

Tibet and the Media: Perspectives from Beijing

Andrew Wei-Min Lee

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/mulr>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Andrew Wei-Min Lee, *Tibet and the Media: Perspectives from Beijing*, 93 Marq. L. Rev. 209 (2009).

Available at: <http://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/mulr/vol93/iss1/13>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Marquette Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marquette Law Review by an authorized administrator of Marquette Law Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact megan.obrien@marquette.edu.

TIBET AND THE MEDIA: PERSPECTIVES FROM BEIJING

ANDREW WEI-MIN LEE*

I. INTRODUCTION

After the closing ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, I was having dinner with a group of scholars from the field of dispute resolution. We remarked how wonderful it was that a group of people from around the world could come together and share dialogue and respectfully exchange different points of view on some of the world's most challenging conflicts.

Over the course of dinner, I expressed my joy over how China had hosted the Olympic Games and the pride I felt at being Chinese.

A colleague across the table, highly educated, very intelligent, and artfully articulate, shook her head furiously and launched into an impassioned speech about how China was destroying Tibet. She told me that I had been completely brainwashed by Communist propaganda, and if I ever could be blessed by the experience of having dinner with the Dalai Lama, as she herself had, I would understand that I should feel shame, not pride about being Chinese.

Tibet is one of China's most high-profile and controversial media issues. I have found it to be a topic that polarizes people and flares emotion. Extreme accusations fly, passionate arguments are used, and fiery language is invoked. Discussions about Tibet often expand to broader assertions about China's human rights record, censorship in China, and Western bias against China. Inevitably, the media gets blamed for being a propagandist or a mouthpiece, or for distorting the truth.

Addressing all of Tibet's issues is beyond the scope of this Essay. This Essay focuses on opinions of the media's portrayal of Tibet from the perspective of someone living in Beijing, and how the media can play a role

* Andrew Lee is an ethnic Han Chinese born in Australia. He first visited China twenty-five years ago. Mr. Lee has been teaching negotiation and dispute resolution in Beijing for the past five years. He has received education in Australia, Singapore, the United States, and the Netherlands. Mr. Lee holds honors degrees in psychology from the University of Adelaide and in law from Sydney University. He also has a master's degree in Chinese law from Peking University. Mr. Lee speaks English and Mandarin.

in improving the situation.

Part II of this Essay introduces an opinion on China and the media in general. It addresses several questions: What are Chinese attitudes toward Western media? What news sources are popular in China? What is censorship really like for someone living in Beijing?

Part III of this Essay speaks more specifically about the media and Tibet, discussing questions such as: What differences are apparent between Western and Chinese portrayals of Tibet? What similarities exist? What are some possibilities for moving forward? How might we possibly shape the future in a more positive way?

II. CHINA AND THE MEDIA

A. *Defining the Media*

In this Essay, I define Western media as large news networks primarily based in the United States and Europe such as the Cable News Network (CNN), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Reuters, and the Associated Press (AP). I define Chinese media as the news networks headquartered within mainland China, such as Xinhua (the primary news agency), China Central Television (CCTV) (the primary television station of China), and *China Daily* (the national English-language newspaper). For Chinese language media, the two largest newspaper sources are the *Guang Ming Ri Bao* 光明日报 and the *Ren Min Ri Bao* 人民日报.¹

This Essay intentionally refers primarily to English-language news sources and web sites because they are more likely to be useful to an English-speaking reader. Obviously, the majority of Chinese are more likely to access Chinese-language media. To extensively refer to Chinese sources may be of limited use to an English-speaking reader. This Essay attempts to strike a balance between being useful to an English reader and being fairly reflective of what is available in Chinese media. I have attempted to ensure that any quoted sources have rough equivalents in Chinese-language media.

B. *Two Contrasting and Simultaneous Chinese Attitudes Toward Western Media*

In my view, Chinese people have a mixed relationship with Western media. On one hand, many believe that Western media is more willing to report things that are critical of China's elite—the rich, powerful, and connected. Therefore, to get “real news” on a corrupt government official or on a polluting factory owned by a rich business executive, one should turn to

1. GUANG MING RI BAO, <http://www.gmw.cn>; REN MIN RI BAO, <http://www.people.com.cn/>.

Western news. When a building adjacent to China's CCTV tower, the heart of China's television broadcasting, caught fire in unclear circumstances and there appeared to be little news in local reports, Chinese people turned to sources like Reuters and CNN for the details.²

On the other hand, there is a feeling that Western media has a history of bias against China; that is, something is only newsworthy in the West if it is critical of China. A Western reporter will never report his interviews with 100 content Chinese citizens. Instead, he will highlight political dissidents, crying monks, or rioting peasants. Happy Chinese are invisible even though they are the majority. It seems that good news about China never reaches Western eyes and ears.

C. The Importance and Availability of Multiple Media News Sources

Chinese people believe strongly in getting news from multiple sources. Mainland China's state-run media are popular and easily accessible first sources. Chinese people realize that, collectively, state-run sources represent a particular perspective. One of my own students perhaps put it best when he said: "I watch CCTV to understand the government's point of view. It's the government that builds the roads, runs the schools, negotiates with other countries Of course I want to know what they think."

There are many other channels for information in mainland China. Hong Kong media are readily available on the mainland, specifically, Hong Kong's Phoenix News television station and web site³ and Hong Kong's primary English paper, *The South China Morning Post*.⁴ Taiwanese newscasts also reach mainland screens. Furthermore, mainland China's major Mandarin television news channels, CCTV2, CCTV4, CCTV News, and CCTV9, regularly invite Hong Kong and Taiwanese professors, journalists, and social commentators for discussion and debate.⁵

Personally, I find it interesting to see the differences and similarities between Hong Kong, Taiwanese, and mainland media perspectives on issues such as local Hong Kong attitudes toward the mainland government after the return from British to Chinese rule, and local Taiwanese attitudes toward the arrest and jailing of former Taiwanese president Chen Shui Bian.

2. Ben Blanchard, Fire Claims Building at CCTV Beijing Headquarters, Reuters (Feb. 9, 2009), <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSPEK19411020090209>; Witness: Top of Beijing Luxury Hotel "Exploding," CNN.com (Feb. 9, 2009), <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/02/09/china.hotel.fire/index.html>.

3. See Phoenix News, <http://news.ifeng.com/> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009).

4. See SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST, <http://www.scmp.com>.

5. See, e.g., *Dialogue: Mixed Signals from Taiwan* (CCTV9 television broadcast Aug. 7, 2009), available at http://www.cctv.com/program/e_dialogue/20090810/104604.shtml.

The radio provides another array of news sources. Generations of Chinese students have grown up listening to Voice of America (VOA), National Public Radio (NPR), and BBC World Service, which are particularly popular around the time of China's English exams.

Cable television has seen huge growth in the past ten years.⁶ Access to America's CNN, England's BBC, Japan's NHK, and the Middle East's Al Jazeera is available. From these sources, the differences and similarities between Chinese and foreign media coverage of such issues as the Iran election, the Iraq war, Guantanamo Bay, and North Korea can be illuminating.

And finally, of course, the Internet has become a popular source of news and information. Recent figures indicate that China has more than 300 million "netizens."⁷ Every local and international media outlet has a web site, and Chinese people love to write blogs, post comments on forums, or upload photos to Tudou.com (the Chinese version of YouTube). Tudou sometimes has photos of events before the professional news stations do.

Importantly, there seem to be a wide variety of news sources and a large amount of healthy cynicism and curiosity in China about news and media.

D. Censorship of the Internet

I often read about how Chinese media is censored and that Chinese people are not able to get the truth because of China's "Great Firewall."⁸ China is listed as one of the twelve most-Internet-censored countries in the world.⁹ Free speech activists and human rights advocates are said to regularly criticize Beijing's censorship of the Internet.¹⁰ Recently, there has been much controversy on the "Green Dam and Escorting Minors" (绿坝·花季护航) program that proponents say filters pornography, but critics say censors politically sensitive content.¹¹

6. *China's Digital Cable TV Subscribers Top 26 Million by 2007*, CHINA DAILY, June 17, 2008, available at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2008-06/17/content_6769964.htm.

7. Li Huizi, *Netizens Change China's Political Landscape*, Xinhua (Feb. 28, 2009), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-02/28/content_10917341.htm.

8. See James Fallows, *"The Connection Has Been Reset,"* ATLANTIC MONTHLY, Mar. 2008, at 64-65; see also Abigail Cutler, *Penetrating the Great Firewall*, Atlantic Online (Feb. 19, 2008), <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200802u/fallows-china-censorship>.

9. Internet Enemies, Reporters Without Borders (Mar. 12, 2009), at 2, 6-8, http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/Internet_enemies_2009_2_.pdf.

10. Council of Foreign Relations, U.S. Internet Providers and the "Great Firewall of China" (Robert McMahon ed., Feb. 15, 2008), <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9856/>.

11. Liu Min, *Reactions Mixed Over Plan to Filter Net Access in China*, Xinhua (June 27, 2009), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-06/27/content_11667091.htm; Chen Weihua, *Op-Ed., Let People Decide on Green Dam*, CHINA DAILY, June 13, 2009, at 4, available at <http://pub11.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

I have encountered Internet censorship in China. As I write this Essay, dalailama.com and freetibet.com are not accessible. I am unable to watch videos on YouTube, view photos on Flickr, or respond to invites on Facebook. Censorship is frustrating because I would prefer to know what these sites have to say, rather than read about it from secondhand sources like CNN and BBC. There is the natural human tendency to be especially curious about anything that is “forbidden” or “hidden.”

However, I do not agree with the idea that censorship in China prevents the Chinese from accessing “the truth.” While some sites are blocked, many are not—and information about Tibet, including that which is critical of China, is not hard to find.

On Google News and Agence France-Presse (AFP), I read about Richard Gere’s support of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan independence,¹² and Nancy Pelosi’s criticism of the Chinese government regarding Tibet, human rights, and Tiananmen Square.¹³ On Phoenix News television, I watched a report about University of Hong Kong students who are rallying support for the “Free Tibet” movement. Yahoo! directs me to Germany’s *Das Bild*¹⁴ and *Frankfurter Rundschau*,¹⁵ and France’s *Le Monde*¹⁶ news web sites to read articles about how the Dalai Lama is a great man of peace, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, and respected around the world.

I find censorship frustrating. I wish it happened less. I think that blocking access to a site or to information sometimes encourages curiosity as to what might actually be there. I also think, however, the issue of censorship should not be overstated. That some web sites are blocked does not automatically mean that Chinese people are unable to “get the facts” or to make up their

12. Gere: After Obama, a Tibetan Leader of China?, AFP (Mar. 10, 2009), http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5galHmnp3t_OmX-9Uo-KvRBnfwcA.

13. Shaun Tandon, Pelosi Says China Stalling on Human Rights, AFP (June 5, 2009), http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5glzz9MbVawltz9AaAYEe_M5OCObQ.

14. *Solidarität mit dem Dalai Lama: Tibet-Mahnwache in Hamburg* [Solidarity with the Dalai Lama: A Vigil for Tibet in Hamburg], DAS BILD, May 16, 2008, <http://www.bild.de/BILD/hamburg/aktuell/2008/05/16/tibet-mahnwache/vor-hamburger-rathaus.html>; *Lage in Tibet Eskaliert: Soll Olympia Boykottiert Werden?* [The Tibetan Situation Escalates: Should We Boycott the Olympics?], DAS BILD, Apr. 11, 2008, <http://www.bild.de/BILD/news/politik/2008/03/26/tibet-kloester-china/umfrage/umfrage.html>.

15. Von Bernhard Bartsch, *Porträt Dalai Lama: Ein Gott für Alle Fälle* [Portrait of the Dalai Lama: One God for All Situations], FRANKFURTER RUNDSCHAU, July 30, 2009, http://www.fr-online.de/in_und_ausland/politik/aktuell/1858339_Portraet-Dalai-Lama-Ein-Gott-fuer-alle-Faelle.html.

16. *Accueil Triomphal pour le Dalai-Lama à Taiwan* [A Triumphant Welcome to Taiwan for the Dalai Lama], LE MONDE, Sept. 1, 2009, http://www.lemonde.fr/asiе-pacifique/portfolio/2009/09/01/plus-de-10-000-fideles-accueillent-le-dalai-lama-a-taiwan_1234474_3216.html.

own minds on controversial issues.

E. Chinese Media Criticizing the Government

There are reports of people being put in prison in China for criticizing the government through the Internet.¹⁷ Additionally, one can read about how every keystroke typed in China is recorded so that Chinese government authorities can track down dissidents,¹⁸ or that if you write something inappropriate in a blog, it will be deleted by the Internet police.¹⁹

I think there are certainly times when concerns of reprisal stifle the media, especially if the target of criticism is a powerful official, an important government department, or a big company. But even a casual glance at local media will unearth criticism of government personnel and institutions.

For example, *China Daily* regularly features material reporting on government officials embezzling public funds,²⁰ government institutions failing to adequately respond to the Sichuan earthquake disaster,²¹ government policies protecting the rich and discriminating against the poor in Shanghai,²² and government officials staying in five-star hotels at taxpayer expense during an economic crisis in Guangdong.²³ Earlier this year, there were opinion pieces encouraging local citizens to fight against unfair police pressure²⁴ and articles challenging Communist Party government officials to stop serving the Party for personal gain and to start serving the people:

The real danger for the Party lies in the fact that some officials worship only power and show no respect for the

17. *Yahoo Accused in Jailing of Chinese Web Dissident*, TAIPEI TIMES (Taiwan), Apr. 29, 2006, at 1, available at <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2006/04/29/2003305143>; Carin Zissis & Preeti Bhattacharji, Council on Foreign Relations, *Media Censorship in China* (Mar. 18, 2008), http://www.cfr.org/publication/11515/media_censorship_in_china.html (last visited Nov. 1, 2009).

18. Calum MacLeod, *Web Users Walk Great Firewall of China*, USA TODAY, Apr. 3, 2006, at 13A, available at http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/internetprivacy/2006-04-02-china-web-cops_x.htm.

19. Vivian Wu, *Internet Police Keep Tight Grip on Blogs*, SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST, Mar. 8, 2007, <http://www.maskofchina.com/hk/2007/03/who-knows-whatll-get-you-banned-in.html>.

20. See, e.g., Xie Chuanjiao, *Audit Finds Funds Missing or Wasted*, CHINA DAILY, June 25, 2009, at 4, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

21. See, e.g., Tan Yingzi, *Still Waiting for a Decent Roof*, CHINA DAILY, June 25, 2009, at 4, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

22. See, e.g., Chen Weihua, Op-Ed., *Shanghai Turning Its Back on the Poor*, CHINA DAILY, June 20–21, 2009, at 4, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

23. See, e.g., *No Excuse for Money Waste*, CHINA DAILY, Feb. 25, 2009, at 8, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

24. Chen Weihua, Op-Ed., *Learn from Landmark Court Case*, CHINA DAILY, May 30–31, 2009, at 4, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

interest of the people. In their eyes, they, as Party members and officials, get their power from their superiors or from the Party. As a result, they are only loyal to their superiors.²⁵

Similarly, by way of talk radio and letters to the editor, citizens are often very critical of government actions and journalists that defend controversial government policies. Massive Internet campaigns have strongly criticized the government's role in a case involving a government official who tried to sexually assault a nightclub waitress,²⁶ and in a case involving a teenage son of rich parents who killed a pedestrian when speeding down a city street.²⁷

There is now a popular trend of using the Internet to criticize and humiliate government officials viewed as “doing the wrong thing” by posting pictures of them driving their Mercedes Benzes, wearing expensive watches, smoking luxury cigarettes,²⁸ and engaging in sexual misconduct.²⁹

On the topic of censorship, *China Daily* journalist Liu Shinan wrote an article about how Internet censorship is important to block access to pornography by young Chinese children.³⁰ Public response was scathing: “Well it looks like the last objective voice on [*China Daily*] has finally been taken to a re-education [sic] camp in order to tow [sic] the party line.”³¹ Another poster wrote, “Are you implying that we are all so stupid that we do nothing except watching [sic] porn as long as youtube or blogger is available? . . . My grandma is a farmer, but what he [sic] said during our chat is waaaaaaaay better than your essays.”³²

Satire is increasingly common. For example, a video by comic Hu Ge parodied the primary government news network, CCTV, through a fake news report filled with newscaster clichés and stock government phrases.³³ At one

25. Editorial, *For Party or People?*, CHINA DAILY, June 20–21, 2009, at 4, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

26. Cai Ke, *Killer's Case Fires Up Netizens*, CHINA DAILY, June 4, 2009, at 7, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

27. *Stop Rich Brats from Speeding*, CHINA DAILY, May 15, 2009, at 8, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

28. *Public Keeping Officials in Check*, CHINA DAILY, Feb. 18, 2009, at 8, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

29. Cui Xiaohuo, *Internet Community Targets Officials' Misconduct*, CHINA DAILY, June 3, 2009, at 3, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

30. Liu Shinan, Op-Ed., *Blocking Net Info All About Saving Youth*, CHINA DAILY, June 24, 2009, at 9, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

31. Posting of Finally to http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2009-06/24/content_8316291.htm (follow “Comments” hyperlink) (June 25, 2009, 21:30 EST).

32. Posting of arealthinker to http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2009-06/24/content_8316291.htm (follow “Comments” hyperlink) (June 25, 2009, 18:13 EST).

33. See Joel Martinsen, Hu Ge Spoof About Group Housing, Danwei (Dec. 19, 2008), http://www.danwei.org/humor/ccav_on_group_housing.php.

point it was one of China's most virally popular videos,³⁴ spreading mostly through the state-run Chinese Tudou.com and Youku.com.

F. A Parting Word Regarding China and Media in General

There was a time when mainland television screens would suddenly go black when CNN reported on Taiwan, when foreign newspapers were impossible to find, and when Google Mail was unavailable in China. However, like almost everything in China, the media is rapidly changing—and I believe for the better.

Does the Chinese media have an “agenda” to promote one particular representation as “the truth”? Probably. I would suggest that almost any form of media has an agenda of some sort. When I look at the Western media and watch Bill O'Reilly's *The O'Reilly Factor* on Fox News, Keith Olbermann's *Countdown* on MSNBC, and Wolf Blitzer's *The Situation Room* on CNN, I sense those shows have just as much of an agenda as China's CCTV and the *China Daily*. I think it would be almost impossible to present the news without some kind of subjective view, no matter how objective a journalist tries to be.

No one is pretending that China is censorship-free, that the Chinese media is perfect, or that no one has ever suffered reprisals for criticizing a government official or policy. I would simply suggest that the Chinese media is increasingly more open, Chinese audiences are increasingly more sophisticated in analyzing the news, and Chinese citizens are increasingly free to be openly critical of their government.

III. TIBET AND ITS PORTRAYAL IN THE MEDIA

Perhaps unsurprisingly, what the Western media say and what the Chinese media say about Tibet differs. What is surprising, though, is the extent to which differences exist. I observe seven contrasts.

A. Differences Between Western and Chinese Media on the Issue of Tibet³⁵

	Western Media	Chinese Media
--	---------------	---------------

34. See Chen Weihua, Op-Ed., *Parody is a Norm of Life, Accept It*, CHINA DAILY, Dec. 27–28, 2008, at 4, available at <http://publ.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy>.

35. These suggested differences are the author's observations, based on his life experiences with both Chinese and Western media's views on the Tibet issue.

Issue framing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independence, freedom, and protection of Tibetan human rights. • Preventing a free, smaller nation from being swallowed by a larger one. • Supporting a weak isolated group of people from being dominated by an oppressive government. • One Holy Man fighting against a whole government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National sovereignty, unity, and stability. • Poverty alleviation and emancipation of slaves. • Raising the standard of living of ordinary Tibetans who suffered terribly under the former regime. • Uniting the diverse Chinese people as one nation, while preserving unique differences.
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China invaded and forced the exile of a peaceful Tibetan leadership from Tibetan lands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China liberated a whole population from the cruel rule of elite slave-owning theocrats.
Cultural preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tibetan lands are flooded by Han immigrants who are eradicating traditional Tibetan life. • “Cultural genocide” of all aspects of Tibetan life by the Han government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tibetan culture is one of the most highly treasured cultures in all of China. Preserving traditional Tibetan language, religion, food, dance, and lifestyle is a high priority.
Political power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tibet is controlled by the Han-dominated Communist Party of China. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tibetans hold key positions of political and decision-making power in Tibet.
Religious freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monks live in fear of persecution due to their religious beliefs and need to hide photos of the Dalai Lama. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddhism thrives in Tibet as it does in all of China. • Tibetan monks are highly regarded as holy people throughout China.
Journalistic freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign journalists are regularly expelled from Tibet. China is hiding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective, fair-minded journalists have never been denied entry and report

	<p>something.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journalists who write negative stories about Tibet do not have their material reported in Chinese news. 	<p>constantly from Tibet.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journalists who write positive stories about Tibet do not have their material reported in Western news.
What do ordinary Tibetans think?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Tibetans are united against the Chinese government oppression, though many are afraid to say it. • The Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader in exile and speaks for all Tibetans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tibetans enjoy an increasing standard of living and more civil liberties than in the past. They do not want a return to the bad “old ways.” • The Dalai Lama speaks only for a very small elite minority who are trying to hurt China.

B. Similarities Between Western and Chinese Media on Tibet

There are some clear and stark contrasts. However, the differences between Western and Chinese media portrayals of Tibet tell only part of the story. What is rarely reported is the common ground between Western and Chinese media regarding Tibet.

Every Western and Chinese report that I have seen on traditional Tibetan life speaks of a rich and ancient culture, pregnant with spirituality and a respect for nature. I have watched Western documentaries and Chinese newscasts featuring amazing Buddhist temples and blessed monks chanting soothing prayers.³⁶ Western and Chinese articles write about exotic food, Tibetan music, and intricate craftwork.³⁷

In the minds of backpackers from Beijing to Boston, the Tibetan countryside is pure, vast, and full of pristine rugged beauty. Tibet is the place to let your spirit roam wild, to meditate in relaxation while doing yoga on

36. For a Western documentary, see, e.g., MYSTIC TIBET (FMPT 2007), <http://www.fpmt.org/Mystic-Tibet>.

37. See, e.g., Sooyeon Kim, *Shangri-La Express Serves Tibetan Food Out of a Pushcart*, New York Pavement Pieces: Stories from the Streets of New York City (Dec. 19, 2007), <http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/pavement/in/shangri-la-express-serves-tibetan-food-out-of-a-pushcart/>; Tibetan Meditation Music, NawangKhechog.com, <http://www.nawangkhechog.com> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009); Tibetan Arts & Crafts, <http://www.tibetanshop.com> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009); Tibetan Food and Culture Week Starts in Beijing, ChinaTibetNews.com, (Aug. 26, 2009), http://english.chinatibetnews.com/Culture/2009-08/26/content_292384.htm; Young Tibetans Infuse New Vigor into Tibetan Culture, China Tibet Online (Mar. 29, 2009), <http://chinatibet.people.com.cn/6624880.html>; Yang Lina, *Mandala: Art Treasure of Tibetan Buddhism*, Xinhua (June 22, 2009), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-06/22/content_11580416.htm.

some mountaintop, and to escape from polluted, stressful, big-city life.

Why are these similarities important? If we talk only about the differences, we begin to imply that only intractable differences exist. By recognizing the many similarities *and* the differences, I believe we begin to sow the seeds for finding common ground and developing solutions, rather than simply inflaming distrust.

Both Western and Chinese media report that Tibet has many fine qualities. The Tibetan people and their culture should be treasured, preserved, and encouraged to grow. I would suggest that this is a very good rallying point from which the stakeholders involved might be able to move things in a positive direction.

C. The Beijing Olympic Torch Relay and the March Riots in Lhasa

Leading up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics and Torch Relay, there was great media attention given to the riots in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet.

One prevalent view in Western media was that the riots were the ultimate and most desperate example of how ordinary Tibetans are fighting against authoritarian Chinese rule.³⁸ Monks were brutalized by the Chinese police and military.³⁹ The disruptions to the torch relay indicated that the world was united behind the Dalai Lama and critical of China.

One prevalent view in Chinese media was that the riots were organized by a small minority of Dalai Lama supporters attempting to distort the truth about China and Tibet.⁴⁰ Police acted with extreme restraint and rescued hundreds of people (Tibetan, Han, and international) from violent terrorists.⁴¹ The Chinese administration bent over backwards to act with restraint and diplomacy against a hyper-aggressive minority mob.⁴² The disruptions to the torch relay overseas indicated how biased Western media had brainwashed Westerners into attacking the Chinese people.

Internationally, Tibetan activists draped flags and slogans on international monuments as the Olympic Torch passed.⁴³ Chinese people saw repeated

38. Emma Graham-Harrison, *Riot Shows Desperate Tibetans May Defy Security*, Reuters (Mar. 23, 2009), <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSPEK62106>.

39. *Id.*; see also Jill Drew, *At Least 8 Reported Dead as Tibetans, Police Clash in W. China*, WASH. POST, Apr. 5, 2008, at A8.

40. Amber Yao, *Chinese Embassy in Nepal Refutes "Tibet Independence" Group's Rumor*, Xinhua (June 23, 2008), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-06/23/content_8422872.htm.

41. *Id.*

42. *Id.*

43. See, e.g., YouTube.com, CBC-TV on Tibet Olympic Protests, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU5OJYa7vCU> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009); Katherine Baldwin & Raissa Kasolowsky, *Chaotic Scenes at London Olympic Torch Relay*, Reuters (Apr. 7, 2008), <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSL0648763320080407>; Renee Maltezu, *Greek Police Stop Tibet Activists' Protests*, Reuters (June 5, 2008),

television broadcasts of “Free Tibet” protesters attempting to rip the torch away from a Chinese wheelchair athlete in Paris.⁴⁴ We saw caricatures of the Olympic rings dripping with blood or turned into handcuffs.⁴⁵ And we watched a segment on CNN’s *The Situation Room* in which news anchor Jack Cafferty said that China’s leaders are “basically the same bunch of goons and thugs they’ve been for the last 50 years” and that the United States imported Chinese-made “junk with the lead paint on them and the poisoned pet food.”⁴⁶

Additionally, there were heavily publicized comments made by the Dalai Lama declaring that the Chinese government has turned Tibet into “hell on earth” and a place of “untold suffering and destruction.”⁴⁷

D. Two Effects Within China of Western Media Reports on the Olympic Torch Relay and the Lhasa Riots

1. Effect #1: Increased Attention to and Negative Sentiments Toward Western Media

One of the most obvious effects of Western reports on the Lhasa riots and the Olympic Torch relay was increased attention to and negative sentiments toward Western media. These reports very quickly became front-page news and primetime Chinese television. They were the topics of Chinese television talk shows, op-eds in newspapers, talk radio, and Internet forum postings.⁴⁸ *China Daily*’s Li Xing wrote a powerful article⁴⁹ that spread rapidly via email in which she wrote that Chinese people should stand up to Western propaganda and “tell them how . . . Chinese [people] feel”:

They [people from overseas writing about Tibet] reason with me, saying that we Chinese at home get only “censored”

<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL0557888520080605>.

44. YouTube.com, Jin Jing and Her Torch Delay in France, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYPdjU1CVZA> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009).

45. See, e.g., Stephen Hutcheon, *Bashing Beijing: The Shame Game Olympics*, SYDNEY MORNING HERALD (Austl.), Apr. 2, 2008, <http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/bashing-beijing-the-shame-game-olympics-20090618-cl4e.html>.

46. *The Situation Room* (CNN television broadcast Apr. 9, 2008) (transcript available at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0804/09/sitroom.03.html>).

47. Steve Herman, Dalai Lama Blames China for Deaths of Tibetans in Past 50 Years, VOANews.com (Mar. 10, 2009), <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-03/2009-03-10-voa8.cfm?CFID=302271546&CFTOKEN=11889556&jsessionid=de306e72594284cdeb98104f702f21432c12> (internal quotation marks omitted).

48. For radio, see, e.g., CRI Netizens and Listeners Around the World Comment on Lhasa Riots, People’s Daily Online (Apr. 10, 2008), <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/6390377.html>.

49. Li Xing, Op-Ed., *Time to Tell Them How the Chinese Feel*, CHINA DAILY, Apr. 24, 2008, at 8, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy>.

information and do not get the whole picture. And for those overseas Chinese worldwide, who have every access to every major and minor Western media outlet and who have also spoken up, the only explanation is they are “brainwashed.”

....

The force that has united most of the Chinese worldwide is not the result of simple propaganda, but born of bitter experiences for more than a century in our relations with the West, ever since it forced open the doors of China with guns and opium.⁵⁰

Much focus was given to the negative Western portrayal of China and the lack of positive news. Why is Western news about China always about how bad the government is, or why there are no human rights, or why we, the Chinese, are all censored and brainwashed by propaganda? Why is the Dalai Lama always represented as being right and the sole voice of Tibet? Why does CNN only highlight the “bad things” happening in Tibet and refuse to report on Tibetans who are happy or prosperous, or Tibetans in power working side-by-side with their Han counterparts?

Public passion erupted on the Internet with many netizens devoting themselves to combating the perceived bias in Western media. The web site anti-cnn.com was born and it identified what it said were intentionally deceptive photos by Western media sources such as BBC, Fox, Reuters, and CNN. For example, there was the BBC picture of a Chinese ambulance in Lhasa captioned to indicate “a heavy military police presence.”⁵¹ Anti-cnn.com also asserted that CNN intentionally cropped photographs to make China look bad.⁵² Additionally, YouTube videos were posted highlighting the perceived bias and inaccuracies in Western media, such as photographs of riots or police clashes that took place in India or Nepal but being captioned to seem as if the events happened in China.⁵³ A new phrase entered the Chinese lexicon—“做人不能太CNN” (which roughly translates to “don’t be too CNN”), meaning that one should not be biased and use exaggerated language when trying to describe an event.⁵⁴

50. *Id.*

51. Compare An Lu, Netizens Slam CNN’s Distortion of Riot Picture, Xinhua (Mar. 23, 2008), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-03/23/content_7841316.htm with Tibetans Describe Continuing Unrest, BBC News (Mar. 17, 2008), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7300312.stm>. Sometime after the BBC News story appeared, the ambulance photo caption was altered to read, “There have been many reports of injuries and deaths in Lhasa.”

52. An Lu, *supra* note 51.

53. YouTube.com, Riot in Tibet: True Face of Western Media, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSQnK5FcKas&feature=related> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009).

54. The Hottest Chinese Internet Slang—2008, eChinacities.com (Dec. 31, 2008),

Wheelchair athlete Jin Jing became a national hero and a symbol of Chinese strength and righteousness against aggressive forces when news coverage and photographs of her defending the Olympic Torch from pro-Tibet independence protesters in Paris became widespread.⁵⁵ Netizens called for boycotts against Western groups that were perceived as being anti-China, such as the Carrefour retail chain store.⁵⁶

2. Effect #2: Increased Positive Commentary About Tibet and Tibetan People in Chinese Media

At the same time antipathy toward Western media grew, there appeared to be a surge in positive commentary in Chinese media about Tibetan people. Web sites on Tibet were regularly updated and improved. Leading news portals on Tibet such as Xinhua,⁵⁷ Tibet Human Rights,⁵⁸ and the China Tibet Information Center⁵⁹ were updated multiple times per day and reported on the richness of Tibetan life and importance of Tibetan culture—not only in Mandarin and Tibetan but also in English, French, and German.⁶⁰

News reports spoke about how much the Chinese government had done to improve Tibetan life. We saw stories of the historic emancipation of slavery in Tibet, and of the national projects to combat poverty, stimulate the economy, provide drought relief, and set up wind farms.⁶¹ We heard about

<http://www.echinacities.com/main/ChinaMedia/ChinaMediaInfo.aspx?n=1368>.

55. See, e.g., Rong Jiaojiao, Smiling Angel in Wheelchair the Talk of a Nation, Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Houston (May 6, 2008), <http://houston.china-consulate.org/eng/nv/t450120.htm>; see also YouTube.com, Tribute to JinJing: Smiling Olympic Angel in Wheelchair, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ql0I1yRN9Zg> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009).

56. Chinese Netizens Urge Carrefour Boycott After Torch Relay Incident, Xinhua (Apr. 16, 2008), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-04/16/content_7989807.htm.

57. Xinhua, Special Report: Tibet: Its Past and Present, <http://www.chinaview.cn/08lhasa/> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009).

58. Tibet Human Rights, <http://en.tibet328.cn/> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009).

59. China Tibet Information Center, <http://eng.tibet.cn/> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009).

60. Xinhua is available in Arabic, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. Tibet Human Rights is available in English, German, and French, and the China Tibet Information Center is available in English. To learn more about Tibet, see, e.g., China Tibet Information Center, <http://eng.tibet.cn/multimedia/tibetan/> (Tibetan language); China Tibet Information Center, <http://eng.tibet.cn/lifestyle/food/> (Tibetan cuisine); China Tibet Information Center, <http://eng.tibet.cn/lifestyle/festival/> (Tibetan customs) (last visited Nov. 1, 2009).

61. See, e.g., Chen Yong et al., Ending Serfdom in Tibet, a Giant Step in Human Rights Progress that Deserves Commemoration, Xinhua (Mar. 26, 2009), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/26/content_11079333.htm; Du Guodong, China Carries on Poverty Fight Despite Achievements, Xinhua (Oct. 17, 2008), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-10/17/content_10211820.htm; Winny Chen, Op-Ed., *Stimulus Package Has Started Bearing Fruits*, CHINA DAILY, May 7, 2009, at 9, available at <http://publ.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>; Li Xianzhi, China's Central Government Allocates 182 [Million] Yuan for Drought Relief, Xinhua (Aug. 19, 2009), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-08/19/content_11912686.htm; Xiong Tong, ADB to Help

successful Tibetans profiting from eco-tourism and setting up schools and museums.⁶²

Qiangba Puncog,⁶³ chairman of the Tibetan autonomous regional government, became one of the most-high-profile figures in Chinese media—regularly speaking about how Tibetans have prospered in cooperation with the Chinese government,⁶⁴ stressing the importance and safety of the Olympic Torch for Tibetan people,⁶⁵ and giving reports about the Lhasa riots and Tibetan life from the perspective of a Tibetan leader living in Tibet.⁶⁶

E. A Way Forward—How Can Media Be Better Used to Find a Positive Way Forward on the “Tibet Issue”?

Having a popular positive media image is powerful. In this symposium, we have learned about the enormous power of positive media representation through the articles of Professors Alain Verbeke and Martin Euwema, and Lynn Malley.⁶⁷ I offer three avenues that China might take to better work with media on the issue of Tibet.

1. Suggestion #1: Resonate More Positively with Skeptical Western Audiences

One important goal should be to resonate more positively and sympathetically with the audience. At international press conferences, the world’s media is assembled and some of China’s greatest skeptics are sitting in the audience. They are golden opportunities to engage and resonate with the critics—words should be carefully chosen to generate sympathy, and not

Finance Wind Farm in China, Xinhua (July 7, 2009), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/07/content_11669040.htm.

62. See, e.g., Foreigners Make up Ten Percent of Visitors to Tibet, Tibet Human Rights (Apr. 21, 2009), <http://en.tibet328.cn/01/01/200904/t298336.htm>; Tibetan Students Celebrate 15th Anniversary of Beijing Tibet Middle School, Xinhua (Oct. 21, 2002), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2002-10/21/content_606667.htm; Tibet Museum Opens to Public Free of Charge, Xinhua (Aug. 12, 2009), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-08/12/content_11867125.htm.

63. For a brief biography on Qiangba Puncog, see Qiangba Puncog, Who’s Who in China’s Leadership, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/MATERIAL/56213.htm> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009).

64. Tibet Regional Chairman: Tibet People Real Beneficiaries of Reform, Development, Xinhua (Apr. 9, 2008), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-04/09/content_7945866.htm.

65. Qiangba Puncog: Olympic Torch Relay to Be a Success, Xinhua (Apr. 9, 2008), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-04/09/content_7946187.htm.

66. Zhu Zhe, *Magnitude of Riot Losses Much Larger*, CHINA DAILY, Apr. 10, 2008, at 1, available at <http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/cdpdf/cndy/>.

67. Martin Euwema & Alain Verbeke, *Negative and Positive Roles of Media in the Belgian Conflict: A Model for De-escalation*, 93 MARQ. L. REV. 139 (2009); Lynn M. Malley, *Observations from an American Conflict Resolution Professional in Serbia on the Effects of the Accessibility of International Media*, 93 MARQ. L. REV. 241 (2009).

to accuse or come across as aggressive. Handling such conferences with compelling, charismatic, and eloquent speakers should be a priority.

Chinese government press conferences on Tibet have, in the past, involved stern-faced government representatives, speaking from behind a large desk, wearing dark suits, and using strong language such as labeling the Dalai Lama a “jackal in monk’s clothes.”⁶⁸ Such language diminishes the sympathy for the speaker’s point of view and may heighten skepticism in an already skeptical Western audience. Once a negative impression has been formed in the minds of an audience, further words and actions from China may be more readily perceived as aggressive and unreasonable. For example, in March 2009, China’s Minister for Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi gave a press conference during which he said that:

The difference between China and Dalai Lama has nothing to do with religion, human rights, ethnic relations, and culture. It is an issue of whether to defend China’s unity against attempts to separate Tibet from China

“Other countries should not allow Dalai to visit and should not let him use their territory to engage in secessionist activities.

“It’s not a matter of doing a favor to China, but rather an obligation under the basic [principles] of international relations.”⁶⁹

On one hand, these words convey the importance that China places on the Tibet issue, the strength of conviction that China feels, and the reasoning behind China’s position. However, because the issue of Tibet has already generated so much negative publicity, it is possible that a skeptical audience may perceive these words as overly inflammatory Chinese government language—compounding the challenge China faces in the media on Tibet. By contrast, Dalai Lama press conferences frequently show him clad in Buddhist robes, surrounded by burning candles and soft incense, and prefacing sentences with peace and harmony. On the Dalai Lama’s web site, there are photos of him bowing while shaking hands with a woman in a wheelchair.⁷⁰

68. *President Ma’s Imperfect Storm: A Planned Visit by the Dalai Lama to Taiwan Upsets China*, ECONOMIST, Aug. 27, 2009, http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14338133&CFID=82482234&CFTOKEN=74733993 (internal quotation marks omitted).

69. Dalai by No Means a Religious Figure, but a Political One: Chinese FM, Xinhua (Mar. 7, 2009), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/07/content_10961657.htm.

70. Photo Gallery, The Office of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, <http://www.dalailama.com/page.109.htm> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009) (follow “With Public” hyperlink).

He writes:

[O]n the level of a human being, my first commitment is the promotion of human values such as compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, contentment, and self-discipline [O]n the level of a religious practitioner, my second commitment is the promotion of religious harmony and understanding amongst different religious traditions I am a Tibetan and carry the name of the Dalai Lama. Tibetans place their trust in me. Therefore, my third commitment is to the Tibetan issue. I have a responsibility to act [as] the free spokesperson of the Tibetans in their struggle for justice.⁷¹

With language that emphasizes compassion and forgiveness, such words generate sympathy in a reader—such that the image of the Dalai Lama is emphasized as representing “good.” When he later uses inflammatory language, the language has a sense of credibility and reasonableness as opposed to extremeness. For example, he stated, “Since March 2008 I have the feeling that a very old nation and its heritage and culture have received a death sentence”⁷²

A different approach for China would be to focus less on negative things about the Dalai Lama and more on positive developments in Tibet. Why not publicize how Tibet’s exemption from the national “one child” birth-control policy has fostered population growth, or that Tibetan projects receive special funding and tax exemptions, or how Tibetan and Han organizations co-fund “Plant a Tree,” drought relief, ecotourism, and wind farm projects?⁷³ Chinese government press conferences could spend more time talking about these topics rather than making aggressive statements. On a topic as controversial as Tibet, on which there is no shortage of negative comment and accusations from all sides, I believe there is great importance in reporting on what good has been achieved by all parties—Western, Chinese, Han, and Tibetan.

2. Suggestion #2: Getting Away from the Cycle of Negative Reporting

71. Questions & Answers, The Office of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, <http://www.dalailama.com/page.54.htm> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009).

72. Dalai Lama Hits Out at China “Death Sentence,” The Office of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama (June 6, 2009), <http://www.dalailama.com/news.389.htm> (internal quotation marks omitted).

73. Melvyn C. Goldstein & Cynthia M. Beall, *China’s Birth Control Policy in the Tibet Autonomous Region: Myths and Realities*, 31 *ASIAN SURVEY* 285, 293–301 (1991); see also Xie Ying, China’s Last Frontier Hoh Xil Plans to Open to “Ecotourism,” *Xinhua* (May 27, 2009), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/27/content_11440615.htm; Plant a Tree to Help the Planet Breathe, Lama Ganchen Peace Times, http://www.lgpt.net/tree/tree_en.htm (last visited Nov. 1, 2009); *supra* note 61.

About “the Other Side”

Chinese media is sometimes criticized as being state-run. The speakers at press conferences are identified as Chinese Communist Party officials representing the Ministry of Propaganda. Instead of being truthful, these government officials are said to simply toe the party line.

In retaliation, Western media is criticized as being ignorant, biased, and wrong. Furthermore, critics say Western media is attempting to undermine and humiliate China and that Western powers are fearful of China’s rise. Prejudiced Western journalists are trying to paint China as evil. As I read things, neither side is being particularly effective at winning hearts and minds; rather, both are compounding distrust and skepticism.

Instead of attributing blame and reinforcing negative opinion, could the media be involved in promoting solutions? What if news sources, both Western and Chinese, focused more on the similarities between the Western and Chinese points of view, such as the aforementioned respect and admiration for the beauty of Tibetan culture? Instead of attributing blame to and criticizing the other side for being propagandist, what if we spent more time on the practical problems that exist in Tibet, such as drought, the challenge of maintaining traditional culture in a world of iPods and Britney Spears, or the lack of clean water and proper sewerage?

I believe moving away from the cycle of negative reporting and more toward positive solution finding would be a great step toward moving the Tibet challenge in a positive direction.

3. Suggestion #3: More International Language Resources

Since China’s primary language is Mandarin, it makes sense that the majority of Chinese news is in Mandarin. There are many excellent and persuasive commentaries and articles in the Chinese-language press. There are professional web sites and a multitude of thought-provoking, eye-opening documentaries about Tibet. And the majority of the excellent material I have seen is in Mandarin.

However, one thing that China can improve upon is the availability of more English-language material. If something is not said in English (and perhaps French), most of the Western world will not hear it.

F. Positive Signs

I am optimistic for the future and see positive signs. China’s government personnel are becoming more sophisticated and comfortable with the media. The era of anonymous officials using harsh language is beginning to fade, and those spokespersons are being replaced by much more media-conscious, diplomatic, and internationally educated speakers. For example, current

United Nations Ambassador Zhang Yesui and former United Nations Ambassador Wang Guangya are fluent in English (and other languages) and perfectly comfortable in front of a camera, effortlessly shifting between telling a gentle joke or delivering a powerful message on a controversial topic that generates sympathy and agreement from an audience.⁷⁴

China's ability to handle the media is becoming more sophisticated. For example, consider the difference in media response between the Tangshan Earthquake of 1976 and the Sichuan Earthquake of 2008. In 1976, foreign journalists were banned and media reports were difficult to obtain.⁷⁵ In 2008, local and foreign journalists cooperated with Chinese military emergency teams.⁷⁶ There were daily press conferences and frequent press statements conducted in multiple languages.⁷⁷ The government was seen as being in control of a terrible situation, military personnel were heroes saving lives, citizens emerged bruised and battered but nevertheless alive, and, overall, world media was highly positive of China.⁷⁸

I see more positive news about Tibet, available in English, French, German, Russian, and other foreign languages. In addition, the standard of foreign language in Chinese newspapers, television, books, and web sites, while still imperfect, is growing more sophisticated.

G. Barriers to Going Forward

It is pleasant to focus on optimism. But there are also real and difficult challenges to improving media portrayals of Tibet. I suggest three.

First, journalists face some extremely challenging situations with regard to producing quality material with minimal resources. It is perhaps unrealistic to expect Western journalists—who face steadily decreasing budgets and tight deadlines, giving them little time to learn the difficult language of Mandarin—to challenge an accepted norm that “the Chinese government is bad” and “the Dalai Lama is good.” Similarly, it can be daunting to expect

74. See, e.g., Ambassador Wang Guangya, Keynote Address at the University of Chicago Symposium: China and the Future of the World (Apr. 28–29, 2006) (transcript available at <http://chicagosociety.uchicago.edu/china/coverage/WangSpeech.pdf>).

75. HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, CHINA'S FORBIDDEN ZONES: SHUTTING THE MEDIA OUT OF TIBET AND OTHER “SENSITIVE” STORIES 9–10 (2008), available at <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/07/06/china-s-forbidden-zones-0>.

76. See Wang Aihua & Yu Zheng, Interpreting Sichuan Earthquake: A Different Picture from What We Used to See, Xinhua (June 12, 2008), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-06/12/content_8353152.htm.

77. For a list of press conferences providing updates regarding the Sichuan Earthquake, see Xinhua, <http://www.chinaview.cn> (last visited Nov. 1, 2009) (enter terms “Sichuan press conferences” in “Search” box).

78. Gu Zhenqiu et al., World Hails China's Quake Response, Reconstruction, Xinhua (May 4, 2009), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/05/content_11313611.htm.

Chinese journalists, with limited training and international experience, under severe deadlines, to write in a foreign language (like English) in such a way that appeals to readers from foreign cultures living in foreign countries.

Second, is it reasonable or practical for one goal of the media to be that of resolving disputes or helping steer debate regarding the issue of Tibet in a positive direction? Why should it be the media's role to solve problems? Is that not the role of diplomats, peacemakers, governments, and non-governmental organizations? There may be considerable pressure on and reward for media institutions in generating buzz or popularizing programs with intentionally provocative language, rather than in finding solutions.

Third, reacting calmly and focusing on solution building is more difficult than reacting aggressively and focusing on retaliation. At the beginning of this piece, I wrote about a colleague who accused me of being a brainwashed apologist for the Chinese government who should be ashamed of China. During that conversation, did I calmly react and direct the conversation toward how she and I could do something positive together to benefit Tibet? No, I reacted angrily and challenged her understanding of the truth, asking her whether she had ever once stepped foot in China and suggested that it was she, not I, who had been deceived by propaganda.

The conversation, predictably, did not go well. In all likelihood, neither party influenced the other. Instead, we only reinforced negative perceptions of the other, hurt our relationship, and possibly introduced a barrier to future cooperation. If this happens between two people who are in the field of dispute resolution, whose very field is about tackling difficult disputes and finding solutions, how much harder must it be for people outside of this field?

H. Summary

Tibet is a very complicated challenge. In my opinion, part of the solution to this challenge will come from more constructive use of media.

This Essay has discussed the media portrayal of Tibet and considered some of the differences and similarities between Western and Chinese media from the perspective of someone living in Beijing. It has argued that a better use of the media would be a great step toward finding solutions to the Tibet issue.

The Essay looked specifically at coverage of the March 2008 riots in Lhasa and the Beijing Olympic Torch relay and suggested that two effects within China were increased negative sentiment toward Western media and increased coverage of developments in Tibet under the Chinese administration.

It suggested three ways in which the media can be better used by China. First, China should focus more on positive developments in Tibet rather than

using inflammatory language to attack the pro-independence movement. Second, China should move away from criticizing Western media and break the cycle of negative reporting which serves to foster skepticism. China should encourage more dialogue on the practical problems and solutions in Tibet, rather than respond to provocative attacks from Western media. Third, China should use more international language resources to speak to Western audiences, because if something is written only in Mandarin, it will not be accessed by the majority of Western people.

This Essay has recognized three barriers to enacting those solutions. First, to enact the above suggestions requires resources that may be scarce—such as more multilingual journalists, government representatives who are better versed in dealing with international media, and more time and money for journalists to research and write articles. Second, the media may not wish to play the role of solution-finder because there may be considerable pressures and incentives in being intentionally provocative. Third, within a tense atmosphere of mutual cynicism, a natural reaction to criticism is to return criticism. It is much more difficult to calmly take stock of the situation, diffuse the tension, and change the focus from criticism to solution-building.

IV. PARTING THOUGHTS

There is a long way to go before the many issues surrounding Tibet will be resolved. However, on the topic of media representation, I remain optimistic. I believe that there are positive signs and that things are slowly, but surely, getting better.

I am not advocating for the removal of criticism from all media reporting on Tibet. That would be both unrealistic and counterproductive because the finding of solutions comes partly from being able to criticize and identify problems. My hope is that Chinese and Western media can come to criticize each other constructively, in a way that promotes solutions rather than skepticism.

Whatever one's view is on Tibet, the Dalai Lama, and Tibet's development under the Chinese government, I believe the goal of a better life for the people of Tibet is something on which we all can agree. Identifying how media can be used more effectively to promote this goal is something that I hope we can work toward.