

# DEMOCRATISATION AND THE MEDIA A PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION OF EXPERIENCES IN EUROPE AND ASIA

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## Abstract

Studies of the relationship of the mass media and democracy either rely very heavily on American and European experience, or they are focused studies of national cases. There are relatively few attempts to generalise from the rich diversity of the last thirty years. This article is an initial attempt to compare the experiences of the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe with the various dictatorships of East and South East Asia. It is argued that, despite the fact that there are important differences between communist and capitalist dictatorships, it is nevertheless theoretically possible to compare the two categories. An outline theory of the relationship between media and social power in both is introduced. In comparing Europe and Asia, it is argued that oppositions between "Western" and "Asian" values are not at all useful, despite their considerable popular currency at the time of writing (September 2001). In both cases, key democratic values like reason and media freedom have a contradictory status that defies continental generalisations. The article continues with an examination of the decay of the undemocratic regimes in the two continents and points to their differences and similarities. In particular, it is noted that there are surprising similarities of outcome in the media democratisation process despite the differences in starting point. The absence of radical democratic movements in Europe is contrasted with their apparently greater prominence in some parts of Asia. It is speculated that the future in China will involve political crises that will provide further opportunities for radical democratic movements.

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## Introduction

It is an incontestable fact that the last third of the twentieth century saw a wave of democratisation sweep across the world. No continent and no type of social system proved entirely immune to the changes. In Europe, Iberian fascism, Greek militarism and Eastern Stalinism all collapsed. In Africa, the racist minority regimes were finally defeated, and elsewhere in the continent there were some successful challenges to the dictatorial rule of the post-colonial strong men. In South America, the bloody dictatorships were supplanted by more democratic regimes, even if the military continued to glower menacingly in the background. In Asia, a string of authoritarian regimes from Korea to Indonesia fell under the impact of popular opposition. Even in North America, the long rule of the Mexican PRI was finally challenged. By the dawn of the new century there were still some notorious holdouts (China and North Korea, for example), some notorious backsliders (Pakistan, for example), and some countries in desperate political crisis (Zimbabwe, for example), but the balance sheet is clear: a much greater proportion of the world's population lived in at least minimally democratic societies in 2000 than was the case in 1970 (let alone 1900).

There are general studies of these events, of which the two best known are probably Samuel Huntington's *The third wave: democratisation in the late twentieth century* (1991) and Francis Fukuyama's *The end of history and the last man* (1992). Both of these writers detected a general process of democratisation, for which they offered different explanations. Whatever the merits of these particular examples, they represent attempts to answer the general question that the empirical reality positively demands a serious social scientist address: are these discrete events part of a general process, or are they rather more or less peculiar local responses to a range of different situations?

Scholars of the mass media have been much less prepared to confront this pressing question, despite the centrality of our concerns to any discussion of democracy. With the exception of John Downing, whose work does indeed raise general issues, most writers have more restricted ambitions (Downing 1996). Thus, there are regional studies of Latin America (Fox 1988), of Central and Eastern Europe (Giorgi 1995; Sparks 1998), and "cultural China" (Lee 2000). There are also many studies of single countries, notably China itself (for example, Hong 1998; Zhao 1998). What are singularly absent are attempts to draw the overall lessons from these disparate events.

The consequence of this lack of attention to the scope of recent developments is that the conceptual apparatus that we bring to the study of the media and democracy is seriously underdeveloped. Works that make claims to be overall studies of the topic frequently rest upon such an astonishingly narrow range of historical evidence and arguments as to seem hopelessly parochial (Keane 1991). In the absence of serious theoretical analysis, the majority of scholars appear to work with a more or less unrevised set of ideas inherited from the depths of the Cold War, whose contemporary relevance is open to serious questioning (Sparks 2000).

In this article I will not remedy that situation single-handed, but I do hope to suggest that we should begin to address the question as to whether there are general features of the relationship between the mass media and democracy to be discerned in the major international developments of the last three decades. In

order to render my task manageable, I have ruthlessly reduced the scope of my investigation: I am concerned predominantly with media structures in the recent past, the last 20 years or so, and I am primarily concerned with developments in Central and Eastern Europe and in East and South-East Asia. In making these exclusions, I will neglect not only large areas of the human experience of democratisation but also questions about the role mass media in the destruction of democracy and in flourishing dictatorships. Any general theory of the media and democracy would, of course, be obliged to take as much account of those aspects as the more congenial issues of the construction of democracy. It is therefore a very small part of a massive question that I address here.

There are several genuine obstacles that make even this relatively modest task extremely difficult. The first of these is that, as Jakubowicz reminds us in this volume, comparison comes at a price, at least for those of us who are not structural – functionalists. Comparison depends upon abstraction, and abstraction means a loss of purchase on the detailed reality of social change. This, however, is an inevitable consequence of all social analysis: theory, after all, is grey while the tree of life is green. In the present case, the abstractions necessary for comparison are also necessary for understanding the main forces at work in democratisation. Only through comparing the different trajectories of the national cases can we hope to find what is genuinely unique and what is part of a more general trend.

Table 1: Examples of Dictatorship

	Asia	Europe
Capitalism	South Korea ROC Indonesia Hong Kong	Germany Italy Spain Portugal
Communism	PRC North Korea Vietnam Cambodia	USSR Poland Yugoslavia Romania

If we accept that, done carefully and conscientiously, the advantages of comparative study can outweigh the price of abstraction, there still remain two major issues that cannot be so easily resolved. Table 1 gives an idea of the field that I wish to explore. The countries I have placed in the different boxes are not intended to be an exhaustive list of the possible members of these classes, nor are they identical examples of dictatorships. They are simply examples, chosen to show how great the differences are within these classes. So Hong Kong, subject to more than a century of British colonial rule, and with a mass media system that remains clearly, albeit decreasingly, marked by that experience, is very different from the other four Asian capitalist examples. The European communist countries, too, were in 1989 very different one from another. What was then Yugoslavia, for example, lay at the “liberal” extreme along with Hungary, while Romania, and to a lesser extent the Soviet Union, were much more “Stalinist” in their political and media structures.

The comparison I propose to make lumps together a number of different kinds of dictatorships, most notably communist regimes and others that were bitterly anti-communist. My examples are also drawn from different continents, and it is not self-evident that the structures of social relations, and particularly issues of political authority, are to be understood in the same way in both places. In order to justify comparisons, we therefore have to show that it is possible to consider communist and capitalist dictatorships as comparable political systems, and we have to show that the evident differences between Asia and Europe do not render comparison irrelevant.

The first two parts of this article are therefore attempts to address those questions. The next two sections turn to more substantive issues: the nature of regime decay and the immediate consequences of collapse for media, and the versions of democracy and the media that have emerged from the transitions.

## Varieties of Dictatorship

Making comparisons between capitalist and communist societies was in the past contested. On both sides of the old Cold War frontier, there were ideologues who wanted to argue that the systems were completely different and incommensurable, and thus could only usefully be contrasted, rather than compared. No doubt elements of those attitudes remain, since the issue of the nature of the differences between the two systems continues to have considerable ramifications. As the European communist regimes recede into history, and those elsewhere make greater and greater concessions to market capitalism, however, it becomes possible to think more clearly about what is at stake.

We will not cast any light on these issues if we begin from a moralistic or humanistic stance. Both capitalist and communist dictatorships are, in my view, equally despicable and equally capable of the most brutal atrocities against their own citizens. Pinochet murdered and tortured a far larger percentage of his own citizens than has Castro. Pol Pot was as barbarous a murderer as Hitler. These crimes are central political facts of recent history, and should never be forgotten. A willingness to condemn them is a necessary moral qualification for honest public life. The views of those who engage in the selective condemnation of the crimes of some regimes, while remaining blind to the equivalent actions of those who are their friends, are not worthy of serious consideration. Such horrors are not, however, the essence of the regimes in question, and they are not the central discriminator between them. From my point of view, the difference between communism and capitalist societies, not as theoretical ideals but as practical historical realities, lies in the nature of power in society.

In communist societies all, or to be precise the great majority, of forms of power are concentrated in the hands of the upper echelons of the ruling party. The state machine is firmly under the control of reliable members of the party. While there may be peasant farmers, perhaps small entrepreneurs, or even formally autonomous productive units, none of these is able to exercise independent economic power. While there may be several legal political parties, and even contested ballots, effective political power is monopolised by the communist party. While there may be formally independent social organisations, notably the media, in reality their control lies in the hands of the leadership of the communist party. As a first

approximation, we might say that the *nomenklatura* of a communist country constitutes its ruling class in a more obvious, direct and complete sense than is true of capitalists in the USA or UK. This class rules not as individuals but as a collective, as the leadership of the communist party. Its individual members have no claim on any aspect of power as individuals, and they are unable to pass it on directly to relatives or friends. They are therefore mutually dependent and constitute a cohesive ruling class in which politics and economics are fused and interdependent.

In the case of capitalist societies, power is as a rule much more dispersed. While economic power is concentrated in the hands of big capitalists, state power is usually in the hands of a professional civil service and military, which present themselves as being independent of party politics. Outside of a theoretical limit case of a single world capitalist, the power of each individual member of the capitalist class is subject to intense economic competition from other capitalists, either within the same state or internationally. To coin a phrase, they are a band of hostile brothers. Even when there is censorship and severe repression, the ownership of important mass media, notably newspapers, remains in the hands of private individuals. These private individuals owe their social position and power to their wealth, which they can acquire in a number of ways, and which they can dispose of to their relatives or other associates, more or less at will. To the extent that one argues that capitalists rule in such a society, it is usually indirectly, through their ability to influence the decisions of others, rather than through they themselves deciding upon policy. The various political and social decision-makers may have some degree of cohesion with their capitalist peers, in Britain they certainly do, but this is not a central condition for their collective exercise of power.

In historical reality, this stark opposition is modified by a number of intermediary positions. In the first place, while the communist bureaucracy is formally united, in practice different sections rest upon different sectors of the economy and society, and articulate sectional interests. This can lead to more or less public quarrels within the ruling class, and the consequent rhetorical mobilisation of public opinion in support of this or that policy. Such divisions within the bureaucracy, however, have always proved dangerous. In all cases prior to 1989, notably 1956 and 1968, divisions within the bureaucracy, and appeals to the public, catalysed crises of the system that could only be resolved with force (Harman 1983). Communist societies were historically incapable of institutionalising pluralism, let alone democracy.

The case of capitalism is in many ways the reverse. Other things being equal, dispersed power finds its best political expression in some form of limited democratic system, in which the major forces articulate different policies within the framework of capitalism. Necessary changes can therefore be openly debated, discussed, voted upon and resolved, without the need for messy conspiracies, military coups, popular uprisings, or any of the other risky ventures that are needed to alter the direction of a dictatorship. The USA is, of course, the clearest example of this kind of polity, in which official political life is the preserve of the extremely well-funded, and in which no major party poses any challenge to the rule of capitalism. Whatever other changes a shift from Republican to Democrat might bring, the interests of business remain at the centre of debate.

Historically, however this is an unusual case, because other things are seldom equal, and the dispersal of power that is characteristic of a pure capitalist system is

modified in practice by the need to unite against threatening social forces, whether real or imagined. Internal threats include hostile social classes, which have often developed programmes of political action and built organisations that are incompatible with the continuation of capitalist rule, and who might threaten to use democratic freedoms to achieve the overthrow of capitalism. External threats include hostile states, which use economic or military power in order to subordinate other territories to their will. Faced with either, or indeed both, of these enemies, real historical capitalist states have departed quite a long way from the ideal type of bourgeois democracy. In the course of so doing, they impose restrictions upon what can be legitimately said and done, not only by their supposed opponents but also by themselves, and particular by those of them who own media outlets. The restrictions take the form both of prohibitions of particular kinds of public, indeed even private, speech, and the coercion of dissenting voices.

The borderlines between the various categories of bourgeois rule require careful scrutiny, and there is room for debate about exactly which states belong in which categories. This is perhaps best illustrated by the regimes I would like call “besieged democracies.” I take, from many possible instances, the strange case of the artificial statelet of “Ulster” as a good example of this. This was created by a gerrymander designed to ensure the domination of a particular religious grouping, and from the start it was rejected as illegitimate by a substantial minority of its own population who had different beliefs. The latter were so disaffected that they periodically waged an armed struggle against the state of which they found themselves unwilling citizens. The government of Northern Ireland deployed a battery of devices to bolster its position and to keep its opponents in their subordinate places. Flags, emblems, organisations, and other forms of political expression that were deemed threatening to the dominant grouping were routinely banned. An armed police force, with a large civilian reserve, was drawn overwhelmingly from the religious majority, and brutally crushed any organised political opposition to its control. Opponents of the regime were sometimes interned without trial. Elections took place, but they were rigged to ensure a favourable outcome, and the dominant group used its political power to cement the loyalty of its own supporters through material rewards like jobs and houses, and to punish its opponents by denying them these things (McCann 1974). The mass media, particularly the broadcasters, were from early on subject to considerable restrictions as to what could be said and shown (Cathcart 1984). This all took place within the framework of the democracy of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.<sup>1</sup> If we take this to be a democracy, we certainly have to concede that it was a different kind of democracy to that prevailing in, say, contemporary Sweden. Simply calling something “a democracy” is very far from settling all of the interesting and important questions that one can ask about the place of the mass media in that society.

At the limit, the need to impose internal restrictions to counter threats can involve the acceptance of a political party that demands compulsory loyalty, that organises large areas of social life under its direct control, that invades the economic realm both to enrich its individual members and to pursue what it perceives as “national interests.” Such regimes also persecute very bitterly anyone who is considered to deviate from the defined norm. The European fascist states, and notably Nazi Germany, represent the extreme historical examples of this kind of polity. These regimes are as “totalitarian” as the communist states in their heyday.

Table 2: Cohesion of Ruling Groups in Different Societies

Least fusion				Greatest fusion					
Bourgeois democracy		'Besieged' democracy		(Military) Dictatorship		Fascism		Communism	
Sweden (1945 ->)	GB	NI (1921-72)	GB (1939-45)	Greece (1969-74)	Chile (1973-81)	Spain (1939-75)	Germany (1933-45)	USSR (1985-91)	USSR (1928-53)
State of laws		Strong state		Authoritarian regime				Totalitarian regime	
□		□							
Greater degree of fusion between politics and economics									
Role of the main mass media									
Politically quite unrestricted		Politically quite restricted		Politically very restricted		Politically completely restricted		Politically completely restricted	
Economically mostly restricted		Economically partly restricted		Economically restricted		Economically partly unrestricted		Economically effectively unrestricted	

I have tried to represent both the extremes and the range of intermediary positions in Table 2, together with examples that I have purposely chosen from "the West." I was tempted to simply use European instances and take, say, the Pilsudski or Horthy periods as examples of highly repressive military regimes that rested on private property, but that would have required too great an historical extension.<sup>2</sup> The borderline between the authoritarian and the totalitarian is one that is drawn by the extent to which the dominant party is able to organise substantial parts of social life under its own direct control.<sup>3</sup>

The phenomena we are considering are not purely European, however. To the outside observer, it looks as though the overall degree of fusion between politics and economics is generally greater in the case of most Asian government than the prevailing norm in Western Europe or North America. It is obviously the case that China, North Korea, and so on, either have been or still are firmly in the "totalitarian" category. Other countries with much more democratic arrangements, like Japan, have had a much closer relationship between large businesses and the state machine than is the norm in Europe or the USA. This pattern, with interesting variants in particular cases, seems to be rather common, and it one of the things that lead to the notorious western charge of "crony capitalism" levelled against Asian societies.

We can understand this interpenetration of state and capital as a response to the circumstances of external pressure in which countries attempting to carry out the early phases of capitalist development within a world market in which there are already strongly established competitors find themselves. In order to force a way into these international markets, it is necessary to direct investment, control wages, keep down social spending, restrict imports, subsidise exports, and so on. This is the situation in which many countries around the world have found themselves in during the course of capitalist development, and they have made restric-

tions upon freedom and departures from the democratic ideal a common feature of recent history. From this perspective, the Stalinist regimes appear only as extreme examples of national concentration in the task of primitive accumulation, rather than some peculiar and unique form of social organisation. These regimes differ in degree from those with less total solutions, but not in their primary historical objectives.

In general, the greater the degree of fusion between politics and economics, the more "total" the system is, and that has consequences for the position of the mass media. In bourgeois democracies, the main media are normally relatively unrestricted as to their political role, but are usually constrained by the need for economic profitability.<sup>4</sup> As we move across the spectrum, so the degree of political restriction increases, but with this comes a greater degree of independence from the need for commercial success.

The changing balance of imperatives has far wider implications than simply the issue of what can and cannot be reported or commented upon. Censorship is present in all societies, and it can be harsh in both capitalist and communist societies, but the organisation of the mass media is a different question. We would expect to find that in bourgeois democracies the mass media display, in their organisation and content, greater or less degrees of market orientation. This contrasts with both the organisation and content of media in totalitarian societies. Although there was programming from capitalist producers, and even some advertising, on television in late communist Europe, the basic organisation of the system remained non-commercial. Segmentation of the audiences, a stress upon entertainment rather than the educational or informative content, a preponderance of advertising oriented material, and so on, are all familiar measures whereby we can examine, and indeed measure, the shifts in priorities. The general implications of this for media and their audiences, I outline in Table 3.

Table 3: Power, Media and Audience

	Communist totalitarian	Bourgeois authoritarian	Bourgeois democratic
Political and economic elites	Fused into one	Partially fused	Separate and independent
Mass media	Politically and economically subordinated	Politically subordinated	Economically subordinated
Social position of audience	Politically and economically subordinated	Politically and economically subordinated	Politically free, economically subordinated
Social organizations	Politically controlled	Politically controlled	Politically independent

From this perspective, there are two important consequences for our study of the mass media. In the first place, we are not primarily concerned with the degree of repression – the jailing of journalists, censorship of material and so on – since these phenomenon, intolerable though they are, are observable in a variety of different kinds of kinds of social organisation. Secondly, the key point of interest is the relationship of the mass media to social and political power, and the way in which the two either act in concert or are separate. It is through the latter lens that we will be able better to understand the variety of opportunities and limits that processes of democratisation open to the mass media.

## East and West

The geographical polarity of our subjects is also an historical and psychological fact. There is always a temptation to quote of line or two of that old British imperialist Rudyard Kipling to the effect that “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,” and immediately proceed to discussing the deep and fundamental differences between the two hemispheres of humanity. We cannot possibly avoid the evident realities of difference, but the task of honestly examining them does not automatically lead to some conception of a clash of civilisations. The fact that there is a clear difference does not tell us how deep it is, what its significance is, and whether it is unbridgeable.<sup>5</sup>

At stake in all of this, of course, is the issue of “Asian values.” This is a more recent debate than that over communism and capitalism, and one that remains extremely heated. The events of 11 September 2001, and their aftermath, have given a new lease of life to this issue. One extraordinary version was penned in the best-selling British serious newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*, by the paper’s Defence Editor, Sir John Keegan, who wrote:

*Westerners fight face to face, in stand-up battle, and go on until one side or the other gives in ... . Orientals, by contrast, shrink from pitched battle, which they often deride as a sort of game, preferring ambush, surprise, treachery and deceit as the best way to overcome an enemy ... . This war belongs within the much larger spectrum of a far older conflict between settled, creative, productive Westerners and predatory, destructive, Orientals. It is no good pretending that the peoples of the desert and the empty spaces exist on the same level of civilisation as those who farm and manufacture. They do not. Their attitude to the West has always been that it is a world ripe for the picking (Keegan 2001, 22).*

I am ill equipped to enter any serious discussion about the nature of Asian values, but it is important to note that the debate is as much between Asians as it is between East and West. Proponents of the view that there are fundamental differences between the West and the Orient come from both East and West. There are Asian critics of the use of Asian values as reasons to justify antidemocratic practices, notably Amartya Sen, as well as some very familiar westerners (Sen 1997; Pye 1998).

Other Asian writers have made a critical engagement with the same kinds of arguments as advanced within media and cultural studies (Lee 2001; Sim 2001). I am on surer ground when I consider the matter from the Western, or at least the

European, side. Here, the argument is often constructed in a way that will not bear serious examination. A series of claims are made about the West being the natural home of modernity, of science, of enlightenment, of democracy, of human rights, and any number of other wonderful things. There are two obvious questions to be asked about all of this: first, whether the West, or even Europe, has the unity that such a characterisation suggests; second, are these positive elements the defining characteristics of the West?

At a very general level, of course, one can say that there are some unifying aspects to the West, or at least to Europe. The value systems are predominantly derived from Christianity, although there have long been important Jewish and Muslim components. The languages spoken are predominantly, although not exclusively, Indo-European in origin. To that extent, it is reasonable to speak about common Western or European traits. These categories, however, are so abstract that it is difficult to see how they can be operationalised to allow the investigation of even simple issues about the mass media. To take an obvious example, the two countries in the world with highest per capita newspaper readership are Norway and Japan. One is "Western," the other "Asian." The utility of continent-wide value systems in explaining these realities is not immediately apparent.

When we move to whether much more precise categories like "modernity," "enlightenment," "democracy," and so on are characteristic of the West, the evidence is much more flimsy. "Modernity" may have been first named in the West, and the European enlightenment is the best-known example of the attempt at a scientific understanding of the world, but it is not true that we can make uncontested claims for European originality, priority and uniqueness. There are other powerful claims for enlightened and scientific thinking, in China, in India and in the Arab world, all flourishing much earlier than in the West. What is more, the triumph of enlightenment in the West is much exaggerated: the most "modern" country, the USA, is also the country in which that ancient enemy of the enlightened, from Voltaire on down, revealed religion, has the strongest popular following. Turn on the TV in a US motel and it is fundamentalist preachers proclaiming the literal truth of the Book of Genesis you will see, not philosophers and scientists debating recent advances in the theory of evolution by natural selection.

The claims for democracy, of course, also rest on equally flimsy evidence. Even in the narrow and formal sense that we have been using so far, it was well into the twentieth century before democracy was established in most of the main western countries: in Britain, it was 1928 before all adults were able to exercise the franchise, and even then curious anomalies like double enfranchisement for graduates of certain universities in parliamentary elections, persisted up until after the election of the 1945 Labour Government. In the USA, the establishment of the reality, as opposed to the rhetoric, of universal and equal suffrage, took place even later. The permanent enfranchisement of the southern Black population was the work of the 1960s, not the 1860s, and it was the product of bitter, and sometimes bloody, struggle against the most determined resistance.

What is more, powerful movements hostile to modernity, enlightenment and democracy have been as much a part of the modern history of Europe as have organisations dedicated to the defence of these values. In all European countries, there have been movements that have explicitly appealed not to reason but to faith, not to democracy but to authority, not to science but to instinct, not to univer-

sal humanity but to race and blood. In many countries, they have had mass followings, and in some they have been in power, with terrible consequences. The direct inheritors of some of the most virulent enemies of democracy and enlightenment that there have ever been are still able to command substantial votes in too many European countries, and in one or two countries they are in the government at the time of writing.

Overall, it seems to me that there is not much substance to the supposition that there is a single Europe, still less a single West. The unifying factors that undoubtedly exist do not explain much in the way of contemporary social realities. The uniqueness of what are taken to be positive European values is exaggerated, and their currency grossly overstated. Enlightenment, democracy, liberty and equality, are all a part of the European heritage, but they are a contested, embattled part. We could equally claim modern totalitarianism, scientific genocide and weapons of mass destruction as the defining European, or at least Western, achievements. The positive parts of the heritage are real, but they things that it is still essential to fight to sustain, not to take for granted. The negative parts are also real, and if we are honest we would be obliged to say that far more money and effort has been poured in to developing them than into the positive side of European or Western values.

This very well-founded suspicion of "Western values" leads me to scepticism, albeit speculative scepticism, as to whether there are Asian values. Asia strikes me as much more diverse, geographically, ethnically, linguistically, religiously, than is Europe, and therefore it seems to me that grand abstractions will have even less purchase on reality than they do in Europe. It seems much more likely that, here too, we will find a bitter contest over values and over definitions of social reality.

The truth in the opposition of Western and Asian values seems to me much better understood in terms of the historical evolution of different societies and their impact one upon the other. It is indeed the case that industrial capitalism, and with it modernity, enlightenment, democracy and the mass media, found their first developed forms in Europe, and later flourished exceptionally well in North America. Obviously, also, these things have often developed elsewhere in the course of an engagement with the West, usually in the extremely unenlightened form of Western imperialism. So, for example, I do not know of autochthonous examples of anything resembling the newspaper in any case other than Japan, before the arrival of the colonisers. The media landscapes of many countries still bear testimony to that history in the fact that major newspapers are in English, and it is western models of broadcasting that dominate the continent.

To say that something originated in the west, or was brought into the continent by westerners, however, is not the same as saying that it is ontologically western, and therefore in some way non-Asian. To take the example of democracy: this was certainly imposed at gunpoint by the West (more precisely, by the USA) upon Japan in 1945.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, democracy in India was wrested in 1947 from the reluctant grip of the completely undemocratic British Raj. Its establishment and extension was one of the main fruits of independence. It has endured enormous strains and, when its enemies briefly triumphed in the 1970s, it was strong enough to re-assert itself within a couple of years. Elsewhere, in Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, for example, what exists today of democratic rule has been won by Asian struggles against Asian tyrants, albeit tyrants often backed to the hilt and armed to the teeth by the West. Are we to say, then, that the example

of Japan shows that democracy in Asia is an imposition of the West? Or that the example of India shows that it is something achieved in a struggle against the worst that the West could do? Or do we look at Korea or the Philippines and say that it is something that has been achieved as the result purely Asian struggles against its purely Asian enemies? No doubt many of the examples of Asian democracy are less than perfect, but, as Indians delight in pointing out, with 800 million electors, many very poor and illiterate, they still seem to manage democratic elections far more convincingly than does the State of Florida.

My second suggestion, therefore, is that we will not find that experiences of the media and democratisation cluster along geographical lines. It is more probable that the differences between geographically proximate countries will be at least as great as the difference between those that are geographically distant. In seeking to understand what similarities and differences we observe, we will need to use less general and abstract categories than continental value systems. The deployment of discourses about Western or Asian values are real constituents of contemporary political reality, but they have more to do with ideological interventions than with objective realities.

## Patterns of Decay

The natural history of the decay of the European communist systems can be written something like this: In their vigorous heyday, there was more or less complete control of the internal symbolic landscape. Everything from children's books through newspapers to the national cinema was an aspect of the party's overall ideological programme. To the extent that there was internal dissent amongst the elite, it was articulated either covertly, or in very highly coded language. To the extent that there was dissent from outside the elite, it lived a precarious illegal existence, and more or less its only public manifestation was in the cross-border broadcasting of external enemies. As the regime began to decay, then dissonant voices emerged. Some of these were inspired by sections of the elite, who more and more openly conducted their struggles in the mass media, and who sought to mobilise popular support for their own goals against those of other groups. (The former Yugoslavia was a canonical example of this process.) Outside the elite, popular mobilisation, and associated media manifestations, became more and more evident, but lived a life of, at best, precariously negotiated legality, with the constant danger of repression. (Poland was the canonical example of this process.) At the point of transition, the old control mechanisms of the media collapsed, and were not immediately replaced. There was a scramble by the existing employees of the official media to secure their positions in the new order. Some had a great deal to hide. Others wanted to seize the media for their own purposes. Most simply revelled in the golden age of freedom that had been suddenly unleashed: anything could be said; nothing was off limits; everything was possible. (Hungary was the canonical example of this phase.) Some of the formerly oppositional media became legitimate and successful publications, and a myriad of other publications were founded. The consolidation phase followed, and it was characterised by two processes that put a sharp stop to the glorious anarchy of the transition process proper. On the one hand, there was the triumph of the market. Many, perhaps most, of the old oppositional media failed to transform themselves into viable busi-

nesses, as did hundreds of the new publications. Those publications that did survive struggled to adapt themselves to a new, advertising driven, model. On the other hand, the society remained extremely politicised, and there were struggles over the media, notably over the control of state television and the award of licenses for private television. Any new voices of opposition found themselves politically legal but economically marginal.<sup>7</sup> This pattern is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4: Media and Regime Decay– the European Communist Case

Media	Apogee	Decline	Crisis	Transition	Aftermath
Official media	Univocal	Some coded criticisms	Open criticism and debate	Scramble for advantage/ Survival Complete freedom of expression	Political control reasserted in broadcasting
Opposition media	Persecuted and marginal	Negotiated marginal existence at the border of legality	Emergence into legality	Some opposition media gain wide audiences	Commercially successful media survive
				New commercial media appear	New opposition economically marginal

There are some obvious parallels between these post-communist experiences and the decay and collapse of European fascism, particularly the Spanish case. We would expect to find everywhere that the end of a repressive regime leads to a great flowering of popular self expression and innovation, a lot of which takes the form of newly-founded publications of one kind or another. The experience of democratisation in Asia, however, suggests, at least at first glance, that there are two important challenges to the further generalisability of the above model of transition.

The first question concerns the spaces open to the media in the collapse of authoritarian regimes. Because important sections of capital, and notably media capital, are in private hands in even the most authoritarian of capitalist dictatorships, we would not expect to find the same pattern of control. Certainly, in the high period of the dictatorship, control over the official media would be extremely strict, and oppositional media would only exist in illegality or exile. (The underground Thai radio of the 1970s is a good example of this.) To that extent, the picture would be similar to that of the communist regimes in their high period. On the other hand, as the regime began to decay, the very fact that the media had a market orientation, and were the private property of sectors of the elite, would mean that conflicts would be more openly expressed than in the communist media at a comparable period. (The early cable broadcasting systems in Taiwan are good examples of the phenomenon of illegal but relatively open oppositional media in a decaying capitalist dictatorship). At the same time, at least some of the oppositional media would be able to flourish from the start as commercial enterprises, and their ability to articulate oppositional views would be relatively greater than their semi-clandestine communist cousins. (The foundation of a major oppositional newspaper in Korea is the canonical example of this.) By contrast, since a struggle for own-

ership of state assets is not a central issue in transitions of this type, and market oriented media already exist, the crisis and transition period would not be marked by the same explosion of new titles, or by the sudden liberation of the employees of state media. The aftermath, on the other hand, would be less dramatic in that the mechanisms of a commercial, advertising funded, media are already more or less in place and do not need to be constructed from close to nothing. (The Philippines provides a good example of this.) I have represented this pattern of transition schematically in Table 5.

Table 5: Media and Regime Decay– the Capitalist Case?

Media	Apogee	Decline	Crisis	Transition	Aftermath
Official media	Univocal	Some coded criticisms in at least a section of the dominant media	Open criticism and debate	Extension of freedom of expression	Political control continues in broadcasting
Opposition media	Persecuted and marginal	Negotiated marginal existence at the border of legality	Emergence into legality	Some opposition media gain wide audiences alongside other commercial media	Commercially successful media survive
			New commercial media appear, sometimes oppositional in orientation		New opposition economically marginal

The second major question is a very big one indeed: what sense can we make of the People’s Republic of China? The European pattern that I reviewed above depended upon a political transformation from a one-party state to a plural political system in order for economic transformation to take place in anything other than a limited and haphazard fashion. The conversion of state property into private property, whether conducted through simple robbery or through more legalistic channels, is essentially a political process. It either has to be ignored by the state or legitimised by it. The general feature of the Chinese case, however, seems to the outsider to be the complete reverse: the development of extensive private property is taking place without there being any serious change in the monopoly of political power held by the Communist Party. There was indeed a substantial challenge, a decade ago now, but the regime was strong enough to survive it and to re-establish its monopoly of political power (Zhao 2001). We thus have an extremely repressive political regime, which once upon a time rested more or less exclusively on large-scale state property, but which today contains obvious and very vigorous elements of private capitalism. To be sure, many of the new capitalists owe their wealth to the fact that they either are, or are closely related to, members of the old ruling elite. This is very similar to some of the processes that went on in the European case, where there was also a certain amount of looting before the liquidation of the old regime. But in China this process seems to be on a very much larger

scale, and to have been going on for a rather long time. Whatever view we may take of the long-term stability of the current regime, there is at present an apparently stable formation which involves continued communist party political power, combined with rapidly developing private capitalism. At a general level, are we to conclude that China has succeeded in making the transition from totalitarian to authoritarian regime without any major upheaval or period of democratisation? And if this is the case, what features made this amazing transformation possible? Is the process in China best described by Table 6?

Table 6: Media and Regime Decay and Resurrection – the Chinese Case?

Media	Apogee	Decline	Crisis	Reaction
Official media	Univocal	Some coded criticisms	Some criticism and debate	Extension of commercial media
			New commercial media appear	Silencing of criticism
Opposition media	Persecuted and marginal	Persecuted and marginal	Emergence into visibility	Persecuted and marginal

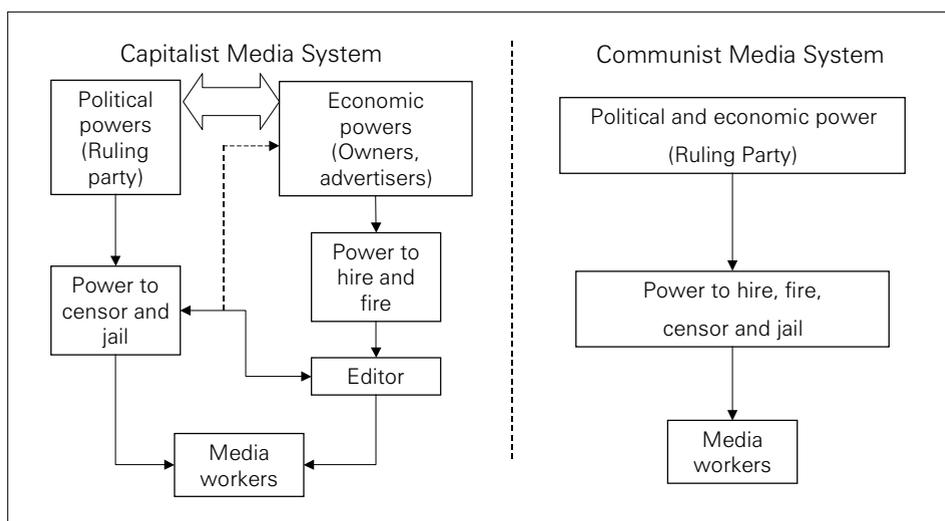
The answer to this problem seems to me to lie in what I have elsewhere called the social continuity of the transition away from communism. If the prime social meaning of the process is that the members of the collective bureaucratic class that rules in communist societies are able to transform themselves into private capitalists without experiencing any serious challenges to their social continuity, and at the same time renegotiate their relationship with the world market, then the precise mechanisms by which that is achieved are secondary. At least in the short term, the Chinese method seems preferable to the European, since it allows the central apparatus to retain political control and thus to be in a position to defeat any popular resistance, and to curb individual examples of avarice that threaten the overall stability of the system and the smoothness of the transition. For exactly the same reasons, there is much less of the total freedom for the media that characterised the transition period in Europe.

In the longer term, however, the method contains considerable risks and penalties. To shift to a market economy while retaining communist party control of the state means that visible economic inequality and chronic instability emerge alongside political repression. This risks destroying the ideological appeal of both the old order and its putative replacement. At the same time, the emergence of an economically differentiated capitalist class means that it is likely that differences of strategy and tensions over resources and policies will emerge within the ruling group. One would expect that some of these would be based on different industrial sectors, some on different market orientations, and some on different geographical regions. From what tiny amount I know about the development of the Chinese economy, I would guess that all three are quite closely linked, and that the latter, regional, orientation is perceived as the most important. Because the social

base of the aggrieved parties is increasingly independent of the central political apparatus, these differences will be difficult to control and keep purely internal. Since a market mechanism already partly exists in the mass media, and since the local media are quite closely tied to the different groups of capitalists, one would expect to find that these disputes and differences tend to surface in the media. I would speculatively suggest that this might be one reason behind the restructuring of the Chinese media into large conglomerates that is ongoing at the time of writing.

Overall, the two transition processes appear to have remarkably similar outcomes, but they are not identical. One can summarise the two main points of difference as follows: One would expect that in the private capitalist dictatorships it is easier for dissident elite voices to find expression, and easier for oppositional media to flourish and command large audiences. On the other hand, the fact that the basic method of social control is through property ownership means that the transitional period is less likely to be marked by the collapse of authority and the extreme freedom of expression that was characteristic of the collapse of communist media.

Table 7: Modalities of Control in Communist and Capitalist Media Systems

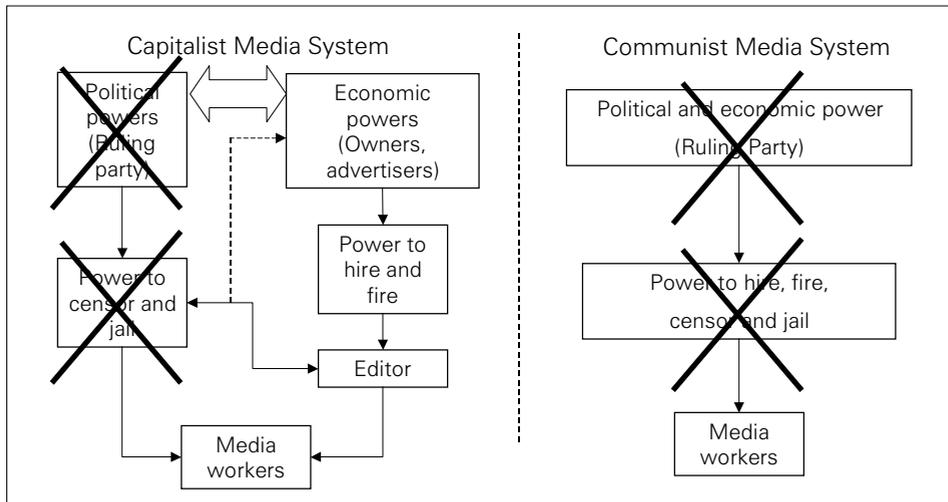


Because of the “totalitarian” nature of communist power, there is an important difference in the mechanism of control compared with private capitalist media in a dictatorship. As Table 7 illustrates, in such societies there is a single line of control, since there is no substantial difference between the bodies that own the media, and thus exert what we might call “internal” control over media workers, and the bodies that are responsible for policing the media – what we might call exercising “external” control. Both are, ultimately, the party apparatus and the Central Committee (or perhaps just the General Secretary) at its apex. In the case a capitalist dictatorship, internal and external control over the media are in principal separate. Internal control arises primarily from one form or another of economic control, and most usually through ownership. Political control, on the other hand, is

the province of a distinct state apparatus permeated by the ruling party. The two may work in harmony, and in cases of dispute the political apparatus may have the decisive voice, but they are different modalities of power.

When the respective systems enter crisis, these difference in power structure have very different effects on the control of media workers. In the communist regimes, both the internal and the external mechanisms of control are shattered. Political coercion vanishes, and there is a vacuum of ownership: the frequent examples of the seizure (or theft) of formerly communist newspapers by their journalists are good examples of how all controls collapsed at one and the same time, very quickly indeed. The media workers suddenly find themselves free to express themselves, to pursue their own interests, to tell the truth as they see it, or to propagandise for their idea of the future – for a short period of time, there is no one to tell them what to do. In the case of the collapse of capitalist dictatorships, however, the situation has been very different. These often have been just as abrupt at the political level, with yesterday's all-powerful dictator becoming today's political pariah, but they have not usually also involved the informal seizure of the owners' assets. Consequently, although there might now be more or less complete freedom for media workers at the political level, they still owe their livelihoods to their ability to please their employers. Table 8 illustrates the difference in the ways in which systemic collapse alters the control mechanisms over media workers.

Table 8: Crisis of Control in Communist and Capitalist Media Systems



In the middle term, however, the outcomes in both continents display surprising similarities. Thus, state interference in the staffing and policies of broadcasting in the former communist countries of Europe is well known, for example in Hungary (Gulyas 2001). Jae-Won Lee, however, wrote recently of the reformist government in South Korea in terms that could be applied exactly to half a dozen European countries and to half a dozen former capitalist dictatorships:

*The ruling power in Korea has been adroit in using the public broadcasting and state-supported media to its advantage. The editorial independence of*

*such public media is duly guaranteed under respective constitutions of the institutions. But such a guarantee is more or less a formality at best. The ruling power finds its way of installing their top management with friendly persons (Jae-Won Lee 2001).*

Similarly, alongside the “envelopmental journalism,” involving the outright bribery of journalists, that is identified both by Lee in Korea and Coronel in the Philippines, is repeated elsewhere. Russian journalists even in big-scale metropolitan media get a good proportion of their income from `hidden advertising, and Russian provincial journalists are often obliged by poverty to find other sources of income, including acting as PR representatives of the very people they are supposed to report upon (Coronel 2001, 118; Koltsova 2001; Vartanova 2001). The owners of private media systems, too, have themselves close relationships with different political parties, and changes of government can lead to pressures on owners, as recent events in both Russia and South Korea demonstrate.

Overall, the media systems of both former capitalist dictatorships and former communist regimes in the countries under review display remarkable similarities in that they are both highly commercialised and highly politicised. In both of kinds of case, there are close relationships between the government and state broadcasters. In private media, both broadcast and printed, close links between owners and political currents are the norm, and these directly influence reporting of events. In both kinds of society, journalists are normally open to one form or another of subsidy from the people they are supposed to be covering impartially.

## What Kind of Democratisation?

So far, we have simply used the term “democracy” without any specification or qualification, but the nature of the emerging systems described above makes at least some discussion of the content of such a term essential. Of course, definitions of democracy differ very widely. At one pole, there are theories of elite democracy that concentrate simply on whether the purely formal methods of periodic election are in place, and regard it as both necessary and desirable that a small layer of professional politicians monopolises the business of government. At the other extreme, there are radical theories of democracy that consider its completion can be measured by the degree to which ordinary people are able to exercise some sort of control over their lives.<sup>8</sup> Whatever view we take of these theories, they direct our attention to different aspects of social reality. Our concentration so far has been on questions that sit easily with the elite theories, and it is reasonable to ask what aspects of the democratisation process might radical theories bring to light?

It is a matter of simple historical fact that radical democratic demands were barely present in the European transition, and radical democratic outcomes completely absent. In the case of Poland, where there was the greatest popular mobilisation against the regime, demands for the radical democratisation of the mass media certainly gained a mass following but, as Karol Jakubowicz long ago demonstrated, these were marginalised in the course of the negotiations between the reform communists and the more moderate members of Solidarity (Jakubowicz 1993). Only in the DDR did anything like such radical demands seem to have been articulated with any degree of popular support, and indeed there they were partially but temporarily implemented. In this case, however, fusion with the BRD

was overwhelmingly the most popular policy for the long-term future of the society, and part of the price was the acceptance of the media system of the west. That meant the marginalisation of any radical impulses generated by the *wende*. There can be little argument that, everywhere, the best that has been achieved is the kind of media systems that exist in southern European societies, and usually things are a great deal less democratic than that.

The overall outcome in the printed media has been a commercial press and a sharp drop in newspaper readership. Often, these newspapers have some of the least democratic aspects of the western press, for example tabloidisation. Nowhere have readers gained any power over editorial policy or coverage, other than the purely negative sanction of non-purchase. Very seldom have any other than a few elite journalists actually become a powerful force in the direction of the press, and nowhere, so far as I know, have the other employees been able to exercise influence. Power over the printed press has passed from few hands to rather more hands, but not into the hands of the people, either as producers or consumers. In broadcasting, the political elite fights amongst itself for control of state television, and grants commercial licences to capitalists it believes are friendly to the interests of this or that faction, which happens temporarily to command a majority in parliament. None of the plans for the empowerment of ordinary citizens with regard to broadcasting policy have anywhere been implemented.

This new state of affairs has been accepted by journalists and audiences with very little organised opposition. No doubt people have been unhappy about what has transpired, but there is little evidence that they are prepared to challenge the outcomes. Almost the only case of serious resistance to the untrammelled power of the political elite over editorial direction was 2001 revolt of the journalists of Czech state television against the imposition of an unacceptably partisan head of news (trained by the BBC World Service, as it happens). Elsewhere, owners, regulators, politicians and broadcasters have performed the most extraordinary political acrobatics, without any hint of resistance.

Everywhere, the outcome of a great revolution has been, at best, the most limited, most stunted, most formalistic kind of democratic media. This is an unusual outcome from the overthrow of dictatorships. The normal historical pattern is that the fall of a dictatorship unleashes the most varied range of popular mobilisations. Such mobilisations are often accompanied by struggles over the extent of democratic control of enterprises, and they often take a particularly virulent form within the mass media. The case of "overenthusiastic democratisation" in Japan in the period 1945-47 is a well-known Asian example, and Portugal in 1974 provides a good European equivalent. The normalisation of the aftermath of such revolutions usually involves a series of measures aimed at breaking the power of such groups so that the new rulers can mould the media in their image. The absence of such struggles, and the failure of journalists, producers and other media workers to organise themselves to resist either the theft of the organisations they worked for or the long string of political interventions into the media is a very striking aspect of the development in Central and Eastern Europe.

The reasons for this outcome are undoubtedly extremely complex, and I can only indicate the outlines of my view here. In the first place, the terrain of transformation was not conducive to radical democracy. In many countries, the transformation was in the hands of negotiators drawn from the reform-minded sections of

the old elite and the more moderate of the opposition forces. One of their main concerns, for different reasons on both sides, was to prevent any destabilising popular mobilisations: after all, Poland had been a salutary lesson of the sort of things that could develop if you let the cat of popular mobilisation out of the bag. In some cases, due to internal conflicts between sectors of the old elite, or the lack of any credible interlocutors for a negotiated transformation, there was indeed some popular mobilisation, most recently and interestingly in Serbia, but in all cases it was sectors of the bureaucracy or of the moderate opposition that quickly took control and demobilised popular opposition. In both cases, leadership fell to groups who set very limited agendas of change, both in terms of structures and of personnel. In no case was the popular mobilisation as independently led, as deep-rooted, as long-lived or as widespread as it had been in Poland a decade before. In such circumstances, it is hard for the mass of the population to break from the habits of passivity and deference to authority, to gain self-confidence, and to articulate any coherent view of their own interests that might include radical democracy.

The second reason was more subjective. The survey evidence, mostly from Poland, shows that while the majority of the population was hostile to the regime, it was not enthusiastic for capitalism. The majority seemed to want some sort of reformed “socialist” society, fuzzily located between Sweden and Yugoslavia. The more coherent oppositional forces, however, were a different matter. Mostly, they wanted “civil society,” and in practice that meant capitalism. The one force that was missing was any serious body of opinion that wanted radical democracy. In the historical perspective, the struggle for democracy, let alone radical democracy, has been one of the defining characteristics of the left. But in the communist countries something that most people thought of as “the left” was in power and hopelessly compromised as the living embodiment of the negation of democracy of any sort at all. Even those who might have wanted to extend the scope of democracy faced an insoluble problem. There is always a question mark about how far radical democracy (actually, any democracy) is compatible with economic tyranny. In order to start solving the questions posed by radical democracy, one inevitably starts asking the questions about the ownership of productive property that are historically associated with the left. Since in a communist country one only had to glance around to see that the answers to those questions seemed to lead directly to both economic and political tyranny, it certainly looked sensible to settle for a compromise that promised economic tyranny but political freedom. There were plenty of people who were prepared to argue and plan, and even suffer, for bourgeois democracy, but there was hardly anyone who could even give voice to any aspiration for radical democracy.

The outcomes in Europe were therefore, as people used to say, overdetermined by a conjuncture of objective circumstances and subjective political will. The people who might have had an interest in radical democracy mostly appeared as a stage army, to be manipulated by one elite group or another, and the astonishing leaps of public imagination that are traditionally associated with great revolutions had no chance to flourish. At best, the people who came to the fore were more interested in economic reform than political democracy, and at worst they were the shameless nationalist demagogues who have plunged whole regions into the bloody horrors of civil war. It did not matter that the mass of the population wanted a third way: there was no more chance of establishing that in Poland or Russia than in Britain.

To the outsider, the situation in both the communist and capitalist dictatorships of Asia seems rather more hopeful than this. In the former, the fact that the formation of at least the embryo of a private capitalist class before the overthrow the communist regime, and the intimate links between the two, means that it is difficult to present the struggle against political repression as the same thing as the struggle for private enterprise. If you spend all day locked into a firetrap making toys for western children and profits for Chinese businessmen, then it is perhaps not so obvious that your only enemy is the communist political regime. More likely, you see the need for a struggle against political repression as linked with the need for a struggle against private enterprise.

In the case of the capitalist dictatorships, a change of regime does not instantly imply a change of economic order. On the contrary, despite the uncertainties of the last five years, the Asian dictatorships had in common the legitimising claim that they had delivered rapid economic growth – in contrast to the European communists, for whom such claims were twenty years outdated by 1989. The political crisis is often protracted, and alternates with periods of economic crisis and struggle. The linkage between the political and economic is such that the former is seen as very obviously the guarantor of the latter: we have to recall that these countries are anything but examples of free market capitalism, and the heavy hand of state direction has played a central role in the process of industrialisation. There is therefore, here as in China, the possibility of a slippage from the political to the economic that pushes formal democratisation to its limits, and opens spaces for more radical programmes.<sup>9</sup>

We can summarise these considerations in the following hypothesis. The conditions that allowed the revolutions of Eastern Europe to be easily contained within the bounds of formal democracy are not reproduced in Asia. The steady retreat of the main capitalist dictatorships has been accompanied by a much broader popular mobilisation than was true in Europe, and it is likely that the fall of the Chinese communist regime will be accompanied by such upheavals too. We can therefore expect much more far-reaching demands for radical democracy, in the media as much as elsewhere, than were evident in Europe.

## Conclusions

The general tenor of the argument of this article has been, we might say, against geographical exceptionalism. While there are most certainly extremely important national differences, I have tried to identify overall patterns in regime structures and in the nature of regime decay. Within those patterns, I have argued that the most important lines of distinction are between regimes with different degree of fusion between politics and economics. These structural features are the ones that largely shape the patterns of democratisation, and have set limits to how far it has gone.

Put very crudely, there is a greater probability that, during the process of regime decay, significant sections of the mass media will be able to exercise a greater degree of independence from the ruling party in societies resting upon private property than those in which state control of the decisive sectors of productive property is the norm. At the same time, there are opportunities for at least some sorts of formerly oppositional voices to command a wide audience and commercial success in such societies. This contrasts sharply with Stalinist regimes, in which the pos-

sibility for oppositional media gaining a stable position is exceedingly small. Only in moments of acute crisis have oppositional forces either the political or the economic space to develop large-scale media, and only in such circumstances do the internal lines of command in the official media break down and permit open criticism.

These factors mean that the crisis of the regime is, from the point of view of the major mass media, rather more intense in the communist case. The established structures of both political and economic control collapse together: the person who can jail the journalist and the person who can fire the journalist are both discredited because they are one and the same. The employees of the mass media, or at least the senior employees, enjoy a brief flowering of extreme freedom. Soon, however, a combination of political interference and market pressures act to restrict these liberties. In the case of private capitalist dictatorships, on the other hand, the transition means, primarily, a shift in the mechanisms of political control, while economic control remains more or less intact: the person who can jail the journalists is discredited, but the person who can fire the journalist retains a tight hold on their property rights. The senior employees enjoy much less of a springtime of liberty in which they can freely express themselves. Looked at "from the top down," therefore, it appears likely that the decay of communist regimes provides greater opportunities for the construction of democratic media. In both cases, market forces reign, and in both cases political interference might continue, but the communist case supposes a deeper crisis of authority.

Looked at "from the bottom up" however, a different picture emerges. Whatever the abstract possibilities, the endings of European communist regimes generally involved a relatively low level of popular mobilisation, and where such mobilisations did take place they were quickly brought under the control of one section or another of the elite. While some members of the elite were ejected and some outsiders were recruited, there were strong continuities between the old and the new orders, both in personnel and in structures. None of the ideas or organisations necessary to construct and sustain organs of popular self-expression emerged as commanding popular support, at least not in the short term. No alternative structures emerged that could sustain the freedom of the media. Sooner rather than later, the old powers of politicians were reasserted, and the new powers of employers were asserted, without serious opposition.

The extent of popular mobilisations in the democratisation of the private capitalist states in Asia has often been very much greater than in Europe, and it has usually been more protracted. While democratisation brought new political forces into play, there was an obvious continuity in the nature of economic life. This has meant that sometimes organisations committed to quite radical versions of democratisation and popular self-expression have emerged, and sometimes they have been significant players. While the transitions did not necessarily raise quite such a wide range of questions as did those in central and eastern Europe, they released forces that are willing to go beyond the very limited gains achieved there.

Against this background, what I think must certainly be the coming crisis in China is particularly interesting. Because of the peculiar and hybrid model that has developed there, features of both kinds of system are strongly present. We may expect that transition in this case will be marked both by the dual crisis of authority that offered such radical potential in the case of European communism, and by the popular mobilisations that have been such a marked feature of the

cases of capitalist dictatorships in Asia. Perhaps, at long last, the outcome will be that somewhere in the world some form of radically democratic media is finally established.

## Notes:

1. Some of these things changed with the imposition of direct rule from Westminster in the 1970s, but the restrictions on, and manipulation of, the media have continued unabated.
2. I should make it clear that this representation is not based on any suggestion that things 'get worse' as one moves across the spectrum. Bourgeois democracy is certainly better than any of the alternatives in this table, and the distinction between totalitarian and authoritarian regimes has been used for scandalous purposes. As I indicated above, I cannot see any evidence that suggests that what I would call a totalitarian regime, say Cuba, is any 'worse' than a military dictatorship like Pinochet's Chile, and in terms of murders and tortures perpetrated against its own citizens, almost certainly a great deal less criminal. All that I am claiming here is that it is possible to make a useful distinction between regimes that rest on military terror as a prime instrument and those which have substantial civil apparatuses for organising and controlling their population.
3. The distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian, and indeed the provenance of the latter category, are highly contentious. I have examined this question at some length elsewhere (Sparks 1998, 21-32).
4. We should note, however, in some cases there are some significant counter tendencies to pure market forces, notably licence fees and press subsidies.
5. Just as an aside, Kipling was certainly an imperialist, but he was not the simple-minded racist than is often supposed. A fuller quotation of the poem from which the famous line above is extracted runs thus:  
 Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,  
 Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgement Seat;  
 But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,  
 When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!  
 A great deal of Kipling's prose, notably the novel *Kim*, is precisely concerned with exploring how porous and shifting the boundaries between East and West actually were even within the undoubtedly racist British Empire.
6. So enthusiastically did so many Japanese take up this 'western' idea and try to put it into practice that the US rulers quickly found they preferred to backtrack and reach a deal with the emperor and his anti-democratic allies.
7. I am summarising the content of my earlier work here (e.g. Sparks 1998).
8. Obviously, these different definitions are closely associated with normative positions towards the struggle for democratisation. We cannot decide between these in this context, but we should at least be clear what our orientations are: mine is unequivocally towards the radical democratic end of the spectrum. Others probably regard the elite view as preferable.
9. In my misspent youth, I used to write that the fusion of politics and economics meant that regime change in communist countries was likely to mean a greater degree of popular mobilisation and empowerment than in private capitalist dictatorships. In the latter, there would always be individual members of the bourgeoisie who, whether sincerely or not, identified with the democratic opposition. In the former, there was much less possibility for divisions within the ruling class. I thought they were a prime case of the old proverb 'hold together or swing together'. It did not look as though there were the social organisations that could effect a transition without a thoroughgoing popular uprising. Well, I was wrong, again. The willingness of a section of bureaucracy to negotiate an end to their collective rule in return for their own personal prosperity, and the emergence of an opposition that was prepared to compromise with the structures and personnel of the old regimes, meant that, in the end, Hungary in 1956 was not the model of social change that I had anticipated.

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