspaper in the digital era, in

which the amount of information is no longer important for a newspaper. Instead, be faster, be deeper, and be more accurate-as the new criteria-have been proposed for traditional professional journalists. In such situation, we anticipate *Beijing News* become magazine (focus on long reportage), visualized (providing more pictures and charts), differentiated (exclusive news stories),and also in-depth analysis”<sup>lvii</sup>.

*Beijing News* was not just the canary in the coal mine for Chinese traditional newspaper, it serves as one example among numerous traditional media around the world wrestling with financial crisis. In the western countries, decline in readers and advertisers arrived much earlier than China. Many western scholars have pointed out that journalism in the late 1990s began to engage in a time of media convergence in response to the challenges posed and opportunities offered by the Internet and other digital platforms. Regarding to the journalistic practice, media convergence is a process, where websites, online discussion forum, and social media-as an essential mechanism to distribute breaking news, a tool of soliciting news leads, sources and fact, and a platform interacting with audience-have been integrated in daily practices traditional journalists and newsroom (Farhi, 2009; Posetti, 2009; Hermida, 2010; Gordon, 2003). Journalism is correspondingly experiencing a shift from “individualistic”, “top-downmono-media journalism to team-based”, “participatory multimedia journalism”(Deuze, 2005;Deuze & Marjoribanks,2009). However, such integration is considered by journalists as a threat to quality journalism when organization

espouses real-time news, large volume of information and the integration of social media content in the traditional news coverage (Nienstedt et al, 2013; Kawamoto, 2003; Pavlik, 2001). Although digital tools give journalists increasingly effective techniques for finding diverse sources and producing news in a more portable and inexpensive ways, they also propose the challenges for journalists in checking reliable sources and facts. Scholars talk about how 'shoe-leather' reporting, which has ever considered as the best reporting, is gradually replaced by the fact that journalists spend increasingly less of their time out in the field observing directly the events and processes on which they report. Scholars also talk about striving for the immediacy redefined by the citizen journalism has significantly reduced time allocated journalists for news gathering and devalued an in-depth coverage; adoption of user-generated content creates tensions for professional journalism based on a discipline of authenticity and accuracy (e.g. See Deuze, 2005, 2008; Lasorsa et al. 2010; Phillips, 2010; Phillips et al., 2009; Ahmad, 2010; Hermida, 2010; Hermida & Thurman, 2009). Scholars have accordingly extended their research to a close examination of how specific newsroom, such as the *New York Times* (Koblin, 2009), *Wall Street Journal* (Strupp, 2009), *CNN* (Lasora et al. 2012). and *Bloomberg* (Carlson, 2009) to institute social media policies to their journalistic practices. Scholars suggest that convergence in journalists' reporting practice is clearly prevalent in media organizations.

So far, however, the few studies have been conducted to look at how new

media influence or redefine their well-established institutionalized practices and professional ideologies within a news room systematically although some scholars have argued that the “social media are creating new forms of journalism, representing one of the ways in which the Internet is influencing journalism practices and, furthermore, changing how journalism itself is defined” (Hermida, 2010). Current scholarship also provides little knowledge about if the newsroom structure, driven by technological change, is converging to bring about a fundamental transformation.

If there is no denying that every newspaper should be on a journey into some kind of digital future, other assumptions about the digital shift are still worth addressing. Techno-Utopian or Techno-determinist assumes that new media technology will completely redesign the newsroom and redefine journalists’ practice. Media convergence is therefore a good thing and inevitable. In this chapter, however, I propose that although journalistic transformation is happening, it is not true that new media technology will completely redesign the newsroom and redefine journalists’ practice. Even if new media has such potential, newsroom’s tradition and culture has generally made significant reorganization very difficult. Based on a case study of *Beijing News* in general and its investigative reporting team in particular, I will discuss how the individual newsroom reacts to the digital challenge. Instead of employing the emergence strategy as dominant scholars have pointed out, *Beijing News* has committed the newspaper a combination of ‘convergence’ and ‘de-convergence’ strategy. *Beijing*

*News* launched online newsroom-in a line with the fashion of convergence-is responsible for providing real-time coverage and promoting brand popularity. However, de-convergence model was innovatively employed by traditional printing newspaper to keep its tradition of providing exclusive coverage and in-depth analysis. As a result, the online newsroom and traditional newsroom are operated separately with different targets, dynamics, working routines and expectations. According to the 'convergence and de-convergence' strategy, *Beijing News* reshuffles its organizational structure to adopt and adapt to the changing digital landscape, which is the pioneer among Chinese newspaper on the journey of digital transformation. Based on my media ethnography, the chapter will depict how *Beijing News* reorganizes its newsroom, which is a balance between 'inevitably responding to the new challenge' and 'consciously keeping the old tradition'. I will also analyze how particular organizational culture-nurtured by *Beijing News*-makes it possible to embark on such reform strategies and innovation paths.

## **7.1 The Structural Adjustment: Cost-cutting**

### **7.1.1 Cutting pages**

It is clear that the Internet alters the existing processes of production and distribution, and thus impacts on the business models of the established media. *News* is increasingly inclined to be delivered on the Internet and delivering

through Internet further erodes established patterns of media consumption (Sparks, 2003:308). Readers are increasingly relying on Internet to track the updated information. The innumerable information on the Internet that readers could easily get access to at any time and at any place as long as there is a electronic device linked to the web has greatly weakened news organization's privileged position in delivering the world to their audiences(Freedman, 2010:35-36).Therefore, online delivery of news has gradually eroded the traditional way of circulating news based on newspaper. Not only does this new technology make stories easier to reach and report, but also it can have a significant effect on cutting costs (Wright, 2010). Daily newspaper is expensive on budget. It must invest in large printing presses, purchase large quantities of newsprint and ink, contract with an extensive distribution network, and hire many printers and distributors, and so, before they can begin publishing (Sparks, 2004:310). However, publishing houses with giant resources are challenged by individuals who own nothing but a computer and a desk in their bedroom. The transformation of readers from newspaper to the Internet in obtaining news and the economic plight the newspaper is suffered from has pushed the printing the newspaper to cut newspaper pages, merging several desks into one desks and reducing the staff to save the expenditure.

In the early media reform period last 90s in China, in order to compete for the advertisers and readers, newspaper had a tendency to be thicker and heavier, which is aimed at incorporating as much as information as possible into the

newspaper(Tong, 2011: 37). However, in the digital age, innumerable information on the Internet that readers could easily get access to make the volume of information no longer a concern for newspaper. The Internet with its endless options and direct sources all give the consumer the choice previously made by the news editor. In such situation, news organizations struggle to provide 'Internet-unknown' information in a time of overflowing with information. The sticky issue facing newsroom-providing the unique information and finding-is the big drivers of structural change. Therefore, newspaper, such as *Beijing News* has dramatically cut the pages to target at providing less but exclusive information on the one hand, and to save the printing investment on the other.

In 2014, *Beijing News* largely reduces its pages from eighty-eight to twenty-four. As a daily newspaper, *Beijing News*-under the slogan of 'responsible for reporting everything'- was famous for its abundant information, which covered almost every aspect of news topics. The previous eighty-eight pages offered a general package of sports, entertainment, business and national political stories. It was divided into four parts based on the different topic: A is political news and sports news, B is economic and financial news, C is entertainment news, D is local news and Beijing life. After the reform, *Beijing News* cut the economic and financial news, entertainment news and sports news. The new twenty-four-page newspaper only includes hard news and brief information relevant to people's daily life (such as weather, stock information, service function and so on). Furthermore, the pages are no longer divided by

theme of news content (such as political news, civic news, economic news) and geography (such as national political news, local political news and international political news); Instead, they are divided by reporting genre and story significance. The front-page should be the most attractive news that *Beijing News* intends to promote. The next sections are editorial comment, in-depth analysis of political policy, investigative reporting, focus interview or figure story, international news and local life information<sup>lviii</sup>. By and large, a defining feature in the adjustment of newspaper pages is cutting the brief and short articles. Deputy editor-in-chief of *Beijing News* informant#15, remarked that:

“Printing media may expect a long-term decline in newspaper readers. Consumer demand and technology are changing the way news is produced, distributed and consumed. Internet is a competitor for providing a great deal of information in an timely updated and fast manner, which largely takes over the role of disseminating brief information. Readers also gradually turn to Internet for breaking news or short reporting. However, information is relatively fragmented and compact in the digital form, which lacks the systematic description and in-depth analysis. Therefore, in order to compete with Internet, printing newspaper should focus on providing a critical analysis or thorough interpretation of news cases that have been already circulated on the Internet, or providing exclusive investigative reporting that is unknown by the world. To differ from information on the Internet, the news coverage provided by printing newspaper is expected to be a craft with journalists’

hard work, which should be pieced together from diverse and often obscure sources that are usually not available on the Internet<sup>lix</sup>.

Targeting at providing the distinctive information, the newsroom has particularly missioned two types of coverage: one is in-depth reporting, which includes investigative reporting, comprehensive interpretation of political policy closely relevant to ordinary people's daily life, and feature story of newsmakers; the other one is editorial, which represents their own perspective and opinion about news cases.

### **7.1.2 Combining 'business' and 'editorial' in the desk of soft news**

Similar to American daily newspaper, who have traditionally erected a strong barrier between the business and editorial sides of the paper, or so-called separation of "church and state" in order to protect the integrity and independence of the news (Pavlik, 1999, 2000), *Beijing News*, also gained its reputation for such separation. However, with a drive for greater circulation and increased profits, *Beijing News* launched to synergize the 'business and editorial' in the apolitical desk such as sports news, entertaining news, celebrity stories, and literature, home design and decoration, car supplement, and tourism and fashion supplement. The integration is aimed at finding more 'efficient' ways of working, exploring new revenue streams and reducing the employees. After the reform, those departments will be operated in a company pattern. Each department, including journalists, editors, advertisement managers, practices

news reporting, looks for advertisement and investment, and participates commercial activities. In other words, journalists are not only responsible for reporting the news, but also soliciting advertisement and investment. After the fusion of editorial and management desk, Economic and financial news, entertaining news and sports news will be published in the form of supplements and weekly magazines.

Dai Zigeng, the head of *Beijing News*, has ever been pretty proud of the tradition of editorial and management separation. He has ever claimed:

“The value of journalists and editors is ensuring the quality of newspaper. The value of management is flourishing advertising business. Management part can never make money from reporting. The successful experience of *Beijing News’s* business is that quality journalism attracts a quality audience which yields a quality group of advertisers. At the core of our newspaper is original journalism, with verified sources and a commitment to social responsibility. Therefore, news is not allowed to be interfered by business part”(Dai, 2010).

Han Wenqian, the manager of advertisement of *Beijing News*, also has ever suggested that “*Beijing News* will never change the principle of separation between editorial and business part. The fundamental factor for newspaper in achieving the impressive advertisement revenue is the high quality of news reporting the newspaper provides. For newspaper, the merger of editorial and business part could achieve significant growth in the advertisement revenue in the short time span. However, the newspaper will die after three years because it

lose the public credibility on the newspaper, which should have been paramount for the newspaper (Han, 2006).”

Nevertheless, in an irreversible trend that circulation and advertising revenues in printing newspaper continue to fall, *Beijing News* has to merge the editorial and business part in the soft-news section (including finance, culture, entertainment and sports). As a result of integration, nearly half of the staff is laid off so that the expenditure could be cut down.

The announcement of merging business and editorial part in the apolitical desk has attracted query from counterparts in other news organizations. For example, Luo Changping, the chief editor of *Caijing* magazine, criticized *Beijing News* in his microblog as follows: *Beijing News* is not doing the transformation of newspaper in the digital age, but transforming a newspaper to public-relation corporations. It is shameful for *Beijing News* that it intends to survive the economic crisis through increasing the paid news<sup>x</sup>.

Although it is still unclear that if the advertisement management of *Beijing News* will become chaotic, it is much more clear that the identity and function of journalists and XX will be blurred because of the formal connection between advertisement departments and editorial departments. Journalists will solicit advertising while gathering news. In fact, before the merging, journalists in the apolitical desk, earn the higher salary than journalists in political desk. This is particularly true for entertaining and sport journalists, who could get red packet every time they participate the activities or conference. Receiving red packet is

allowed for journalists working in apolitical desk, while forbidden for journalists in political desk, such as investigative journalism and national news<sup>lxi</sup>. After the merger, it is very possible that news will be offered as 'bonus' in catering to an advertising or sponsorship deal. The economic crisis the newspaper is currently facing forces it to increase the effectiveness of advertising solicitation. The number of advertisement journalists could solicit is also closely related to the material reward given by newspaper. What is more, the amount of bonus given by advertisers from one deal is much more larger compared with journalists' salary. Series of economic benefit could stimulate journalists to pursue the advertisement at the cost of the credibility and objectivity of news. Although the apolitical news will be published in a form of supplement, which is separated from daily newspaper, we are still not sure if such merger will influence the public's credit on the *Beijing News*. Nevertheless, it could be sure that such merger has remarkably increased the advertisement revenue of *Beijing News*, which has been showed in the data provided by *Beijing News* only two months after the implementation<sup>lxii</sup>.

## **7.2 Establishment of The Center of Media Convergence in *Beijing News***

Media convergence is described as "a melting together of information systems, telecommunications, and media technologies"(Deuze, 2004). In the news making process, it refers to a process whereby more than one media platform is engaged at the same time in the production and dissemination of

content (Erdal, 2007; Lawson-Borders,2003; Quinn,2005). Regarding to the research of media convergence, a great emphasis has been put on the cons and pros of the implication on journalism practice (Deuze, 2003; Pavlik, 2000;Singer, 2003). Numerous studies have pointed out that sharing content, sources and ideas between different platforms, especially on the various online applications, could be very useful and efficient for journalists. A lot of news cases could be cited as examples to prove that social media were advantageous as a primary means of disseminating updates during emergencies (Lasorsa et al, 2011). For example, twitter is preemptive in providing up-to-date information in the case of London subway bombing in 2005 (Gillmore, 2006), the crash of US airway's plane on the Hudson River in 2009 (Kawk et al. 2010), the 2009 Iranian election (Grossman, 2009) ,and the 2011 Egyptian revolution (Crovitz, 2011). What is critical about the digital environment in general and the explosion of 'user-generated-content' in particular is that it changes the phases of reporting breaking news and redefines 'news immediacy' (Bivens, 2008). The definition of news immediacy has been transformed from 'getting the news and pictures about what news spot looks like after the emergencies happened' to 'getting the news and pictures as it happens'. Journalists have raised concerns about the negative impact of ever-accelerating news cycles on quality journalism and accordingly on media's credibility (Fioretti & Russ-Mohl, 2009). Singer (2003, 2004) has shown how the tensions between online and print journalists have emerged during the integration of newsrooms and how this has slowed down the

supposed benefits of convergence. The consequences of journalists working with timeliness across more media type is what Davies refers to as “churnalism-the rapid repackaging of largely unchecked second-hand material” (Davies, 2008: 60).

Although with skepticism and obsession, current scholarship seems to agree that it is inevitable and irreversible that every newspaper is on a journey into some kind of digital future. Newsroom and journalists throughout the world strive to adopt and adapt to the media convergence environment. At the very moment, *Beijing News* launched The Center of Convergence Media to embrace the digital world on the one hand and to promote its brand popularity on the other. The Center of Convergence Media is remarkable on the ground that it takes over reporting the breaking news and all the online journalism tasks, ranging from tracking updated information, monitoring public opinion and hot-button issues, reporting breaking news, to interacting with readers. The printing newspaper, therefore, is ensured to practice traditional quality journalism without concerning the negative effect brought by digital technology.

In 2014, *Beijing News* establishes the Center of New Media Convergence, taking charge of reporting breaking news in the multi-media platform, ranging from electronic version *Beijing News*, *Beijing News* microblog to *Beijing News* public Wechat account<sup>lxiii</sup>. News about emergencies-in a form of short articles or diagrams-will be in the first time released on the above-mentioned digital platform. The Center of Convergence Media, led by informant#15 (Head of the Center) and guided by informant#17 (Acting chief editor), is targeting at help

*Beijing News* thrive and survive in the environment of 'heightened immediacy'. From journalism's earliest days, the work of journalists is surrounded by "an aura of instantaneity and immediatism, as 'news' stresses the novelty of information as its defining principle" (Deuze, 2005). Therefore, the work of journalists involves notions of speed, fast decision-making, hastiness, and working in accelerated time. Being immediacy is also an important criterion to beat the competition between different newsrooms (Weaver et al, 2007). The notion of immediacy in journalistic practice has been rekindled by digital technology. Informant#17, the former editors in investigative reporting team and currently acting chief editor of Convergence Media Center, explained to me how 'immediacy' has been transformed in the digital age:

*"Four years ago, when she was an investigative journalist, the immediacy means, she left for the news spot as early as possible, so that she could arrive at there earlier than other journalists. Nowadays, however, the immediacy means reporting the news when news is going on. The redefined notion of 'immediacy'-like second nature-requires journalists to make 'live' or 'instantaneous' coverage."*<sup>lxiv</sup>

Informant#17's explanation echoed many other editors from the world-wide mainstream news organizations, who also highlight the difference between 'traditional meaning of immediacy' and 'redefined immediacy-enabled by user generated information- in the digital age'. For example, BBC editor Nicola Green suggests that, news in nowadays is pretty much instant. By comparison, it is a

difference between “getting the picture of the explosion as it happens and getting the picture of firemen turning up afterwards and hosing it down”(Bivens, 2008).

Preoccupied with survival in the face of competition from the Internet, which transmits information instantaneously, The Center of Convergence Media is primarily focused on three areas: first, accelerating the newsgathering and distributing breaking news; Second, delivering news in an instantaneous manner without sacrificing *Beijing News's* commitment to accuracy; Third, imbuing the breaking news and major event coverage with innovative social media aspects, such as using data, diagram, and also pictures to report the news.

## **7.2.1 Working routines of The Center of Convergence Media: speed and accuracy are two major concerns**

### **7.2.1.1 Working routine**

Journalistic practice is operated in the media organizations, therefore it should follow working routines set by news organizations (Breed, 1955; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1973; Schudson, 1989b). Previous studies from media sociologists, over decades and across countries, have concluded that the organizational environment is the predictive of journalistic behavior pattern. What journalists do in the news-making process is a routine, deeply embedded in the process of socialization in the newsroom (Tuchman, 1978; Schudson, 1989b).

The organizational influence on the journalistic making process comes from organizational hierarchy demanding for journalists' conformity (White, 1950; Breed, 1955; Gieber, 1965; Snider, 1967), organizational preferred news values (Mcleod & Hawley, 1964; Johnstone et al 1972), organizational perception of journalistic role (Cohen, 1963; Donsbach, 1983; Soloski, 1989), the organizational requirements and working routine (Tuchman, 1972; Molotch & Lester, 1974; Schudson, 1991)

For investigative journalism today in China, it has been strongly embedded in the structures of individual news organizations (Tong, 2011; Lin, 2008, 2010). Thus, the practice of investigative report needs to follow a series of working procedure through allocating work, gathering news, the submission of reports, and the editorial process (Tong, 2011: 139). It is also true for new media journalists. Although news coverage on the Internet is expected to be operated in a pretty instant way, Convergence Media Center should follow a series of working routines, which by and large has been normalized to suit existing routines of traditional newsroom. Even if speed and immediacy are two major concerns, it should strictly follow a working process, from information gathering, doing interview and investigation, to writing up and posting on the Internet. What differentiates new media journalist and printing journalist is the former will gather information on the Internet or by phoning the interviewee, instead of going to the spot.

Generally speaking, journalists and interns should keep an eye on the several

major social network platforms, such as Provincial BBS, Tencent microblog and Sina microblog. When news-clues appeared, they will shout loudly to tell colleagues. Every time, zhang Bingkun will reply in a same way-checking the information's facticity by phone. Compared with shoe-leather journalists, interviews of new media journalists are conducted via the telephone. Scholars have worried that 'credibility issues are possible to prevent news organizations from incorporating content from blogosphere into their coverage'. However, leader of New Media Convergence Center zhang Bingkun believes that 'it is not challengeable for professional journalists to check the reliability of information'.

It is true that immediacy is the major concerns of New Media journalism. However, catching up with the speed has never postponed the accuracy of news coverage. Even if working on the online platform, objectivity and the pursuit of objectivity still remain one of the most salient features of journalism's professional character (Schudson, 2001). Bending professional norms in the news-making practices to adapt to social media tools will undermine the newsroom's credibility and reputation. The repercussion is particularly obvious when exchanging accuracy for timeliness is detected by the newsroom's rivals, for which opportunities are provided to say something unfavorable to the newsroom. For example, during tracking the updated information of missing flight Malaysia MH370, *Beijing News's* new media convergence center published minute-by-minute microblogs with unverified information, yet marking that those information is under checking by journalist. Those microblogs went viral

online quickly. However, netizens and other journalists on the Internet showed much less tolerance towards unverified information released by professional newsroom. For example, chief editor of *Sohu Portal Website* and journalist from *Southern People Weekly* criticized *Beijing News* for disseminating fake news. Within short time span, the piece of news has been attacked by a lot of professional journalists and netizens on the Internet. Informant#14, editor-in-chief of *Beijing News* also criticized journalists' for releasing news before confirming the facticity. Afterwards, *Beijing News*, to remedy its reputation, justified its performance as follows, "at that time with deadly deficient information, many readers want to know what Chinese media are doing and what we have found out. Thus, journalists are inclined to post information as quickly as possible. Moreover, *Beijing News* considers microblog as an always-on communication system that we tell audience what we getting and what we are confirming on a rolling basis. Therefore, we have indicated on the microblog that information authenticity is under-checking and journalists will update the information once it is confirmed". Regardless of whether *Beijing News's* explanation of activity is understandable and acceptable, there are debates going on about how professional journalists from traditional media engage in social media to release news. Journalists from *Beijing News* are inclined to adopt an interpretative standpoint concerning the utility of social media as a platform of gathering and disseminating news. Not as rigorous as reporting on the printing newspaper, journalists believe they could provide early hints of trends and

information as long as indicating clearly that news is under-checking. Journalists also consider as social media collective intelligence system, which could provide the resource to help journalists to finish the under-way investigation. However, the audience on the Internet still expects professional newspaper-despite of on-line version-still serves as a trustworthy and valid source of information. Therefore, in the realm of new media journalism, although the place journalists get story leads and the way journalists do interview have changed, the primary function of journalists as a provider of facts and truth has remained. Being attacked by their counterparts in other news organizations and ordinary Internet users, Journalists in *Beijing News* acknowledged that while reportings are done very quickly, there is little margin for error. Journalist's pursuing of velocity should not be at the cost of facts and truth.

#### **7.2.1.2 Gate-keeping role**

There is a long tradition of media acting as gate-keepers, which will decide what is important information and worthy of transforming into a public message. It is through journalists' activity of blocking, adding and prioritizing information that they seek to reflect or indeed to determine the political and social agenda of the moment (White, 1950; Snider, 1967). However journalists obtain information, how they evaluate it, and whose they choose to highlight is critical to the journalists' gatekeeping role (Phillips, 2010). However, in the digital age, the new medial platforms enable audience to possess plethora information. The Internet-with its endless options and direct sources -give the consumer the

choice previously made by the news editor. The internet invites ordinary people to make the news and given their voice. The interactive potential of digital media also enable audience to participate in the dialogue with newsmakers, which has gradually transformed the journalism “as a lecture(journalists told readers what news is) to a seminar (conversation between journalists and readers)” (Gillmore, 2006; Shoemaker&Vos, 2009). Therefore, a series of questions arise with respect to whether it is changing the power relationships between journalists who have had privileged access to information and the public. There is scholarship with the argument that the interactive potential of digital media increases the ways in which individuals can reverse the flow of news (Finnemann, 2011). The reversed flow of news compels news organizations to act as distributors and pass on material to news agencies and other media (Bivens, 2008). The explosion of UGC content journalists confront, which is unexpected and unprecedented, has stimulates some scholars to alter the preoccupation with “institution-driven” news to “even-driven” news (Schudson, 2005). Schudson(2005), for example, calls for scholars’ attention to understand how the institutions and practices of news-making interact with events.

Nevertheless, the daily practice of journalists that I have observed in the online newsroom of *Beijing News* is not entirely identical with what scholars have claimed. Evidence drawn from my participation observation has shown that the new media journalists’ interaction with Internet has not weakened the ‘gate-keeping’ role of professional journalists. The flood of user-generated

content linked to a breaking news item largely fail to reverse the traditional flow of news. There are two considerations make the idea that newsroom loses a choke-hold on the flow of information particularly problematic. In the first place, the working routine of The New Media Convergence Center of *Beijing News* clearly suggests that the traditional newsroom, despite of practicing journalistic activity on the Internet, is not amplifier of any breaking news occurred on the Internet. Journalists' news coverage is not accumulation of information without any indiscrimination. It targets at quick reaction to the major news event, rather than quick reaction to the any news event released on the Internet. The inclusion of news items ultimately rests with the organizational notion of newsworthiness. Specifically, informant#17, acting as gatekeeper, will decide if stories are significant enough for publication. Even if reporting in a way of brief and short articles, it is impossible for new media journalists to select so many stories for investigation. News stories reported by The New Media Convergence mainly focus on vicious murders and emergencies such as explosion, fire disasters, and fatal traffic accidents. Secondly, even if new media journalists obtain news clues from user-generated content on the Internet, which is particularly common in journalists' reporting of breaking news, journalists control the news-making through determining the interviewees from whom getting evidence and determining the reporting perspective from which to construct the news coverage. Professional journalistic practice should follow the working routine, from selecting news topic, gathering information, finding interviewee and doing

interview, constructing news stories to publishing the news. It could be argued that the interaction between professional journalists and Internet users happen merely in the first step when journalists find news topics on the Internet. What is more, the prerequisite of such interaction is journalists will filter the news topics based on the assumptions and criteria set by the newsroom. To include some while ruling out others on a basis of journalists' perception of news events demonstrate the gatekeeping role of journalists *per se*.

To be concluded, it is undeniable that journalists will routinely monitor the Internet and track the hot-button issues exposed and circulated on the Internet. It is also true that journalists can no longer ignore the content generated by ordinary people. However, professional journalists and news organization by no means relinquish its gatekeeping role. The selectivity process of new media journalists in *Beijing News* is operated in the frame of traditional routine of news organizations. There are a lot of news stories on the Internet, among which could be selected by professional journalists to further enter into the news-making process is in minority. Relying on the notion of 'newsworthiness', which is in fact a complex set of norms and assumptions internalized within newsroom, journalists decide which stories could be included included. On that score, the gatekeeping role of journalists and newsroom is not dramatically redefined in the digital time in which a groups of journalists make news on the Internet. Furthermore, in addition to providing the facts and injecting the authenticity to the news events, reporting from traditional media also intends to explain the

broader social context and attach the social significance to them. Therefore, journalists' selectivity process and their ability to shape larger conversation through professional interpretation maintain the gate-keeping role.

### **7.2.2 The Center of Media Convergence as a strategy to compete the market**

The central economic fact about online news is that Chinese Internet users are impossible to pay for news content, dominantly because of a residual belief that all online content should be free. What is worse, China lacks the copyright protection of online news. News, produced by professional newsroom, could be reproduced freely by other news agencies. Even so, this has not stopped *Beijing News* from developing its online instantaneous news. It allows and even encouraging news portal websites to disseminate their news. Underlying such strategy-promoting online news regardless of its little economic return-is the consideration that it will expand the brand influence. As informant#14, the chief editor of *Beijing News* says:

“Even if there is no money could be gained from disseminating news on the Internet, The aggressive traditional newspaper and magazine, which expect to survive the crisis, still work hard to operate the online newsroom as a platform of reporting breaking news. Newspaper will die sooner if prevent news from spreading on the Internet out of the protection of news copyright, because it will weaken the influence of newspaper. Once the newspaper lose its social influence, the advertisement will according decline” (Informant#14,

2014).

What informant#14 has suggested could be further confirmed from *Beijing News* and the other two newsrooms, *Caijing Magazine* and *Caixin Magazine*, all of which, as pioneers experimenting with new media in producing breaking news, invest a lot with the new media journalism. For example, *Beijing News* invested several experienced journalists with The New Media Convergence Center. Informant#15, who was a renowned investigative journalist and the deputy chief editor of *Beijing News*, is appointed as the leader of new media team. Informant #3, who was also an experienced investigative journalist, is also transferred to the team. The personnel arrangement of *Beijing News* demonstrates its emphasis of breaking news on the one hand, and the fierce competition between different news organizations in the realm of online news on the other.

Regarding to the online news, while much has been done revolving around attracting readers and promoting the brand influence, the business model for online news still remains very much in the embryo stage. Currently, newsroom spends a lot of money on online newsroom to generate audience and enhance the brand popularity; nevertheless, it does not find the way to generate revenue from the audiences they have attracted. Occasionally, journalists and editors discussed in what way online news could produce revenue. However, at the moment, what journalists talk about most is how to reach the maximum audience through providing quality journalism. It is like What Freedman(2010: 47) called chicken-egg relationship: you've got to have the audience before you can

get the revenue from audience on the Internet.

### **7.2.3 Political matters: Extremely limited sense of experimenting with a participatory form of communication**

Although the working routine of The Center of Media Convergence is closely relevant to audience and new technology, journalists' interaction with ordinary people and their employment of information supplied on the Internet is confined in a limited scope. Two points need to be highlighted about the limited experimenting with online environment in journalists' news-making practice. Firstly, it is incorporating social media into daily routine of journalistic practice, rather than incorporating the user-generated content on the social media into news coverage. Out of protecting themselves from political risk, journalists are reluctant to incorporate user-generated content of ordinary people into news coverage. Journalists prefer to employ the evidence from officials and governments, which adds 'authenticity' and 'official tone' to the journalistic coverage and thus lessens political risk. Secondly, it is difficult for journalists conduct an interview by phone with Internet users who post information on the Internet. Although Chinese Internet users are willing to provide information and express their opinion on the Internet, they prefer not to receive the interview from journalists, let alone appearing on the coverage as the news resources.

The political concern of new media journalists is closely related to the news topic the Center is targeting at. In general, the topic of breaking news reported by

new media journalists in *Beijing News* still belongs to the hard news, which involves serious traffic accident, explosion, fire disaster, murder case, sudden dismissing of high-ranking provincial officials, and trial information related to the hot-spot criminal and so on. It is well known that propaganda department will issue political taboo or directive everyday about the news topic reported by printing newspaper. However, in the Internet environment, although information is nearly released and circulated in an instantaneous way that Propaganda Department is incapable to catch up the news timeliness, journalists are by no means free from political control. Therefore, the heavy concern of political safety is the major obstacle to incorporate UGC content into news stories. When reporting breaking news, journalists are inclined to be more official response rather than information from ordinary people as the credible source to confirm what has happened. In journalists' working routine, they will check information with corresponding officials in reporting breaking news. For example, in the case 'Director of Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Food Safety and Quality taken away for investigation', although news clue is firstly released by netizens on the Sina microblog, journalists interview Chengdu government officials to check the authenticity and incorporate the officials' response as the sole evidence<sup>lxv</sup>. In the case 'fire incidence of student hall in Peking University', journalists interview the staff of security department of Peking University to introduce the accident cause. In the case 'gas explosion of residential building in Dongguan, Guangdong province'<sup>lxvi</sup>, journalists interview fireman, doctors and also witness. Hardly

journalists incorporate what netizens say into the news coverage. Several benefits could be gained from using quotations from official sources. Firstly, quoting the official response could add the authenticity to the news events. Sometimes, officials, to dodge the responsibility, will distort the fact or conceal some important information. Their explanation of news event is very likely different from ordinary people. If journalists' news coverage is merely based on the description of ordinary people and ignores the official explanation, it is possible that government, after manipulating the facts through political power, can sue journalists fake reports. Therefore, quoting the official resources eliminates the possibility that government will deny or distort the facts after the coverage coming out. Secondly, if the news coverage provokes the central departments, the local officials who receive the interview from the journalists and release information to the journalists will be firstly punished, and accordingly the punishment exerted on the media will be alleviated. Disseminating the fake news is the major excuse used by government to punish journalists and news organization when they carry out sensitive stories. Therefore, as long as journalists could claim that objectivity of the news coverage, and as long as journalists could gain the official description in the first time in case that officials deny the facts afterwards, journalists' political risk will be significantly reduced. In a nutshell, employment of quotations from official side is a strategy for Chinese journalists to keep the political safety when covering emergencies and social problems.

Nevertheless, the challenge for Chinese journalists to incorporate official response into coverage is officials-in most cases-are unwilling to talk with journalists immediately the emergency happens. Officials are waiting the authoritative tone about how to communicate with journalists, which is in general released by local propaganda department. Therefore, it is common that government agencies and officials responsible for dealing with emergencies provide nothing useful for journalists and also recommend journalists to interview officials in propaganda department-an agency by no means tell journalists anything useful. Furthermore, it is not easy for Chinese journalists to do interview by email, phone or chatting online. However, to catch up with the immediacy, those interview methods are predominantly used by journalists in new media team. There are two reasons underlying the preference of conducting interview face-to-face. Firstly, doing interview through email or phone was considered as informal. Officials could easily refuse journalists' interview with an excuse that they are busy and can only talk to media fact to face. Secondly, Officials suggest it is difficult for them to confirm journalists' identity through email or phone, which is also an excuse frequently employed by officials to decline journalists' interview. Habitually wary of media, even if receiving a face-to-face interview, Chinese officials require journalists to present the journalists license and the letter of showing interview purpose approved by news organizations. Therefore, conducting an interview through phone or email with officials is much less likely to succeed.

In a short, even if releasing news coverage on the Internet in an instantaneous way, which seems that propaganda department fails to catch up the time to issue political ban or reporting instructions, Chinese journalists are by no means free from political risk. The strategy used by journalists in The Center of Convergence Media of *Beijing News* to avoid political punishment is normalizing new media forms to suit existing routines of traditional journalists. Central to such strategy is claiming to provide an objective and authentic coverage. However, in Chinese case, fact and truth is not always equivalent to 'what really happens', but depends on how officials describe and explain the case. In many situations, in order to shirk the responsibility or cancel the malfeasance, officials could manipulate the facts. Therefore, although social media has widened the range of accessible information, some of which is provided by witness in the news event, journalists are still heavily reliant on official resources and responses as the most 'credible' source in their coverage. It is 'credible' not because it is closest to the fact and truth, but because it reflects how official 'define' the news event. Chinese officials, who have the power, could gloss over and distort the 'fact' in service to their interest. To avoid that officials blame journalists for fake news after they cunningly manipulate the fact, it is necessary for journalists to incorporate the official response to their coverage. The predominant reliance on official source also differentiates professional journalists' reporting from ordinary people's exposé.

### 7.3 Reorganization of investigative reporting team

Scholars have concerned that investigative journalism will be most vulnerable in the new media environment since the redefined notion of immediacy has required to significantly reduce time located to journalists for news gathering, which however should be prerequisites of any good investigative reporting (Scott, 2005; Saltzis & Dickinson, 2008). Some media workers even predicted that in the digital age, the measure of performance of news organizations has shifted from providing exclusive coverage to provide real-time coverage (Nigel Baker, executive director of APTN, cited in Kim Bivens, 2008). Investigative journalism is therefore under threat in a time that news is being urgent and newspaper is under recession. Furthermore, investigative journalism is practice featured by time consuming and money investment, the Internet's siphoning off advertising revenue has led news organizations to cut back on such editorial commitment (Freedman, 2010:41).

Scholar's concern has its rationale on the grounds that newsroom, in the digital age, is forced to be in a constant state of war to be first and live with something. However, it does not mean that newsroom will completely abandon providing interesting, exclusive and also in-depth coverage. It is true that new technology has a toll on traditional journalism; however, it does mean that newsroom will not take step to overcome the negative effects. In this part, I will use investigative reporting team of *Beijing News* as a case study to elaborate how organizational adjustment is initiated by the team to maintain the investigative

reporting tradition in the digital age. Firstly, investigative reporting team, giving up the responsibility of reporting breaking news, is protected from obsession with speed or the pressure of timeliness. Secondly, new topic selection strategy and new reporting genre-targeting at producing more exclusive without political cost-are employed to compete for the tightened political control and excel in the intensified market competition.

In a time of what scholars called media convergence, the response by *Beijing News* to such trend, which seems unexpected and inconceivable, is what I called 'De-convergence'--protecting printing journalism from the Internet's disruption of their territory. The above-mentioned The Center of Media Convergence is designed to meet the ends of heightened immediacy. Posting news on the Internet will present a minute-by-minute but fragmented reporting experience. However, the printing newspaper still follows the classical paradigm of journalism, providing investigative reporting and thick analysis of event regardless of the new requirement proposed by Internet environment. The different orientation between 'printing journalists' and 'new media journalists' also serves different expectations. Releasing information on the Internet is evaluated by its immediacy; however, reporting on the printing newspaper emphasizes original journalism and in-depth analysis.

### **7.3.1 Reconstructing investigative journalism team.**

In the early 2014, investigative journalism team, experienced the

organizational reconstruction. The most apparent change is the team is renamed as in-depth reporting team. Changes could be detected at the first glance. 'Investigative reporting' must be 'in-depth'; however 'in-depth reporting' is not necessarily 'investigative'. Therefore, transforming from relatively narrow but definite name 'investigative reporting' to the more comprehensive but equivocal name 'in-depth reporting', the team actually intends to embrace a wider spectrum of topics. Previously, the objects of the team are focus on two aspects, one is following up emergencies and incidents, and the other one is practicing domestic muckraking/revelatory reporting like the *Washington Post's* Watergate report. Currently, however, those two types of reporting is no longer suitable for the team. Firstly, coverage of emergencies and incidents are increasingly concerned with being instant, which is absolutely impossible to wait for the 24-hour publishing period of printing newspaper. Therefore, reporting emergencies has been taken over by the newly-established department 'The Center of Convergence Media'. Secondly, investigative or revelatory coverage was ever aimed at the authority institutions or powerful individual or groups which commit to political or economic malfeasance. Nowadays, however, narrowly focus on 'muckraking practice ' is increasingly unsuitable for the investigative reporting team. There are two reasons for this: in the first hand, the increasingly tightened political control over newspaper after 2003, and particularly the repression of media supervision in the provincial and local realm, make muckraking coverage difficult; in the second place, *Beijing News* consciously

shifts the attention from scrutinizing authority to reporting the tragic individual or vulnerable groups with general concern to the public interest and societal problems. It attaches more importance to the relationship 'downwards' to the ordinary people than 'upwards' to the authorities. Under such circumstance, the team extends its reporting genres, maintaining the 'old' tradition-investigative reporting with an emphasis of exposing social problems, and injecting 'new' blood-incorporating 'feature story and dialogue with the newsmakers' and 'in-depth analysis of political policy closely relevant to ordinary people's life into the team. Particularly, the team innovatively establishes the Zhanghan Studio of Feature Stories as its strategy to expand the reporting realm. The team is not only focus on 'news events', but begin to pay attention to the 'key figures' closely relevant to news events.

With the reconstruction of the team, the criteria about deciding what types of reports could be considered as 'in-depth reporting' changes accordingly.

Accordingly, changes of criteria of deciding what types of reports could be considered as investigative reporting correspondingly highlight in the transformation. Firstly, a five-thousand-word description of emergency scene or the synopsis of news events with an interview of witness is no longer an investigative or in-depth reporting. Under the background of digital age with a plethora of information, it seems not difficult to understand why the description of an event, such as what has happened and what the news spot looks like, can no longer satisfy the expectation of the team. When journalists rushed to the

spot, the superficial information merely about what happened has been already exposed by ordinary people on the Internet. Further justify such transformation, informant#13, chief editor of the team, explains that:

*“News is a multi-layer product. Similar to the earth, it has the multiple layers, from the surface going deeper until the core. A five-thousand-word description of the event is the outermost layer of news coverage, which is easiest to get. In the digital era, the surface layer of information will be covered by ordinary people through their contribution of fragmented and updated information. Even it is true that the user-generated information needs professional journalists’ verification and systematic integration, stopping at providing the surface information can not save printing journalism from losing audience. Because, it is hardly differentiating professional journalists from amateur citizen journalists, let alone differentiating Beijing News from other newsrooms. In a time that ordinary people could own ever-growing mounts of information, it is essential for professional journalists to provide the original information that ordinary people incapable of getting access to. Journalists have the expertise in explicating the underlying reason of the news events and relating the news event to broader social problems or policy deficiency, which should be the deeper layer of the news events.”*

In fact, What informant#13 suggested is pointing out a defining feature of online information. It does produce the sheer abundance of news and information. The increased quantity caused trouble for professional journalists to

provide original material. Western scholarship has discovered that news outlets of all kinds often tell the same stories, from the same perspective, using much the same material (Paterson, 2005; Ofcom, 2007). Informant#13 agrees that what professional journalists lack is not the ability of getting useful information and verifying the information, but the distinctive angles to analyze the news events without losing its objectivity, facticity and balance. Such unique interpretation could help the newsroom different itself from Internet and other news organizations, and thus attract its own readership<sup>lxvii</sup>.

In addition to encouraging the original journalism, the team has shifted the reporting target from digging out the official corruption or malfeasance of economic elites to explicating down-to-earth stories of ordinary people in the course of rapid economic and social change. For such transformation, informant#13 explained that:

Holding power to account is the focus of newspaper in its infancy time, because exposing the corruptive high-ranking officials could help the newspaper gain the reputation and public credibility promptly. However, when the newspaper is gradually mature, it begins to value the coverage articulating the social problems that closely relevant the ordinary people. There is a change regarding to uncovering the social problems beneath the selected news stories. Merely pointing out the social problem, which was ever advocated by the newsroom before, is no longer treated as exemplary coverage in *Beijing News*; instead, the team emphasizes to analyze the

shortcoming of current official policies underlying the illuminated social problems<sup>lxviii</sup>.

Those adjustments are based on three considerations. Firstly, the increasingly tightened political environment seriously squeezes the permissible space for investigative reporting team. Chinese Journalists are always on the way to innovate reporting strategies to evade political censorship (Tong, 2007). A quarter years after media reform, Chinese investigative journalists are still targeting at the died tigers (high-ranking officials) and live small flies (low-level officials). There is no possibility for investigative journalists to push the official line to engage in the muckraker of provincial and above level officials. Whether or not to encourage critical reporting and to what degree the critical reporting could be allowed is a dilemma for Chinese central government. There is growing concern that rampant corruption at the local level could heighten public resentment against the central government and threaten CCP rule on the national level; the central leaders therefore relinquish a tiny portion of control over media to reap media's supervision over the performance of local officials. Although the central government, out of fighting against the widespread corruption of the local government, encourages journalists to write exposé of the corruption, it is still worried that frequent exposé could lead to the decline of public credit on the government. Therefore, the room for journalists to engage in the exposing the official corruption is strictly restricted by central government. What is worse, the local governments are very much protective of themselves

and of their power, so there is a conflict between central government and the local government in dealing with investigative journalism. Censorship by provincial and local branches of the CCP Propaganda Department is judged as by journalists as harsher than that at the national level (Shirk, 2011: 21). Consequently, the room for journalists to practice investigative reporting is further narrowed by the local governments' blackouts of critical news stories. At the same time, media revelations of local malfeasance benefit more upwards to the central government instead of downwards to the ordinary people. Consequently, journalists are increasingly unwilling to take such adventure in uncovering the official corruption, which to some degree benefit government more than ordinary people. Instead, journalists turn to digging out the social problem that ordinary people is suffered from, which is undoubtedly interwoven with the official malfeasance.

Secondly, the accelerating pressure of market competition between different news organizations forces *Beijing News* to cultivate the comparable advantage through exploring the distinctive reporting genre and writing style. In China, among the news organizations that commit themselves to investigative reporting, *Caijing Magazine*, *Caixin Magazine* and *Southern Weekend* are the strongest rivals of *Beijing News*. The four newsrooms have different market niches, and thus they have different criteria in deciding newsworthiness. The Guangdong-based *Southern Weekend*, targeting at the national market, use domestic muckraking/revelatory to attract a business-oriented, cosmopolitan

audience (Burgh, 2003). The Southern style is not only famous for journalistic progressiveness but also for its delicate and literary expression<sup>lxix</sup>. *Caijing Magazine* and *Caixin Magazine*, as a weekly magazine, aim at power abuse of authority institutions, officials or individuals in the economic domain. *Beijing News*, however, pays attention to the vulnerable groups and general interest of ordinary people. In recent years, although investigative reporting in *Southern Weekend* tends to shift the attention from checking against administrative power to illuminate societal problem, *Beijing News* still differentiates itself from Southern Style as being less sensational and more rational. Beijing-style journalism is much more concerned about political policies<sup>lxx</sup>. Beijing is close to the seat of national power and to the center of scholars and intellectuals. "Quicker access to central government, key decision-makers and cutting-edge scholastic opinions" all contribute to the Beijing style journalism, which is more rational and keen to analyze policies (Lin, 2006). This is why the team particularly values the coverage linking the individual news event to the deficiency of policies or providing constructive suggestions for the country's development.

Finally, it is a response to the newspaper's growing up from infancy to mature period. In the classic work, Ettema and Glasser argue that investigative journalism involves special claims to knowledge and truth and investigate reports usually not only present facts, but also 'critically search for the common ground' and 'reveal hidden truths about moral disorders' (Ettema & Glasser, 1998). Although illuminating the veiled moral disorders is not paramount in Chinese

investigative journalists' practice, it is true that news coverage includes different layers of information, from the most superficial layer presentation of 'what has happened' to the deeper layer analysis about 'how and why the cases happened in the particular political, economic and social environment'. Such perspective is pointed out by informant#14 during my interview, which echoed informant#13's remark on the expectation of investigative journalism. Informant#14, explained different stages of investigative reporting with a parable of mineral:"

*News Event likes the sealed mineral with rough surface. The initial stage of investigative coverage is describing how the rough surface looks like. However, the advanced or advocated coverage should be cracking the rock and digging out the essence inside them. The 'facts and truth', therefore, is merely one component in investigative reporting. How to give meaning to the reports via assembling pieces of evidence and fitting them into an investigative story is what Beijing News preferable."<sup>lxxi</sup>*

### **7.3.2 Working routines of investigative reporting team**

The practice of investigative reporting needs to follow a series of working routines, from work allocation, doing investigation and gathering information, writing up to publishing the reports. Previously, there are two ways to allocate work. The first one is assigning the task, which is common in the breaking news reporting. When some major events happen, team leader informant#13 will designate journalists to report on the story. The second one is self-generated

topics by investigative journalists. If investigative journalists have got exposure gates from informants, they will report them to informant#13. Informant#13 will decide if the story is significant enough and if the story fits well the orientation of *Beijing News* for further investigation. Just as I have mentioned above, breaking news is no longer the targets of investigative reporting team, the team is therefore mainly focus on the second way of job assignment in daily practice. If the user-generated-information in the breaking-news reporting practice has the potential to reverse the traditional flow of news agenda, newsroom remains tight control of routine in the practice of printing newspaper, with chief editors' preserving narrow news agendas and restricting the scope of reporting perspectives.

There are two ways for journalists to obtain story ideas, one is getting 'exposure' from unacquainted informants, the other one is getting scoop based on journalists' personal relationship with counterparts from other news organizations, or social capital of provincial officials. Still following the classical paradigm of news making practice, investigative journalists of *Beijing News* keep themselves impervious from the Internet, which is packed with information and public opinions and emotions. Informant#14, identifies two reasons of journalists' intentional separation from, rather than embrace of Internet. Firstly, highly reliant on Internet information will lead to the homogenization of news content between different publications. However, newspaper needs to differentiate themselves from other publications and thus appeal to specific

audiences, which could be best achieved by deciding its own news agendas through self-generated topic. Therefore, in order to excel in the market competition, news organizations strive to produce high-quality and exclusive investigative coverage. Secondly, the printing newspaper has consciously kept a distance away from Internet when journalists gradually aware that public opinion on the Internet-full of emotional outpouring-is possible to veil over the facts and truth. The earliest efforts to get away from influence of public opinion is reporting the case of Tang Hui<sup>lxxii</sup>, in which journalists publish their investigation incompatible with online interpretation. Despite the wall-to-wall media coverage of Tang Hui Case, nearly all journalists from other news organizations follow the public outcry on the microblog, showing sympathy to Tang Hui and advocating her battle against the authorities. However, after the rigorous investigation of *Beijing News's* investigative journalist, it is found that Tang Hui-in many times-uses the radical method to force the judges to meet her requirement of punishing the criminals seriously, which interferes the judicial adjustment and independence. In the coverage, *Beijing News* teases out how the case evolves with time and how judicial process is interfered by the aggrieved party, the accused party, and also the authorities. In the editorial conference, informant#14 praised the reporting and comments as follows: "*Beijing News* should give the independent voice, free from the intervention of political power and discourse violence from netizens."<sup>lxxiii</sup>

*Beijing News* has paid great attention to the interaction between newsmen

and readers even since its founding. Readers could provide clues and information through making a call or writing a letter, which will be dealt by investigative journalism team. Informant#15 recalled, nearly one hundred letters, written by ordinary people about official corruptions, social problems, and their miserable experiences, will arrive at newsroom every week. Journalists will read every letter carefully and find the valuable information. It has ever been an important channel for journalists to get exclusives. However, with the boom of Internet, informants also shift their *exposé* activity from writing letters or calling to newsroom to the new media platform, which makes news organizations difficult to get scoops from ordinary people. In facts, currently, Journalists hardly get scoops from letters or calls from informants<sup>lxxiv</sup>.

### **7.3.2.1 Getting scoops from journalists' social capital**

The unprecedented volume of information on the Internet, along with dramatic shrinking of exposure coming to newsroom aggravates *Beijing News's* pressure to distinguish itself from rivals on the market through providing original journalism. In such situation, journalists' capacity to get exclusive news stories or cover the hot-button issue in a unique angle by incorporating exclusive interview becomes essential for *Beijing News*. Journalists in *Beijing News* could get news stories from personal relationship with counterparts in other news organizations or officials in some provinces where journalists have expertise in reporting. In most cases, investigative journalists of *Beijing News* have already had rich working experience of reporting breaking news or political news in the

metropolitan newspaper before joining the team. The old connection with former colleagues is a good resource for journalists to get scoop. The colleagues in provincial metropolitan newspaper are also willing to provide information for investigative journalists, because their own news organizations are not committed to investigative reporting.

For example, informant#1, comes from *People's Procuratorate Daily* based in Beijing; Informant#4, comes from Jiangsu sub-branch of *China Youth Daily* based in Jiangsu province; informant#10, comes from *Xiaoxiang Morning Herald Newspaper* based in Hunan province; Informant#3, comes from *Huaxi Metropolitan Daily* based in Sichuan province; Informant#2 comes from *Yanzhao Metropolitan Daily* based in Hebei province and informant#7 has ever worked in *Southern Metropolitan Daily* based in Guangdong province. The social capitals brought by the former working experience in deed help investigative journalists get exclusive stories in their daily work. During my field work, informant#10 got the information about 'Hengyang voting scandal' from his former colleague in *Xiaoxiang Morning Herald*; Informant#2 obtained the clue of 'the abuse of anti-poverty funds of the central government in fuping, nationally designated poor counties in Hebei province' from counterpart in *Yanzhao Metropolitan Daily*.

### **7.3.2.2 Getting scoops from cultivating centralized 'news net'**

Increased competition for loyal readers and market niche pushes the newspaper to seek stories that readers want to know about but still unknown to other newspaper. However, the economic crisis the newspaper is facing make it

impossible to systematically scatter reporters in state or national capitals, or potentially significant events. Therefore, the intense competition, limited investigative journalists, and economic repression combined together to result in the centralization of news gathering of *Beijing News*. “The growth of centralization is in fact a method of getting as much as information as possible for the minimal investment possible” (Tuchman, 1978: 20). *Beijing News* and its investigative reporting team achieve such centralization through cultivating its geographical focus. Three factors are taken into consideration in the process of forming geographical focus: firstly, the places should be news-rich areas, where is more likely to produce significant events; secondly, political control over media in those areas are relevantly loosened than other places; thirdly, investigative journalists in *Beijing News* have social relations in those areas, such as human relationship with officials or local journalists, which could definitely facilitate journalists’ investigation.

After the long-term practice, both *Beijing News* and the investigative journalists cultivate the “news net”, which is not only about what topic or types of stories fitted into the organizational preference, but also about which province should be potential to dig out the stories. Different from what Tuchman (1978: 23) has suggested that the news net enhanced the probability of duplication, Establishing its own news net, *Beijing News* is aimed at blanketing the world by their independent efforts, despite the world is limited within several provinces that *Beijing News* particularly focuses on.

*Beijing News* nurtured a geographical focus in its “news net”, such as Henan province, Hebei province, Hunan province, Shanxi province, and Sichuan province, where feed numerous investigative stories to the team. The formation of geographical focus is a dynamic and ever-evolving process. In the first place, they are news-rich area, which attract newsroom’s significant attention to follow the news events happened in those provinces. In the long-term of doing investigative reporting, journalists and newsroom develop a strong social capital with local officials and counterparts in local newspaper, which is in turn conducive for journalists to conduct interview and carry out news coverage quickly when any events happen in those provinces. Examined in the long run, *Beijing News* will be more advantageous in digging out the stories in particular provinces than other newsrooms. The comparative advantage will further strengthen news organizations’ narrow focus on particular provinces, which could be the orbits that *Beijing News* is especially targeted at. Such convenience-evolving into a routine-will facilitate news organization’s pursuing for exclusiveness. The routine could be also consolidated by organizational preference in recruiting journalists for whom has even working in the metropolitan newspaper of corresponding provinces.

Cultivating the geographical focus and adjusting the geographical focus with time are not only vital for newspaper to sustainably provide the exclusive stories and find the market niche in the digital age; but also necessary for newsroom to ensure political safety during the process of experimenting with investigative

reporting. In fact, in China, not all the provinces “produce” significant news events. For example, Tian jin is a place that hardly provides investigative news leads<sup>lxxv</sup>. Furthermore, significant news events in some provinces are hardly to report because of the political sensitivity, which is particularly true in the five ethnic minority autonomous regions. Therefore, it is important for *Beijing News* to find out the news-rich provinces where political censorship is relatively loosened. What is more, the geographical focus of *Beijing News* is evolving and adjusting all the time with the pendulum-swing of political ecology in specific province. Chinese economic reform not only stimulated the transition from state socialism to market economy but also significantly reshaped power distribution and has inevitably resulted in a decentralization of power (Wu, 2000; Tong & Sparks, 2009). In contrast to past central dominance, some provincial governments, city authorities and local officials enjoy a surprising degree of autonomy(Goldman & MacFarquhar, 1999; Gries & Rosen, 2004). The rise of local power has further developed into economic and political localism or protectionist policies to defend and expand their local interests(Segal, 1994). As the regional authorities seek to protect their interests, they will interfere journalists’ investigative practice(Tong, 2010, 2012). A prime example of political interference in *Beijing News’s* investigative reporting activity concerns the case ‘Villagers died in protecting illegally occupied land in Pingdu City, Shandong Province, in 21 March 2014’. Local government is powerful enough to bypass the central government and issue political ban to the *Beijing News*<sup>lxxvi</sup>. The journalist

informant#11, taking charge of the topic, yelled in the newsroom: "President Xi, do you know Ping Du City is so powerful that it bans all my reports?" When the political control becomes more tightened with the conservative authorities coming into the power, the cross-regional investigative reporting will be accordingly hindered by local government. The local officials become more wary of media watchdogs and do what they can to fence them out. In such situation, the province will be removed from the "news net" of prioritizing investigative reporting practice. Therefore, the geographical focus of *Beijing News* is not constant all the time. On the contrary, newsroom is in a dynamic adjustment to reflexively find out some appropriate provinces performing investigative reporting.

Tuchman(1978: 25) has pointed that "the formation of geographical focus is based on news organization's notion that what it believes its particular readers want to know and what it is financially prepared to bring them". In other words, the economic concern is particularly essential for news organization's calculation of geographic focus. However, such explanation can not fit well in Chinese case. Both the political concern, that is skirting political censorship, and economic concern, that is getting as many as scoops with economical expenditure are important for *Beijing News*. Although the formation of geographic focus of *Beijing News* is intended to find its market niche and excel in the intense market competition, the selection of places who could be cultivated as focus is on condition that those areas are comparatively easier to carry out investigative

coverage.

### **7.3.3 Establishment of New Division: Informant#12 Studio of Feature Story**

#### **7.3.3.1 New Strategy to overcome the economic and political crisis**

In the early 2014, the investigative reporting team established a new division-Informant#12 Studio of Feature Story. As the name suggests, the new department is established by informant#12, deputy editor-in-chief of investigative reporting, and is responsible for reporting feature stories. Targeting at recording the key figures involved in the news events, The Feature Studio embraces a broad spectrum of news topics, not only including the abused in their conflict with the privileged and powerful one, or the killed and wounded in the emergencies and accidents, all of which could be attributed to the topic realm of classical investigative reporting; but also including the parties involved in the controversial social issues, which arouses public attention and heated discussion. Those issues, despite not targeting at revealing the significant social problems characterizing current China, are meaningful to serve as a prism reflecting a down-to-earth facet of Chinese social transformation. For example, the story of Ma Jiajia, a post 90-college student, establishing a business of adult products and advertising the company through exposing her body. The case of Ma Jiajia epitomizes the undesirable trend in recent years towards the worship of money while ignoring the morality and social justice in China. The story of Zhu Qingshi,

who establishes *South University of Science and Technology of China (SUST)* and advocates the higher education reform in China. Zhou attracted wide attention and aroused heated debate after he vowed to build China's first professor-led and bureaucracy-free university and started enroll students without college entrance examination in 2011. The reforming blueprint Zhou has advocated embodies a defining plight traveling Chinese high education--the academic freedom and scholars' academic excellence are overshadowed by bureaucratic concern.

Reaping the economic benefit with the less political risk is the driving force for *Beijing News* to establish the Studio of Feature Story. In the economic side, as a new reporting genre, feature story is introduced to help *Beijing News* excel in the market competition after seriously calculating its competitors. In a macro-level, among *Beijing News*'s rivals, *Caijing Magazine* and *Caixin Magazine* are good at writing reportage about economic issues. *Southern Weekend* is also a lack of feature stories or dialogue types of report. Other local newspapers, such as *Jing Hua Times (Jing Hua Shi Bao)* and *Beijing Evening Newspaper*, emphasize civic news and daily news. Therefore, features stories have not drawn the attention from most of newspapers. In a micro-level, in the competition of reporting same news items, identifying the key person closely relevant to the occurrence or development of the news cases, and doing interview and constructing a story around the person are an innovative reporting angle when journalists are apt to dig out facts and truth around the case itself. Furthermore,

compared with taking pains to represent ‘what has happened’ fairly and integrally, articulating the story of key figures, such as their personalities, working experience, and life experience is a shortcut to carry the coverage out. According to informant#12, constructing a story of key figure in the news events is a strategy to preempt the market, because feature stories could gain the time and help *Beijing News* become the first newsroom to release news coverage<sup>lxxvii</sup>.

The establishment of Feature Studio is also a new strategy responding to the increasingly tightened media environment. In the simplest term, portraying people involved in the sensitive news event rather than paying attention to the “event” itself is a strategy to skirt the political censorship. Zhanghan explained this point with example drawn from covering illegal land expropriation:

“If a hard news story recounts how and why the land of 30 villagers is illegally expropriated by the local government, a feature story might focus on just one of those villagers, portraying their struggles in defending the lands and their grief after losing the lands. In discussing the problem of land illegal expropriation, coverage focusing on events is more vulnerable to be banned by propaganda department than feature stories concerning the life of one person.”

Taking the case of ‘deadly bus explosion and fire set by criminal Chen Shuizong<sup>lxxviii</sup>’ as an example, informant#12 further illustrates the advantage of figure story in skirting the political censorship, competing for the timeliness and seizing the market:

“When nearly all the newsrooms are trying to dig out if there is any problems on bus safety, trying to report how drivers then react to the emergencies and how current government responds to the accident, I required journalist to write a story about criminal Chen Shuizong, sketching in detail ‘what he looks like in daily life and how the neighborhood’s impression on him’. Within one day, the reporting comes out, which turns out to be the only coverage about the accident. Political bans arrive the next day, and thus there is no opportunity for other news organizations to release their coverage.”

Informant#12 ’s analysis could be concluded simply enough: being earlier to publish coverage adds much more possibility of bypassing political censorship and preempting the retailing market. On the one hand, Chinese journalists are always racing with propaganda departments. They need to carry out the coverage before the arrival of political ban; otherwise, their efforts will be in vain. On the other, being first or as earlier as they could to publish the coverage could attract more readers, which will bring out more economic revenue.

### **7.3.3.2 Combing aspiration of individual journalists and organizational culture of *Beijing News***

Just as the name implied, the Feature Studio is resulted from Zhanghan’s utmost promotion. The deputy chief editor of investigative reporting team Zhanghan, holding a master degree from Peking University with a major of Chinese literature, is pretty good at writing feature stories. She is particularly at

home with portraying the survivors in the tragic events. As the chief journalist in *Beijing News*, informant#12 worked there since the founding of newsroom. She has produced many profound feature stories in the past nine years and has won four-time annual best news awards. For example, in the Wen Chuan Earthquake in 2008, she reported a series of stories about the life of survivors and their memories of dead relatives; in the accident of deadly downpour in Beijing in July, 2011, she wrote a story of survivor Li Ruyou in Fang Shan Street-the most heavily affected area-who lost his friends, daughters and wives in the accident; she wrote the story of Zhao Zuohai, who was declared innocent and released after languishing for about 10 years in jail as a convicted murder. She spared no efforts to promote the establishment of Feature Studio.

Individual editor's willingness could be appreciated by newsroom is largely because of its organizational culture, which values more the intelligence of chief editors than teamwork. In other words, *Beijing News* is heavily relied on the working capacity and intelligence of individuals with middle-to-high hierarchal rankings within the newsroom(chief editors of each department and above) to manage journalists' daily practice, ensure quality reportings, and also promote its development. In turn, chief editors' individual thought is highly appreciated and respected.

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of hierarchical relationship and labor distribution among editor-in-chief, editors and rank-and-file journalists in Chinese newsroom organizational structure: vertical editor-in-chief responsibility system

and horizontal editor responsibility system.

Taking *Beijing News* and *Southern Metropolitan Daily* as an example for comparison, although *Beijing News* was heavily influenced by *Southern Metropolitan Daily* from 2004-2010, the two newsrooms' organizational structures are entirely different. Compared with *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, which has more than eighty-hundred journalists and editors, *Beijing News*-with less than three-hundred journalists and editors-is a small newsroom. The different scale of newsroom decides different organizational structure and working procedure.

*Beijing News* is characterized as editor-in-chief responsibility system, while *Southern Metropolitan Daily* is featured by editor responsibility system. The vertical editor-in-chief responsibility system underscores the intelligence of chief editors and their leadership over editors and journalists, such as the vital function of informant#13 and informant#12 in *Beijing New*. The news reporting of editor-in-chief responsibility team is a craft made under the guidance of chief-editors. However, horizontal editor responsibility system emphasizes the editors' cooperations "upwards" with chief-editors and "downwards" with rank-and-file journalists. The news work of editor-responsibility system is closer to an organizational work, which is based on the negotiations between editors, journalists, and chief editors.

In *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, the investigative reporting team is structured hierarchically as chief editors, editors and journalists. The chief editor of

investigative reporting team, is at the top of the inter-team hierarchy. However, chief editor is hardly participating in the news-making procedure. What the chief editor does is reviewing the reporting to make sure the quality and political safety before it comes to market. Three-to-four editors-in a lower bureaucratic hierarchy-are responsible for job design, work allocation, discussing reporting angles with journalists, providing ideas and updated information to the front-line journalists when they are out for interview, and revising the reporting. If editors have uncertainties or questions dealing with particular topics, they will consult chief editor for suggestions, which however happens occasionally. Therefore, the work of investigative reporting-under the guidance of editors-is an outcome of cooperation between journalists and editors<sup>lxxix</sup>. In *Beijing News*, the investigative reporting team is led and guided by chief editor informant#13 and deputy chief editor informant#12. They directly participate in the news-making process everyday. They discover interesting topics, assign job to journalists, and communicate with journalists when they do investigation. Once finished, editors will revise the reporting structure and polish the language. During the revision process, editors will discuss with chief editor informant#13 and informant#12 about their requirement and suggestions. Finally, informant#12 will be responsible for negotiating with Editorial Board of *Beijing News* about the page arrangement and publishing time for the reports. Thus, the work of investigative reporting in *Beijing News* is a collaborative product between journalists and chief editors in the news-making stage and editors and chief editors in the editing

stage. Compared with *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, the impact of chief editors, informant#12 and informant#13, is regarded as important in the news-making process (see figure 7.1).

#### **7.4. Digital Divide and Internet's limited impact on investigative journalists**

It has been well known that the past decades witness an explosion in the development and use of information and communication technologies in China. However, the prominent growth of Chinese Internet technology is only one side of the story. The other side story is digital development is severe uneven between different regions and social groups(Fong, 2009; Jack, 2008). Firstly, large discrepancies exist in the inter-provincial use of the information and telecommunication technologies in China, especially between coastal eastern provinces and interior provinces. The Internet penetration rate is probably the most basic indications of a region's progress toward information. According to the data from CNNIC in 2013, Beijing was leading the nation in the Internet penetration rate, followed by the coastal provinces of Shanghai, Guangdong, Fujian, Tianjin, Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Liaoning. By contrast, the low penetration rates of most middle-western region area were also impressive. For example, Xizang, Henan, Guanzu, Yunnan, Guizhou, Jiangxi and Hunan, with a less-than 30% Internet penetration rate, were still lagging largely behind the current trend

of technological diffusion(CNNIC, 2013). In addition to the spatial disparities, the digital divide can also be revealed by the clear and sharp contrast between city and rural area. CNNIC (2013) showed that rural Internet users only account for the 28.6% of the whole Internet population. Given that the majority of Chinese live in the countryside, the digital divide between urban and rural areas is therefore significant. Numerous studies have pointed out that Chinese netizens are featured by relatively well educated, wealthy and young professionals. Workers and farmers, the two largest social groups, however, amounted to only minuscule percentages of the online population (Zhao, 2008 : 257.) Therefore, the digital divide between urban and rural areas will be further compounded by the broadening income gap between urban and rural residents and the low education level of rural residents (Song, 2008).

The digital divide is a multifaceted phenomenon, which is deeply rooted in and reflected on the political, economic, social and cultural dimensions of society. In this part, I will illustrate how the uneven development of Internet technology in China makes the assumption that Internet's function as information-provider will deprive traditional organizations' privilege position in delivering the news to the readers unconvincing. It is true that since the 2000s, the Internet has in many instances provided the traditional media news leads and resources (MacKinnon, 2008; Tai, 2006; Tong & Sparks, 2009; Wang, 2011; Xin, 2010; Zhao, 2008).Internet's function as information-provider is particularly significant regarding to emergencies such as earthquakes (Li & Rao, 2010; Huang et al 2011)

and fatal traffic accidents (Liu, 2013), and also politically or socially sensitive issues relevant to the intensifying social problems in China today. However, scholars' observation is true on the grounds that those cases, chosen as research object in their study, indeed illuminate the Internet's advantage in aggregating information in the special cases and in a short-time span. However, scholars should be cautious when generalize the special individual case to overall pictures of how Internet sets the news agenda for traditional media. Even in some cases where microblog is successful in mobilizing public opinion to induce traditional media's following up. However, it should not mask the reality that there is a vast majority of injustices, power abuses and grievances can't be exposed on the Internet or don't gain widespread publicity or support even if exposing on the Internet. If taking journalists' daily practice in the ongoing and dynamic perspective, I suggest that there are overwhelming majority of cases that Internet hardly provides any information to the traditional media. Such situation is particularly true when the news cases happened in the places where the population of Internet users and penetration rates are low.

Internet has facilitated public to release self-generated information, expression opinions and articulate problems. As a result, since the 2000s, the user-generated information on the Internet has in many instances sets the news agenda for traditional media. The prerequisite of Internet users acting as information provider in the emergencies is that witness or people familiar with the situation can get access to the Internet and post information on the Internet

platform. The first-hand information, further reproduced by other netizens, could go viral and attract the intensive attention. However, questions arise when many news cases happen in the remote area of China and witness has difficulty in getting access to the Internet. Is it still possible for traditional news organizations to get first-hand information from ordinary people? Evidence drawn from my field work in *Beijing News* could show that journalists find little information in reporting the news events happened in the remote area of China, for example, the case 'deadly stamped at mosque in the Guyuan city in northwestern Ningxia province, 14 killed and 10 wounded' and the case 'deadly explosion in Laoshan village in Kaili city in southeastern Guizhou, killing 14 and injuring seven'. According to CNNIC, Guizhou province ranks second last and Gansu province ranks third last with the respect to the Internet user numbers and penetration rates. Personal computers, which are a daily necessity to many urban residents at present, are still considered an extravagant purchase in the two places, which is particularly true for Guyuan city in Gansu province, one of the 100-most-impoverished counties in China (Song, 2008). Therefore, when breaking news occurs in the interior or western undeveloped areas, where actually emergencies frequently happen, Internet and online users play insignificant role in providing information for journalists. In such situation, uncovering the facts has to rely on professional journalists through doing interview and investigation.

If the digital divide in the different provinces and urban-rural areas hinder

Internet's role of gathering and disseminating information for helping traditional journalists when they report breaking news, the digital divide in the social-strata level (such as the rich and the poor, the middle class and the workers and farmers, the college educated and those without college education) makes the Internet limited in providing information to investigative journalists when they look into the topic generated by journalists themselves. Sometimes, the urban/rural digital divide, overlapping with social-strata digital divide, will further weaken the Internet's capability of feeding information to traditional media, as the disenfranchised workers and farmers in the Chinese impoverished county are largely without Internet access.

Informant#7, an experienced investigative journalist in *Beijing News* suggests that netizens could be useful for journalists in investigative reporting when three prerequisites are satisfied (informant#7):

*First, the parties involved in the case could use computer; Second, the parties involved in the case provide information on the Internet and have the consciousness of online participation; Third, the parties could transform online interaction with netizens to offline interaction with journalists, in other words, the parties are willing to tell their stories to journalists. In many cases, ordinary people are reluctant to communicate with journalists, because they burden the pressure exerted from authorities, who warn them not to contact with professional journalists.*

Social media such as microblog and BBS are not an institutionalized

mechanism of mobilization. On the contrary, they are characterized by its sporadic, transient, and capricious nature(Jiang, 2010). The flood of information makes vast majority of emergencies and social problems quickly disappear and fail to gain public attraction. Therefore, questions emerge as what determines whether nor not a case could be widely circulated and reported by the traditional media. According to her working experience, Zhanghan explained to me to what degree the Internet is useful in empowering the abused or unprivileged to transform the problem into a hot-button issue that arouses intense public intention:

*Posting information on the Internet is useless to solve their problems. Only the information that are reproduced by famous people (entertainment stars) or cultural elites (professors, activists, renowned attorneys,and investigative journalists)with large number of followers can churn up heated discussion and attract traditional media's attention. However, it is difficult for the poor or the rural to do so, because they even have difficulty in getting access to Internet, let along utilizing the Internet to serve their purpose.*

Zhao(2008) is the earliest scholar who closely studied how the unprivileged could be successful in using Internet and traditional media's coverage to make social mobilizations. Sun's success should be largely attributed to "its college student identity, which made him nodal point in China's urban social networks and played an instrumental role in connecting his family with sources of organizational and cultural power" (Zhao, 2008:250). Through Sun's case, Zhao demonstrated the inherent inequality in the Chinese nascent Internet public

sphere. A clear recognition that the majority of Internet users belong to the well-educated, urban-based 'middle social strata' should be the starting point for understanding Internet discourses in China. Therefore, how to arouse the attention of this group of people becomes the key point for the success of Internet mobilization.

Just as I have mentioned above, investigative reporting team of *Beijing News* has its own geographical focus, where the newspaper targets at most. Most of the places, such as Henan province, Hunan province, rural areas in Hebei province, and Shanxi province, are all located in the interior China with unsatisfied Internet penetration. What is more, the news-rich areas mostly concentrate the cities and provinces with backward economic condition, where is more likely to cause the social conflicts. Therefore, it is not easy for local people to get access to the Internet, let alone using the Internet strategically to arouse the attention and resonance of middle-class Internet users. Even if exposing their problems on the Internet, most of them, overwhelmed by the large volume of information, fail to attract journalists' attention. As a result, digging out the stories in those areas still dominantly rely on shoe-leather professional journalists, who go to the news spot to do interview and collect information. The mismatch between 'news-rich areas' and 'areas with well-developed Internet' also undermines the Internet's impacts on providing information for ordinary people and professional journalists, which in turn reinforce the necessity of professional journalists.

## Summary

Taking an organizational approach, this chapter I explored the undergoing transformation of *Beijing News* and its investigative reporting team. *Beijing News* is not only fighting to retain readers share and advertising and implementing the technological innovation, but also struggling with an encirclement of political powers keen to make inroads on its way of pursuing original, critical and investigative journalism. Therefore, compared with western newspapers, whose transformation revolves around technological and economic impact, the organizational adjustment of Chinese newspaper need to consider one more factors-politics.

A decline in advertising revenues and reader figures has forced *Beijing News* to cut back on pages and staff for saving expenditure. The pressure of soliciting advertising and digging out new profit pattern has propelled the newsroom to combine 'editorial' and 'business' board in the soft-news desk. While I found little evidence that such combination has sacrificed the news credibility in exchange for commercial interest, anxiety arises as it has such potential.

The empirical data drawn from my ethnographic study may refute series of argument claiming the negative consequences of new technology impinging on journalism. I argue that even if new technology is possible to undermine the quality journalism and even make the investigative journalism dying out, it by no

means that newsroom will not take initiatives to dodge such harmful effect. Even if traditional newsroom felt increasingly obliged to respond the phenomenon of media convergence, it does not mean that newsroom is entirely redefined by such trend. Even if new media has such potential, newsroom's tradition and culture has generally made significant reorganization very difficult.

To adapt to the increasing convergence media environment and to sustain original and quality journalism, a strategic combination of 'convergence' and 'de-convergence' is employed by *Beijing News*. As a result, the online newsroom and traditional 'printing' newsroom are operated separately with different targets, dynamics, working routines and expectations. Thanks to the combination of 'convergence' and 'de-convergence' strategy, *Beijing News* responds to the new challenge proposed by Internet while carefully keeping its old tradition of targeting at exclusive, in-depth and critical reporting.

Just as I have repeated emphasized, the adjustment of Chinese newsroom is not only a calculation of technological and economic challenge, but also a reaction to new political atmosphere. The reshuffle of investigative reporting team in *Beijing News* clearly demonstrated this point. Changing the name from narrowed 'investigative reporting team' to broad 'in-depth' reporting team, incorporating the 'feature story' and 'interpretation of current policies' into the team, and nurturing the 'news-net' in the province with relatively loosened political control all suggest that the newsroom is negotiating with the Party-state in its transformation.

Last but not least, the discussion of 'new media' leads me inevitably to confront the fact that the opportunities to participate in the online communication is not equally distributed. The obstacle to access to the Internet in Chinese remote western provinces and impoverished rural areas undermines Internet's capacity to deliver the news to the world. Therefore, shoe-leather professional journalists are irreplaceable when carrying out the news happened in those places.

## Conclusion

“Chinese investigative journalism is always going through the baptism of blood and fire. However, there are no dark nights that we could not suffer through; there are no dawns that we could not wait for”(Pan, 2009:262), ten years ago, Cheng Yizhong said to his fellow colleagues in *Beijing News* before he was dismissed from chief-editor position and put into jail. Ten years ago, in the well-believed heyday of Chinese investigative journalism, *Beijing News* was just born in. It seems difficult to provide a panorama of what Chinese investigative journalism has experienced in the past decade. However, it seems clear that we need to reconsider what constitute the ‘blood and fire’-the difficulty, obstacle, and pressure- of Chinese investigative journalism.

Ten years ago, when doc-com development was still in its infancy, what trammels Chinese investigative journalism is the government’s control over news media. While the quarter-century media reform leads to the growing commercialization of Chinese media and the pluralistic media content, it has not challenged either the authoritarian regime or the Party-state’s capacity in censoring the media. Even though Chinese journalists have been devoted to push the envelope in various ways, their over-aggressive journalistic reporting could also bring trouble for themselves and news organizations. Ten years later, as Cheng Yizhong had anticipated, the political condition facing printing newspaper

seems unchanged, or perhaps even increasingly draconian. What Cheng failed to predict, however, is that the 'blood and fire' facing printing newspaper now includes the new economic difficulties, due in large part to the Internet development. The Internet has siphoned off large portions of readers and advertisers from traditional media, which posed an irresistible threat to the latter. Therefore, the question arises as how Chinese newspaper and its investigative reporting team accommodate itself to the political and economic pressure in a digital time.

My dissertation provides a case study of transformation of traditional media. Based on three-month ethnographic study in the investigative reporting team of *Beijing News*, this dissertation discusses what specifically macro-level political and economic pressure means for the micro-level journalistic practice embedded in the newsroom and how newsroom reacts to the pressure through reshuffling the organizational structure. After president Xi Jiping took office, the Party-state continuously ramps up its control over media. The ever-deteriorating political environment not only undermines the journalists and newsroom's capacity to carry out critical reporting, but also dampens their enthusiasm and faith of staying in this career. The impact of political control not only directs to the professional ideal of newsroom and journalists, but also to their economic condition. The increasingly narrowed space for critical reporting directly leads to the shrinkage in investigative coverage, which seriously impairs the newspaper attractiveness and market competitiveness. For a newspaper, who resorts to

investigative reporting as its selling point to differentiate itself from other publications and Internet information, the lack of such reporting has taken a toll on its circulation revenue. This point become particularly challenging and severe, considering that newspaper is losing entire swathes of readers in the digital time. For individual journalists, the precarious political environment makes their income unstable, because journalists are not uncertain if the coverage-with the investment of time, money and effort-could be published; however, journalists' income is based on the number of coverage they publish and the words built in the coverage. Political restrictions on job autonomy and unsatisfied economic condition have substantially weakened journalists' insistence on staying in the profession. The loss of talents is a thorny issue perplexing traditional newsroom, which makes up a facet of newspaper crisis.

Since early 2000, the Internet has in many instances played a leading role in setting the news and public debate agenda of the entire media system. Internet-facilitated online discourse provides news clues, resources, and political protection over traditional journalism. The interaction between online public opinion and off line traditional media enhances journalists' capacity to carry out critical reporting. However, as Xi comes to the power, the central government began a new wave of crackdown on online negative speeches. The campaign has helped the Party-state successfully eliminate online critical and emotional expression. Consequently, the online and offline interaction has been cut off. Traditional journalist has lost a very important and helpful channel to practice

investigative reporting.

While suffering from political, economic and technological impact, traditional newsrooms are not waiting for death. They are more or less transforming themselves to adapt to the emerging challenge and new environment. In the early 2014, based on the strategy of combining 'Convergence and De-convergence', *Beijing News* reshuffled its organizational structure. Some adjustments, such as cutting the pages and combining the 'editorial' and 'advertising' in the desk of soft news, are response to the economic crisis; some reform, such as establishing the 'The center of media convergence', is a reaction to the technological development; some others, such as 'The redefinition of investigative reporting team' and 'The establishment of Feature Story Studio' is accommodation to the tightened political control. In my discussion of *Beijing News*' transformation, two points are highlighted and also may provide useful supplement to the existing scholarship. Firstly, it is true that every newspaper should be on a journey into some kind of digital future; however, technology alone cannot completely redesigns the newsroom and redefines journalists' practice. The well-established organizational culture and tradition makes the complete reorganization impossible. Secondly, new technology possibly has the negative effect on quality journalism in one way or another. However, I suggest that such negative effect is not inevitable. Newsroom and journalists have the consciousness to adopt new technology while overcoming the undesirable impact.

While aiming for a detailed ethnographic account of micro-level journalistic practice in the time of crisis and transformation, one of the goals of my dissertation is to turn the ethnographic lens back on the macro-level theory of political economy. I argue that the crisis of Chinese newspaper and investigative journalism is not only resulted from the ongoing technological and economic transformation, but also from increasingly tightened political control. Therefore, I suggest that the analysis of Chinese traditional media in the digital age heightens the relevance to the 'liberal-pluralist' approach to the political economy of communication. However, given that economic concern is also important for the market-oriented newspaper, I concur with Lee (2004)'s idea that we should be reopening the issue in the belief that the two approaches-'liberal-pluralist' and 'radical-Marxist'-represent a complex dialectic and have the respective merits in explicating Chinese media system in the emerging political, economic and technological transition.

My study is among the first to offer a detailed and systematic description about how newsroom and journalists are influenced by and respond to rapid technological and economic changes. Deeply rooted in the sociology of news, my study is not based on scholars' assumption and perspective of how technology could influence journalism and how newsroom should respond to the undergoing crisis, which tends to dominate the current scholarship. Relying on my own empirical research on newsroom, my study provides a first-hand information about how emerging technological and economic crisis actually affects journalism,

how journalists think of such crisis, and how they react to the crisis in practice. The micro-level studies of journalists and newsrooms are often neglected by the macro-level studies that researchers provide analysis based on their evidence and understanding. However, in my opinion, if we intend to gain an in-depth analysis of how political, economic and technological change specifically impacts on newsroom and journalists, and if we want to gain a comprehensive understanding of how newsroom and journalists react to the crisis, we need to examine the organizational adjustment in news organizations and observe journalists' practice. My micro-level studies of Chinese journalism and newsroom in a time of crisis may repudiate or supplement scholars' argument from macro-level analysis, which may be helpful for further close examination. Moreover, my research, concerning the interplay between traditional journalism and new technology within a news organization, will contribute to our new knowledge of sociology of news. For example, my study has explained how well-established working routine makes technology's complete redefinition of newsroom impossible, how professional journalists' gatekeeping role is maintained despite of technological impact, and how different strategies are adopted in the newsroom transformation based on particular organizational culture.

Linking micro and macro levels of analysis, my study also gives the *processual* approach its particular advantage. I suggest here that it will be very productive to pursue a *processual* and practice-oriented approach in studying

media and political-economic relations. Instead of focusing on significant cases, which I think tend to be static and isolated, my study accepts and also highlights the untidiness and dynamism of journalistic practice and broad political economy relations. Consequently, my study includes the description about, for example, the process in which the particularly influence takes shape and the process in which particular strategy comes into being. Through examining the process, I disentangle the complex relation between macro-level political economy and micro-level journalistic practice within a newsroom.

My study also injects fresh vigor to the study of Chinese journalism in a new situation, where economic pressure dramatically increases, political control continues to trammel journalistic practice, and technology profoundly changes the economic model of newspaper and journalistic practice. Until now, there is no systematic study about the changes of Chinese newspaper and journalists' practice embedded in the organization. Existing study revolves around either the media reform in the 1990s or the first decade of this century. However, my study provides a fresh and better understanding of the interaction between broad political, economic, and technological transformation and journalism in the new era.

More broadly, my thesis could speak to renewed interests in political economy of communication. On the one hand, the political economy perspective in Anglo-American media studies has put more emphasis on the economic determinants of news production while being insensitive to political and legal

factors. Following the same vein, some Chinese scholars, such as Zhao Yuezhi, also stress very heavily on the economic dimension of Chinese media development, particularly as mediated through class relations. On the other hand, the study of the media in China, even in its broader forms, has always been heavily concerned with the influence of politics (Sparks, 2009). However, my study calls for a reconsideration of political economy in discussing Chinese traditional media in the emerging political, economic and technological transformation. Previous academic discussion about Chinese media happened either in a period of rapid economic expansion or a period of rapid media expansion. However, current economic and political condition of media has changed dramatically, both of which are becoming severe for newspaper. The historical change provides us an environment where it is much easier to test the relative merits of different approaches to political economy of communication-Radical Marxist and Liberal Pluralist. My study could bring academic attention to the Chinese media in the new environment and also revisit the political economy of Chinese media.

To be sure, my study is facing several challenges due to the disadvantages of ethnographic method. Short-term studies are at a particularly disadvantage. Three-month is not long for ethnography given that ethnography is time-consuming and requires a well-trained researcher. It takes time to build trust with informants in order to facilitate full and honest discourse. Lack of time will also results in the deficiency of data, which may further lead to false

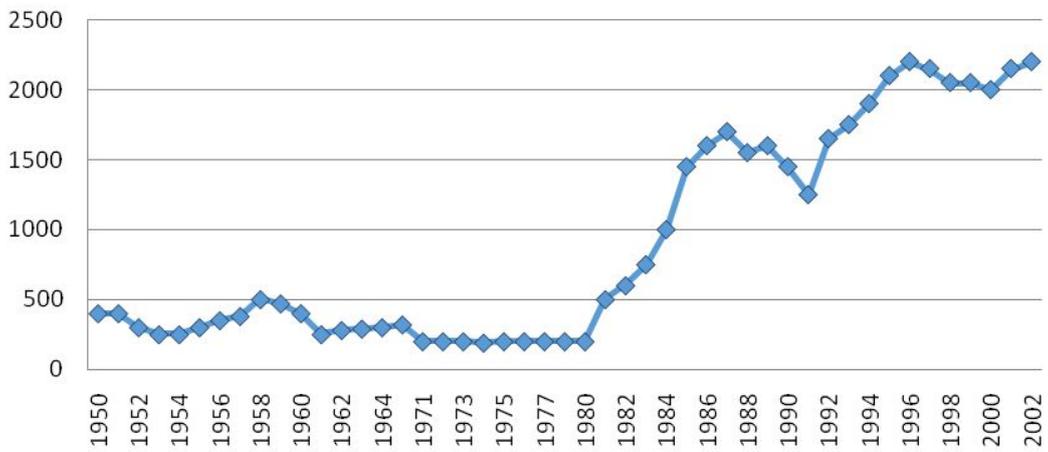
assumptions. However, I speed up to build the relationship with my objects in my participant observation through causal interactions after work. I always spent coffee breaks and lunch time with a group of journalists. Such relaxed gathering facilitates my familiarity with them. I also speed up to collect my data through keeping diary every day to flesh out the information I need to get and keeping in touch my supervisor to get useful guidance.

Another limitation of my study is the difficulties for generalization. Focusing on a particular newsroom, it should be cautious to apply my research result to other newsrooms within or out of China. However, I want to reiterate that my study is an ethnographic study, which aims at understanding how the specific groups of journalists understand the meaning of crisis, and how they specifically to struggle for surviving the crisis. While the specific strategies employed by the different organizations may be different, the political, economic and technological impacts on the news organizations are more or less the same. Therefore, my study could provide a good starting point for further studies to understand the crisis of Chinese newspaper. This is what I hope to have accomplished.

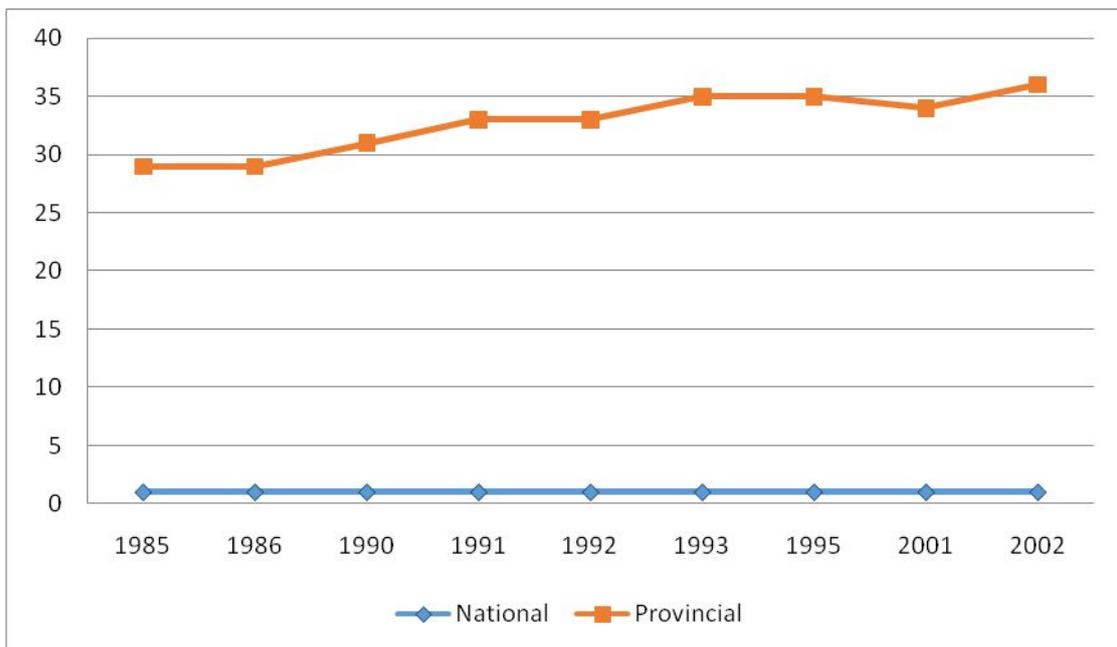
Technology changes are so frequent that it is difficult both for newsrooms and scholars to capture a whole picture. Sometimes very promising technologies emerge, are rapturously received, and then fade from the stage with extreme rapidity (Sparks, 2003: 307). Therefore, my study in the early 2014 may quickly proved outdated. However, my analytical framework may provide useful

reference for further studies. For further studies, I would like to examine how technological, economic and political impacts on other news organizations and how they react to the crisis. I also would like to compare with newspaper and television to examine if they face the similar crisis. I also would like to compare with the crisis and strategies employed by news organizations in different country. To do so, it may make the generalization possible.

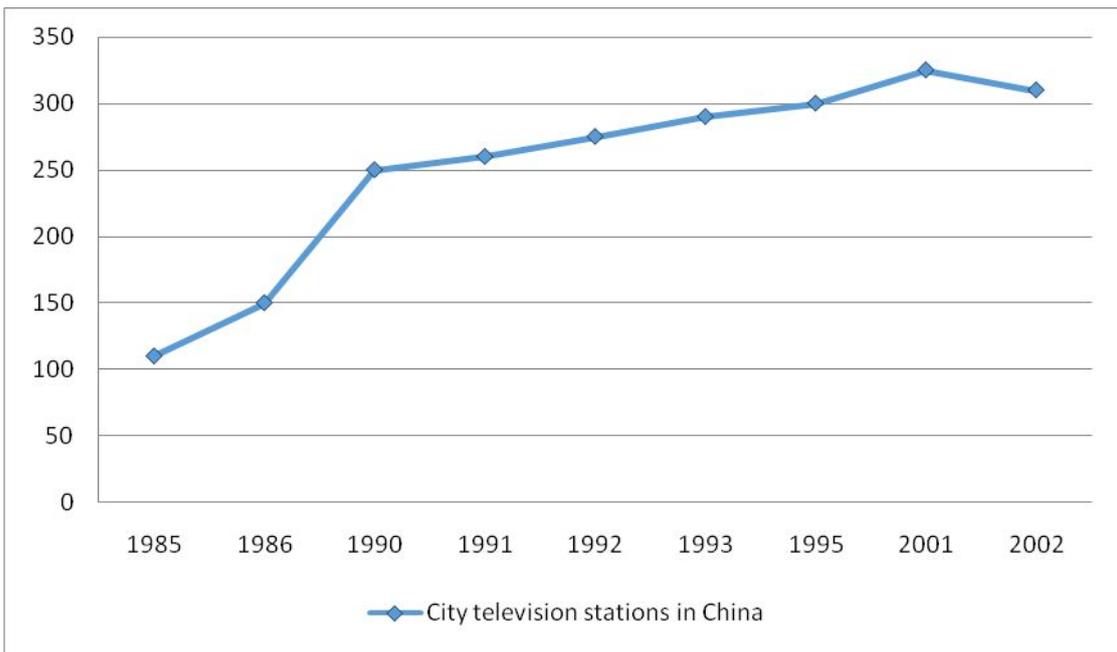
## Appendix



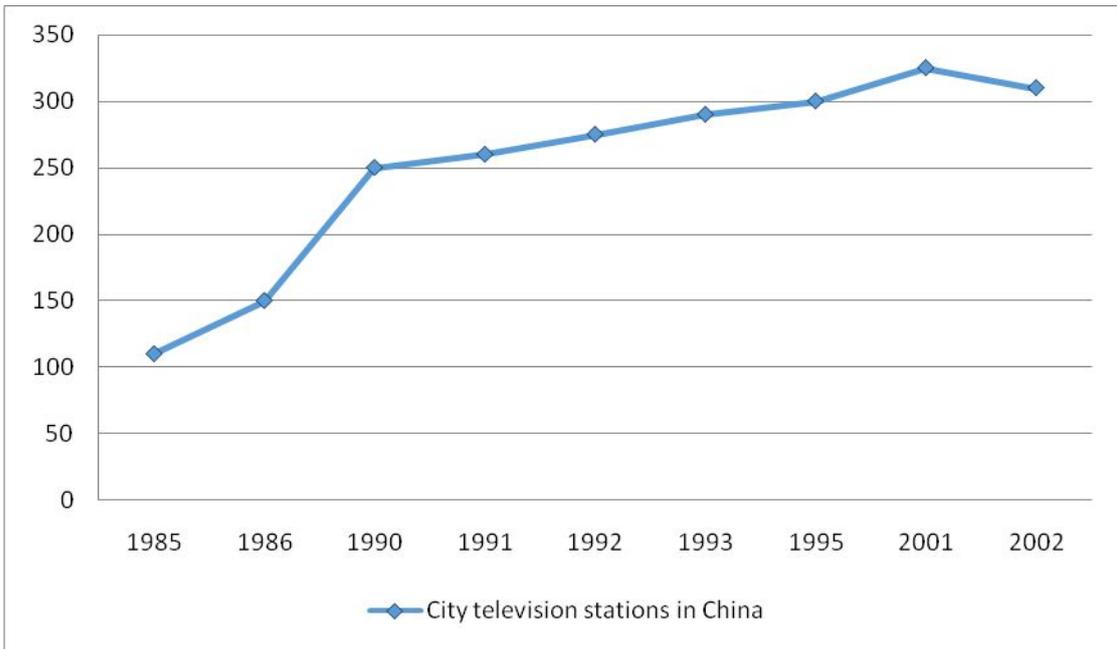
图表 1 Figure 1.1 Newspaper number in China (1950-2002)



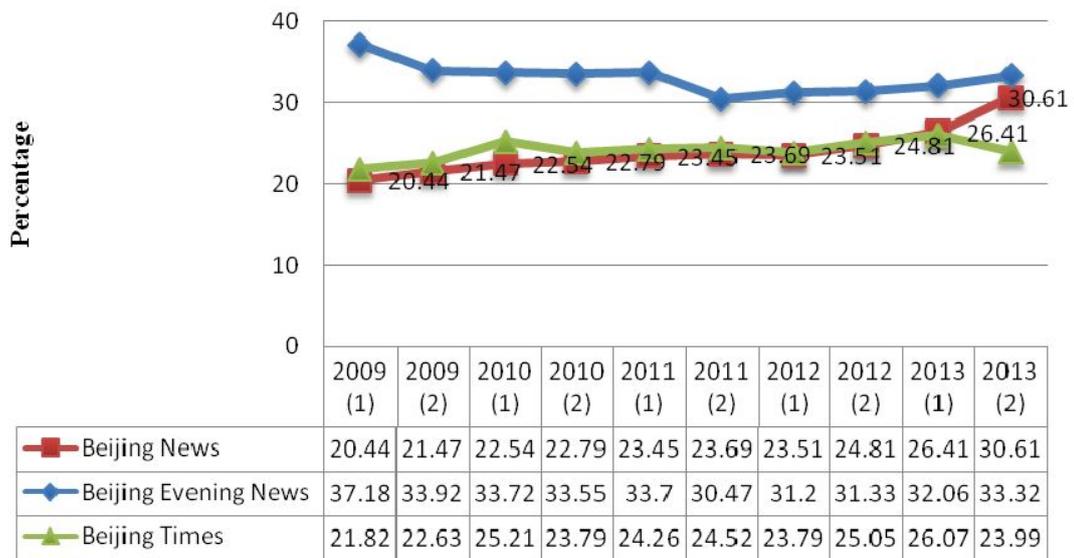
图表 2 Figure 1.2 National and provincial television stations in China (1985-2002)



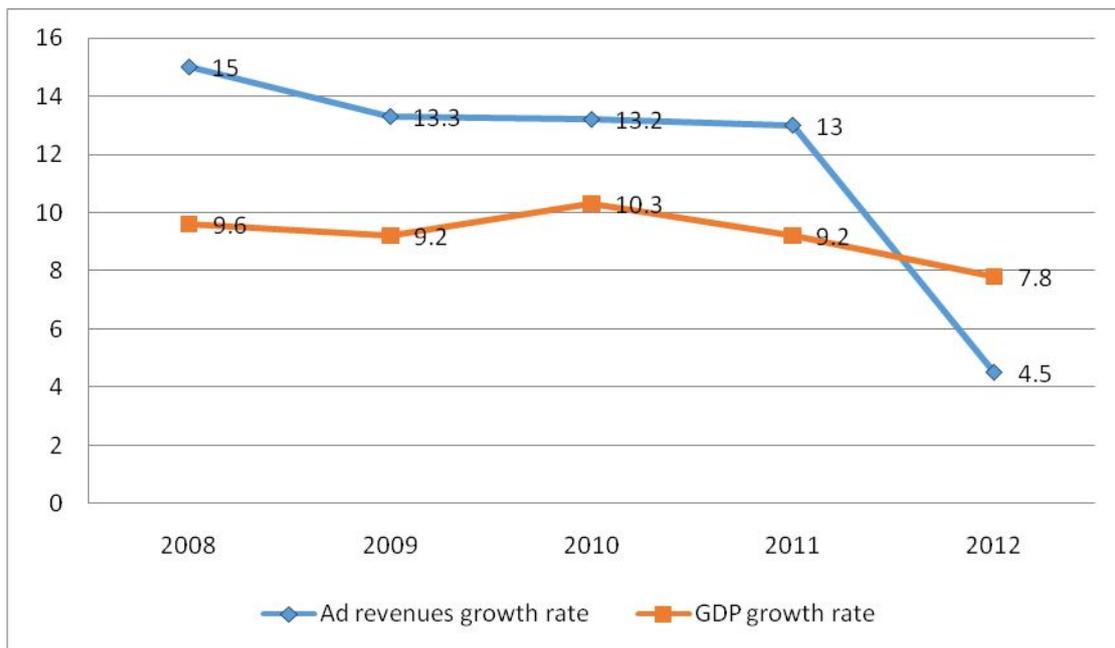
图表 3 Figure1.3 City television stations in China (1985-2002)



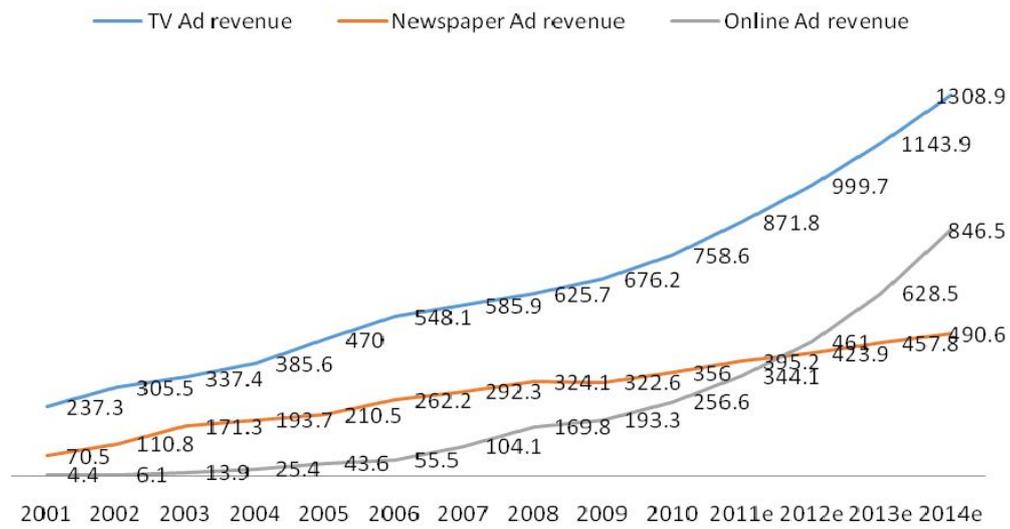
图表 4 Figure 1.4: County television stations in China(1985-2002)



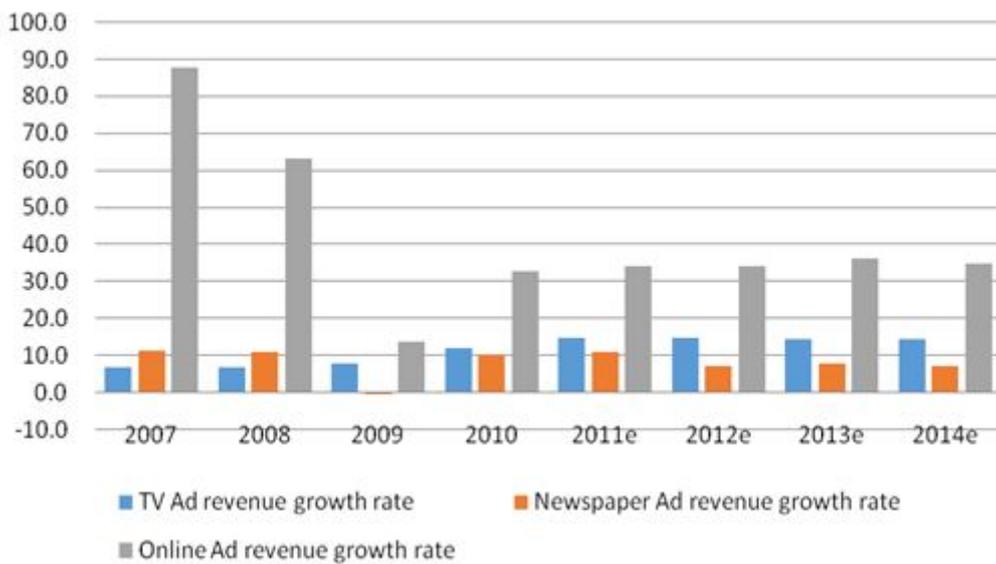
图表 5 Figure 3.1 Shares of circulation of major newspaper in Beijing (2009-2013)



图表 6 Figure 4.1 Chinese newspaper advertisement revenue growth (2008-2012)



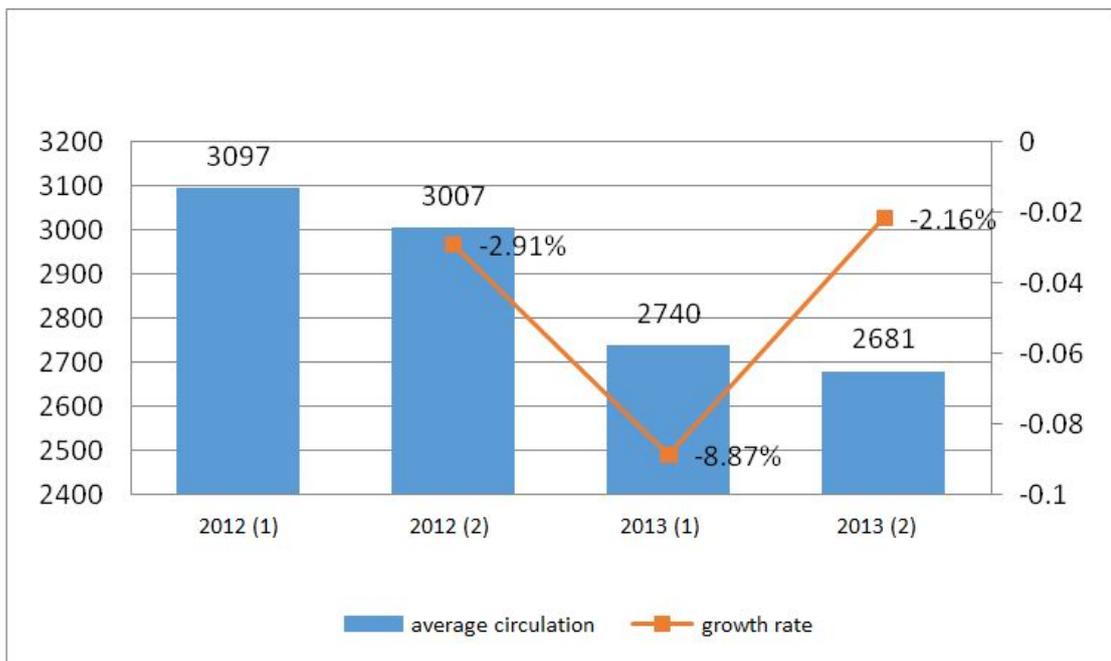
图表 7 Figure 4.2 Advertisement revenues of China's major media (2001-2014)



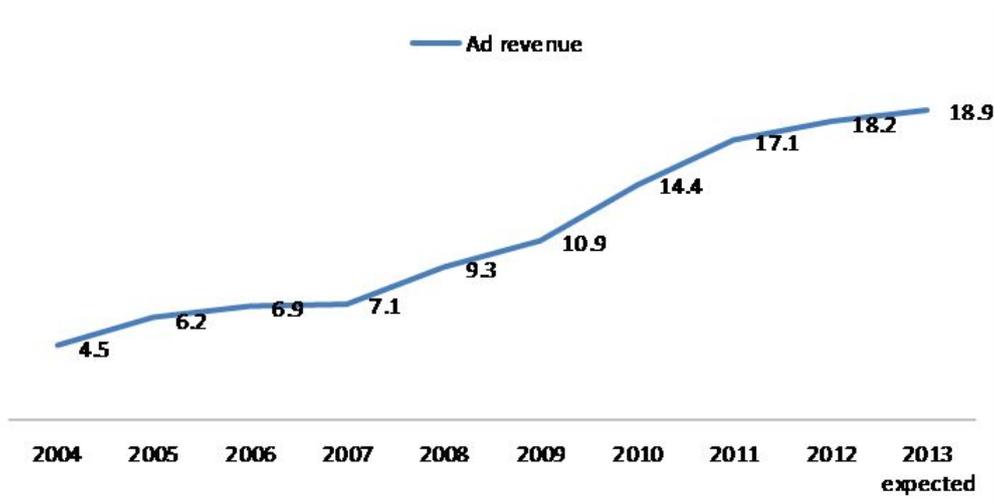
图表 8 Figure 4.3 Advertisement growth rate of China's major media (2007-2014)



图表 9 Figure 4.4 Chinese newspaper retail sales (2007-2012)



图表 10 Figure 4.5 Chinese newspaper circulation and growth rate (2012-2013)



图表 11 Figure 4.6 Advertisement revenue of *Beijing News*  
(Unit: hundred million RMB)



图表 12 Figure 7.1 Comparison of organizational structure between *Beijing News* and *SMD*

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- i Private discussion with my supervisor Professor Colin Sparks.
- ii Private discussion with my supervisor Professor Colin Sparks.
- iii Private discussion with my supervisor Professor Colin Sparks.
- iv 165 journalists and staff includes 54 journalists, editors and different levels of chief editors, 45 newspaper distributors, 48 advertisement managers, and also 21 staffs.
- v Chinese newspaper circulation includes retail numbers and subscription numbers, and the latter is composed by individual subscription and organizational subscription.
- vi Interview with informant#13. Beijing. March. 2014.
- vii Interview with informant#13 and informant#15. March. 2014.Beijing.
- viii Newspaper has the administrative level, which includes from top-to down ministry(bu), bureau(ju), branch(chu), and section (ke).These four levels are generally associated with different access to news sources in the system and their ability to cover certain issues. In the general, the higher a news organization is in the hierarchy, the wider access it has to news sources(Pan, 2000).
- ix Interview with informant#13, March, 2014. Beijing.
- x Some data points out advertisement revenue decreased by 10.4% in 2012 and 7.5% in the first half of 2013. See link <http://www.admainmai.com/ShuJuJianCe/Detail/10153.htm> get accessed by 9May, 2014.
- xi Interview with informant#19, a journalist from Southern Weekend, Hong Kong, June, 2013.
- xii Interview with informant#13, Beijing, January, 2014.
- xiii Xi Jinping: Ideological work is an extremely important for the Party. Xinhua News Agency Website. 20 August, 2013.<http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2013-08-20/191028001307.shtml>. Get accessed by 23 May, 2014; Xi Jinping: Making the propaganda work better to serve as the economic development of the country. People's Daily. 21August, 2013. <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/0821/c1024-22635998.html>. Get accessed by 23 May, 2014.
- xiv Interview with informant#1,Beijing, January. 2014.
- xv Interview with informant#1,Beijing, January. 2014.
- xvi Interview with informant#1,Beijing, January. 2014.
- xvii Interview with informant#1,Beijing, January. 2014.
- xviii Interview with informant#1,Beijing, January. 2014.
- xix Interview with informant#12,Beijing, January. 2014.
- xx Interview with informant#13,Beijing, January. 2014.
- xxi Interview with informant#4,Beijing, January. 2014.
- xxii 56 Delegates of Hunan provincial-level people's congress were found to have paid more than \$ 18 million in bribes to gain the delegate qualification. The fifty-six delegates come from Hengyang City, Human province.
- xxiii 14 people killed and 10 other people injured in the mosque stampede accident in Guyuan, a city in Ningxia province, January5, 2014. The stamped occurred during the process of handing out traditional food during the collective event to commemorate the religious figure.
- xxiv 14 people killed and 7 injured in an explosion taking place in Laoshan village in Kaili city in southwestern Guizhou province, January 14, 2014. The explosion was thought to have taken place at an illegal gambling site on the hill.
- xxv At least 28 people killed and another 113 people wounded by knife-wielding attackers in a violent terrorist attack at a train station in the Kunming city in southwestern Yunnan province, March 1, 2014.
- xxvi A 63-year-old Shandong villager killed and two other villagers seriously injured in protecting his illegally occupied land in a poor village, administered by the city of Pingdu, costal Shandong province. Pingdu city has long been notorious in its illegal land confiscation in recent years, which has invoked the villagers' resentment and constantly resulted in violent confrontations and deaths. Illegal and violent occupation of land is said to be initiated



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was on 27Feb, 2014. <http://news.qq.com/a/20140227/022625.htm> get accessed by 25May, 2014.

xlxi Xi Jinping talk: Without Internet security, without national security. 28Feb, 2014. <http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2014-02-28/011929582778.shtml> get accessed by 25May, 2014.

l Generally speaking, causal visit could be judged by Xi's dressing style. If xi wears causal cloth instead of suit in the activity, it could be judged as causal rather than official(According to my interview of informant#1, an investigative journalist in *Beijing News*)

li Interview with informant#1, Beijing, March, 2014.

lii Pengshui scandal: an ordinary person was taken into custody and faced a charge of libel because he wrote a poem that was thought to contain satirical comments on the local governor.

liii Shanxi brickfield scandal: children were kidnapped and sold to black brickfields in Shanxi, which are the official-commercial collusion company. Children are enslaved and mistreated in the back brickfields in Shanxi and Henan. Some of them were even sold by local government government departments.

liv Interview with informant#1, Beijing, March, 2014.

lv Interview with informant#1, Beijing, March, 2014.

lvi The name is actually based on the journalist informant#12, which has to be anonymised

lvii Interview with informant#14, Beijing, March 2014.

lviii The adjustment strategy of *Beijing News*. Circulated within *Beijing News* editorial panel in March, 2014.

lix Interview with informant#15, Beijing, March, 2014.

lx Microblog of Luo Changping, posted on 31 March, 2014.

[http://weibo.com/p/1003061646068663/weibo?profile\\_ftype=1&is\\_ori=1&key\\_word=%E9%87%87%E7%BC%96&is\\_search=1#\\_0](http://weibo.com/p/1003061646068663/weibo?profile_ftype=1&is_ori=1&key_word=%E9%87%87%E7%BC%96&is_search=1#_0) get accessed by 27May, 2014.

lxi Journalists talking about the merger during the supper. March, 2014. Beijing.

lxii Interview with informant#13 by phone, Hongkong, May 2014.

lxiii First released in January 2011, WeChat is a mobile text and voice messaging communication service developed by Tencent in China.

lxiv Many times of Interview taken from January 2014 to March 2014. Beijing.

lxv Sun Jiancheng, director of Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Food Safety and Quality was taken away for investigation. 31 December, 2013.

<http://www.bjnews.com.cn/news/2013/12/31/300024.html> get accessed by 30 April 2014.

lxvi Gas explosion in Dongguan's residential hall, killing one and injuring 31. 3 March 2013.

lxvii Interview with informant#13 by phone, Beijing, March 2014.

lxviii Interview with informant#13, Beijing, March, 2014.

lxix Interview with informant#12, Beijing, March 2014

lxx Interview with informant#12, informant#13 and informant#1 many times, Beijing, January to March, 2014.

lxxi Interview with informant#14, Beijing, March 2014.

lxxii Tang Hui, the Chinese mother who was locked up in a labor camp for demanding justice for the rape, kidnap and prostitution of her 11-year-old daughter. The netizens believes that law-manipulated by the powerful criminal-provides unequal treatment to the aggrieved party Tang Hui and her daughter. Therefore, the public opinion on the Internet shows the overwhelming sympathy and support to Tanghui, yet resentment to the criminals, the ignorance of law from the privileged part, and unjust law system. After *Beijing News's* investigation, however, journalists suggest that Tang Hui has employed radical method to campaign for harsher punishment for the men who kidnapped and raped her young daughter, forcing police to speed up the trial procedure and impose death penalty over criminals. According to Chinese law, although the criminals should be alleged culpability, the sentence Tang Hui appealed is much more severe than the criminal should have committed to. Finally, two of kidnappers were sentenced to death, four were given life sentences and one was jailed for 15 years. Following the sentence, Tang Hui further campaign for the death penalty

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for all criminals, which was rejected by court. From the beginning, Tang Hui's radial appeal and her maneuvering over public emotion on the Internet interferes the judicial independence.

lxxiii Interview with informant#14, Beijing, March 2014.

lxxiv Interview with informant#15, Beijing, March 2014.

lxxv Interview with informant#1, Beijing, March 2014

lxxvi According to Tong (2010), generally speaking, local government could control local media, but are unable to exercise any influence over out-of-town media.

lxxvii Interview with informant#12, Beijing, March 2014

lxxviii on June 7, 2013, Chen Shuizong, set himself on fire on a commuter bus in Xiamen, Fujian Province. The sudden fire engulfed the bus, leading to 47 dead and 34 injured. The case is identified as caused by the suicide of suspect Chen Shuizong, who unleashed his depression towards life and resentment towards social injustice by setting the bus aflame. Interview with informant#9, Beijing, February 2014.

lxxix Interview with journalists in Southern Weekend and Southern Metropolitan Daily, Hong Kong, October 2013.

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