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978-1-107-01844-0 - Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China

Daniela Stockmann

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Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China

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

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

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Politics and relations among individuals in societies across the world are being transformed by new technologies for targeting individuals and sophisticated methods for shaping personalized messages. The new technologies challenge boundaries of many kinds – between news, information, entertainment, and advertising; between media, with the arrival of the World Wide Web; and even between nations. *Communication, Society and Politics* probes the political and social impacts of these new communication systems in national, comparative, and global perspective.

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To my parents

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

Douglas Adams

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Acknowledgments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Berlin

July 2012

Abbreviations

BAS	Beijing Area Studies Survey
BBS	Bulletin Board System (chat forums)
CATA	Computer-Aided Text Analysis
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
GAPP	General Administration of Press and Publication
GPS	Random Sampling according to the Global Positioning System
ISDN	Integrated Services Digital Network
KMT (in Taiwan)	Kuomintang or Nationalist Party
LLCATA	Labor Law Computer-Aided Text Analysis
LLM	Survey of Labor Law Mobilization
MAELEZO	Information Services Department of Tanzania
MCT	Media Council of Tanzania
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PD	Propaganda Department
PPS	Random Sampling according to Probability Proportional to Size
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRI (in Mexico)	Institutional Revolutionary Party
RCCC	Research Center for Contemporary China
RMB	Renminbi
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SMS	Short Message Service
SOE	State-Owned Enterprise
SPPA	State Press and Publication Administration (now General Administration of Press and Publication [GAPP])
USCATA	United States Computer-Aided Text Analysis
WTO	World Trade Organization

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

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

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<i>Chongqing Morning News</i>	<i>Chongqing Chenbao</i>	重庆晨报
<i>Chongqing Times</i>	<i>Chongqing Shibao</i>	重庆时报
<i>Chongqing Youth Daily</i>	<i>Chongqing Qingnianbao</i>	重庆青年报
<i>Economic Daily</i>	<i>Jingji Ribao</i>	经济日报
<i>Economic Observer</i>	<i>Jingji Guanchabao</i>	经济观察报
<i>Financial News</i>	<i>Jinrong Shibao</i>	金融时报
<i>Fujian Daily</i>	<i>Fujian Ribao</i>	福建日报
<i>Global Times</i>	<i>Huanqiu Shibao</i>	环球时报
<i>Guangming Daily</i>	<i>Guangming Ribao</i>	光明日报
<i>Guangzhou Daily</i>	<i>Guangzhou Ribao</i>	广州日报
–	<i>Huaxi Dushibao</i>	华西都市报
–	<i>Jiankangbao</i>	健康报
–	<i>Laodong Wubao</i>	劳动午报
<i>Legal Daily</i>	<i>Fazhi Ribao</i>	法制日报
<i>Legal Evening News</i>	<i>Fazhi Wanbao</i>	法制晚报
<i>Liberation Daily</i>	<i>Jiefang Ribao</i>	解放日报
<i>Lifestyle</i>	<i>Jingpin Gouwu Zhinan</i>	精品购物指南
<i>Nanfang Sports</i>	<i>Nanfang Tiyu</i>	南方体育
<i>New Women (Paper)</i>	<i>Xin Nübao</i>	新女报
<i>New World</i>	<i>Xin Shijie</i>	新世界
<i>People's Daily</i>	<i>Renmin Ribao</i>	人民日报
<i>People's Liberation Army Daily</i>	<i>Jiefangjunbao</i>	解放军报
<i>Reference News</i>	<i>Cankao Xiaoxi</i>	参考消息
<i>Science and Technology Daily</i>	<i>Keji Ribao</i>	科技日报
<i>Shanxi Evening News</i>	<i>Shanxi Wanbao</i>	山西晚报
<i>Soccer News</i>	<i>Zuqiu</i>	足球
<i>Southern Daily</i>	<i>Nanfang Ribao</i>	南方日报
<i>Southern Metropolis Daily</i>	<i>Nanfang Dushibao</i>	南方都市报
<i>Southern Weekend</i>	<i>Nanfang Zhoumo</i>	南方周末
<i>Tianjin Daily</i>	<i>Tianjin Ribao</i>	天津日报
–	<i>Titan Zhoubao</i>	体坛周报
–	<i>Wenhui Bao</i>	文汇报
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