

# Informal informational networks in the People's Republic of China

JOHN W. WILLIAMS, PRINCIPIA COLLEGE



Portion of the Goddess of Democracy Declaration

[This is the conclusion of a two-part commentary (begun in the Winter 1998 issue) on aspects of communication in the People's Republic of China.—Ed.]

A fascinating short article in the *China Daily* revealed much about the media structure and role in China.

THE PAGE TWO ARTICLE, entitled "Media urged to brush up on morals," reported on a speech by a senior Communist Party official at a conference on the

state of "professional morals." "The days of backhanders and free lunches may be over for China's journalists," the article opened. Xu Guangchun, deputy head of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, "called for a new code of morals to stop the practice of reporters being paid by companies or organizations to cover specific stories." Xu was quoted as saying, "The media sector should be highly responsible to the party, the people and the cause of journalism, and should take it as a perennial task to fight 'paid news'." He was also quoted as say-

ing, "Most of the staff in our media sector have regulated themselves strictly and have been honest in performing their duties." However, he added, according to the article, that the "incidences of 'paid news' have reappeared as corruption has infected the news media."

The conference, "has thrown the spotlight on the 'unhealthy trend' which has filtered through the industry. The conference was attended by officials of "25 major media organizations and provincial propaganda departments," including major newspaper and media organizations. The "officials...compared notes on promoting professional morals over the past three years" ("Media urged to brush up morals," *China Daily*, Thursday, May 9, 1996, p. 2).

The story reaffirms the Party's supremacy in media matters, reveals the role of Party propaganda officials in directing the media, and reminds us that the media are to serve society in a specific manner, which does not provide for

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## QS considers changing its name

LINDA STEINER, RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

Whether the Qualitative Studies Division might be better off with a different name has been a matter of ongoing discussion during the last several years.

The term "qualitative" research seemed appropriate years ago, when AEJMC was dominated by social scientists doing quantitative research. The Qualitative Studies Division was established as the home within the organization for people searching for alternatives to quantitative methods.

In 1989-1990 division members discussed whether a different name might better communicate the agenda and interests of the division.

Among the advantages cited of a more specific name was that more people

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# Help QS through changes

BONNIE BRENNEN, VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

I've just finished proofreading the program copy for Baltimore, and it looks like the Qualitative Studies Division will once again sponsor an excellent array of thoughtful and intriguing sessions. Thanks to everyone who submitted panel proposals.

My two years as head of QS have been a rewarding and enjoyable experience



which I highly recommend to all of you. But of course I haven't done it alone. The hard work of our board members has made this job much easier, and I thank them all.

IN THE LAST FEW HEADNOTES, I HAVE discussed proposed changes to the Council of Divisions programming policy and have asked all of you to let me know your views on this issue. I have received a variety of thoughtful responses from division members who raise some excellent points. Several wrote that they consider QS their home and that without QS they would have no reason to attend the AEJMC conferences. Overall, each person who responded maintains that QS must fight any attempts to tie programming

rights to membership numbers.

I have shared the concerns voiced by QS members with COD leadership, and, at the COD business meeting in Baltimore, I will do my best to make sure that the welfare of QS and other small divisions is not sacrificed in any attempts to streamline an unwieldy system. I plan to update QS members on the status of

this issue during our business meeting and hope that we can also discuss some specific strategies for insuring the future of the Qualitative Studies Division.

I hope that all of you will be able to attend this year's AEJMC conference in Baltimore and that you will join us at the QS business meeting on Thursday, August 6 from, 8 to 9:30 p.m.

We need the support of all of you to help keep QS strong. ❖

(NAME, continued from p. 1) would more clearly understand what kind of scholarship would find an audience in the division. An informal survey conducted within the pages of the QS newsletter, however, showed little support for a name change.

At last year's business meeting, members revisited the issue. Especially now that some of the original members of the division are less active, if not retired, some members feel the title is misleading. Members of other AEJMC divisions apparently wonder if QS is making a claim about its intellectual virtue. Among the suggested alternatives are "Cultural/Qualitative Studies Division" and "Cultural/Critical Studies Division."

The issue will be raised at the 1998 business meeting of the division in Baltimore, at which time the membership will discuss the list of names that should be considered. In the meantime, please share your responses, pro or con, on the issue.

Contact Linda Steiner (*lsteiner@scils.rutgers.edu*), James Wittebols (*jhw@niagara.edu*), Richard Campbell (*rcampbell@a1.mtsu.edu*), or Karen Riggs at Univ. Wisconsin-Milwaukee at (414) 229-4436. ❖

## Qualitative Studies Division 1997-1998

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University

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<http://www.geneseo.edu/~comm/qs/>

# Annual Convention Research Paper Abstracts

**Cindy M. Brown, University of South Florida.** “Grounded Moral Theory: A Feminist Way of Doing (Media) Ethics.”

In this paper, I articulate the fundamentals of a bottom-up method of ethical inquiry that I refer to as “grounded moral theory.” Grounded moral theory, which consists of listening to people’s real-life concerns, generating recommendations to deal with these concerns, and extrapolating from recommendations and concerns to ethical theory, is placed into the context of feminist ethics. The method is based on philosophical ideals from an ethic of care and methodological notions about building theory from the ground up.

**Cindy T. Christen, University of Wisconsin-Madison.** “Vilification as a Rhetorical Strategy in Social Movements: A Comparison of Environmental and Wise-Use Rhetoric.”

This paper uses the controversy surrounding natural-resource management in the U.S. to examine vilification as a rhetorical strategy in social movements. Using the framework proposed by Vanderford, examples of the vilification practices of wise-use advocates and environmentalists are identified and compared. Based on the analysis, implications are drawn regarding the functions of vilification in the confrontation between environmental and wise-use movements.

**Brenda Cooper, Utah State University.** “Hegemony and the Re-Creation of Dominant Culture: A Critique of Hollywood’s Cinematic Distortion of Women of Color and Their Stories.”

An investigation of male directors’

film translations of three texts written by women of color—Isabel Allende’s *The House of the Spirits*, Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, and Tina Turner’s *I, Tina*—explicates how marginalization and omission function as hegemonic devices to renarrate the women’s writings. The result is depoliticized film narratives that minimize or mute altogether pivotal elements of the women’s texts and lives, including their complex voices and unconventional beliefs regarding the role of gender, race, and spiritualism, thus demonstrating the semiotic power of film to construct cultural meanings and to perpetuate society’s existing dominant ideological beliefs.

**Stephanie Craft, Stanford University.** “Memory and Record: Evocations of the Past in Newspapers.”

This paper explores how history is evoked and invoked in journalistic writing, and the implications of different conceptualizations of “history” for the study of collective memory and news. The paper examines how other scholars have traced the contours of history and memory, and it attempts to find a space for journalism within that discussion. Second, this paper offers a preliminary attempt to apply those concepts to news stories and identify questions for further examination.

**David Craig, University of Oklahoma.** “A Critical Assessment of News Coverage of the Ethical Implications of Genetic Testing.”

Using ethical theory as an analytical lens, this paper assesses news coverage of the ethical implications of genetic testing through an in-depth textual analysis of 31 broadcast and print stories by major news organizations in 1995 and 1996.

Consequentialist concerns, especially avoidance of harm, were prominent in most stories, but deontological references were often lacking. Ethical themes, sometimes emerging as direct questions to readers, underlined the choices facing individuals and society.

**Fabienne Darling-Wolf, University of Iowa.** “On the Possibility of Communicating: Critical Theory, Feminism, and Social Position.”

This paper is an investigation of the epistemological significance of social position. Starting with early critical communication research, I explore the development of this concept in feminist scholarship, particularly feminist cultural studies. I argue that looking back at critical communication research might provide useful insights on some of the most pressing theoretical dilemmas of contemporary feminist thought, and help take the identity politics debate beyond academic discourse into politically grounded everyday practices.

**Charles Fairchild, SUNY Buffalo.** “Community Radio and the Development of Empowering Institutions: The Case of CKRZ and the Six Nations Reserve.”

CKRZ-FM was created to serve the needs of the Six Nations and New Credit Reserves. The station has so far succeeded in pursuing its goals because it is an example of empowering community development. The station has been created and is controlled by community members and it has evolved within a framework of values that has long been in place in these communities and which remains a vital force in the social lives of residents.

**Brian Feeney, Temple University.**  
**“Social Movement Organization  
Collective Action Frames and Press  
Receptivity: A Case Study of Land-  
Use Activism in  
a Maryland County.”**

In this study, focus groups were used to interview members of a social-movement organization (SMO), real-estate developers and the local newspaper editor in a case study of land-use politics in a suburbanizing Maryland county. The study found that SMOs have a greater barrier to entry to the newsnet to overcome, requiring them to act as surrogate reporters. Also, both groups complained of poor reporting due to the newspaper's use of inexperienced reporters.

**Mark Geise, Penn. State Univ. &  
Bette Kauffman, Northeast  
Louisiana Univ. “Being There: Using  
Ethnographic Methodology in the  
Study of Electronic Communities.”**

The authors explore issues of ethnography as applied to two Internet newsgroups. Historical and theoretical constructions most applicable to adapting the methodology to CMC are examined. Modifications and implementations, including a description of the text-based Internet communication and gaining entrée to the *alt.cyberpunk* community are discussed. It examines problems encountered in soliciting informants and how an acceptable “look” is constructed. It speculates about “being there” in a CMC environment and future applications of “electronic ethnography.”

**Cinda Gillilan, University of  
Colorado-Boulder. “Essential &  
Constructed: Community  
and Identity in an Online  
Television Fandom.”**

Television zine fans create community based on identification with media-mediated images/stories online, and as Internet use increases these communities grow larger, more diverse and more intimately connected. This paper examines how one online fan community manipulates material and symbolic discourses to produce

belonging and meaning for its participants. The ability to define our lives/values is not a release from hegemony, patriarchy, heterosexism, etc., but it is a matter of (em)power(ment).

**Kim Golombisky, University of  
South Florida. “Interior Design  
Magazines as Neurotica.”**

Interior design magazines equate home with leisure, a fantasy for female readers with jobs and families. Women's magazines typically compel women to become neurotic about housekeeping and family. But decorating magazines represent “neurotica,” an erotic ideal of home wiped clean of the family who makes housework. However, this resistant version of home still encourages domesticity by erasing not only the family but also the reader's labor that keeps the home so attractive.

**John M. Groves, University of  
Oregon. “Self as Panoptician:  
‘The X-Files,’ Spectatorship,  
and Discipline.”**

Cultural studies research on television has often taken the form of textual or reception analysis that examines the televisual production as if it were a written text. This paper looks at the serial plot of “The X-Files,” but places that plot within the non-diegetic context of the viewing experience. The cinematic “look” of the show creates a coherent “spectator” position, calling for application of psychoanalytic film theory. This effect works with the conspiracy-oriented plot to create a viewer/text interaction which inverts subjective relations to discipline. If in the workplace subjects occupy tightly circumscribed positions in panoptic networks, “The X-Files” offers textual positions which allow viewers to transgress symbolic constructions of panopticism.

**James Hamilton, SUNY Geneseo.**  
**“An Alternative to  
‘Alternative Media’.”**

This study argues that traditionally conceived “mass” media are inherently

incapable of playing a significant role in assisting alternative social and political movements, due to the necessary professionalization of their practice and the resulting separation of media workers from the people they represent. It concludes by suggesting an alternative basis for a theory and the practice of alternative media that may better fit the realities of political movements today.

**John Hartsock, SUNY Cortland.**  
**“Literary Journalism as an  
Epistemological Moving Target  
Within a Larger  
‘Quantum Narrative’.”**

No abstract available.

**Olaf Hoerschelmann, University of  
North Texas. “Building a Heartline  
to America: Quiz Shows  
and Audience Participation  
in Early Broadcasting.”**

This article investigates the development of quiz shows as experimental forms to explore the relationship between broadcast institutions, media texts, and audiences. During this period of instability in the broadcast industry, quiz shows created a particularly close and involved relationship with radio and television audiences. While early quiz shows thus offered unusual forms of interaction and participation for the audience, the stabilization of the network system in the early 1950s changed the form and meaning of the genre and limited the audience to a more restricted viewing position.

**Rick Jackson, University of  
Washington. “Searching for a Voice  
of Authority: Journalism Between  
the Modern and the Postmodern.”**

Buffeted by hostility from the outside and by crumbling confidence from within, journalism appears to be experiencing a crisis of cultural authority. This crisis emerges amid a complex set of tensions, what James Carey calls “between the modern and the postmodern.” Though these tensions erode journalism's epistemologi-

cal confidence, the emergence of new models of journalism (public journalism) and professional conventions (narrative writing techniques) suggest ways in which journalism can begin to repair its cultural authority.

**Darlene Jirikowic, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.**  
**“I Love Lucy’ and Ethel Mertz: An Expression of Internal Conflict and Pre-Feminist Solidarity.”**

While feminist literature has clearly documented both the pre-feminist and hegemonic influence in postwar comedies such as “I Love Lucy,” this paper intends to illustrate the importance of a supporting character such as Ethel Mertz. The internal conflict that marked women’s lives sometimes took the shape of feminine discourse between a key comedic character and a secondary female character. It is through that dialogue (the interplay between the two women) that the complexity of postwar tension becomes apparent.

**Paulette Kilmer, University of Toledo.** **“The Cadaverous Bad Boy as Dream-Shadow Trickster: Why Freddy Krueger Won’t Let Teens Rest in Peace.”**

The slasher films in the “Nightmare on Elm Street” series gained popularity about 20 years ago by featuring campy dialog, a rouge anti-hero and a new dimension for terror: sleep. The villain Freddy Krueger quickly became a pop-cultural celebrity with his own TV show and line of merchandise. This paper examines that guru of gore in Jungian terms to place him in the ongoing process of myth-making that defines humanity. The Freddy Krueger films embody parables about coming of age in a scary, technological world.

**Nathaniel Kohn, University of Georgia.** **“Messing: Information, Liminality, Dread.”**

Written as a screenplay. A series of scenes. Known in Hollywood as a sequence. With/out con/sequences.

Moving across borders. Thresholding. From academic to the movie biz. From young to old. From conscious to unconscious. From mediated to permeated. In the second person, between first and third. Dialogic. Unsettling. Destabilizing. In/form/ation, overloading, assaulting. The dread, consuming. Autoethnography. Scenes from a. A so-called. Get a. Driving without a. Etc.

**Jack Lule, Lehigh University.**  
**“Brokaw on the Holodeck’: The Future of the News Story in Cyberspace.”**

In early 1997, Janet H. Murray, senior research scientist in MIT’s Center for Educational Computing Initiatives, published a remarkable book, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. Murray offered a vision of the computer as a spellbinding storyteller. She identified the aesthetics of digital narrative—its characteristic means of capturing beauty and giving pleasure. And she suggested rich paths for the future of narrative in a digital age. The purpose of this paper is to explore the implications of *Hamlet on the Holodeck* for the future of the news story. The paper explores how the aesthetic of digital narratives might be gained by online news. It asks: How might the aesthetic of digital narratives transform the future of the news story? The paper concludes with a discussion of implications facing journalists in the digital age.

**Michael Maynard, Temple University.** **“Table for One: TV Screen as Eating Companion in a Public Space.”**

This pilot study reports how students who eat in a campus food court that includes a large television screen configure themselves so as to face the screen. Based on qualitative analysis of how the screen interacts with students who are alone or in groups, the following roles were coded: screen as attention-getter, scene dominator, time marker, hypnotist, distracting element, eating companion, sleep-inducing

agent, seducer, ice-breaker, time-filler, agent of conformity, non-demanding companion, and keeper of social rhythm.

**Patrick Meirick, Marquette University.** **“They’re Ba-ack: ‘Ghost Mate Movies’ as Expressions of Mass Dreams and Cultural Norms.”**

This paper explores how “ghost mate movies”—movies in which a dead lover returns to the bereaved partner as a ghost—reflect both cultural forms about bereavement and group fantasies about recovering the lost mate. The movies fill an information void left by the death taboo. Western ghost mate movies reinforce norms about detaching from the dead and moving on with life, but a Brazilian one suggests detaching from the dead isn’t necessary.

**Richard C. Moore, Boise State University.** **“Earth First! and the Boundaries of Postmodern Environmental Journalism.”**

Modernistic assumptions have long been fundamental to journalistic practice. As those assumptions are increasingly questioned, scholars should consider the implications of alternative foundations, especially as they relate to communicating about important social issues. In this paper, the author offers a theoretical discussion and brief qualitative analysis to better understand what postmodern communication (most visibly on the Internet) might look like, and the difficulties ahead for environmental groups if they adopt anti-foundational and anti-narrative communication patterns.

**Patrick Murphy, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.** **“Into the Field: A Narrative Account of Doing Audience Ethnography.”**

This paper is a narrative account of the early stages of an ethnography of television viewers in central Mexico. The narrative details the events that shaped the direction of the inquiry, acknowledges the visibility and self-

interest of the ethnographer, and describes the selection of and movements within the audiences represented in the study. The account demonstrates how the methodology was not based on a systematic design for finding a research "sample," but rather the result of emerging relationships and contextual processes.

**Eleanor Novek, Monmouth University. "Reframing a House of Mirrors: Communication and Empowerment in a Community Leadership Program."**

Scholars assert that communities strengthen themselves by bringing residents together and mobilizing them to solve local problems. How does this happen? What communication practices enable individuals to act together for the common good? This paper explores the development and implementation of a community leadership program in the northeastern United States from a communication perspective, in order to help grassroots practitioners maximize the application of meaning production and discursive reframing as communication strategies for empowerment.

**Laurie Ouellette, University of Massachusetts-Amherst. "Can We Be Excellent and Equal Too?" Cultural Capital, Silent Sponsors and Early PBS."**

Drawing from Bourdieu's theory of class reproduction, this article examines cultural and economic contradictions underscoring early conceptions of PBS as an equalizing educational force. Comparing the debut of "Sesame Street" and "Civilisation," I show how the goal of improving the lot of disadvantaged children ran counter to the motives of "silent sponsors" seeking to reach upscale consumers. This tension was compounded by class hierarchies constructed around PBS in the popular press and in station program guides.

**Radhika E. Parameswaran, Indiana University. "Pleasure, Privilege, and**

**Leisure Reading: Class Identities and Romance Reading in Postcolonial Urban India."**

This paper takes an ethnographic approach to analyze young Indian middle-class women's interpretations of imported Western romance fiction, particularly their responses to representations of Western material lifestyle in these romances. My analysis is based on participant observation and interviews with 42 women, parents, book publishers, and library owners. The interviews were conducted in Hyderabad, India during May-August 1996. I demonstrate that Indian women's engagement with Western romances in postcolonial India is an experience that is mediated by their socialization within privileged class structures. In my analysis, I use Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to show that these readers draw on their romance reading to construct and bolster their social identities as modern and sophisticated women.

**Peter Parisi, Hunter College. "Gotcha!": Sensationalism, Discourse, and Public Affairs."**

Although sensationalism is typically equated with lurid, frivolous subject matter, research suggests it can also heighten public-affairs exposés. Using discourse analysis, this paper examines these possibilities in a New York City tabloid newspaper's stories on Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's harassment of a gadfly who exposed an illicit traffic trap. Examining reporting, columns, editorials and headlines, it shows how sensationalism mutes and suppresses key public-interest issues. The paper concludes by exploring the possibility of counter-hegemonic sensationalism.

**Randall Patnode, University of North Carolina. "The Mythos of Cyberspace: Acceptable-Use Policies and the Ideology of the Internet."**

The rhetoric of the Internet suggest that the new medium will provide a host of benefits to society, including more democratic participation and greater economic prosperity. Beneath

the rhetoric, however, is an ideology that often runs counter to these ideals. This paper argues that the underlying ideology of the Internet can be seen in the content of acceptable-use policies used by public libraries and K-12 schools.

**Soon-Chul Shin & Elizabeth P. Lester, University of Georgia. "Korean Rap at the Cusp: A Proposal for Analyzing Relations of Power."**

Among the many cultural products, pop music plays a uniquely significant role in terms of everyday life practices. One of the most distinctive characteristics of pop music is its "transnationality." This paper focuses on the relationship between the pop music genres rock and rap, and an issue of identity in Korean teen culture. U.S. rock and rap have been successfully articulated in the Korean pop field, and the Korean "teen bloc" has positively negotiated with the transnationality of U.S. pop culture. However, a cultural struggle between the "parent/adult blocs" and the teen blocs is becoming increasingly problematic in Korea. Teens have incorporated what the parent blocs call mediocre American culture; the ensuing struggle emerges not only from generational taste but from specific issues of power.

**Linda Steiner, Rutgers University. "The Cable Collective as Public Space: 'New Directions for Women'."**

Assuming that something like the public sphere is indispensable to democratic political practice, the question addressed here is whether the work of a collective that produces "feminist television programs" can be seen as a representing agency in the public sphere. This paper highlights the efforts of a group that produces, under the aegis of the National Organization for Women, a series called "New Directions for Women." The programming is cablecast on cable television public-access channels in three states. The research finds that public-access cable television does

provide an opportunity for impassioned discussion and criticism of other spheres—state, economy, and family. Yet, publicness is at odds with certain feminist principles, at least as these have been practiced in feminist media projects (i.e., directed at the enclave) over the century. Cable access production presents viable opportunities for debate and deliberation on feminist issues (“content”); but the technology constrains enactment of feminist modes of production.

**Brad Thompson, Penn State Univ.  
“Communications Policy Through  
Thick and Thin: Thick Description  
as a Methodology for Democracy.”**

This paper proposed the use of anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s “thick description” as a methodology for communications policy research. Ethnographies employing thick

description would give voice to the concerns of ordinary citizens. They also would help make policy more accessible so the public could participate more meaningfully in policy making, thus enhancing prospects for democracy. A literature review found no instances of authors explicitly employing thick description in mass-communications policy research.

**Ron Warren, University of  
Arkansas. “Ideology and the  
Interpretation of Media Texts.”**

This paper examines the role of ideology in interpretation and argues for a conceptualization of ideology that is fluid enough to handle the complexities of the interpretation process. A model of interpretation is presented and the complexity of interpretation research findings are discussed. Rather than suggesting that texts can deter-

mine meanings through ideological dominance or that readers enjoy discursive pluralism through differential interpretation, this paper argues that ideology works to constrain the interpretation process.

**Rita Zajacz, Indiana University.  
“Negotiated Fun?: Audience  
Responses to ‘TV Nation.’”**

A racially mixed and two all-white focus groups provided polyvalent interpretations of two “TV Nation” segments, which used humor and documentary techniques to get their strong political point across. While the racially mixed group discussed racism and the participants connected the topic to their lives, the all-white groups provided an oppositional reading by attacking the motivation of the director and by attacking the structure of the segment they disagreed with. ❖

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its protection to act independently.

THREE ANECDOTES ILLUSTRATE the situation. First, reporters for the *China Daily*, when interviewed about the structure of the paper, cannot explain the relationship of the paper to the government or the party. One reporter expressly asserted having no interest in the matter. A former *China Daily* reporter confirmed that the paper is ultimately responsible to the Party’s Central Committee. Second, expecting to find the Women’s Journalist Association to be an independent body, we found that it is housed in government offices, protected by the armed police. Finally, as evidence of the spread of free enterprise to the media sector, on one trip I found myself in the broadcast ministry’s recording studios doing voice-overs for commercially-marketed English-language teaching videos.

Another article in the *China Daily* summarized the need for “rules” for TV stations. The article cited reports in the *Beijing Radio and TV News*, and the *People’s Daily*, as well as officials of the Ministry of Radio,

Film and Television, including the chairperson of China Central Television, who serves as one of the vice-ministers. The article reported that “faced with the shortage of programmes and shrinking audiences, some TV stations choose to show obscene, pirated or politically incorrect programmes” (Xi Mi, “Rules needed for TV stations,” *China Daily*, Tuesday, April 9, 1996, p. 4). Citing the *People’s Daily*, the national Chinese language newspaper, the article reported, “In a nationwide crackdown in 1995, eight TV stations were fined, and had their operations suspended for airing pornographic, smuggled or politically problematic programmes...” (Xi). The article concluded by editorializing, “It is obvious that TV stations still need State regulation” (Xi).

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, THE government has limited the number of Western (mostly American) films to ten titles per year. Among the recent titles were “Bridges of Madison County,” the Batman sequels, and “Blown Away,” with Tommy Lee Jones as the IRA bomber in Boston. These and Arnold Schwarzenegger

films don’t fit any ideological profile. The explanation may be economic, revealing the deep fear of losing culture, in this instance losing the domestic film industry. It is an industry that tends to get more recognition and acclaim outside of China than inside.

The Beijing Film Studios, which according to a Western source familiar with the studios, function as a type of “Potemkin village.” The studios apparently exist to support the assertion that movies are made in Beijing. However, the leading Chinese filmmakers are kept at arms length from the capital city, in part because of the anti-government messages in their films. One person likened it to the situation at a state technical university, “They have a media department, but they have no equipment.”

Communication technology has confounded the Chinese, as it has other authoritarian regimes. The 1989 uprising was noted for the use of fax machines. Dissidents keep in touch with the world via the fax. We remember watching live as Dan Rather was ordered to “pull the plug” on his satellite uplink. The Chinese

post, telephone and telegraph ministry could not afford to pull the plug on the telephone system. In effect, the Chinese were hamstrung by the very technology they needed. The Nineties version of the fax is the Internet. Over the last two years, the Chinese have struggled to balance the technological need for access to the Internet with the concerns for internal security and political stability. It was a rocky start, attempting to control the technology by limiting the nodes or access points.

All media are government controlled, published either by government agencies or party organizations. This allows coordination of political messages across the media and throughout the country. Chinese newspapers regularly cite each other, generally derived from reports from Xinhua, the national news agency. Foreign journalists who monitor the Chinese media are conscious of the pattern.

THE FOREIGN MEDIA ARE HEAVILY monitored. One American journalist acknowledged that there is "intellectual handwringing" over issues of political freedom, though little action. In spite of the extensive media portrayal in the West, the dissident community is very small. There is political apathy,

perhaps as a result of the heavy propaganda.

The major issue for Chinese press has been criticism of corruption, albeit low-level corruption, or, as one Chinese economist told me, "the people that the government can't protect." The Chinese press does provide information and insight. Gossip in the regional papers "reveals a very free market of public life," a CNN staffer told me. She told about a famous dancer who had a sex change operation to become a woman. Although openly gay, he is attracted to straight men. The feature stories are "really revealing about local conditions." One foreign correspondent likened reading the Chinese press to Cold-War Kremlinology, "China has made an intellectual exercise out of reading between the lines."

IF ALL NORMAL MEDIA CHANNELS ARE either controlled or restricted, and the traditional forms of communication, such as Big Character posters and Democracy Walls, are not operating, how do people communicate? It appears, in the words of one foreign diplomat, that there is a structure of "back alley news." People talk to each other. One person I interviewed said,

"My idea is that most people sit around at work and talk, with nothing else to do." The technology that may be stimulating the transmission of back alley news is the proliferation of the telephone and the improvement in its quality. Perhaps the fastest growing segment of the telephone system is the cellular phone, since it does not require the extensive delay and bureaucratic paperwork for installation. On one trip, I traveled to Datong, a provincial city (not even a capital) northwest of Beijing, with the person supervising the installation of a new 30,000 cellular phone system. Once again, the technology needed to advance economically provides the challenge to political dominance. ❖

The Graduate Student Caucus of the MLA is producing a new online academic labor journal *Workplace*.

The first issue features articles by Cary Nelson, Paul Lauter, and an interview with Stanley Aronowitz.

Also included are articles about organizing, book reviews, convention reports, and links to other sites. Find it at <http://www.workplace-gsc.com/>. ❖