

Hsiao-wen Lee, PhD Student of CAMRI, University of Westminster

## **Tabloid press embed a new public in China**

### **Abstract**

Comparing with the bourgeois public sphere, the tabloid press drives toward the other side that is full of sensational, trivial and personal sphere. Since the tabloid press became the leading position in press group in China, it not only affects the common public but also awakens the latent opinions which have been often ignored for a long time. This storytelling form is welcomed in public and reveals the serious social problems in the community. It threatens the political authority gradually rather than opposites to state directly. However, the tabloid press absolutely shapes a new public, different from that of the Communist Party press.

In Chinese culture, operating on different levels of social fields to regulate social relations, three historically constituted principles or doxa—qing—sentiment—li—reason—and fa—legality—are at work. Within the three, fa is the third and the last resort. When legal means are adopted, people do not think it is an activation of civil rights, but a punishment system at work, a weapon of the governing violence. This mind-set is still operating in contemporary daily life, partly because no one could trust the legal system, due to the fact that it has been the apparatus for the authoritarian regime to control the population. Therefore, the tabloid press sometimes makes illegal conduct or challenge legality even though their conduct is sensible and reasonable, people can accept and recognize it.

In short, China's tabloid press draws the attention of the common public by sensible stories and challenges the Party line. In a strictly controlled society, it does not allow rational critical debates even will lead to jail, so cynicism instead. The tabloid tales are the representative not the alternative public. It is a real public.

Key Words □ China's newspaper, tabloid press, popular press, alternative public sphere

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate why China's popular press can make a convictive public sphere in their society and how they address their public debates which differ from Party or official press. I will use a specific news event, the 6.11 Dingzhou events, to illustrate how the popular press forms a more convictive public sphere and its significance in persuading the general public. At first, this event happened on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2005, and the Beijing News, the most progressive tabloid in Beijing, first reported this event to the public, and caused the concerns to the Chinese government. Afterwards, this event led to a series of repressive actions within the Beijing News office which sent shockwaves around the world.

## **Tabloids, Popular papers and Alternative public sphere**

In terms of the tabloid, there are many different discussions about their definitions, including format, content and audience reception and so on, inasmuch I will discuss what are tabloids and their relation with the popular press. Furthermore, how they play an alternative role and what it means in a mass communication society.

What is the definition of the tabloid? First of all, the tabloid is a prime example of 'infotainment', in which the audience cannot draw a meaningful distinction between 'information' and 'entertainment' □Hallin, 1992; van Zoonen, 1998□. Some scholars attribute to market forces, commercialization and commodification of media content the ongoing blurring of boundaries between information and entertainment □Dahgren and Sparks, 1992; Mcmanus, 1994; McChesney, 1999□ In Western society, the popular papers derive from commercial society. The press appeared as exclusively a

commodity in the 1880s in the UK (Hampton, 2001). Because of the increased concentration of the press, the principled owner of a small newspaper could not survive (Lee, 1976:117-130). The increasing domination of advertising revenue placed a premium on mass-circulation. In addition, the advertisers demanded the right kind of readers, and sometimes exercised an effective censorship over press content (Curran and Seaton, 1997:31-41). That is, the paper 'representing' the people. On the one hand, commercialization could be seen to liberate the working-class consumer who, in a less commercial setting, would not receive adequate 'representation'. On the other hand, commercialization could appear as the driving force behind the production of 'feather-brained' journalism by concentrating ownership in the hands of fewer and fewer capitalist proprietors, whose commercial interests led them to give the hopeless 'quarter-educated' members of the working class what they wanted (Hampton, 2001).

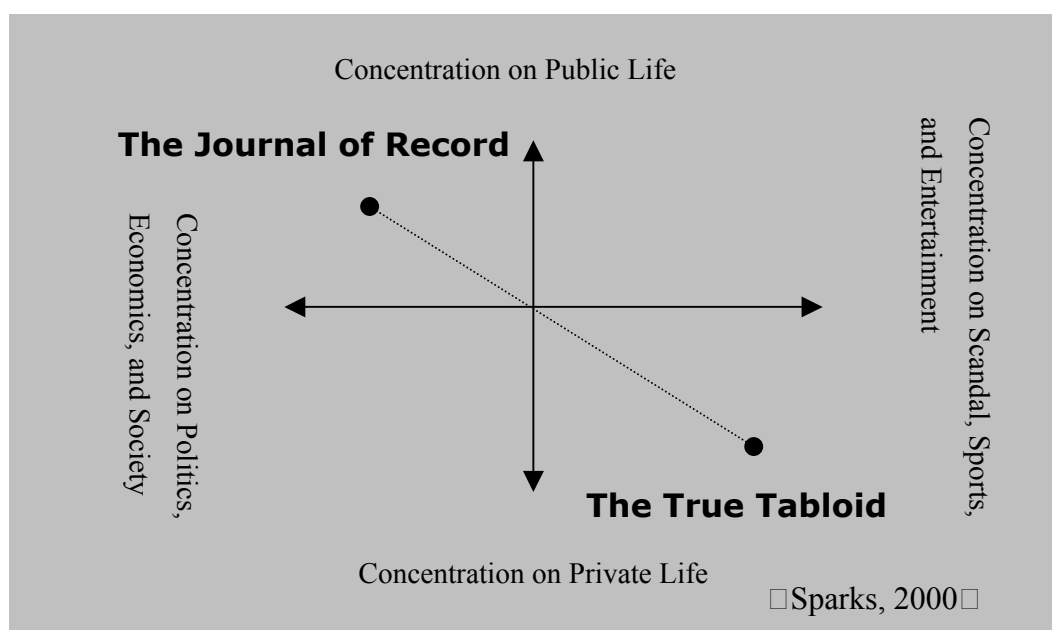
Secondly, the tabloid is 'other news'. Compared with hard news, they are remnant categories. Langer (1998) analyzed thousands of pieces of news in the tabloids, concluding that these crime stories, traffic events or other trivial news, by contrast, can reflect the real life of common people more effectively than those reporting serious news. Thirdly, the tabloid has a subversive role in challenging the hegemony of the 'power bloc' (Glynn, 2000). Glynn argues that the tabloid media establishing truths are destabilized by a proliferation of competing voices.

Fourthly, Fraser (1992) uses the late 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist movement as an example of such a subaltern counter public, using alternative outlets like journals, publishing companies, bookstores, film and video distribution networks, meeting places, and festivals to invent, formulate and spread new concepts and terms for describing and critiquing social phenomena. Unlike Habermas (1989) who is interested in the public

sphere as a locus for political power, Fraser (1992) is discussing the role of the public sphere as an arbiter of cultural recognition.

As the results, Örnebring & Jönsson (2004) bring up four dimensions of the alternativeness of tabloid journalism. “First, alternative might be taken to mean that the discourse itself takes place *somewhere else* other than in the mainstream mediated public sphere—in alternative media outlets, in specialized journals or fanzines, on the Internet, etc. Second, the alternative public sphere may be alternative in the sense that *other participants* than those normally dominating media discourse have access to and a place in the debates and discussions taking place. Third, an alternative public sphere might be alternative in the sense that *other issues* than those commonly debated in the mainstream are discussed—or that issues not even debated at all in the mainstream are discussed in the alternative sphere. Fourth, the “alternativeness” may derive from the usage of *other ways or forms* of debating and discussing common issues than those commonly used in the mainstream, for example forms which encourage citizen participation and non-parliamentary direct action.” There is a table to explain tabloids’ basic characteristic.

**Table 1** Two axis of journalism



This table reveals two axis of journalism. Tabloids are emphasis on private life and concentrate on scandal, entertainment and sport news. On the contrast, the journals of record are emphasis on public life and concentrate on political, economic and social news.

In short, tabloids derived from commercialization and the content is trivial and private news rather than serious and public news. Their alternativeness plays a counter public role that provides different forms and ways of debating or discussing common issues.

## **The Beijing News and Its Story**

What is the 6.11 Dingzhou event□Dingzhou is in the northern province of Hebei. The central government planned to build an electronic plant according to national policy. However, the compensation was too low and people in one of these small villages where a dust-collecting electronic plant would be built, protested vigorously several times, and even assembled in the assigned place for many days. In the very early morning of 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2005, two or three hundred masked gangsters who held sticks or weapons attacked the villagers there and caused six villagers' death and dozens of villagers were injured.

The Beijing News<sup>1</sup> was the first newspaper to report this event and published some dramatic photos at that time. Six months later, the local officials were sentenced and

---

<sup>1</sup> The Beijing News was founded in 2003 and its circulation is near 0.5 million daily in 2005. Its amount of advertising is the 48<sup>th</sup> position of city newspapers in China.

the dust-collecting plant was suspended. In the meantime, the editor-in-chief of the Beijing News and the other two senior editors were also removed by the central public propaganda organ, then, hundreds of journalists walked out, soon after this event became public. This is also second time this young paper was forced to remove its editor-in-chief.

In the end of 2005, Beijing journalists caught world's attention. About 100 reporters in the mass-appealing newspaper walked out in protest after the sudden sacking of their editor. Staff at the Beijing News, known as one of the Communist country's most progressive newspapers, angered when their editor in chief, Yang Bin, was removed without any official explanation. Soon after that, journalists put a cryptic indication of their feelings on the newspaper with a photograph of a flock of birds flying through dark sky above the newspaper's office, with one bird out in front. The image was accompanied by a pointed message 'The sky may not be very clear, but they will still fly into the distance with their mission close to their hearts.' □ The Guardian, 30/12/2005 □

Where does the Beijing News staff's bravery come from? Obviously, it is media's marketization. The market newspapers spread out quickly and the staffing system is switching from lifelong system to a contract one □ He, 2000 □. The famous journalists become popular and have more opportunities to choose their jobs. The Beijing News was founded in the end of 2003 as a joint venture of the Communist Party-controlled but financially struggling Guangming Daily and Southern Daily press group □ The New Times, 31/12/2005 □. The Beijing News has a reputation as one of China's boldest newspapers. Its circulation increased rapidly in a short time. The main editorial staff almost came from the Southern Daily press group. The Southern Daily press group is

called the most open and progressive press group in China. In contrast, the Guangming Daily press group is a typical Party press. At the beginning, the Guangming Daily is responsible for running the Beijing News but newsroom was independent. After the walkout, Guangming Daily press group staff totally took over the main editorial positions of the Beijing News soon. In fact, in 2004, one of the Beijing News' founders, Cheng Yizhong<sup>2</sup>, was arrested under the embezzlement charges dating from his time at another newspaper, Southern Metropolitan newspaper. He was released without charge five months later, and supporters said the charges were politically motivated□BBC, 29/12/2005□.

This city tabloid story also reveals contemporary China's media tug-war between political control and commercial interests. The most competitive advantage of this city tabloid is its criticism of social problems and its instant coverage rather than to report celebrity gossips. The Beijing News is tabloidization of headline news story while the format of its content closes to public interests and echoes the need of social reforms. It exactly uses an alternative powerful approach to appeal mass interests.

## **China's Press System and Its Characteristics**

What is China's press system□In China, there are 39 press groups and more than 2,000 newspapers all over the country□Tang, 2005□. This 39 press groups published 271 newspapers whose circulation totally accounts for one third market share in China. Each press group, on average, has 7 kinds of newspapers, ranging from Party press, to evening press, market press, publishers and so on.

---

<sup>2</sup> Cheng Yizhong had been the editor-in-chief of the Beijing News and of Southern Metropolitan Newspaper in the same time.

The traditional Party newspapers are trusted by political authorities to serve as a propaganda vehicle but the new popular newspapers have to attract their intended audiences and advertisers to support themselves financially. Although they belong to the same press group as Party press, their editorial policy, management and marketing strategies are totally different. Besides, these new, popular newspapers have outperformed their mother newspaper□Party press□ in circulation and profits and became the leading position in the press group. Hence, they are more critical news coverage and have great possibilities to provoke public debates.

According to existed China's press studies, I divide them into three approaches.

The first one set is adopting political economic approach□Chen, 2000; Winfield and Peng, 2005; Akhavan-Majid, 2004; Chen and Guo, 1998□. They argue that how the media reforms in the press group make a big profit from advertising and marketing. This approach based on economic statistics to analyze how phenomenal achievements these new popular press has made, and then how they use this advantage to continue their reforms. For example, in Chen's study, he thinks China's press follow the principle of maxi-profits to look forward innovating of system. They often throw edge-balls to test the bottom line and Party line. However, Winfield and Peng□2005□ point out that China's media system is moving from totalitarianism to market authoritarianism. They think China's political system remains basically intact and persists while the economic system has been changed. This inevitably results in a press system still shaped by an authoritarian system, yet enticed by a vigorous system. They draw the picture that the government has made various adaptations and diversified its control in different alternative ways including political and ideology control, economic control, institutional control, legal control and administrative control. Therefore, the

media reform in China difficult use the West theory and experience to explain it.

Another one is institution analysis approach□Zhao,1998; 2002; Sun, 2006□. This approach argues these new, popular newspapers' information is short and abundant. Their agenda are obviously more diverse than traditional Party newspapers. For instance, Zhao□1998□analyses newspapers for the market, in Beijing, almost major national Party and government organs, including People Daily, Guangming Daily, Economic Daily, and Worker's Daily, are rarely available on the streets, even Beijing Daily. These are official newspapers subscribed to with public money and for consumption in offices, classrooms, and factory workshops. The best sellers on the street vendors are China Television News, the Evening papers, street tabloids, and weekend editions. Zhao illustrates some evening papers to demonstrate their characteristics. They try to write political and economic news from a personal angle and to soften hard news reports. The wide popularity of evening newspapers can also be attributed to their attempts to address the concerns of city residents and to voice their complaints against bureaucracies, particularly utilities. In short, these popular papers do their best to access to most potential readers.

The last one set is history and documentary analysis approach□Huang, 2001; Rosen, 2000; Zhao, 2000□. On the one hand, they explain how the market-oriented papers rise up but still formally remain the authoritative voice of the ruling power□Huang, 2001□. Huang also argues that all media reforms have seemed to reflect rather clearly the Chinese authorities' intention to set up a 'one system two strategies' model to save the country's huge yet problematic Party and government organs of the press. That is, to save major Party and government propaganda-oriented papers by establishing market-oriented subsidiaries within them. On the other hand, some scholars□Rosen,

2000□ analyses many of controversies of the Beijing Youth Daily in their reports to demonstrate which is for success in a crowded marketplace of declining newspaper subscribers, it began to pursue stories that had elicited wide public interests and raised important questions about the future role of the state's key institutions and core values under the impact of a market economy.

In conclusion, China's press system runs 'one system two strategies' model. Party press depends on public organ's subscription and supplement. It plays a main propaganda role and delivers governmental voices. On the contrast, market press depends on street sale or retail. Its function is to devote more profits to its own press group. Therefore, it should make efforts to appeal mass interests. But it is still controlled by government censorships in political and ideological aspects, it is in the same press group with Party press.

## **China's Social Operation and Its Public Sphere**

Chinese is the most obedient people in the world. It is the reason why the autocracy can last very long time in China. A famous historian, Sun Longji<sup>3</sup>□1983□, wrote a classic book, the depth structure of Chinese culture, to draw a comparison between Chinese and western culture<sup>4</sup>. He pointed out Chinese people put stability and unification in politics as the top priority because harmony is the most important value rather than diversity. The government uses stability and unification as a legitimated excuse to suppress the needs of diversification from the public. Therefore, unlike

---

<sup>3</sup> Sun Longji was born in mainland China in 1945 and grew up in Hong Kong. Then, he went to Taiwan to study for his BA and MA program. Sun furthered his study and got his PhD degree in America.

<sup>4</sup> This original version of this book is photocopy in 1983 and wide-spreading in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China for several years.

Protestant people, they emphasize an individual subjectivity and they can organize a legal interest group to fight for their own interests. This is the reason why there is no human rights mind-set in China. The government can easily deprive its people of the most basic freedom. Sun argued there is no concept of citizenship in China but only the folks.

However, Sun (1983) points out that common people use alternative way to resist authority. It is 'outwardly compliant but inwardly unsubmitive' (yang feng yin wei). Chinese people do not violate the law directly, but they usually follow their own judgements in different situation. Law is the only superficial regulation but personal judgement is the most important means in some certain circumstances. They usually apply to the so-called 'negative resistance'. The consequence is that people do not abide by the law and do not believe the legal system. In other words, even the rule is reasonable, if there is no penalty, people do not obey it. Chinese are more outwardly compliant but inwardly unsubmitive is than obedient in general.

Further, Chen (2003) illustrated what kind of social order in China's society is. "There are three principles, qing (sentiment), li (reason) and fa (legality) at work. Within the three, fa is the third and the last resort. That means when legal means are adopted, people do not think it is an activation of civil right, but a punishment system at work, a weapon of the governing violence. This mindset is still operating in contemporary daily life, partly because no one could trust the legal system due to the fact that it has been the apparatus for the authoritarian regime to control the population" (Chen, 2003). Chen explains when a social conduct itself is sensible and reasonable, though it is illegal, it would not be challenged. If a conduct is challenged only on a legal basis, but the conduct itself is sensible and reasonable, then the challenge will not be accepted by

the people. Therefore, people always say China is a sensible society. The legal system does not effective but the sensible and reasonable orders actually operate this society. Indeed, there does not exit a rational and critical sphere in China, but a sensible and reasonable recognition instead. As this mindset is common in China, it provides an opportunity for tabloids to develop as well. Because of the one system two strategies, Party press is to responsible for propaganda purpose and popular press is to appeal to public interests for the actual aspiration. Tabloids' sensible and trivial characteristics not only meet human interests but also fit China's actually social operation.

Levy (2002) and Zhao (2002) had analyzed the discourse of China's tabloids. Levy illustrates the corruption news in tabloids which writing is frequently quite stylized, exaggerated, crude, and prurient. First, they often reinforces the significance of the issue and evokes powerful emotions —ranging from righteous anger to lustful envy— about these corruption stories. Levy thinks “in some ways the stories in the tabloids maybe continue the Maoist tradition of character assassination against privileged people. Only now the stories are produced for commercial rather than political reasons. Second, the tabloid stories usually focus on corrupt individuals who have been arrested by heroic investigators and police, thus conveying the message that the system works.” According to Zhao's study, “the tabloids are as a means of social communication and a potential forum for popular expression. Although political persuasion is not their primary objective, they are socially embedded. Behind the bizarre and apparent deviations from the norm are consensual views about the social world and take-for-granted assumptions about what these norms are or ought to be. Publicly exposed corrupt officials are the subjects of much indignation in tabloid stories. Zhao thinks that given popular resentment against corruption and official anticorruption campaigns in the late 1990s, it is not surprising that tabloids capitalize on a populist

‘people versus corrupt officials’ theme.”

Actually, the authority also uses the emotional and moral tactic to educate common people. The authority treats common people as children. For example, there is a witness story that China’s president, JinTao Hu, speak of a sentence ‘Do good and avoid evil’ has been spreading across all China. This kind of appealing moral is instead of legal reform. Hu's fatherly advice, in the form of eight do's and don'ts, was issued on March of 2006 as an antidote to the corruption and cynicism distributing over whole China, a result of the often raw capitalism that has emerged during 25 years of dramatic economic change. Although his aphorisms may sound simplistic to Western ears, such as ‘Work hard, don't be lazy’ and ‘Be honest, not profit-mongering’ , Chinese analysts said they are a response to a deep-seated desire among people here for a moral compass to guide them through the unsettling transformation□Washington Post, 23/03/2006□<sup>5</sup>.

Although the authority’s propaganda purpose may be different with tabloid’s coverage, the government’s tactics obviously coincide with tabloids’ to access to popularity.

## **Research Questions and Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to examine how tabloids embed a new public in China and what different news values exists Party papers, official papers and tabloids and so on. Next, I will prove why the tabloids can provoke a counter public in China’s society.

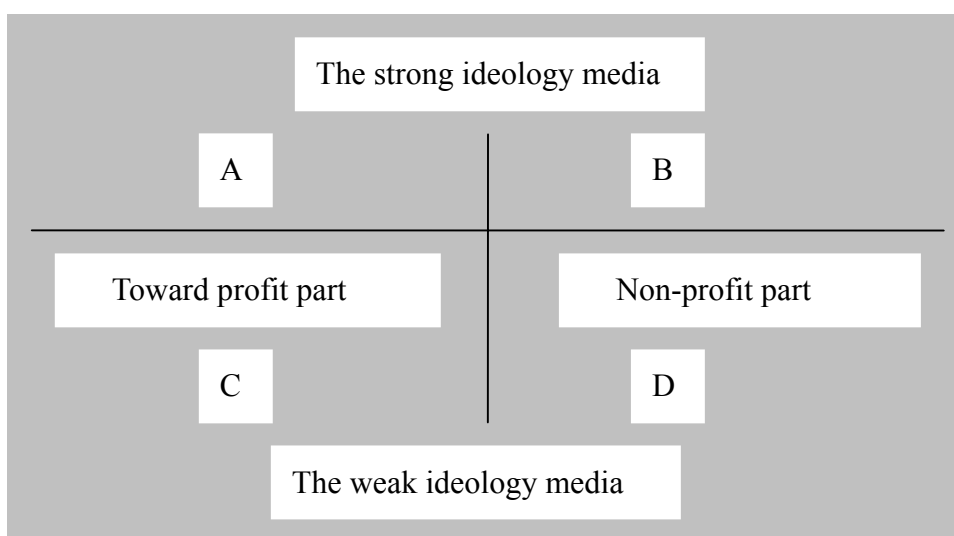
---

<sup>5</sup> 8 Do's and Don'ts are Love the motherland, do not harm it. Serve, don't disserve the people. Uphold science, don't be ignorant and unenlightened. Work hard, don't be lazy. Be united and help each other, don't benefit at the expense of others. Be honest, not profit-mongering. Be disciplined and law-abiding, not chaotic and lawless. Know plain living and hard struggle, do not wallow in luxuries□Washington Post, 23/03/2006□.

Finally, I use textual analysis to prove my argument.

China’s newspaper spectrum is very complicated since there are several newspaper groups distributing in the same city or province and their ownership is controlled by different public authorities and organs. From the mission of public propaganda to public interests, different newspapers have different missions in one newspaper group. According to ideology and the rule of profits, there are different parts in one media enterprise as setting in the below table (Zhao, Zhang, Wang, 2002:18). The state controls the strong ideology and non-profit part; the other three parts are allowed to develop freely.

**Table 2** ‘One System Two Strategies’ system in one news group



First of all, I select the relevant news about the 6.11 Dingzhou events as comparative samples. Because of this event derived from the Beijing News report and led to the removed of editor-in-chief, then hundreds of journalist stroke and the conflicts between central propaganda department and progressive media exploded. Second, I choose dozens of papers in Beijing or nationwide circulation newspapers to conduct the different news values test. However, some famous newspapers did not report this

event, but I still list the consequence all I had conducted. Third, I collect newspapers regarding this coverage of this event from their electronic database on internet. I survey twelve newspapers in total. Some of them have the coverage about the 6.11 Dingzhou events but Beijing Daily newspaper group—three newspapers—in Beijing did not have any report about this event. Fourth, though some newspapers report this event, the proportion is too small to compare with. Therefore, I also select reports and editorials which are the following up of this event and mainly focus on how government should protect ordinary people's property and land. They published the official's or expert's explanations rather than the report of the conflict and bloody incident of the 6.11 Dingzhou events.

In the end, the selected newspapers are People Daily, China Youth Daily, Beijing Times, Legal Daily, The Beijing News, Beijing Youth Daily, China Economic Times, Beijing Daily, Beijing Morning, Beijing Evening, GuangMing Daily, and Worker's Daily, covering eight newspaper groups totally. The actually comparative newspapers are seven.

## **Genre and Agenda Comparison**

I use the comparative approach to check different newspapers' coverage of the 6.11 Dingzhou event including genre and agenda. The genre divides into spot coverage, investigation, the direct review and relevant review<sup>6</sup>. The agenda—news resources—are ordinary people, official, and government or experts.

The samples' period is from 13<sup>th</sup> of June in 2005 that the Beijing News firstly

---

<sup>6</sup> Relevant review means it is relevant news but does not mention this event clearly.

reported this event to the end of year that the public officials and relevant criminals were sentenced in December. The actually comparative targets are seven press including People Daily, GuangMing Daily, China Youth Daily, Beijing Youth Daily, Legal Daily, China Economic Times and Beijing News. These newspapers include Party papers, official papers, and one is city tabloid, the Beijing News. Their ownership and function are totally different. Some papers belong to Party organ, some papers are governmental papers. These samples cover a broad range.

**Table 3□ Eight papers’ coverage compares**

	People Daily	GuangMing Daily	China Youth Daily	Beijing Youth Daily	Legal Daily	China Economic Times	Beijing News
13/06							Spot coverage, pictures
14/06		Relevant review				Direct review	Investigate news, pictures
15/06							Investigate news
16/06							Investigate news
17/06					Spot coverage		
19/06				Review, XinHua News			XinHua News
20/06	XinHua News					Investigate news	
21/06					News Analysis	Investigate news	
27/06						Relevant review	

10/07			Review, XinHua News	XinHua News	XinHua News		XinHua News
11/07						XinHua News	
12/07						Relevant review	
21/07				XinHua News	XinHua News		XinHua News
22/07						Direct review	
16/12			Court News				XinHua News
17/12	Court News						
<b>Total news</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>

□ **The Beijing News**



According to table 3, this event is the Beijing News<sup>7</sup> exclusive coverage on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June in 2005. During the first four days, the Beijing News is the only one paper to report this event. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, journalists interviewed the injured villagers who show the weapon of raiders in the spot. Some villagers even provide bloody photos on

<sup>7</sup> This paper is a subordinate paper of GuangMing press group. GuangMing press group and South press group corporate together to create this market-driven newspaper. It soon becomes the fastest development paper in Beijing.

that day. The Beijing News published these horrible and dramatic images without any reservation.

This press constantly reported this event for the first four days and conducted investigation by themselves.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, journalists interviewed several villagers how raiders hit them for more than one hour and led to 6 died and several villagers injured seriously. According to villager's explanation, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, there once had twenty raiders hitting them and one of the raiders was seized by villagers who was imprisoned in a cave until now.

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, the Beijing News reported the mayor and Party Secretary of Dingzhou were removed and new mayor went to hospital to visit these injured villagers. Other villagers refused the police's requests evacuating from their farmland except that they got the reasonable compensation. They also refused to hand in the hostage to police. These villagers realized this behavior is improper, but they emphasized they have no choices. They treated the hostage very well, giving him rice and meat every meal. After the Beijing News reported the event, the public officials decided to settle this controversy soon.

On June 15<sup>th</sup>, the new Party Secretary visited the injured in the attack. He said if the villagers have any questions, he was willing to help them and talked to them face to face. He also thanked the Beijing News of reporting this event in many days.

On June 16<sup>th</sup>, the government sent the coroners to Dingzhou. Then, the government also would help villagers reaping the wheat and provided financial aid. That meant

through this event and the Beijing News' reports, all requests of villagers had been fulfilled.

In these four days coverage, the most interesting thing is I could not find any critical review but only the spot coverage. Until 19<sup>th</sup> of June in 2005, the official news agency □XinHua□ published this event and the Beijing News adopted the official reports directly till the end of this event.

#### □ **China Economic Times and Legal Daily**

In addition to the Beijing News, China Economic Times and Legal Daily are the only two media reporting this event before XinHua news agency, the main official news agency in China, reported the same event. The initial following paper of the Beijing News coverage is China Economic Times<sup>8</sup>. It not only reported this event but assigned journalists to the village to do interview directly. Besides review and interview, China Economic Times is good at economic news so they invited experts to discuss land reform policy. Within their coverage, China Economic Times even stated that its news resources came from the Beijing News. One possible reason is that this press and the Beijing News do not compete with each other. Their markets and readership are different. The other reason is that the press views itself as a critical press and aims to reflect the social reality and problems. This paper is one of the few media to report and investigate this event on their own. They only adopted one news story from XinHua news agency. Although it did not have not spot coverage, its deep and broad discussions about this event are more deliberate than the Beijing News. Obviously, the Beijing News aims to appeal to the public's emotion and invokes sympathy on the

---

<sup>8</sup> China Economic Times is founded in 1994 which is a professional economic newspaper. Its ownership is the development central of the State Council. This department is consultant organization of the State Council.

villagers but China Economic Times attempts to look into the reasons behind the event.

The third paper is Legal Daily<sup>9</sup> which is good at judiciary news and often discusses legal precedents. It was the third paper following this news and did some interviews in the village though the amount of its coverage is far behind the first two newspapers. However, this paper focused on the discussion how many problems would occur when government levies lands in its news analysis.

#### □ **Beijing Youth Daily and China Youth Daily**

The fourth paper is Beijing Youth Daily<sup>10</sup>. Except a piece of editorial, this paper adopted XinHua news in all three coverage. This paper had been called a market success □ Rosen, 2000; Zhao, 1998 □. It has introduced a series of management reforms since the early 1980s. Its entertainment-oriented weekend edition launching in early 1992 and its motto is using close to market public taste. It had been proud of its news values and news selection which are different from those of Party newspapers. On the other hand, this paper's street sales account for half of its circulation. Undeniably, it has to use sensational headline and story to appeal to the public. But in this event, this paper, by contrast, is more conservative than the other official papers.

The fifth paper is China Youth Daily<sup>11</sup>. This paper also has a review, a piece of news adopted XinHua news and the other news came from the news release of the local court in Dingzhou. Its format of coverage is more similar to Party organ press. However, this newspaper group has its own internet which reports more critical and sensational news

---

<sup>9</sup> Legal Daily is a nationwide public organ.

<sup>10</sup> Beijing Youth Daily is the first China's newspaper to enter the stock market in Hong Kong in 2004.

<sup>11</sup> China Youth Daily is Party paper but creates a weekly edition 'the Freezing Point' to do an experiment for critical articles.

than those on the paper edition. In its electronic database, I can find some coverage citing from other papers' coverage regarding the relevant news of the event such as the Beijing News, Hong Kong Sun Daily and so on. Their coverage is more critical but only show on its electronic database. Maybe it is somehow another way of 'one system two strategies'.

#### □ **People Daily and Guangming Daily**

The sixth paper is GuangMing Daily<sup>12</sup>. This paper is the Beijing News' mother paper. However, during the course of this event, it never reports any news about the 6.11 Dingzhou events. Only on the second day, the Beijing News reported this event, this paper published some expert and professors' discussion on how to balance between economic development and farmers' property. This way of report is close to a relevant review but it is too obscure to realize what happened on this event. This paper sees itself as an intellectual paper. Therefore, its coverage based on intellectuals', experts', and officials' opinions.

The seventh paper is People Daily<sup>13</sup>. This paper is main Party organ press and serves the mouthpiece of the government to be the national representative. It reports twice about this event in a straight coverage. One is at the beginning, it adopted XinHua news agency. The other one is at the end, it adopted the news release from the court. There was no review or interviewing and the way of its expression was hard and formal.

#### **People Daily Vs the Beijing News**

---

<sup>12</sup> GuangMing Daily is a Party press and central propaganda organization manages it directly.

<sup>13</sup> People Daily is one of Party press but plays the most important role on central propaganda work.

People Daily and the Beijing News are on the two sides of spectrum in journalism. One is formal Party press, the other one is genuine city tabloid. However, in the 6.11 Dingzhou event, People Daily's coverage merely gave an account for this news. The timing of its coverage even fell behind other newspapers which have reported this event. The first time People Daily published this news on 20<sup>th</sup> of June. Obviously, the central government allowed this event to be reported and XinHua news agency released this news on 18<sup>th</sup> of June. Afterwards, all newspapers formally followed XinHua news to report this event.

In People Daily, its coverage emphasized how government paid much attention to this event and efficiently dealt with these problems. There was no ordinary people opinion, pictures, review or spot coverage. By contrast, the Beijing News used a lot of firsthand materials and interviews to account for this event's cause and process. Only after XinHua news agency began to release this event did, the Beijing News like other newspapers almost adopt its coverage.

Moreover, most newspapers did not report this event until XinHua news agency reported it. Except that the Beijing News is a city tabloid, other newspapers are official or Party press. The People Daily is even the mouthpiece of the Party. In short, the differences between them are very clear.

### **The spectrum of China's press**

According to the above analysis, I have drawn a spectrum of these papers and attempted to inducing individual characters. This elementary comparative consequence can let us see what the differences between tabloid and official papers are. Moreover, the progressive tabloid embeds its readership total differently with the Party and

official papers.

**Table 4** □ **The spectrum of newspapers**

	Genre	Agenda
Party paper	Serious and formal news, official review	Government, Party organ or expert
Official paper	Official news, critical review	Government, Party organ
Critical official paper	Official news, investigative news, critical review	Ordinary people, government
Progressive tabloid	Spot news, investigative news	Ordinary people, government

The different pattern of papers overlaps each others' characteristics to some extent. Especially, all Party papers depend on official organ's subscription, and official papers are half subscription, half retail; by contrast, tabloids depend on retail sales. Market-driven power leads tabloids to become mass appeal newspapers. This not only expresses their characteristic on format and news selection, but on the news resources and critical spot coverage.

Furthermore, the Party press is heavily dependent on government support in finance and official resources and it also follows the Party line. From its genre to agenda, Party press coverage is authoritative and strict and never goes beyond the Party line. As regards the official press, some papers are half sold by retail, thus, they sometimes make some critical reviews to appeal to audiences and after this controversy which is then allowed by the government. But the official press is not so open, it still follows the propaganda policy very cautiously. The other pattern, I call the critical official press, because it is more progressive than the official press. The critical official press though does not report dramatic stories. It also does not follow the public organ step by step to

report news. The critical office press has its own angle in its coverage and depth of discussion.

The last one is the progressive tabloid. The progressive tabloid uses tabloid tactics to report serious news. These tactics include populism, big headlines, individual tales, short news items and dramatic pictures. The most important thing is all tabloids depend on street sales. Therefore, the front page story is the crucial selling point. It has to be eye-catching. Hence, the progressive tabloid puts the emphasis on communicating with ordinary people.

Briefly, this newspaper spectrum is from the serious press to the tabloids and also from the government stance to the ordinary people.

## **Conclusion**

Why can China's tabloids make a convincing public sphere than the Party or the official press? According to the above discussions, there are at least two dimensions that can explain this argument. One is Chinese traditional culture; the other is their newspapers' structure.

In Chinese cultural factors, as people's sensible and reasonable mindset, legal system is a facial conduct that it has not really effects on everyday life. By contrast, ordinary people are selective to obey the law but most of the time they do not know how to protect their own rights. They perceive a legitimate conduct depending on their sentiment and reason. For example, in the 6.11 Dingzhou events, villagers arrested a raider in order to grab the other suspects. They even refused to give the police this

raider and they thought they treated the raider very well who ate meat and fishes at every meal. In other words, people use sentiment to justify the legal system. The tabloid often uses moral sanctions instead of legal discussion because it can provoke ordinary peoples' emotion and interests. Coincidentally, China's legal system often rules by individual case not by legality and the sensible consideration is often beyond the law. Therefore, the tabloids' individual tales are more welcome among ordinary people and more convincing than the official press.

In China's press structures, the Party press is well-known as the Party mouthpiece. Moreover, its finance totally depends on government support and subscription. On the other hand, all tabloids have to make money independently as the result become the people mouthpiece. They have to create their own values in the market and try some experiments to appeal to mass interests. The Party press and tabloids bases are very different. The trajectory leads to the division into two opposing extremes.

However, the patriarchy still influences the press system. It is a variable in tabloids. Sometimes tabloids are forced to follow official news. Most time, it is a genuine power to report the truth and provoke the public's needs in China. That is the reason why tabloid is a true public rather than other official press.

## Bibliography

Akhavan-Majid, R. □ 2004 □ 'Mass Media Reform in China.' *Gazette □ the international journal for communication studies*. Vol. 66 □ 6 □ 553-565. London □ Sage.

"Beijing journalists stage walkout." *The Guardian*, 30 December 2005, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/china/story/0,,1675479,00.html> □ accessed 30 March 2006 □

Chen, H. □ 2000 □ 'A gradual process of China's media institutional reform- a study of press.' *Mass communication research*. Vol. 62. Taiwan □ ChengChi University.

Chen, H. and Guo, Z. □ 1998 □ 'An Analyze of Divergent Development in Advertising Market Shares among Party and Mass Newspapers.' *Mass communication research*. Vol. 57. Taiwan □ ChengChi University.

Chen, K.H. □ 2003 □ 'Civil society and min-jian □ on political society and popular democracy.' *Cultural Studies*. 17(6): 876-896. London □ Taylor □ Francis Ltd.

Curran, J. and Seaton, J. □ 1997 □ *Power Without Responsibility*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn. London □ Routledge.

Dahlgren P. and Sparks, C.(ed) □ 1992 □ *Journalism and Popular Culture*. London □ Sage.

"Eight-Step Program for What Ails China President Reacts to Rising Greed, Cynicism" *Washington Post*, 23 March 2006, A16.

Fraser, N. □ 1992 □ 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy', pp. 109-42 in Craig Calhoun(ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MA □ MIT press.

Glynn, K. □ 2000 □ *Tabloid Culture-Trash Taste, Popular Power, and the*

- Transformation of American Television*. USA □ Duke University Press.
- Habermas J. □ 1989 □ *The structural transformation of the public sphere □ an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge □ Polity.
- Hallin, D □ 1992 □ ‘The Passing of the ‘High Modernism’ of American Journalism.’ *Journal of Communication* 42 □ 3 □ 14-25.
- Hampton, M. □ 2001 □ ‘Understanding media’ □ theories of the press in Britain, 1850-1914.’ *Media, Culture □ Society* Vol.23 □ 213-231.
- He, Z. □ 2000 □ ‘Chinese Communist Party Press in a Tug-War: A Political-Economy Analysis of the Shenzhen Special Zone Daily’ pp112-151 in Chin-Chuan Lee □ ed □ *Power, Money, and Media-Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China*. Evanston, Illinois □ Northwestern University Press.
- Huang, C. □ 2001 □ ‘China’s State-Run Tabloids-The Rise of City Newspapers.’ *Gazette*. Vol.63 □ 5 □: 435-450. London □ Sage.
- “In Rare Move, Journalists Strike Paper in Beijing” *The New York Times*, 31 December 2005, 9.
- Langer, J. □ 1998 □ *Tabloid Television □ popular journalism and the “other news”*. USA □ Routledge.
- Lee, A. □ 1976 □ *The Origins of the Popular Press in England*. London □ Croom Helm.
- Levy, R. □ 2002 □ ‘Corruption in Popular Culture’ pp39-56 in Perry Link, Richard P. Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz. □ eds □ *Popular China-Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*. USA □ Rowman □ Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- McChesney, R. □ 1999 □ *Rich Media, Poor Democracy □ Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. Urbana □ University of Illinois Press.
- McManus, J. □ 1994 □ *Market-driven Journalism □ Let the Citizen Beware* □ Thousand Oaks, CA □ Sage.

- Örnebring, H. & Jönsson, A. M. □2004□ ‘Tabloid Journalism and the Public Sphere: a historical perspective on tabloid journalism.’ *Journalism Studies*, Vol.5, Number3, pp283-295.
- Rosen, S. □2000□ ‘Seeking Appropriate Behavior under a Socialist Market Economy: An Analysis of Debates and Controversies Reported’, pp152-178 in Chin-Chuan Lee □ed□. *Power, Money, and Media-Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China*. Evanston, Illinois □Northwestern University Press.
- Sparks, C. □2000□ ‘Introduction □the panic over tabloid news’ pp1-40 in Sparks, C. and Tulloch, J. □ed□ *Tabloid Tales □Global Debates over Media Standards*. USA □Rowman □Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Sun, L. □1983□ *The Depth Structure of Chinese Culture* □Photocopy□. H.K. □Hua Qianshu Press □2005 republished□.
- Sun, X.P. □2006□ ‘Metropolitan Press □The most meaningful reform in China’s press.’ at [http://academic.mediachina.net/academic\\_zjlt\\_lw\\_view.jsp?id=4743&pepl e=403](http://academic.mediachina.net/academic_zjlt_lw_view.jsp?id=4743&pepl e=403) 4 □accessed 16 February 2006□
- Tang, X. □2005 □ ‘China’s Newspaper Group-Advancements within Exploration’, pp106-114 in Baoguo Cui □ed□. *Blue Book of China’s Media 2004-2005*. China □Social Sciences Academic Press.
- “Walkout protest hits China paper” BBC, 30 December 2005.
- Winfield, Betty H. and Peng, Z. □2005□ ‘Market or Party Controls □□ Chinese Media in Transition’, *Gazette: The international journal for communication studies*. Vol. 67(3): 255-270. London □Sage.
- Wu, G. □2000□ ‘One Head, Many Mouths: Diversifying Press Structures in Reform China.’ pp45-67 in Chin-Chuan Lee □ed□ *Power, Money, and Media-Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China*.

Evanston, Illinois □ Northwestern University Press.

Zhao, Y. □ 2002 □ 'The Rich, the Laid-off, and the Criminal in Tabloid Tales: Read All about It □' pp111-135 in Perry Link, Richard P. Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz. □ eds □ *Popular China-Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*. USA □ Rowman □ Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Zhao, Y. □ 2000 □ 'From Commercialization to Conglomeration: The Transformation of the Chinese Press Within the Orbit of the Party State.' *Journal of Communication*, Spring 2000. USA □ International Communication Association.

Zhao, Y. □ 1998 □ *Media, Market, and Democracy in China- between the party line and the bottom line*. USA □ The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.

Zhao, Zhang, Wang □ 2002 □ *Big tide of media*. Taiwan □ Empire Press.

Zoonen, L. van □ 1998 □ 'The Ethics of Making Private life Public' pp113-23 in K. Brants, J Hermes and L. van Zoonen □ eds □ *The Media in Question □ Popular Culture and Public Interests*. London □ Sage.