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ABSTRACT This article examines the way in which newspaper discourse gets changed. Original reports of three social problem events that journalists sent to two different newsrooms and reports that were published are compared using critical discourse analysis. It is argued that the practice of self-censorship helps newsrooms bypass political 'minefields', and at the same time increase the possibilities of the publication of reports on highly politically sensitive topics. In this sense, in the Chinese authoritarian media system, self-censorship has potentially become a force that increases media freedom instead of a threat to media freedom. This special function of self-censorship fits what Gramsci describes as a 'war of position' for Chinese journalism.

KEY WORDS: *Chinese media, Critical Discourse Analysis, newsroom politics, self-censorship*

Introduction

This article² examines the ways in which newspaper discourse gets changed. This allows us to see how newsrooms employ self-censorship to minimize political risks while maximizing public interest. Original reports of three social problem cases journalists sent to two newsrooms and the final published reports are compared using critical discourse analysis. Issues raised here include differential concerns between two newsrooms and among news workers at different levels. Consideration is given to conflicts of interest between journalists and newsrooms as a result of pressures on the press. The conflicts of interest lead to the practice of self-censorship within newsrooms as a key way of balancing between the power relations that influence the media.

There are two reasons for these analytic choices. First, the topic of social problems is highly politically sensitive. Ranked as the 'highest politically sensitive reporting minefield',³ these topics must be approached by journalists and newspapers in a very careful manner. Examining such politically sensitive

topics clearly illustrates the clash of interests within Chinese newsrooms. Representations of riots and the government's response to social problems reveal the distances between journalists, newsrooms and the authorities, and the degree of their commitment to official discourse.

Secondly, the editorial process is a self-censoring one. Within the process, information in the original reports submitted by journalists to the editor's desk is included or excluded by newsrooms according to a newspaper's overall position, underlying ideology and understanding of the socio-political situation. Such inclusions and exclusions are a result of the practice of the politics of self-censorship.

Examining both inclusion and exclusion, therefore, is an efficient means of seeing how self-censorship works in a newsroom, as well as revealing newspapers' ideologies. Van Dijk even regarded the analysis of the 'unsaid' as being sometimes more revealing than that of the 'said' (Van Dijk, 1991). If the original reports are available to the researcher and the editorial process leading to the final report can be observed, it is possible to see what newspapers do in the self-censoring process in order both to report events and avoid annoying the authorities.

As a result of this analysis, it is argued that self-censorship functions as a mechanism for negotiating power relations in Chinese newsrooms. Chinese newsrooms consider not only political safety, but also journalists' professional concerns and other requirements of social forces for journalism. The degree to which discourse is changed by self-censorship, and in which way, depends on the priorities of newspapers. Practising the politics of self-censorship helps newsrooms bypass political 'minefields', and at the same time increases the possibility of the publication of reports on highly politically sensitive topics. In other words, self-censorship maximizes both the public and private interests of mass media, especially the more 'liberal' media. In this sense, in the Chinese authoritarian media system, self-censorship has potentially become a force that increases media freedom instead of a threat to media freedom. The special function of self-censorship in Chinese newsrooms fits what Gramsci describes as a 'war of position' (Gramsci, 1988).

Chinese media discourse as a site of power contest

News discourse has a close relation to power. The importance of controlling news discourse in power struggles and in maintaining power leads to competition for power over media discourse (Fairclough, 1989). In China, media discourse is first of all controlled by the political elite via censorship. Before the 1980s, the Party held a monopoly on the mass media in order to propagate Party policies and educate people (Chan and Qiu, 2002). Since the 1980s, marketization has broken down the Party's monopoly control over the media and made room for liberalization and diversity (Zhao, 1998; Chan and Qiu, 2002). Nevertheless, mass media are still obliged to follow the Party line (Chan, 1993; Abels, 2005). The current Hu-Wen leadership hopes that tightening media control will help reconstruct the legitimacy of its rule (Zheng et al., 2005).

Overt propaganda bans and informal instructions set up reporting minefields (Tong, 2007). These propaganda minefields prohibit media from reporting on topics regarded as a threat to national stability. Taboo topics range from criticism of Party leaders, human rights abuses and riots, to severe accidents or disasters, and the range is increasing in recent years (Abels, 2005; Freedom of House, 2008). In addition to such pre-publication restrictions, the authorities also apply post-publication censorship, which results in a warning to newsrooms and political crackdowns on those media who break restrictions (Freedom of House, 2008).

The tightening political control over media discourse, however, does not match Chinese ideological and social development in the post-reform era. One significant change in the ideological sector is that the ideology of the formerly authoritarian, Communist country is now no longer dominated by official Marxist Communism, but by a dissonance mixture of neo-conservatism, old and new leftism, liberalism and other intellectual discourses (Misra, 2003; Wang, 2003). These discourses strive for media space to reflect their specific political appeals.

Implications for new power relations also come from the social sector. The reconfigured pyramid of social stratification in post-reform China has a small group of economic and political elites at the top, a larger group of intellectuals, expert technicians, clerks and the self-employed in the middle, with the largest group of workers, peasants and the unemployed at the bottom (Lu, 2004). Much evidence, for example the Shanghai maglev rail extension case⁴, has shown that the social groups in the middle and lower positions, and quasi-social groups,⁵ are beginning to compete with those at the top for media coverage of their own interests.

The emancipatory forces released by the market, and the social and ideological developments, thus pose a potentially pluralistic challenge to political control. This pluralism is reflected in a range of ways of being innovative and diverse in media outlets, for example new newspapers and channels with more open content and new genres of journalism, such as investigative journalism (Wu, 2000). A significant number of media practitioners, particularly journalists, see themselves as public intellectuals with a professional identity that obliges them to report on different social groups and to push forward the boundaries of journalistic practice (Tong and Sparks, 2009). For example, despite constraints, Chinese journalists have found ways to develop investigative reporting in line with their new professional consciousness (Herbert, 2001; Collings, 2002; Tong, 2007).

These signs of liberalization in the press, however, are subject to constraints, including the influence of political elites, economic elites, powerful social institutions, and even the institutional pursuits of the private goals of media organizations. The latter include concerns over the cost of expensive investigative journalism, political risks, commercial incentives and their ability to compete in the market. These private goals, however, not only limit media liberalization, but also prevent media institutions from unthinkingly following top-down

Party orders. Chinese media are obliged to consider commercial incentives as well as to ensure their own development. What Chinese media have to do is to find a way to report on what the market wants them to report, but in a manner that is neither annoying to the Party-State nor totally follows administrative orders from above.

These factors compete for control over media discourse. The range of power relations is wider than just the political power of the Party-State and the economic power of the market. Other social forces join the fight for access to media discourse for their own interests, including the public demand for journalism, journalists' professional self-identity and the institutional pursuit of both public duties and private goals by media organizations. Self-censorship is thus a mechanism to negotiate a way through all these conflicting dynamics.

Background to the case study and methods

THE NEWSPAPERS

The two newspapers used in this study are from different geographic regions in China: the *Dahe Daily (DD)* from Henan Province and the *Southern Metropolitan Daily (SMD)* from Guangdong Province. Both newspapers were launched in 1995. They are both at a provincial administrative level.⁶

The *DD* is a commercial offspring newspaper of the *Henan Daily Press Conglomerate*. It enjoys a high circulation and large advertising revenue. During its early years of development, it was famous for its brave investigative journalism and was even regarded as being the initiator of critical reporting in China (Jia, 2006). It has gradually been transformed into a commercial newspaper that is less critical than before.

The *SMD* is a non-Party offspring of the *Southern Daily Press Conglomerate*. It is a big seller and a famous investigative newspaper. It built its reputation on its pugnacious investigative reporting of social issues and the dodgy deeds of (local) corrupt officials.⁷ It is regarded as a pioneer in independent reporting, for example with its SARS reports,⁸ and as a paradigm of the investigative liberal press.

Two cases of 'social riots'

A 'social riot' is the outbreak of the collective resentment of a social group's collective resentment. It is a good reflection of the social problems that China faces today. Two cases of social riots are analysed in this paper: the *DD* covered the Wanzhou Mass Riot on 26 October 2004, while the *SMD* reported the Chizhou Mass Riot on 28 June and 1 July 2005.

On 18 October 2004, the Wanzhou District of Chongqing City witnessed a serious mass incident (*qun ti xing shi jian*) involving thousands of protesters.⁹ This was sparked by the beating of a peasant labourer by two people, who claimed to be 'civil service officials' (*gong wu yuan*). That day, Hu Quanzong and his wife,

Zeng Qingrong, were walking in the Shuangbai Road in the Wanzhou District. As they passed Yu Jikui, a porter (*bian dan*) who had come into the city to work, Yu's carrying pole struck Zeng by accident. This triggered a fierce argument and blows between the two sides, and resulted in an injury to Yu. Hu claimed to be a civil service official and said that he could use his money to fix any possible problem. Hu's behaviour and words caused anger amongst bystanders and led to a large-scale riot, in which police cars were burned, protesters surrounded and looted the Wanzhou District government building, and a violent confrontation developed between the rioters and the police.

A similar event occurred in Chizhou City on 26 June 2005. A Honda hit a young bicycle passenger, who was a student. The driver and the three other passengers in the Honda demanded that the boy reimburse them for the damage to the car (some scratches), while the boy wanted them to take him to hospital. After negotiations failed, the four Honda passengers beat up and injured the boy, claiming that even if the boy were beaten to death, they could cover it up by spending 300,000 RMB. Their behaviour and words triggered anger in the nearby crowds, leading to a mass incident involving up to 10,000 people. The riot resulted in the smashing up of a police station, the looting of a supermarket, the burning of cars and injuries to the (armed) police.¹⁰

The case of the abolition of ancestral temples

On 26 April 2006, around 1000 peasants from two clans with different surnames in Jiangxi's Wanzai County were involved in an attempted armed clash. One month later, the government of Wanzai County decided to abolish all ancestral temples in the province and quickly transformed them into 'cultural entertainment centres' (*wenhua yule huodong zhongxin*) or 'peasants' night schools' (*nongmin yexiao*), declaring that the move aimed 'to attack clan factions and to construct an harmonious Wanzai'. Consequently, all ancestral temples in Wanzai County were dissolved and county residents were no longer able to pay their respects to their ancestors. The SMD published a report on 18 May 2006.

Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis is used to analyse news discourse. The analysis is based on the sketch of the characterization of newspaper discourse with a focus on discursive strategies or rhetorical patterns that embody potential ideological meanings. The reasons for this are that journalistic decisions influence linguistic choices in news reports on the one hand, and the structure and other discursive characteristics of news text are used by journalists and other news workers as strategies to achieve their professional purpose, on the other. This article identifies and analyses five features in the text of newspaper reports: (1) newspaper headlines (captions) and leads; (2) topics and their ordering; (3) quotation patterns (news sources); (4) lexical agency; and (5) grammatical agency.

The case of Wanzhou Riot: concealing social conflicts and constructing a positive political stance

Examining the original report of this case closely, we can find three traits in news discourse. First, the journalist reveals the social conflicts and clarifies that the negative mood of people toward government results from social inequalities and failures in governance. Second, the journalist critically constructs a negative image of local government. Third, a clear opposition between the lower class and officials is established. The major revisions made by the *DD* newsroom are: concealing social conflicts; lessening political criticism; and moderating the opposition between government and people.

The original report focuses on the cause of the riot, instead of the action itself. The report identifies the real triggers of the riot by describing three stages in the evolution of the conflict that led to the riot. The three steps are: (1) disputes between the individually powerless and individually powerful; (2) the evolution from the individual dispute to the anger of passers-by towards the individually powerful; and (3) the evolution from anger at individuals to public anger towards the government, finally leading to mass riots. Figure 1 shows the conflict evolution of social riots of this kind.

The original report indicates that the motivation of the bystanders was reasonable, because what they wanted was the punishment of those who carried out the assault. More importantly, the riot was actually triggered by accumulated social conflicts and the negative mood of people towards the government. An apparently trivial dispute was only the flashpoint. Furthermore, the report pointed out that it was not the first time the government had used the police force to

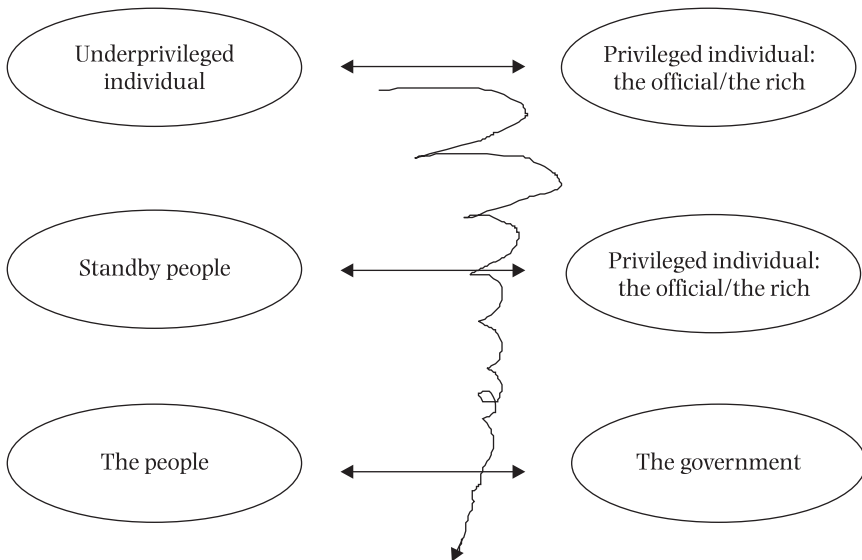


FIGURE 1. *Three conflicts in the Wanzhou and Chizhou riot events*

suppress the people. In fact, the government's armed suppression in a previous event contributed to this riot. According to an original report, the invisible crisis in society was the main reason for the riot. In this example and others, the DD journalist's descriptions of the violent police attacks on the citizens, and the local government's inefficiency and corruption, establish a negative image of the government as 'Them'.

The journalist's original report also creates a clear opposition between people and government through lexical agency. For example, he used the word *biandan* to label, and even to substitute for, the porter Yu Jikui and other porters in the text. *Biandan* is a collective appellation for the occupation of porter in the Chongqing dialect. The word represents a group of lower-class people who sell their labour for very little money. The term *biandan* is used both to refer to Yu Jikui, and to label the rioters who attacked the police car (see Example 1).

... police car's windows were smashed by bystanders and '**biandan's (porters)**. Bystander crowds/masses gathered again, the number of them climbed up to four or five thousands.

EXAMPLE 1. Quotation from the DD journalist's original report submitted to the editor's desk

The journalist also uses *qunzhong* (crowds or masses) to refer to the rioters. The other side, however, is referred to as 'officials' (*guanyuan*) or 'official ranks'. The Chinese words *qunzhong* and 'official' show the hierarchical relations and hostility in the event. The word *qunzhong* in a Chinese context has the implication that people who are led by prominent individuals are of lower social status, and are 'masses' and 'mobs' without their own ideas and rationality (Zhong, 2005). In Example 2, one side in the conflict is 'the masses' and the other side comprises 'officials and police'. The hierarchy of the news actors can be seen in the text of the news report. The appellation 'official ranks' shows the respect of the journalist for these news actors, while the terms *qunzhong* and *biandan* do the opposite.

To the surprise of local officials, around 6 pm, 4,000 or 5,000 masses gathered again and blocked the traffic. A lot of people surrounded the District Government building. The cries of 'Hand over the killer. Punish the killer' rose from time to time. **Officials** and the police organised the crowd of people (*renqiang*) in order to prevent rioters crushing into the building. Conflicts occurred between the two sides, a witness said.

To the surprise of local officials, around 6 pm, 4,000 or 5,000 masses gathered again and blocked the traffic. These fellows surrounded the District Government building. The cries of 'Hand over the killer. Punish killer' fell and rose from time to time. **Government staff** and police organized the crowd of people in order to prevent rioters crushing into the building. Conflicts occurred between the two sides, a witness said.

EXAMPLE 2. On the left is the quotation from the DD journalist's original report, submitted to the editor's desk, and on the right is the quotation from the published report of the DD

The *DD* newsroom, first of all, has concealed social conflicts in the published report by completely deleting the paragraph (marked in bold) the journalist used to analyse the (real) social reasons behind the riot (see Example 3). It does not mention the invisible crisis in society at all, which in the journalist's original report was the main reason for the riot. It hence lessens the rationality which the original report gave to the rioters. The published report in the *DD* therefore merely explains the direct reason for the riot and depicts the two conflicts (see Example 3). In this way, the published report is much safer politically than the original report and avoids too much departure from the official ideology.

What local government needs to do next is to revise and implement the document to deal with the emergency and to try their best to improve the quality of life for the citizens.

Furthermore, (local government) declared in the conference on October 23 that from that date, the lowest level of social security benefits for urban citizens in Wanzhou District was increased from RMB115 Yuan per month to RMB140 Yuan per month.

In the process of the investigation, the journalist heard the civilian version of explanations for the riot. People believed the increasing number of laid-off workers and the accumulating conflicts between people and government were the main reasons for the riot. As more and more people were laid off, a lot of people lost their income and had to sell their labour to maintain the most basic and lowest standard of living. At the same time, however, the government was constructing the so-called 'image project' (*xingxiang gongcheng*) and political achievement project (*zhengji gongcheng*). The riot broke out in the newly finished and furnished Gaosuntang Business Culture Plaza, in front of the District Government building. According to the government, building the plaza was a business development activity, but the government used the police to force out residents and business people who had not signed 'remove and move' agreements (*chaiqian xieyi*) with the government. It was a sort of police suppression - remove and move. Besides, the corruption of officials also contributed to the outbreak of the riot. A comrade who was on the staff in the government of Chongqing City said that in the urban development process, six officials including the Vice-Governor of Wanzhou District were doubly regulated (*shuanggui*), besides a myriad of smaller corruption cases. All of these social reasons became the source of growing conflict between people and government, which finally broke out after being triggered by a trivial individual dispute.

EXAMPLE 3. *Quotation from the Dahe Daily journalist's original report*

The *DD* newsroom has also changed the image of the government from a negative 'Them' to a positive 'Us' in the published report by deleting the description of police violence and local government failure. The published report only describes the action of the protesters. It deleted the action of the police in the journalist's original report. The rioters were described as a mob that attacked and injured the police, while the police were the victims.

Furthermore, the *DD* newsroom constructed the 'correct' political position by finding excuses for the authorities. In the *DD*, although describing the three stages of conflict evolution in the Wanzhou Riot, the published report pointed out in its reading guide (which effectively functions as a lead in a Chinese newspaper) and text that the riot originated from a misunderstanding. The assaulter was actually not a real 'civil service official'. It implied that the anger towards the official and government was unnecessary, as the assaulter was not a real 'official'.

The opposition between 'masses' and 'officials' is also mitigated in the published report. For instance, in Example 2, the change of a word (in bold) is very interesting. The word 'official' (*guanyuan*) in the original report is changed to 'government staff' (*zhengfu gongzuo ren yuan*) in the published report. 'Official' is a word connoting hierarchy, while the words 'government staff' are more neutral, without status implication. In describing the locality of the conflicts between the rioters and the police and officials, the shift from 'officials' to 'government staff' demonstrates the newsroom's intention to dull the presentation of conflict and opposition.

Furthermore, the intention to lessen the opposition between the under-privileged and the privileged is present in the grammatical agency as well. In Example 4, we can see that the identity of 'civil service official' is deleted from the published report. In the original report, the identities of 'biandan' and 'civil service official' are clearly opposites, while in the published report, the people who beat up the 'biandan' are invisible. The Chinese word *zao* in the original report also has the meaning of sympathy and surprise. It is changed in the published report into *bei*, which only shows the passive action without any emotional meanings.

A 'biandan' was beat up by a 'civil service official' in street.

'biandan' in street was 'gongwuyuan' beaten up

'biandan' jietou zao 'gongwuyuan' baoda

A 'biandan' was beaten.

'biandan' was beaten

'biandan' bei da.

EXAMPLE 4. Grammatical agencies' analysis of a sentence in the journalist's original report (above) and the published report of the *DD* (below)

The case of the Chizhou Riot: implying social conflicts and lessening political risks

The original report of the Chizhou Riot has similarities with the original report of the Wanzhou Riot. The *SMD* newsroom, however, has revised it in a different way. The *SMD* newsroom lessens the political risks, but also keeps the main

themes of the original report. That is, the newsroom has used discursive strategies to imply social conflicts between the lines, but equally to lessen the political risks.

Similar to the journalists in the *DD*, the *SMD* journalist pointed out the major social reasons for the riot and the three steps of conflict evolution. The original report also represented an image of a 'Them' government. The contextual reasons include the negative mood of Chizhou citizens towards official corruption, towards possible collusion between business people and the city's governor, towards rapidly climbing real estate prices, and towards the cancellation of the business of motor-cycle taxis¹¹ in Chizhou City. Like the original report of the Wanzhou Riot, the focus on the causes defined the Chizhou riot in a broader social context and therefore portrayed the rioters' activities as having certain rationality.

In the published report, the newsroom used a discursive strategy to make the report politically safer, but it retains a clearer presentation of social conflicts. The use of 'rumours' is one prominent discursive strategy, which lessens political risks as well as implying criticism. For example, public opinions about the event in the original report are classified in the published report as 'rumours'. In this way, social conflicts, for example complaints about the collusion between officials and businessmen, are able to be safely clarified.

Despite the report being politically safer, the theme of social crisis is even more prominent than in the original report. Unlike the *DD*'s published report of the Wanzhou Riot, the published report in the *SMD* strengthens, instead of weakening, the causes of the Chizhou Riot and retains the three stages of the conflict. The published report is even more focused on the reasons for the evolution of the event. It listed the high-level and low-level themes as follows:

1. A normal 'car-hits-passenger' traffic dispute in Chizhou, Anhui Province, evolved into a mass incident that involved fights, smashing, looting and arson.
2. Rumours circulated by troublemakers, anger at bad treatment and so on contributed to the escalation of the incident.
3. What Wu said annoyed the crowds.
4. Bystanders believed that the student was beaten to death.
5. People thought the police covered up for the assailants, who were prominent business people from another province. They were hated by the people of Chizhou City because they were believed to have colluded with the CCP Secretary of the city.

Reading between the lines, the published report in the *SMD* informs its readers that the riot originated from various social issues and that the rioters were not a mob. In other words, by speaking of rumours and public opinion, the newsroom implies that what was behind the riot, and what really triggered it, were the conflicts, misunderstandings and negative moods of the people in Chizhou City towards the authorities, the police, the officials and the rich. In this way, the *SMD* newsroom managed to retain the essence of the original report in the published report by using the subterfuge 'rumours'.

But the SMD newsroom also tried to make the story politically safer by attributing a positive political stance to the authority. In the lead, added in the editorial process, the SMD clarified that the purpose of the report was to offer constructive suggestions to the authority instead of criticizing the authority. The lead protects the report by presenting it as an example of the problems facing the government. The published report supports the government's efforts in a friendly way rather than making trouble or criticizing. Therefore, the newsroom constructs a positive political stance for the report by claiming to provide constructive suggestions for the authorities.

The case of the abolition of the ancestral temple: modifying political criticism and employing official discourse

The original report of this case is different to the other two cases. Here, the journalist directly and strongly criticized the behaviour of local government. Comparing carefully the two versions of reports on the ancestral temple case, we find that the SMD newsroom has modified political criticism in the published report by deleting discourse with obvious political risks, while keeping milder political criticism in the report by employing official discourse.

This case is about local government's response to a recent clan clash. In the original report, the journalist strongly criticized the activities and policies of local government by using ironic terms and quoting news sources. For example, the journalist described governmental activities in Example 5 at the beginning of the report. He used *yundong* (the movement) to refer ironically to government behaviour. 'Yundong' is normally used for social and political movements that have significant, usually negative, results, e.g. 'wenge yundong' (the Cultural Revolution movement) and 'po sjiu yundong' (the Abolish Four Olds movement). Another ironic phrase: 'zui yuzhongbutong de yangben' (*the most extraordinary sample*) used in the following sentence further demonstrates how the reporter satirizes local government.

*'The **movement (yundong)** was regarded as an important part of "new countryside construction" by the local government. The deployment of the movement made Wanzai **the most extraordinary sample** in the nationwide wave of "new countryside construction".'*

EXAMPLE 5. Quotation from the SMD journalist's original report

As an echo to the ironic name 'Yundong' at the beginning of the article, the journalist cited an old villager's comments on the 'Yundong' in the following paragraphs (see Example 6). In the quotation, the old villager compared the local government's behaviour to the 'Cultural Revolution', which was traumatic for China. Furthermore, the reporter strengthened the criticism by using quotations from villagers to show that they viewed the government as destructive. The news sources and statements in the quotations listed in Table 1 show the attitudes of villagers toward the government's behaviour. From the propositions, one can see that the report totally disagreed with the government's behaviour.

TABLE 1. *News sources and quotations in the original report*

<i>News sources</i>	<i>Propositions in quotations</i>
Villagers with the Long surname	Police destroyed everything inside the ancestral temple, except the couplet hung on the columns of a hall, which was regarded as a cultural relic.
Villagers with the Long surname	A lot of people disagreed with the government.
Villagers with the Long surname	They felt insulted and could not understand government activities.
Chief of Gao clan	'Our ancestral temple was dug up and pulled down!' They were full of resentment.
An old man in the Xin clan	The government was destroying the temple. Why did the government do this? Now is not the Cultural Revolution.
A lot of villagers	What the Wanzai County government did reminded them of the movement 40 years ago, that started with 'Abolish Four-Olds' (po siju).
Villages of the Zhang clan	The government activity broke the law.
A lot of villagers of the Long clan	The government's activities caused public anger and sharpened conflicts between government and the masses. They will soon appeal to Beijing for help.

*According to an old man with the surname Xin in Zhutan Town, 'the local government is destructive. The ancestral temples educate clan members to respect older people and be filial to parents. What is wrong with that? ... **Now is not in the time of Culture Revolution'. The behaviour of the local government in Wanzai County reminded villagers of the 'yundong' that happened 40 years ago. Its first appearance was also as 'abolishing four olds'.***

EXAMPLE 6. *Quotation from the SMD journalist's original report*

Furthermore, through quoting villagers, officials and academics, the original report clearly shows that the villagers favour clans because of local conflicts between people and government and popular concern about local government failures, for example local corruption. In Example 7 and Example 8, the journalist quoted both the comments of an official on the revival of clans and villagers' viewpoints, demonstrating the positive function of clans in supervising local government wrongdoing.

*'According to Yu Yangqing, the CCP Committee Secretary of Zhutan Town, the desire of clans of all surnames to take back their ancestral temples became fierce around the year 2000. In this year (2000), the CCP Committee of Zhutan Town planned to sell the government building (that was an ancestral temple) and move it to another place. **Several hundreds villagers with the Long surname surrounded the town's government office and then ferreted out the CCP Committee Secretary. The villagers forced him/her to sign a contract to promise not to sell the government building. The next year, the Party Secretary was sentenced for corruption.***

EXAMPLE 7. *Quotation from the SMD journalist's original report*

'But according to local Surname-Long villagers, the clan has the power to stop local government's power abuse and to protect the villagers' interests. On the notice board of the Zhutan Town Government Building, the journalist saw the task assigned by the higher Party Committee to Zhu Chengwen, the Director of the Police Bureau in Zhutan Town that: in order to fulfill its task (the Police Bureau in Zhutan Town) should arrest 50 people who commit crimes, 100 people who disturb the public order, and find 20 people who need to be re-educated by labor. The villagers said that clan committees can resist to a certain degree the Police Bureau's illegal fines and arrest.

The clan committee's ability to deal with disputes is also much better than local government's ability. According to Tang Taiping, the Chair of People's Representative Committee of Tanbu Town, "sometimes the disputes that cannot be solved by local government can be solved by clan committees. So clan committees lessen the burdens on local government". According to Yu Yangqing, the CCP Committee Secretary of Zhutan Town, local government indeed has faults and cannot satisfy the needs of local people. Clans fill the gap.'

EXAMPLE 8. *Quotation from the SMD journalist's original report*

Furthermore, the journalist made personal comments as follows:

- (1) 'It seems that the local CCP Committee and government went too far with this policy.'
- (2) 'So far it has been difficult to see how much the take-over of ancestral temples can change the villagers' attitude and improve local government.'

From these quotations, discussion and comments, we can see that the journalist in fact wrote the report from the position of the people instead of the government officials. He blamed the government's stupid activities and argued that the official measures would inevitably lead to sharper conflicts between the government and the people.

The *SMD* newsroom modified the strong political criticism toward local government by deleting problematic sentences. The Editor-in-Chief deleted a lot of words and paragraphs, which he regarded as being politically dangerous in order to make the report safer. On close examination of the deletions and revisions, one finds that the Editor-in-Chief deleted sentences and paragraphs relating to intra-governmental cover-ups, government treatment of villagers, the positive functions of clans, the public anger of the villagers involved and the comments of journalists. Examples 6, 7 and 8 are three instances of these modifications. The sentences in bold have been deleted in the self-censoring process.

The intention to modify political criticism is also reflected in the fight over the headline between the journalist, the desk editor and the Editor-in-Chief. Examining the different versions of the headline in Figure 2, we can see that the Editor-in-Chief would like to choose a politically safe headline that will not attract the attention of the relevant propaganda departments.

Examining the different versions of the headline closely, one can see the different ideologies and intentions behind them. The first version is the one on the original report submitted to the Editor-in-Chief. It describes the government's

The headline in the journalist's original report submitted to the newsroom:

Take-over Ancestral Temples Abolish Clan Organizations
*'Thousands of People's Attempted Armed Clash' Event Spurred the Birth of
 Another Strange Sample of 'New Countryside Construction'*

First version of headline revised by the Editor-in-Chief:

Take-over Ancestral Temples: Abolish Clan Organizations

Second version of headline revised by the Editor:

Who Touched Our Ancestors?

Third version of headline revised by the on-duty Editor-in-Chief:

All Ancestral Temples in the County Lost

Fourth version of headline revised by the on-duty Editor-in-Chief:

Clean up All County Ancestral Temples to Make Sure of Social Stabilization

Fifth version of headline revised by the on-duty Editor-in-Chief (zhiban zongbian):

Clan Armed Clash Caused Clean up of Ancestral Temples

The final version of (the published) headline accepted by the Editor-in-Chief:

Clamp Down Clan Organizations Transform Clan Ancestral Temples
Jiangxi Wangzai Firmly Dispose of a Clan Clash Event

FIGURE 2. Revisions of the headline in the editorial process

activities and explains the cause of the event, defining the event as being 'another strange sample of "new countryside construction"' in the sub-headline. The word *linglei* (another strange sample), used here, means that things are very strange and different to customary and normal things. It shows that the reporter does not agree with the government and even regards the administrative order as ridiculous, and a historical retroversion.

The Editor-in-Chief, however, deleted the sub-headline in the first revised version. It is difficult to judge the intention of the report from this version. When the report was submitted to the Editor, he changed the Editor-in-Chief's neutral headline into *Who Touched Our Ancestors?* He believed that such a headline could still show the public's indignation and anger. But the on-duty Editor-in-Chief then changed it to '*All Ancestral Temples in the County Lost*'. The Editor accepted it, because he thought the title still showed the meaning from the people's point of view.

The on-duty Editor-in-Chief, however, realized the angle, disagreed with the position of the headline, and believed the title should be from the government's standpoint. As a result, the headline was changed to *Clean up All County Ancestral Temples to Make Sure of Social Stabilization*. The Editor regarded this as fine, because the logic in the headline was ridiculous, and it ridiculed, and to a certain degree satirized, the government's activities, but the headline was soon changed again to *Clan Armed Clash Caused the Clean-up of Ancestral Temples*.

Although not on duty, the Editor-in-Chief kept phoning the on-duty Editor-in-Chief. The latter was asked to read the headline to the former, who gave instructions of what the headline should be. Around five minutes before the deadline for the submission of newspaper pages, the headline was finally changed to the published headline, which is dull and in official discourse.

The SMD newsroom modifies the level of political criticism in the report. But the published report still retains mild political criticism. In Example 8, the sentences in bold have been deleted by the SMD newsroom. But the newsroom kept what Yu Yangqing, an official, said. The remaining quotation criticizes the local governance. Another example is that the questions and negative attitudes of the villagers toward local government behaviour listed in Table 1 have been retained in the published report. After self-censorship, political criticism in the published report has been retained by maintaining neutrality and employing official discourses or third-person quotations. The journalist's subjective comments have been deleted. All opinions are expressed by villagers and officials.

This discursive strategy of employing official discourse was also used by the Editor in the editorial comments; he made a reference to the official document: *Decision of Central Government to Strengthen the Governance Capability of the CCP* (*zhongyang guanyu jiaqiang dang zhizheng nengli jianshe de jueyi*) to back up his criticism.

The Editor regarded the abolition of the temples as a symbol of the failure of local government. The mass incident could have been solved by negotiation, instead of the arbitrary administrative methods used by the government. The government's order to abolish the ancestral temples was quite like the methods popular during the Cultural Revolution era to 'abolish the Four Olds' (*posijiu*). It was ridiculous and ironical that this policy was presented as New Countryside Construction (*xin nongcun jianshe*). But the report could not express this directly and had to follow the major propaganda themes of New Countryside Construction and Harmonious Society Construction. So the Editor pointed out in a satirical way that the local government had put the abolition under New Countryside Construction. In order to show this ironical meaning, he deliberately picked a picture to express it (see Picture 1). In the picture, we can see a slogan – 'Conducting the Advanced Education Activities of the CCP to Improve Socialist New Countryside Construction' – on the banner.

Concluding remarks: press self-censorship as a balance of power

The media have been regarded as playing an essential role in constructing an image of a harmonious and consensual society by concealing social conflict, even in Western societies (Hall, 1977; Curran, 2000). The media has also been seen as supporting the existing power structure, the social order and elite hegemony (Downing, 1980). Given that the party line forces the Chinese media to support the governments' policies and polish up the image of the Party, Chinese media should definitely try to conceal social conflicts and contribute to the maintenance of existing social order.



PICTURE 1. *The picture with a slogan: 'Conducting Advanced Education Activities of the CCP to Improve Socialist New Countryside Construction' on the banner*

What we found is that in each of these cases, rather than concealing them, all three journalists revealed deep social conflicts and clarified the negative mood of the people toward government as a result of social inequalities and governmental failures in their reports submitted to the editor's desk. They criticized the systematic problems within Chinese society as well as the local leadership. They criticized the over-emphasis on economic development in Chinese modernization that has led to the moral collapse of the rich and the loss of people's confidence in their governors. They also criticize the official-capital collaboration, local corruption and the failure of local government.

This new type of journalism tends more to represent the voice of the under-privileged social groups and depict the whole of the events, instead of broadcasting the government's voice and following the official account. Journalists of this kind have a clear understanding of social reality. As a response to Chinese reality, these journalists have a willingness to tell the truth and they are trying to fulfil professional ideals. They position themselves as opponents of authority, standing out and speaking for the people. They are concerned with the public interest and their professional values instead of political safety. Journalists leave the latter to newsrooms. Instances of self-censorship are rare at the level of the individual journalist.

Faced with this new journalistic practice, however, newsrooms cannot let reports like these be published, as the topic of social problems is highly politically sensitive. Social problems, one of which is social inequalities, have inevitably appeared in the Chinese economic reform process alongside rapid economic growth (Wu, 2004; Wang et al., 2006). These issues hence put the Chinese

media in a dilemma. On the one hand, the lower classes struggle to voice their grievances and complaints, even by way of a protest (Shue and Wong, 2007). A new genre of journalists has paid attention to these lower-class voices. On the other hand, the topics are political minefields. Touching one can easily lead to political crackdown on news media. Failure to give voice to the people could lead to journalists and the public losing trust in the media, while any improper approach to these topics may result in political trauma to the media. Newsrooms need tactics for handling these problems. Self-censorship fits the need.

From the editing process, one can clearly see the struggle in the newsroom over discourse rights. The struggles are not based on purely editorial concerns, e.g. grammar and lexical corrections, or improvements, or cutting paragraphs to fit the available space. They arise from self-censorship concerns over political safety.

Self-censorship is an efficient way for newspaper organizations to deal with the clash between their interests and those of the interests of journalists and the public. The self-censorship in Chinese newsrooms nowadays is not a strict 'No' policy. Instead, it helps maximize the possibility of getting reports published at the same time as minimizing political risks. Newsrooms do not absolutely refuse reports on highly politically sensitive topics. With greater concerns over political safety, newspaper organizations act as gatekeepers via self-censorship, thus avoiding potential political risks caused by the violations of propaganda taboos in journalists' reports.

Examining what is included in the original reports but excluded in published reports, we can see that high-ranking media practitioners make every effort to lessen the political risks and to ensure the safe political character of the report. Although both newsrooms have switched the tone of the reports and constructed a positive political stance, displaying the same concern for the political risks of covering social problems, we can also see that the two newsrooms have used different strategies to achieve their aim. The *DD* shifts the tone of the original report and keeps more in congruence with the official report. However, the *SMD* keeps the major meanings of the original report, but makes it safer to present the story by using hidden scripts and discourse strategies. Besides attributing information to rumours and providing constructive suggestions for government policy, the *SMD* newsroom also utilizes official discourse and quotations to carry the real meaning of their reports. These practices are coherent with what the author observed in the two newsrooms and from interviews. From this standpoint, one can see the importance of organizational factors in journalistic practices. More conservative media organizations limit the realization of liberal journalistic practices, while more liberal newspapers help the fulfilment of journalistic professionalism and so help speak for the interests of the people and the underprivileged. The expression of the interests of underprivileged social groups, however, is covert and circuitous instead of being straightforward and open.

The process of self-censorship reflects the clash between the private and public interests of the organization. To publish a report is to take account of the journalist's and Editor's desire to practise professional journalism and to maintain public interest. Meanwhile, the Editor-in-Chief's efforts to find a safer

headline and safer forms of expressions are aimed at minimizing possible political risks and prioritizing private interests. The reason for these differences is that it is a necessary concern of newspapers to take account of the needs of other social forces rather than merely those of political authority. The degree of modification, however, depends on the overall positions of different newspapers. Newspapers like the *SMD*, with a more liberal political stance, respect their journalists' work more and are more likely to keep the essence of the original reports, while newspapers like the *DD*, giving priority to political safety, are keen to stay congruent with authority. They give less autonomy to journalists and narrow the scope for journalists' expression, which they assume is to speak for underprivileged people. This is an organizational attempt to keep a balance between public and private interests. Finding a way not to surrender totally to political pressures demonstrates a strategic counter-attack by the media against political censorship, which can be described in terms of Gramsci's 'war of position'.

NOTES

1. Thanks go to the *Southern Metropolitan Daily* and the *Dahe Daily*. Special thanks to all the journalists, whose names have been deleted here in order to protect them. Thanks to the reviewers for their valuable comments. The author also much appreciates Professor Colin Sparks' valuable comments and polishing of the language. None of the above can be held responsible for any of the viewpoints expressed in this article. Thanks also go to Dr Marina Svensson and the University of Lund for offering me a visiting scholarship, which gave me the time to finish this article.
2. Besides critical discourse analysis, this article is also based on in-depth interviews with 71 journalists conducted in six cities over a period of time between 2004 and 2007 and the six-month participant observation in the two newspaper newsrooms.
3. According to interviews.
4. In January 2008, hundreds of Shanghai citizens, worried that it would cause environmental problems, protested against a planned extension of the city's maglev rail.
5. A quasi-social group refers to a group organized temporarily and perhaps unconsciously, by a group of people with the same interests during a period of time. The relationship among these people is flexible and the groups cannot be regarded as fixed, or called classes such as 'working classes'. For example, in the Xiamen XP project case, the citizens in a city that face an environmental crisis because of the launch of a chemical factory can be regarded as a quasi-social group who posit an interest camp and oppose the government's decision to launch the factory. The group will no longer exist when the government cancel the decision and the environmental crisis has passed.
6. An official way to classify Chinese newspapers is according to their administrative levels, i.e. central, provincial and city.
7. As evaluated by Asia Cases 2004, accessed in November 2005 and available at www.cpj.org/cases04/asia_cases04/china.html
8. In 2003, when national and local governments in China covered up the truth of the SARS epidemic, *Southern Metropolitan Daily* carried reports questioning the lies in official media coverage and drew both foreign and domestic attention to the crisis.

9. The number of protesters involved in the riot differs from media to media. The domestic media claim the riot involved thousands of people, while international media believe 10s of thousands of people took part in the protest.
10. A summary based on reports in several media, e.g. Agence France Presse, Global Insight Daily Analysis, Newsfile, Reuters News (accessed 17 April 2007 via the Factiva database).
11. A lot of laid-off workers and peasant labourers work as motor-cycle taxi drivers to earn a living. However, a lot of cities in China have prohibited taxis of this kind. The governmental decision, in fact, made those taxi drivers jobless.

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