# MEDIA, DEMOCRACY AND GLOBALISATION:

## A COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK

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## Abstract

The differences within and between Western and Eastern democracies are so significant that the concept of multiple democracies is proposed. To most of the developing world, democratisation is transculturation — a process by which Western democracy is transformed for self-aggrandisement. In the age of globalisation, the media are potentially important sources of international and domestic referencing. Media and democratisation are mutually reinforcing, one being constituted by the other. The roles of the media in a society are very much defined by its mode of media control, which varies mainly with its power structure. With concentrated power, the media tend to demote democracy; the opposite is true when equity reigns. Based on a mixed use of inducements and constraints in media control, four modes of state-press relationships are identified: laissez faire, repression, incorporation and co-optation. Each ideal type entails certain media roles that have important implications for democratisation. Media can perform both positive and negative functions in regard to democracy, depending on the prevailing mode of power distribution and specific social and organisational contexts. Each mode of media control and the corresponding media roles may shift as power is restructured. Media usually assume a more emancipatory role as the power structure becomes more decentralised.

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Democracy has been an integral part of Western nations where democratic values and institutions are relatively stable and are sometimes taken for granted, forming what may be called mature democracies. Some form of free and independent press system has organically arisen in these democracies. In contrast, democracy is treated only as part of the unfinished modernisation project in the developing world. With democratic values and institutions in the making, democratisation can take an evolutionary or revolutionary path. Whatever forms democratic struggles may take, the configuration of media is always shaping, and being shaped by, the level of democratisation. This observation not only applies to the transitional societies but also to mature democracies. It is with this basic understanding that I set out to try to articulate the interrelationships between media and democratisation in a globalising environment. Before I examine these interrelationships, I shall first explore the notion of democracy and how the democratic ideas are transformed as they spread around the world.

## Multiple Democracies

What constitutes democracy is far from settled. It is subject to various interpretations and contextual influences. To enable general and comparative analysis of democracy, it is necessary for us to identify its essence. A review of some of the works in this area (e.g. Przeworski 1991; Held 1999) has led me to this synthesis: Democracy is a political system with a relatively equitable distribution of political power that is marked by government accountability, power checks and balances, and systemic openness to fair political competition. Democracy is achieved not by the goodwill of individuals. It operates inside an institutional framework which enables various political forces to compete for the realisation of their interests by a set of rules (Przeworski 1991). No one has full control of the outcome of such contestations. Democratisation can therefore be viewed as a process by which political contestation opens to fair participation within an institutional framework.

In reality, all democracies are historical and contextualised. They may differ in terms of institutional arrangement, election mechanisms, political culture and other traits. Seen from a world perspective, according to Nathan (1985), the American version of democracy is rather unusual because of its emphasis on individual rights, tolerance for the expression of conflict and antagonism in politics, the advancement of self-interest with the help of the state, and an uncommon judicial review system. In contrast, other democracies may share a political outlook that puts greater value on the harmony between the citizen and the state, one-party leadership, the priority of public interest over citizens' rights, and the power of the state to make laws it deems necessary. These characteristics are unevenly reflected in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, India, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, and so on. Although these countries may have been tainted by croniness, corruption, illiteracy, and poverty, it is not easy to write them off as authoritarianism or non-democracies altogether.[1] Their governments are procedurally voted into offices, subject to various levels of checks and balances, and abide by a democratic constitution. All these seemingly contradictions suggest that democracy does not exist in the singular but in multiple forms.

This is analogous to the observation that there is not just one modernity but multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 1999; Chan and Ma 2002). I bring in the idea of

modernity because, contrary to what some contemporary rulers think, modernity is much more than the introduction of a liberal economy (Wittrock 2000). It is also linked to a democratic revolution, a package of social, organisational, technological and academic arrangements. Modernity was at first viewed as an end state towards which all societies are inevitably moving. This teleological view of history assumes that the path of development taken by Western societies provides the universal model which all societies must follow sooner or later (Hall 1992). However, comparative development has demonstrated that such unconditional universalism is fallacious: history simply does not unfold according to one logic, both paths and consequences may vary with contingencies. The successes of Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, Korea, and Hong Kong in achieving modernities that are distinct from the West have formed what Berger (1988, 6) calls a "second case" of capitalist modernity, lending strong support to an alternate conception of historical formation that stresses more on varied paths to development, uneveneness, contradiction, contingency, contextual differences, and diverse outcomes.

The theme of multiple democracies runs even stronger when we examine the within differences among Western democracies. The United States is known for its decentralised democracy whereas the political systems in most Western European countries are comparatively more centralised. Sweden, for example, has historically witnessed a higher level of state intervention than the United States where personal autonomy is given greater value (Waters 1995). Indeed, the interpenetration of state and society in the Scandinavian countries has gone further than any other Western country (Wittrock 1998). The existence of multiple modernities and democracies in the West and East is a refutation of the democratisation theories that assume all societies will one day converge. The experiences of countries spanning from Asia to Latin America have demonstrated that the homogenising and hegemonic assumptions of this Western democratisation program were not fully realised. Like modernity, the best way to understand the contemporary world and democracy, according to Eisenstadt (2000, 2) is to see it "as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs." The idea of multiple democracies presumes that significant differences still exist between societies that are being transformed by globalisation and that the package of democracy originated from the West can be disaggregated and reassembled in different ways. This makes it possible for transculturation to play an important role as political systems encounter, clash and compete.

## Globalisation and the Transculturation of Democracy

On the one hand, the recognition of multiple democracies should sensitise us to the relativity, historicity and diversity of democracy. On the other hand, the thesis of multiple democracies should not be treated as an argument for the absolute relativism of democracy. Although China can claim to be a "democracy with Chinese characteristics," it is difficult for anyone to come up with hard evidence to qualify it as a democracy. For China to be called a democracy, the very definition of democracy given earlier will have to be changed. Countries may vary in the degree to which they are democratised. However, the difference can be so big that democracy can be differentiated from authoritarianism. The idea of multiple democracy, as used here, does not necessarily rule out the basic principle of democ-

racy — the openness of the political system to fair competition. Striking a balance between universalism and particularism in this regard will enable us to better tackle the issues related to democratisation and media in a globalising environment. It is the clash between the globalising and localising forces that help shape how democracy is constituted and reconstituted in the contemporary world.

At the core of globalisation is the notion of connectivity which is found in one form or another in most accounts of globalisation (e.g.:Tomlinson 1999; Giddens 1990; Waters 1995). This implies the increase of global-spatial proximity, the compression of time and space, and the stretching of social relations across distance. The growth of global interconnectedness has resulted in the reduction of effective political instruments available to governments, and greater cost for not joining international collaboration, thus straining the underlying assumption of traditional democratic theory that democracies are merely self-contained national units (Held 1999). In the context of globalisation, democracy should be thought of as a "double-sided process" (Held 2000, 30) — "the deepening of democracy within a national community" as well as "the extension of democratic processes across territorial borders."

To the developing world, democracy is largely a political idea that spreads from the West through colonialism and the expansion of modernity and globalisation. Liberal democracy owes its universal appeal to its being an integral part of the modernisation project which is either imposed on or emulated by the developing countries. If the non-western countries were allowed to have their own preferences, they would probably carry on their original political trajectories — be they authoritarianism, tribalism, theocracy or monarchy — and shy away from importing democracy. They opted for modernisation out of a desire to survive and to compete with the world powers. Again, if they could achieve economic modernisation without democratisation, they might very well try to do that. Indeed, this disjunctive approach, as illustrated by the course of democratic development in China (Nathan 1985), has guided the processes of political development in many countries for as along as it is feasible. But revolutionaries in many countries have learnt from practice that democracy is an inseparable part of the modernity project. They thus draw inspirations from the liberal democracy of the West in overthrowing the traditional political order and establishing a new one.

The globalisation of democracy cannot be a linear process as democracy was born out of specific contexts of Western nations and is tied to important issues such as the redistribution of power, economic interests and ideological representations. It will unavoidably involve contradictory forces trying to promote and demote democratisation at the same time. Very seldom is democracy rejected or imitated in total. Most of the time it is *transculturated* to meet local needs. Whatever works in one culture may not apply in a different context (Hannerz 1996). Cultural mingling and recombination are thus the norms. Based on a study of how a Chinese legend was transformed and incorporated by Disney (Chan 2001; Chan and Ma 2001), I have proposed the notion of transculturation to refer to the process by which a culture is transformed by another for self-aggrandisement. It is an evolving process involving both organisational routines and experimentation through which the foreign culture is decontextualised, essentialised, indigenised and recontextualised. Transculturation always results in the hybridisation of two or more

cultures. While the relative weights of the component cultures may vary in various hybrids, cultural transculturators tend to strike a balance between the foreign and indigenous in order to maintain a relatively stable self-identity. Although the concept of transculturation is initially applied to a cultural artefact such as legend, I think that it is also applicable to the analysis of macroscopic socio-cultural encounters, including the indigenisation and appropriation of democracy.

The transcultural perspective also highlights the power hierarchy in these historical formations. The globalised world retains a power imbalance tilting in favour of the developed centres. The resulting transculturation of democracy therefore shows hybridisations carrying strong imprints of Western democracies. To say the least, they have to always engage in a dialogue with the democratic values and institutions that are cherished in the West. Democracy is thus not merely a diffusion of Western institutions around the world. It involves very diverse and complex historical processes that may give rise to multiple institutional and ideological patterns. Distinctly democratic, these patterns all bear the influences of the cultural premises, traditions, and historical experiences of the reception countries.

Saying that democracy originated from the West is transculturated should by no means imply that it is necessarily transformed beyond recognition when it spreads to other countries. There is no inherent contradiction between the perspective that allows the reduction of democracy to its conceptual core and the omnipresence of the process of transculturation. Democracy, after all, is always a process of becoming. Transculturated democracy can still fulfil the basic properties of democracy.

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## Media Roles and Democratisation

Social change and media roles are interdependent (Jakubowicz 1995). While media roles are predicated on the existence of favourable social conditions, social change can give rise to media actions to influence society. By the same token, democratisation and media constitute a chicken and egg relationship. On the one hand, the extent to which a society is democratised defines the mode of media control and the roles they perform. On the other hand, the media are neither totally autonomous from, nor totally subservient to, the established power. They can play an instrumental role in effecting democratisation or de-democratisation as the case may be. Media and democratisation are mutually reinforcing, one being constituted by the other.

Democratisation is a political struggle among and within the ruling elites and various socio-political forces. In the developing word, democratisation is also a process by which democracy is transculturated. As a rule, all the parties concerned in democratisation will try to seek the endorsement of the media in order to strengthen their positions at the expense of the opponents'. The ways the media frame the issues and render their sympathy will affect the balance of power in a

public debate. Essentially, the media represent resources that can be mobilised to demote or promote democracy. The democratic cause will be served if they can help spread democratic ideals, reflect the voices of contending parties, provide the public with quality and relevant information, articulate the social choices, and facilitate public deliberation. Failing all these functions, democracy will be undermined. In such a case, the media will be maintaining the status quo by legitimating the power centre, marginalising the contending voices, diluting critical information, precluding genuine options, short-circuiting public debates, and demobilising collective behaviours.

What contributions mass media can make towards democratisation varies with a host of determinants such as the power structure, political culture, media configuration, market pressure, organisational constraints, press ideology and personal inclinations. It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a comprehensive review of how all these determinants may interact in defining the roles of media. I would rather concentrate on how they are shaped by the mode of media control that, in turn, is determined by the pattern of power distribution in a given society. It is my contention that the power structure and the location of the media in it are the most important variables that account for various democratic media roles.

### Mode of Media Control

In an attempt to typify the democratic roles of media, Curran (2000) uses the locus by which the political elite relates to other elites and the media in a society as the classificatory criterion. Four ideal types are subsequently identified: The first model, as illustrated by contemporary Russia, represents the domination by the economic elite who exerts its political influence through its power base in the economy, control of private media, funding of political candidates and informal channels of access to the state. In the second model, as broadly represented by Malaysia and South Korea and Taiwan before recent democratisations, the leading group is the political elite who exercises its influence through the media system to other groups in society. Corresponding to some Latin American countries, the third ideal type marks an alliance between the political and economic elites who try to win the popular acceptance of their consensus through the media. The fourth model, typified by liberal corporatism in contemporary Sweden and until the 1980s by Britain, is based on a system of power sharing between organised capital, labour and the state that largely defines discourses in the media.

In another context, Chan and Lee (1991) propose a typology of state-press relationships which deserves an explication here as it has more direct implications for the analysis of the democratic roles of mass media.[2] This typology views the application of power as the exercise of rewards and punishments, as reflected by Gamson's (1968) formulation of "inducement-constraints." Based on how different levels of inducement and constraints are combined to form varying modes of media control, the typology is indicated in Table 1. I shall briefly explicate each ideal type and the accompanying media roles.

The first type, laissez faire, is characterised by a low level of state inducements and a low level of constraints, as commonly found in liberal democracies such as the United States whose power structure is in general more decentralised and pluralistic. With minimal government intervention, the media are primarily left to the

regulation of the market. The journalists working in this system often adopt a form of media professionalism that values objectivity, accuracy and balanced reporting. In practice, this media professionalism represents a general unarticulated commitment to the established authority (Bennett et al 1985; Tuchman 1978). The privately and sometimes publicly owned media tend to reproduce the existing order, by cultivating value consensus rather than resorting to state coercion. Within the boundaries of capitalism and liberal democracy, the press amplifies diverse voices, especially those of legitimated elite dissent. The media render their ultimate support for the existing social system as long as it shows flexibility in adapting to new challenges. They may play a role in the redistribution of political power, but always among the already powerful.

Table 1: A Typology of State—Press Relationships

| | Inducements | |
|---|---|---|
| Constraints | Low | High |
| Low | Laissez-faire | Co-optation |
| High | Repression | Incorporation |

Source: Chan and Lee 1991, 27.

Opposite to laissez faire is repression that is practised in systems with a centralised power structure, as represented by China and other Central and Eastern European countries before the collapse of communism around 1990. In a totalitarian or authoritarian system, the state intrudes into every domain of the civil society and levies strict constraints on the press without delivering a corresponding level of inducements. Outright press control is imposed. A repressed press tends to exist on state subsidy and have little autonomy, especially in the political sphere. Under these circumstances, the mainstream media in general will serve as the mouthpieces of the governing elite, legitimating the status quo, demoting democracy and blocking out dissenting voices. There is little room for the survival of an alternative media. If there is one, it is usually run as the propaganda tool of an underground democratic movement.

Epitomised by Taiwan and South Korea until recent democratisation, state incorporation is marked by a simultaneous or intermittent interplay of repression (high constraints) and co-optation (high inducements) in a system where political power is centralised in the hands of the state. The press is politically kept as a weak, auxiliary, and dependent organ of the state but not strictly as its mouthpiece. Press lords amass huge amounts of wealth before — but, in some cases, because — they are incorporated. But press owners are invariably too imbued with vested interests and dominant ideology to challenge the established power. An incorporated press often garners huge profits from crass commercialism or state favouritism; while politically subservient to the state, the press has a substantial room to manoeuvre in non-political areas. Those who willingly accede to state inducements relish vast economic benefits and political status, but those who contest the power structure would undoubtedly suffer from coercion or suppression.

Colonial Hong Kong is characteristic of yet another type of press control — state co-optation — where a high level of inducements is accompanied by a low

level of constraints. Co-optation is the process of bringing outsiders inside so that the outsiders' views can be in line with those of the central authority. Providing the press with a variety of symbolic and financial inducements such as exclusive information, honours, and government advertising, the state induces the press to be neutral or supportive of the government. The press is not directly penalised for keeping a distance from the government. The cost, if any, is that it will not be rewarded by the state. State co-optation is most common in systems where the press is privately owned and the power checks are not very strong.

Like many ideal types, the boundaries between these models are sometimes not as distinct as they should be. There is a chance for a given country to share the traits of more than one type. It should be understood that the above ideal types are meant for analytical purpose and are made with the modes of media control as the major demarcating line. It should also be recognised that the ideal types are not static and can be transformed as a result of power reconfiguration or democratisation. At this juncture, I shall turn to how media roles may shift with power change.

### The Shifting of Media Roles

The above typology assumes (Chan and Lee 1991) that the configuration of media is primarily a function of the pattern of power distribution. Media roles are embedded in, and elaborated by, the underpinning processes of social formations. From this vintage, mass media reflect the perspectives of the power structure. In addition, they react to the changing power relations in a society. Most of the time, such reflection and reaction are uneven. The media construct realities to make sense of the changing power dynamics. The mode of media control and its associated media functions may change as power is realigned. In the instance when a "hard" authoritarianism is transformed into a "soft" authoritarianism as a result of growing democratisation, the state may change its press control from *incorporation* to *co-optation*. This process was rendered visible when South Korea and Taiwan, where opposition parties and grass-root groups gained solid legitimacy to challenge the ruling regime's monopoly in the late 1980s and 1990s. The vibrancy of market competition also served to reduce press reliance on the state and to loosen state coercion of the press. The relaxed control of media results in an expanded public sphere which further reinforces democratisation.

These examples, coupled with other cases of transitional societies from Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Sparks 1998; Downing 1996; Paletz, Jakubowicz and Novosel 1995), reconfirm this conclusion: Shifts of media roles will occur as the dominant power structure is fundamentally upset and as new socio-political configurations emerge. From an organisational perspective, political transition generates environmental uncertainty. Both the power structure and the press have to develop strategic interorganisational relations to cope with, and to reduce, this uncertainty. Furthermore, internal resources of the press are not capable of self-maintenance; the press must enter into transactions and relations with the new political structure in the changing environment for further resources and services. This means that, in order to consolidate their legitimacy, power centres have to co-opt the press with the delivery of considerable inducements without imposing concomitant constraints. The press in turn has to accommodate this pressure by according the power centres with legitimisation.

The shift from one mode of media control to another does not mean the old is totally eradicated. As the new is born within the old, the traits of one mode may overlap with those of another. It takes time and the right social conditions for the new media roles to take root and to develop to the full. This is evidenced by many examples in Central and Eastern Europe where media are operating in an environment that is still susceptible to influence from the past (Jakubowicz 1995), so much so that "the oppressive and exploitative social relations that were once characterised of the old order have not been altered fundamentally" (Sparks 1998, 188). While the Central and Eastern European countries vary in their media situation, they are observed to be sharing two general patterns (Fabris 1995): First, mixed forms of old and new authoritarian structures as well as new commercial spheres linger on and co-exist. Second, although the Western media "logic" has prevailed in principle, the traditional Eastern European media philosophies and behaviour patterns survive and continue to have their influence felt.

The shifts of media roles are not always as dramatic as in cases of major power restructuring (Chan and Lee 1991). As an agent of media control, media professionalism was not born with journalism in the United States. It is the result of a historical evolution spanning the development of market democracy in the 1830s (Schudson 1978). It is still evolving, varying its emphasis on objectivity and advocacy and responding to the extent to which the society is split. The democratising function of the media can vary as a result of splits in a given power structure, especially if disagreements develop within the central elites. These conflicts are generally reproduced in the media, giving the impression that the media are indeed engaging in watchdog activity and public debate (Curran 2000). The media may rise to represent critical public opinion and become an emancipatory force when they break from the spell of the prevailing power system under the combined influence of an energised civil society, well-developed alternative networks of communication, professional oriented media staffs, and consumer pressure. In a similar vein, Hallin (1986) observes that the American media did not question their government's policy on Vietnam until after the issue had become a focus of rancorous dissent in the Congress and the two-party politics.

## Media Roles in the Context of Globalization

The role of media in the globalisation of democracy should not be understood in term of what some have come to called a global public sphere. As Sparks (2000) has argued, no media is genuinely global in nature. In addition, the so-called global media's audience are "too small, too rich and too English-speaking to be considered inclusive." There is little evidence that supports the existence of a global public sphere and the public sphere remains largely state-oriented. The lack of a global public sphere, however, should not lead one to deny that media play an important role in facilitating the spread of democracy around the world via demonstration (O'Neil 1998). It is usually through the media that both the elite and the public of one country learn about social change in another, get encouraged, and press for similar change in their home country. In effect, the global communication network is a network that helps foster global diffusion of democracy. Contemporary media indeed provide an efficient link among the elites around the world. People are inspired by events that happen far away. It is no coincidence that one

country after another was baptised by democracy in the 1990s. People power, as practised in the Philippines, is a source of motivation for many that struggle for democracy around the world. Images of the 1989 pro-democracy movement in China are still vivid in the world's collective memory. The First Amendment of the American constitution finds its way into the debates about press freedom in many countries that are geographically and politically far off from the United States. There is no question that all these globalising trends are made possible with the help of mass media at both the domestic and international level.

The international media are sources of international and domestic referencing. They can undermine the governing elite's monopoly of information in authoritarian systems. A good illustration is the significant impact of Western films, literature, and radio programs on the collapse of Eastern Europe. According to Fabris (1995, 222-223), the Western media "represented not only a corrective to the local official media, but at the same time symbolised 'codes of modernity' that were and are still being associated with most of the products of the Western cultural industries." The influence was particularly strong when Soviet Union's withdrawal had left a "widespread ideological, media, and cultural vacuum." The Western radio stations had for years served as a source of information about events in Eastern and Central Europe. But the foreign media do not act alone. They joined forces with the civil communication channels that had developed next to and around the state-controlled institutions and organisations. The contribution of Western media to democratisation was especially obvious when it helped trigger the domino effect arising from Hungary and Poland. But they are observed to continue to play important roles during the consolidation period.

An emerging issue in this age of globalised communication is whether new information technologies such as the Internet has an impact on democratisation. Take China for instance, it is increasingly recognised that the new media, especially the Internet, plays an important role in China's media liberalisation (Chan and Qiu 2001). Even before the Internet became publicly accessible in the late 1990s, technologies such as cassette tapes, compact disk, VCD, telephone, mobile phone, satellite and cable television constituted an effective force that made the country's media system more open to the world and freer from the monopoly of the party-state (Chan 1994). This trend continues with the Internet, whose liberalising power is enhanced by its global accessibility, channel capacity, interactivity, and decentralised structure. The Chinese authorities do attempt to constrain the liberalising effects of the new media. Consequently, online messages are systematically cleansed, oppositional sites banned, and a few rule-breakers detained for leaking "state secrets." It is true that no technical innovation can sweep out the nation's system of media control overnight. The Chinese Communist Party still has the will and the capability to keep its media, both old and new, in order. But if the Internet is compared to traditional mass media, the former favours greater autonomy and content diversity. This is tied to the characteristics of the Internet as a relatively open, many-to-many network with higher accessibility, interactivity, and international connectivity. The Internet is potentially a useful resource in attempts to achieve greater democracy, allowing for more rapid organisation, communication, and even deliberation.

# Conclusions

Democracy has no end state; it is always becoming. Democratisation is not a uniform and linear process. In contrast with the "mature democracies" in the West, there are numerous developing democracies around the world. The differences within and between Western and Eastern democracies are so significant that the concept of multiple democracies is proposed in lieu of the general assumption of universal democracy. Democratisation is an equitable reconstitution of the power structure. In the age of globalisation, the pressure for more democracy and media equity is not only from within but also from without. To most of the developing world, democratisation is transculturation — a process by which foreign culture, in this case Western democracy, is transformed for self-aggrandisement. In spite of the rapid spread of democracy in the 1990s on a global scale, it is too early to speak of the world having one unitary democratic system and sharing one democratic political culture. Democracy is first of all a national project. But it is susceptible to the influence of regional and global forces. For instance, the United States, long regarded as the world's advocator of democracy, used to put anti-communism above democracy during the Cold War (Lee 2001). Yet with its leadership, the Allied Forces imposed the American-style democratic system and a free press on Japan and West Germany after the Second World War.

The roles of the media in a society are very much defined by its mode of media control, which varies mainly with its power structure. In general, when power is concentrated, media tend to serve as an extension of the state and support the status quo. The prevailing journalistic paradigm is partisan and administrative in nature. When power is more diffused, media can maintain greater relative autonomy and serve as a forum for a wider sector of the public. Associated with this is the journalistic paradigm of media professionalism that operates in a marketised environment. Based on a mixed use of inducements and constraints in media control, four ideal types of state-press relationship are identified: laissez faire, repression, incorporation and co-optation. Each ideal type entails certain media roles that have important implications for democratisation. Media can perform both positive and negative functions in regard to democratisation. They can prevent, resist, promote and accelerate democracy as the case may be, depending on the prevailing mode of power distribution and specific social and organisational contexts. What is especially relevant to the theme of democratisation is that each mode of media control and the corresponding media roles may shift as power is restructured. The media can render a greater emancipatory force when the power structure becomes more decentralised or divisive. Table 2 is a summary of the interrelationships between democratisation and media.

The use of arrows in Figure 2 should not be interpreted as to represent a linear view of historical development. There is no denial that more and more countries around the world are shedding their authoritarian past to take on more democratic features. However, democracies may be reversed, as evidenced by the rise of dictatorship in Germany and Italy before the Second World War. As the Chinese Communist Party assumed power in 1949, it was a setback for democracy in terms of political liberty and press freedom. The key to the transformation of modes of media control lies in the configuration and reconfiguration of socio-political power.

A more equitable distribution of power will always result in a more relaxed mode of media control which, in turn, favours the use of media as a promoter of democracy. It should also be noted that what Table 2 tries to portray are ideal types. In practice, the ideal types are not pure, with one ideal type overlapping with another. The media roles identified in the figure are derived from the mainstream media in each social system. Not shown are the alternative media that may counteract the mainstream media as they relate to democracy.

Table 2: Democratisation and Shifts of Media Roles

| Power Structure | Mode of Media Control | Media roles of Mainstream Media | Social Contingencies |
|---|---|---|---|
| Authoritarianism | Repression | As a mouthpiece of the state | Underdevelopment of media market |
| | | Demoting democracy | |
| | | Demobilising collective behaviour | State media ownership |
| | ↓ | | Underdevelopment of media professionalism |
| | | Supporting established order | |
| | Incorporation | Marginalising contending voices | |
| | | Precluding genuine options | |
| | | | ↓ |
| ↓ | ↓ | | |
| | | ↓ | |
| | Co-optation | | |
| | | As a public forum | Market regulation and/or public media ownership |
| | | Providing quality information | |
| | ↓ | Facilitating public deliberation | Rise of media professionalism |
| | | Articulating social options | Rule of law |
| | Laissez faire | Social mobilisation | High literacy |
| Democracy | | Reflecting public opinion | Democratic political culture |
| | | As a public resource | Relative affluence |

Democracy is more than informing the voters. At its heart is "self-determination, participation, voice and autonomy" that bespeak a political culture for self-development and mutual collective expression (Hague and Loader 1999, 7). The challenge is therefore "to find ways of deepening the democratic stake by enlarging the scope of deliberative processes, enhancing their quality and ensuring that they have perceptible consequences for the decisions taken at various levels of

social and political life" (Thompson 1995, 257). A deliberative democracy in the contemporary society is by definition a mediated democracy, with the media serving as a means of information and as a means of expression. We are entering an age marked by the proliferation of new information technology and globalised communication, how to organise the media system to enhance democracy is a growing challenge.

Democracy assumes the existence of a public sphere where people can carry out rational and informed discourse on public issues. How effective can the media, as a major embodiment of the public sphere, serve this purpose is a question as the media are often geared towards the ruling elites. However, not all the media in a market democracy serve as a source of empowerment and as a public forum. Some choose to roll back democracy and cancel out the pressures for democratisation. The market-driven media, as argued by Curran (2000), are flawed on two counts in this regard: First, the market has favoured the overgrowth of entertainment at the expense of current affairs. It is doubtful whether the media can perform the watchdog function. Second, the collusion between government and the media is growing because of interpenetration in interest and mutual dependence. In other words, the market has become a source of media corruption. Under this circumstance, how to enable the media to fulfil their democratic functions as a check of the power centres and as the public sphere poses a serious question. It is only imperative then for the media to maintain its independence and to put public interest ahead of other considerations. While some scholars (e.g. Curran 2000; Tracey 1998) in the United Kingdom resort to the traditional ideal of public broadcasting as the way out, some of their colleagues across the Atlantic (e.g. Glasser 1999; Carey 1999) think that public journalism may serve to correct the deficiency of a system that is overdriven by the profit motive.

This criticism of market-driven journalism not only applies to the mature democracies but also the developing democracies in Central and Eastern Europe and other parts of the world. However, in authoritarian countries such as China and Vietnam where private media are banned, expanding the media market and allowing private media ownership command a much higher priority in the democratisation project. Without due autonomy and a free environment, it is difficult to envision how the media in these countries realise their potential as a democratising agent. This is analogous to the critique of media professionalism as being inherently biased in favour of the status quo. While that may very well be the case in the advanced democracies, media professionalism and the media market are often regarded as liberating forces in authoritarian countries where the media are tightly controlled by the state (Lee 2000; Ma 2000). While the media market can be restraining, it can promote diversity and countervail arbitrary state power. By the same token, media professionalism can be strategic rituals defending the status quo, it can help promote pluralism and freedom. In spite of the different priorities that developed democracies and developing democracies may attach to the media market and professionalism, the challenge for both is the same: how to enhance the media as sources of empowerment and enlightenment.

Without assuming a linear model of media development, a question often asked is whether marketization will eventually lead to a free press. This question is particularly relevant to market authoritarianism in countries such as China and Viet-

nam. Economic growth and marketization are two important enabling conditions for the development of a more liberal press. Without them, the media will have little chance of economic independence, a precondition for a free and independent press. However, in the absence of democratisation, economic development and marketization — not even private media ownership (Zhao 1998) — will necessarily lead to a free and independent press. The primacy of an equitable redistribution of power is borne out by the case of Singapore whose tight press control contrasts strongly with its advanced economic status (Chan 1997). If cases of Taiwan, Korea, and other Central and Eastern European countries are of any guide, democracy is the very foundation of a free press. Democracy represents socio-political pluralism, an equitable distribution of power and the existence of checks and balances. Media commercialisation under state endorsement may simply give rise to a symbiosis between money and power, resulting in state corporatism. In the case of China, there is no denial that the civil society may continue to grow, intensifying the frictions between the ideological and economic logic and other kinds of social tensions. It should be increasingly difficult for the ruling party to cope with such contradictions without a more equitable redistribution of political power.

From a comparative perspective, all societies are transitional in the sense that they are in a state of flux, with the old being replaced by the new. Many societies have gone through similar social processes and come to share some common features. This forms the social basis upon which we can make general observations on the patterns of interaction between media and democratisation. The extent to which democratisations in various countries differ or resemble is partly dependent on one's levels of analysis. It is in the spirit of fostering a comparative perspective that a broad-brush approach is adopted for this article. But any actual case of democratisation is history-specific and warrants a more contextualised analysis. I believe that it is the combination of comparative analyses and specific case studies, both done at varying levels, that will give us a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between media and democratisation.

## Notes:

1. For an analysis of democratization in the third world, see Bauzon 1992, and Handelman and Tessler 1999.

2. Chan and Lee (1991) were originally interested in articulating how journalistic paradigms, defined as the gestalt worldviews which inform the journalists on what to report and what not to report, relate to the patterns of power distribution and other factors. The observations were reproduced in this section and the next because journalistic paradigms and media roles are closely connected. As a matter of course, part of the credit carried in this section should go to Prof. C.C. Lee, my original co-author.

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