

# YOUR SHOW'S BEEN CUT: THE POLITICS OF INTELLECTUAL PUBLICITY IN CHINA'S BRAVE NEW MEDIA WORLD

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## Abstract

This paper examines the increasingly important communication politics between the media and intellectual fields in China's brave new media world. It starts by outlining key factors that have shaped the evolving post-1989 politics of intellectual publicity in China. It then describes a deep "liberal versus new left" division within the Chinese intellectual field and the ascending power of the *Nanfang Weekend* and liberal intellectual alliance within China's CCP-controlled media system. In a subsequent case study, I analyse how the destructive logics of media sensationalism, academic corruption, ideological polarisation, and "liberal media instrumentalism" have intersected to spectacularise intellectual in-fights and distract both the media and the academy from engaging the public around the urgent political economic and social issues of the day.

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## Introduction

Chinese media and intellectuals have been extensively studied in their respective relationships vis-à-vis the Chinese state, and more recently, in terms of how they each have been caught “between state and market” or “the party line and the bottom line” (Zhao 1998). There are also studies of prominent Chinese intellectuals working in the media during the Mao era, most notably Deng Tuo, who served as an editor-in-chief of the People’s Daily during the Mao era (Cheek 1997). However, there has been less analysis of the dynamics of interaction between media and intellectuals and its implications for Chinese polity and society. As Bourdieu put it, the political, social science, and journalistic fields “have in common the fact that they all lay claim to the imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world,” and “that they are the site of internal struggles for the imposition of the dominant principle of vision and division” (Bourdieu 2005, 36). The Chinese equivalents of Bourdieu’s highly theorised concept of the “field” – “circle” (jie) or “sphere” (ling yu) – are more descriptive than analytical. The degree of relative autonomy and the dynamics of interaction among the three fields in contemporary China are also quite different from those of Bourdieu’s France. Nevertheless, Bourdieu’s observation of how, “for a number of years now,” and with regard to “symbolic production,” “the journalistic field has exerted an increasingly powerful hold ... on the field of the social sciences and the political field,” is increasingly pertinent to contemporary China. As the spring-summer 2010 *Nanfang Weekend*-initiated accusations of plagiarism against leading “new left” scholar Wang Hui underscores, there is an imperative to critically examine the evolving politics of intellectual publicity in China and assess its implications for the struggles over the “vision and division” in relation to China’s transformation. This inevitably involves case studies of individual intellectuals and media outlets. However, in line with Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 96-97) definition of a field as “a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions,” I foreground a dynamic relationship between structure and agency both within and between the media and intellectual fields. Lurking in the background are their evolving positions within China’s state-society nexus and their imbrications in Chinese social power relations.

I begin with a discussion of post-1989 developments in Chinese intellectual and media fields that have intersected to shape the new politics of intellectual publicity, including the commercialisation and fragmentation of the Chinese media field, the rise of the expert discourse and the ascendancy of neoliberal market economics as the most powerful intellectual discourse in the media, the selective re-incorporation of elite intellectuals in the post-1989 market authoritarian social order on the one hand and the ideological polarisation of the Chinese intellectual field along the “liberal versus new left” fissure on the other. The explosion of the Internet and the resultant incorporation of a wider educated stratum in the new politics of intellectual publicity and the intensification of global intellectual flows are two further developments that I will discuss as well in this regard. I then describe the ascending discursive alliance between *Nanfang Weekend* – China’s most influential intellectual oriented post-Mao print media outlet – and liberal intellectuals since the late 1990s. Finally, I place the intertwined struggles for journalistic and academic norms and for the “imposition of the dominant principle of vision and division”

in China in the post 2008-2009 global political economic and intellectual contexts and analyse the *Nanfang Weekend*-led plagiarism accusation against Wang Hui in March 2010 as part of these struggles.

I do not assume *a priori* definitions of intellectuals. Rather, I specify which group or what type of intellectuals has access to what kind of media in historically specific discursive settings. My categories of the intellectuals range from the broadest Chinese understanding of those having high-school or above education to the narrower one of the “college intellectual,” i.e. those with positions in the academy. Thus, contrary to the prevailing tendency in the Western media and academy to associate Chinese intellectuals with writers and those working in the humanities, especially those who speak the language of the dominant Western liberal democratic discourse – the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo epitomises a narrow and highly politicised notion of the Chinese intellectual – I aim to provide a broader analysis of intellectual publicity. For this reason, economists – an important category of college and establishment intellectuals in China’s reform era, assume a pivotal role in my mapping of the intersections of what Bourdieu described as the “social science” and “journalistic” fields. Similarly, I extend Bourdieu’s “journalistic field” to include not only the print and broadcast media, but also the Internet. I argue that the core issue in the politics of intellectual publicity is precisely about who assumes the status of intellectual authority to define the visions and divisions of the world and who has access to what kind of medium in the hierarchy of accessibility and credibility within the realm of mediated representation.

### Media Commercialisation, Neoliberal Economics, and the Rise of *Nanfang Weekend* as a Liberal Intellectual Organ in Post-1989 China

Post-1989 developments in the Chinese media and intellectual fields have significantly redefined both the form and substance of Chinese intellectual publicity. With the purge of “bourgeoisie liberalisation” elements in the official party organs and the closure and reorganisation of intellectual-oriented media outlets deemed to have “bourgeoisie liberalisation” tendencies, the media were brought back under the closer control of the CCP’s propaganda department after the relative openness of the immediate pre-1989 period (Zhao 1998, 46). However, although “old leftists” briefly regained their discursive space in the official media in the immediate post-1989 period (Brady 2008; Zhao 2008), waves of commercialisation soon engulfed the Chinese media field after 1992. The implications for intellectual publicity are multifaceted and paradoxical. On the one hand, commercialisation marginalised humanistic intellectuals in general and a rising capitalist consumer culture quickly brought the demise of the “high culture fever” of the 1980s (Jing Wang 1996, 116). This discursive marginalisation, along with the relative decline in the income of “college intellectuals” vis-à-vis the newly enriched business strata, led Xu Jilin to comment on the “second marginalisation” of intellectuals in the PRC, that is, after their “first marginalisation” during the Cultural Revolution: “During the early and mid-1990s, intellectuals suddenly dropped to the status of the ordinary folks. This is their most painful period” (Xu 2010). The key difference, Xu Jilin (2005, 4) pointed out, is that this time it was not the state, but society, more precisely, a market society, which crushed the intellectuals’ “dream of returning to society’s centre.”

However, this “second marginalisation” is not only temporary, but also partial – unless one defines intellectuals narrowly as humanistic intellectuals critical of the state, as opposed to, say, pro-market economists who have not only been able to secure powerful positions within the state’s economic reform apparatuses, but also have been able to translate their media celebrity status to hefty speech fees and even cash or stock compensation for company board positions. Moreover, to the extent that the state continues to enforce explicit media bans on outspoken intellectuals ranging from dissidents of the 1989 era such as Liu Xiaobo and Dai Qing to whomever it deems to have gone beyond its permissible ideological boundaries, the state’s role in “burying” certain intellectuals remains important. Nor did the economic status of “college intellectuals” as a whole dropped to that of the “ordinary folks,” even if we define the “ordinary folks” in relation to the urban populace (forget about the peasants!) and even if this might be the case for a few short years in the early 1990s. Indeed, if one of the key appeals of intellectual publicity in the 1980s was to empower the intellectual strata and to improve their social economic status, especially those working in the education system, many eventually got it in the post-1989 Chinese political economy. By the late 1990s, not only the state had recognised the importance of “college intellectuals” in legitimating its power and the broader strata of “knowledge workers” in promoting economic development in the “knowledge economy,” but also it had recentralised its extractive power and thus repossessed the economic resources to “buy off” “college intellectuals.” While the salaries of front line workers remained stagnant and even declined throughout the 1990s, the salaries of teachers and “college intellectuals” increased significantly in the late 1990s. At the same time, the state began to enrich “college intellectuals” by either directly injecting research funds to higher education (especially to elite universities and scholars) in the name of boosting China’s national power through science and education or indirectly by allowing the drastic marketisation of high education, that is, by empowering the college intellectual strata to extract directly from society. Consequently, in a movement that is oppositional to the late Qing period or the immediate post-1989 period, when intellectuals sought fulfilment outside the orbit of the state, “a large number of intellectuals began to return to the system to seek rent, and to return to ‘feed on the emperor’s grain’” (Xu 2010). In the context of a state-administered “feeding frenzy” and a highly bureaucratised, marketised, and competitive academic culture, the “intellectual opportunism” of the pre-1989 period that Dingxin Zhao (2001) wrote about evolved into widespread corruption, fraud, corner-cutting, and a “getting fame/rich quick” mentality.

In the discursive realm, although humanist intellectuals and writers lost their dominant position in the official media, a commercialised media system, under the state’s watchful eyes, provided expanded space for intellectual expression of certain kinds. On the one hand, the state continues to contain radical liberal intellectuals who openly advocate “bourgeoisie liberalisation,” especially multi-party democracy and the wholesale privatisation of the economy. On the other hand, continuing an ideological tendency already set in motion in the 1980s, left-leaning critical perspectives further lost out in the struggle for intellectual publicity in the post-1992 media political economy. On the political plane, Deng’s instruction of “guarding against the right but primarily against the left,” together with his “no debate” decree – that is, there should be no debate over the capitalist or socialist

nature of the economic reforms, continued to silence the party's "old leftists" in the post-1992 march toward accelerated marketisation. At the same time, media commercialisation resulted in a structural bias against left-leaning perspectives, as advertising-supported media outlets cater to the economic interests of advertisers and the neoliberal political and social sensibilities of middle class consumers.

Along with the selected re-incorporation of the intellectual strata into the post-1992 political economy and the state's growing reliance on experts to legitimate and administrate its market-oriented reform and global reintegration projects, the experts assumed a prominent discursive position in the media. Market-oriented media outlets, specifically, mass appeal urban dailies which have emerged since the late 1990s and a rapidly expanding business press, have consistently provided spaces for the expert perspective on economic, social, and cultural issues since the 1990s. By the early 2000s, these newly established market-oriented media outlets, typically urban subsidiaries of provincial party organs and broadcast stations, have become the most influential and dynamic segment of the Chinese media system, or, in their self-promotional slogan, the Chinese media system's "new mainstream." Most notably, in a significant development in journalistic writing in the 1990s, Chinese news reports, inspired by Western style of professionalism, began to incorporate a limited range of "expert opinion." The expert interview – in the form of newspaper features and television forums, became a popular genre. However, the Western journalistic convention of "balance" – that is, citing experts who hold opposing views on a controversial issue, is rarely practiced.

The result was the entrenchment of the neo-liberal perspective on economic and social issues as the universalising and rationalising intellectual discourse in the media. If the iconic figurers of intellectual publicity in the 1980s were writers and humanistic scholars such as Liu Binyan and Li Zehuo, economists, most specifically, neoliberal economists who try to model the Chinese economy in the idealised image of a Western-style free market capitalist economy, become the new heroes of media publicity throughout the 1990s. Market Wu (Wu Jinglian), Shareholding Li (Yining), and Bankruptcy Cao (Siyuan) – economists who advocate market reforms through various market mechanisms, became household names. The depoliticised and capitalised "human" (ren) in the "new Enlightenment" humanistic discourse of the 1980s – then a critical discourse vis-à-vis the class struggle discourse of the Mao era – had been implicitly reconstituted as the "economic man" of market economics, while the market had come to be celebrated as the best mechanism for individual self-realisation (He 2010, 80-81). Democracy, in a triumphant post-1989 neoliberal globalisation discourse that not only echoed Francis Fukuyama's (1992) "end of history" thesis but also resonated with the human rights discourse of Western governments, follows the market economy. In media coverage of China's WTO accession agreement with the U.S. in 1999, for example, a whole army of pro-market and pro-WTO economists in elite universities and government research institutions served as the chief interpreters and elaborators of the Chinese state's attempt to reintegrate itself with the global market through WTO accession (for a detailed analysis, see Zhao 2003, 42-43). Liberal intellectuals outside the economic field, meanwhile, lent their support of China's WTO entry by noting how further global economic integration and the rule-based WTO will bring democracy to Chinese politics, or in the words of Beijing University historian Gao Yin in a *Nan-*

*fang Weekend* article, “WTO entry will further broaden the avenue to democracy in China” (Gao 2001). In this way, neo-liberal economists and liberal intellectuals in other fields formed a powerful ideological alliance in the media.

At the centre of this ideological alliance was the rise of the *Nanfang Weekend* as the *de facto* organ of post-1989 liberal intellectual publicity. Although liberal intellectuals suffered a huge blow in 1989 and lost much of the media space they had gained in the pre-1989 period, they have gradually regained new space in the post-1989 commercialised media system. This space centres on the *Nanfang Weekend*, a market-oriented subsidiary of the CCP Guangdong provincial party organ, the *Nanfang Daily*. Perhaps symbolic of the institutional and intellectual continuities between the 1980s and 1990s, the *Nanfang Weekend*, found in 1984, is a product of the first wave of media commercialisation in post-Mao China – the “weekend edition fever” in the early 1980s, a process in which party organs published market-oriented weekend supplements to boost revenues. Compared to the *Nanfang Daily*, which has an official mandate to fulfill its political propaganda function, the *Nanfang Weekend*, while continuing to be regulated by various forms of party control, assumed more editorial autonomy and experimented with the provision of “journalism for the market” (Zhao 1998, 134). Initially, its officially prescribed status as the *Nanfang Daily*’s weekend supplement had confined its subject matter to cultural and economic issues, as well as sensational stories of human interest dealing with crime and corruption scandals. This formula not only brought it immediate commercial success in Guangdong, but also made it one of the most widely read newspapers in China in the early 1990s. However, rather than appealing to the lowest common denominator, it started to cultivate an elite national intellectual readership and solicit intellectual-contributors of national status to its special feature columns. As prominent writers such as Wang Meng and Jiang Zilong started to guest-edit its “Weekend Tea Forum” in the immediate post-1989 period of 1991-1992, and as leading liberal scholars such as Zhu Xueqin, Xu Youyu, Liu Junning, Qin Hui, Wang Xiaobo, and He Weifang became regular contributors from the mid-1990s onwards, the paper successfully established itself as a forum for the country’s liberal intellectuals and the educated urban strata (Hong 2005).

By the mid to late 1990s, the *Nanfang Weekend* and liberal intellectuals had forged a strong alliance to speak out on matters related to China (Hong 2005; Zhao and Xing forthcoming). While the paper gains political and intellectual influence by providing a space for liberal intellectuals, liberal intellectuals gain their prominence in the public realm through the paper. By this time, the “highly unified historical and cultural consciousness” that had existed in the Chinese intellectual field in the 1980s had become fractured as Chinese intellectuals tried to understand the drastic social changes since the early 1990s and related themselves to a once again “fractured” (Sun 2003) Chinese society. Specifically, Wang Hui’s 1997 essay, “Contemporary Chinese Thoughts and the Question of Modernity” (English version, Wang Hui, 1998), which first appeared in the intellectual journal *Tianyan*, challenged the validity of the “new Enlightenment” discourse of the 1980s in analysing contemporary Chinese problems. This marked the beginning of the “liberal versus new left” debate in the intellectual field (for one of the early accounts of this debate in English, see Fewsmith 2001). While there are nuances and internal divisions within this debate, in broad stroke, this debate pits a “liberal” perspective that

rejects China's revolutionary legacies and embraces liberal capitalist democracy and the values of free market, private property, and human rights as "the end of history" against a "new left" perspective that refuses to bury China's revolutionary past and calls for institutional innovations to renew a radical democratic socialist vision based on a critique and transcendence of capitalist modernity (Zhang 1998, 135). At stake are different notions of democracy, different perceptions of Chinese reality, and different visions of China's future (Zheng 2004).

Contrary to the pre-1989 era when a higher degree of integration between the political, intellectual and media fields had meant that the highest level CCP leaders and the most authoritative party organs were involved in major media debates – exemplified both by the 1978 "Truth Criteria" debate initiated by the central party organ *Guangming Daily* and involved then CCP Organisational Department Director Hu Yaobang and by CCTV's highly controversial 1988 documentary *River Elegy*, which popularised hot intellectual ideas of the day and had the backing of then CCP General Secretary Zhao Ziyang – official media outlets such as the *Guangming Daily* and CCTV were not the sites of this post-1989 intellectual debate. This underscored the relative autonomy both the media and intellectual fields have gained vis-à-vis the political field on the one hand and the separation between the media and intellectual fields on the other. Much of the "liberal versus new left" debate occurred in specialised domestic academic journals such as *Reading*, *Tianya* or overseas publications. The *Nanfang Weekend*, however, emerged as the only mass circulation newspaper that was directly implicated in this debate by serving as a platform for the "liberal" side in this debate. On November 28, 1997, the paper published a special page commemorating the death of liberal theorist Isaiah Berlin, whose endorsement of "negative freedom" over "positive freedom" resonated with Chinese liberal intellectuals. This special page, which was put together with the networking effort of liberal scholar Zhu Xueqin, marked the first attempt in which liberal scholars tried to promote liberalism in a mass media outlet (Hong 2005). In his contribution to the special issue, Zhu Xueqin acknowledged the *Nanfang Weekend* for having accomplished a task that "specialised academic newspapers and journals did not or were unwilling to do" (Zhu 1999, 362). On December 25, 1998, in a direct response to a September 1998 *Tianya* article by "new left" scholar Han Yuhai entitled "Behind the Posture of Liberalism," the *Nanfang Weekend* published Zhu Xueqin's famous essay, "Speaking of Liberalism in 1998" (collected in Zhu, 1999), in an explicit attempt to stake out the liberal position in the debate. In his article, Han Yuhai argued that not only "liberalism" had become the "ideology of contemporary mainstream intellectuals" in China, but also the kind of "liberalism" that its Chinese supporters espoused is an "essentialist" discourse that de-contextualises the market. For his part, Zhu depicted liberalism as a suppressed intellectual discourse in China after 1957. Although it regained ground in China in the 1980s, it had to "borrow other theoretical symbols" at the time. It was only in the late 1990s, with the fragmentation of the Chinese intellectual field, that liberalism emerged as an explicitly articulated discourse. Specifically, Zhu asserted that 1998 marked the year in which liberalism finally braved itself to break a crack in the door to become a manifest discourse. For Zhu, this constituted "the most noteworthy scene in the intellectual and academic circle in 1998." Most famously and contrary to the "new left" argument that China's problems must be understood

in the context of global capitalism, especially a neoliberal global capitalist order in which state power has been mobilised to open up markets and sustain capitalistic social relations, Zhu constructed a binary dichotomy between state and market and made the famous assertion that, in China, the problem is that the “visible foot” of the state had stampeded the “invisible hand” of the market.

Most significantly, the *Nanfang Weekend's* involvement in the debate became a subject of contention between Han Yuhai and Zhu Xueqin. Specifically, in an interview with the more specialised intellectual weekly, the *Book Review Weekly*, Han (collected in Zhu 1999) argued that if the mass media has one “intrinsic character,” it is a tendency to sensationalise or dramatise. In his view, as a newspaper with a large circulation, it is necessary for the *Nanfang Weekend* to be self-reflective and vigilant against such a tendency. By presenting Zhu’s article under the banner of “Reading ‘98,” Han asserted, the paper had not only represented a “misreading” of the “real problems” and “real knowledge” of the Chinese intellectual field in 1998, but also contributed to the “concealment of the true state of the Chinese intellectual circle in 1998” and the “burial of truly significant knowledge and thoughts.” Han then moved on to cite how in 1998, discussions on “ownership reform” and “property rights” had been deepened to involve discussions of “economic democracy” and social justice in the economic field, and how research in foreign trade and financial crisis had brought the problems of globalisation and financial liberalisation to the fore, thus once again clearly underscored the point – a point that has been persistently maintained by the “new left” position – that discussion of contemporary Chinese problems can no longer be separated from the problems of globalisation (Han, collected in Zhu 1999, 409).

Notwithstanding Han’s misgivings about the *Nanfang Weekend's* slant, the paper’s clear ideological stand only helped it to rally more liberal intellectuals under its flag. Between 1999 and 2003, Qin Hui, the top intellectual contributor, wrote nearly 50 column articles for the *Nanfang Weekend*. Liberal legal scholar He Weifang published approximately 40 articles between early 1998 and 2003, ranking second in the number of columns published by a single author in the paper (Hong 2005). That the *Nanfang Weekend* played a pivotal role in rallying Chinese liberal intellectuals is well captured in the following conclusion by Hong Bing, a Fudan University journalism scholar:

*The Nanfang Weekend, a popular weekly outside the domain of scholarly publications, has been able to accomplish the task of aggregating writers and scholars upholding the position of public intellectuals. This is a truly unique scene in the Chinese journalism and intellectual circles of the 1990s. Not a single non-specialised newspaper has been able to accomplish this in the view of this writer. The mutual reception of the Nanfang Weekend and its intellectual contributors is a complicated process of interaction, based on the highly consistent value positions of both sides (Hong 2005).*

Other market oriented subsidiary papers of the *Nanfang Daily* group, most notably the *Nanfang Metropolitan News*, and the *Nanfang People Weekly*, serve as additional forums for liberal intellectuals, making the *Nanfang Daily* group a bastion of liberalism in the Chinese media system. To be sure, these papers have run into troubles with the CCP central propaganda department; however, the Guangdong provincial political authorities have provided them with the necessary



political protection vis-a-vis the central authorities. In any case, and exemplifying the profound contradictions of the Chinese media political economy, the *Nanfang Daily Group*, with the *Nanfang Weekend* as its crown jewel, is one of the CCP's most successful flagship media conglomerates. Indeed, some left-leaning intellectuals, recognising the *Nanfang Daily* group's system of ideological inclusion and exclusion, its rigidly enforced editorial guidelines with regard to the selection of news sources and columnists, as well as its growing national discursive power, have called it "the underground central propaganda department" (*dixia zhongxuanbu*).<sup>1</sup>

## Conflicting Visions, Professional Norms, and an Ugly Turn in the Politics of Chinese Intellectual Publicity in 2010

Although China's political, intellectual and media fields are no longer as tightly integrated as the pre-1989 days, the intellectual and media fields have intertwined in new ways during the period of China's accelerated marketisation and global integration after 1992. To manage the explosive social tensions the post-1992 reforms have engendered and to consolidate its power, the Hu Jintao leadership, which came to power in late 2002, and had to face a wave of popular critiques of the elitist orientation of the reforms since 2004 in the aftermath of the so-called "Lang Xianping Storm" (Zhao 2008), redefined China's developmental model from "high speed to high quality" (Naughton 2010). It also adopted a series of social policies aiming at promoting social justice and equality under the ideological rubric of building a "socialist harmonious society." While it passed a highly controversial Property Right Law in March 2007 and thus further entrenched capitalistic social relations, it continues to frustrate liberal intellectuals' demands for political liberalisation. In response, the *Nanfang Weekend* and its allied liberal intellectuals have escalated their pursuit of the liberal democratic vision by rearticulating it as a universal vision. On May 22, 2008, ten days after the devastating May 12 Wenchuan earthquake, the *Nanfang Weekend*, in an editorial that ostensibly praised the government's swift rescue efforts, set out to redefine the political nature of the PRC state by proclaiming the birth of a [new] "new China" out of the earthquake pains. Making an implicit contradistinction with the state's self-definition of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," the paper defines this "new China" as one in which the state honours "its commitments to its own people and to the whole world with respect to universal values" [of human rights, rule of law and democracy]. In the paper's framing, through its behaviours, the Chinese state has taken a historical turn in renewing its "ruling ideas" and integrating itself with "modern civilisation" (News.ifeng.com 2005). This editorial quickly set off a debate on "universal values," and by September 2008, the *People's Daily* had published a signed editorial to accuse supporters of "universal values" of trying to westernise China and undermine "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (*The Economist* 2010).

On December 10, 2008, the media and intellectual debate over "universal values" took a more dramatic political turn, when hundreds of liberal intellectuals and dissidents signed Charter '08, a political manifesto calling for the end of one-party rule. Proclaiming "freedom, equality and human rights" as "universal common values," the document posits an unavoidable choice for China: to continue authoritarian rule or "recognise universal values, assimilate into the mainstream civilisation,

and build a democratic system” (Charter ‘08 for Reform and Democracy in China, *December 10, 2008*). Not only *River Elegy’s* “azure civilisation” (i.e. Western liberal democratic capitalism) has returned as “mainstream civilisation,” but also once again, a large group of intellectuals appealed to the state to implement their vision of society. The Chinese state responded by jailing Charter ‘08 leader Liu Xiaobo and banning domestic media interviews of any individual who signed the document (Anderlini 2009).

Concurrently, however, new developments in the global political economy, most significantly, the U.S. originated global financial crisis of 2008-2009, have not only challenged the supremacy of neoliberalism and shaken the economic pillars of the “azure civilisation,” but also further exposed the interconnected nature between China and global capitalism. This has further boosted the “new left” critique’s basic starting point, that is, China’s problems need to be understood within the framework of global capitalism and China’s pivotal position within it. The “new left” critique, however, has a complicated relationship with the CCP’s official ideology. To the extent that “new left” intellectuals do not negate the Communist Revolution and have a critique of global capitalism and the unequal power relations it has engendered both inside and outside China, they share common ideological grounds with the Party’s socialist pretensions. This critique, however, went beyond the CCP’s historical critique of capitalism by questioning the modernising project not only of the liberal intelligentsia and technocracy but also of the CCP itself (*Barmé* 2001, 249). In fact, “new left” criticisms of capitalist modernity and their vision of radical democratic politics are fundamentally at odds with the CCP’s paternalist official ideology – even the Hu Jintao leadership’s most “people-centred” version. Moreover, contrary to the CCP’s official nationalism, as He Guimei has asserted, the primary project of these critical Chinese intellectuals since the 1990s has been to explore “critical thoughts of the global capitalist era” which extends the critical Third World tradition of the 1950-1970 period while transcending its economic determinism and single nation-state centric perspective (He Guimei 2010, 366). To pursue this new mode of critical intellectual perspective, “new left” intellectuals have struggled for the relative autonomy of the academic field in the post-1989 period. Gan Yang and Wang Hui, both of whom later became well known as “new left” scholars, for example, were among the founders of the academic journal *Scholar* (*Xueren*) in 1991. Through this journal, they aimed to redress the academic field’s overt politicisation in the 1980s and its deviation from “the academic norms,” and to emphasise the distinction between the academic and political fields. That is, they tried to retreat from “the square” to “the study” and to redefine their own subjectivity from “intellectuals” to “scholars.” As He Guimei argues, in the context of the immediate post-1989 period, this choice of “scholarship” is a gesture of protest against collaboration with the post-1989 power regime and a “highly politicised symbolic action” (He Guimei 2010, 324).

Thus, a fundamental difference exists in terms of intellectual perspective and political strategy. For liberal intellectuals, especially those who were taking the strategy of issuing Charter ‘08, because liberal capitalist democracy and its legitimating values are “universal,” the “transcendence” of the “China/West” dichotomy ends with China’s assimilation into “mainstream civilisation.” For left-leaning intellectuals who resist “the end of history” thesis, “genuine self-reflective critical

thoughts" in the era of globalised capitalism requires a "broader historical and world perspective" that rests on the possibility of a social formation beyond, or "outside" global capitalism (He Guimei 2010, 324). From this perspective, transcending the China/West dichotomy does not necessarily end with China's assimilation into an (imagined) planetary liberal democratic capitalist order, but rests on the possibility of transcending global capitalism. In this sense, I propose that "new left" intellectuals would agree with sociologist Richard Madsen's position "that there may be different concrete forms of democracy," and "far from presuming that a society like China must become like the West, it assumes that the West itself need to search for new ways to revitalise its public spheres. The search for new ways to institutionalise a public sphere under modern (or postmodern) circumstances brings China and the West together in a common quest" (Madsen 1993, 107). From a global "new left" perspective, an argument can be made that this common search for new forms of public life has not only assumed a new urgency in the post-2008 crisis era, but also entailed a search for new modes of organising the economy and new modes of development. Indeed, for world system theorist Immanuel Wallerstein, the conjunction of three elements in the 2008-2009 crisis – the magnitude of the "normal" crash, the rise in costs of production, and "the extra pressure on the system of Chinese (and Asian) growth," "means that we have entered a structural crisis" (Wallerstein 2010, 140). Thus, the question for Wallerstein (2010) is no longer one of how the capitalist system will mend itself but rather, "what will replace the system? What order will emerge from this chaos?" (140). Toward this end, Wallerstein (2010) called forth serious and open intellectual debate about the "parameters of the kind of world-system we want, and the strategy of transition." As Wallerstein (2010, 140) goes on to say, "[T]his requires a willingness to hear those we deem of good will, even if they do not share our views. Open debate will surely build greater camaraderie, and will perhaps keep us from falling into the sectarianism that has always defeated anti-systemic movements."

Rather than busy themselves with debating future visions on a planet scale, the Chinese media and intellectual fields were involved in the production of a publicity spectacle centred on several footnotes in two editions of a book published between 1988 and 1991 by Wang Hui precisely at the moment when Wallerstein issued his call on the pages of the *New Left Review*. By this time, as a member of the Chinese intellectual stratum engaging in exactly what *River Elegy* had envisioned, that is, to "conduct a direct dialogue with maritime civilisation," Wang Hui had achieved his international academic prominence by sticking to what he and his fellows set out to do in the early 1990s, that is, to maintain relative academic autonomy by focusing on scholarly work. However, precisely because of China's global re-integration, the politics of Chinese intellectual publicity has not only become global, but also the "direct dialogue" that *River Elegy* had envisioned turned out to be multi-faceted. That is, China's intellectuals, no longer sharing the unified "New Enlightenment" historical consciousness of the 1980s, are not carrying out this "direct dialogue" in the kind of singularity that *River Elegy* had imagined. Moreover, the complicated intersections among the political, intellectual and media fields at the global and national levels have produced intriguing dynamics. On the one hand, the Western political field and the transnational media field embrace China's highly politicised liberal intellectuals and liberal media outlets. Former U.S. President George W. Bush

welcomed Yu Jie, Wang Yi and Li Boguang, radical Chinese liberal intellectuals who have entrusted their own souls to Western culture by converting to Christianity, to the White House in May 2006. Current U.S. President Obama granted an exclusive interview to the *Nanfang Weekend* during his November 2009 official visit to China with the explicit aim at rewarding this paper and making a point about China's lack of press freedom (for details on this interview, see Zhao and Xing forthcoming). For its part, the Western intellectual field, while giving liberal intellectuals and human rights activists ample institutional and symbolic supports, has also given "new left" scholar Wang Hui prominent academic recognition.

On March 28, 2010, Wang Hui was to reflect upon "Chinese modernity" in his keynote address to the Asian Studies Association Annual Conference in Philadelphia. This was the first time a China-based scholar was invited to address an audience of predominantly Western-based scholars. By then, however, as far as the Chinese world of intellectual publicity was concerned, the issue was not whether Wang Hui had brought prestige to the Chinese academic field, let alone what Wang Hui had to say in this "direct dialogue," but whether he had committed the academic crime of plagiarism: Wang Hui's professional ethics and his very credentials as a scholar was put on the line, by none other than an alliance between *Nanfang Weekend*, and one of its liberal intellectual columnists, Nanjing University literature professor Wang Binbin. Simply, Wang Hui's intellectual show at the global stage was cut by an unfolding domestic media and Internet show.

The accusation was launched in a coordinated, sensational and highly unethical form. Wang Binbin's "bombshell" article accusing Wang Hui of plagiarism in his 1988 dissertation-based book *Against Despair* (*fankang juewang*) was first published in the March 10, 2010 issue of the small circulation academic literary journal *Literature and Art Research* (*Wenyi yanjiu*), and then in the March 25, 2010 edition of the *Nanfang Weekend*. While *Wenyi yanjiu* established the article's academic legitimacy, the *Nanfang Weekend* ensured the article's mass circulation and sensational effect, a tendency that Han Yuhai had warned against at the onset of the paper's partisan involvement in the "liberal versus new left" debate. To dramatise the impact of the article, the *Nanfang Weekend* resorted to a CCP party journalism convention by forwarding Wang Binbin's article with an editorial commentary that not only presumes Wang Hui guilty, but also claims the necessity of outside intervention to overcome the failure of academic self-discipline. Immediately, the media and Internet exploded with news reports, commentaries, as well as forensic attempts to support/refute the accusation, contributing to the making of a media and Internet spectacle that lasted several months in spring and summer 2010. By July 2010, the controversy had led two opposing groupings of domestic and international scholars to issue their respective open appeals to relevant academic authorities. One group, made up of mostly liberal intellectuals, called upon Wang Hui's employer Tsinghua University and his doctoral degree granter, the Chinese Academic of Social Sciences, to take up the *Nanfang Weekend's* allegations and launched an investigation; another group, made up of mostly left-leaning international scholars, defended Wang Hui's academic integrity against a malicious media attack (Ou Qiping 2010). Furthermore, the media and Internet spectacle over Wang Hui provoked netizen "Isaiah" – an anonymous doctoral student – to launch a plagiarism case against leading liberal scholar Zhu Xueqin's doctoral dissertation based book on the Internet

(Shi Jiefeng 2010). The “liberal versus new left” intellectual debate over the future of China evolved into the so-called “Wang-Zhu incident” over academic norms, centring on the academic integrity of this debate’s two leading scholars.

Academic norms are important. The *Nanfang Weekend* raised a legitimate, and indeed urgent, issue; however, Wang Binbin’s mobilisation of symbolic violence and his prosecution-style presentation of what one Western observer characterised as a “pretty thin” case against Wang Hui (Custer 2010),<sup>2</sup> the specific historical and production contexts of Wang Hui’s publication and the evolving nature of academic norms in China, as well as the *Nanfang Weekend*’s blatant instrumentalism and its persistent exclusionary practices in the presentation of the case,<sup>3</sup> undermined the high moral grounds both Wang Binbin and *Nanfang Weekend* claimed in the name of promoting professional norms. Moreover, the *Nanfang Weekend*’s agenda-setting role played into the market-oriented media’s unspoken bias against the “new left,” fed into the logic of media sensationalism, as well as unleashed a collective “cultural unconsciousness” against the academic elite on the Internet. The resulting spectacularisation of academic sectarianism and McCarthy-esque hunt threatened to not only revive Cultural Revolution-style symbolic violence, but also engender a highly cynical version of “anti-intellectual radicalism” that condemns the elite intellectual strata as a whole at best as a vested interested group in the current Chinese social order and at worse as a shameless, corrupt, and unworthy bunch. While it remains to be seen whether the media and Internet spectacle and the “great bourgeois academic cultural revolution” (Blum 2010) it unleashed will contribute to improved academic integrity and the public nature of the Chinese intellectual field, this newest and arguably ugly episode of intellectual publicity served to distract both the media and the academy from engaging the public around urgent political economic and social issues at a time when “serious and open intellectual debate” about visions are indeed urgently needed. By this time, more than a dozen workers at China’s iPhone maker Foxconn in Shenzhen – no doubt one of the most underrepresented social force in the Chinese media and intellectual fields – had broken into the Chinese and global media spotlights by protesting the inhumanity of their exploitation with a spate of suicides. This has been unfortunate not only for the individual academics involved, but also for China’s already highly constrained, or as Timothy Cheek put it, “directed public sphere” (Cheek 2010).

## Concluding Remarks

Post-1989 developments in Chinese intellectual and media fields have intersected to not only significantly reshape the politics of intellectual publicity, but also drastically redefine the terms of Chinese political communication. How did the highly dignified herculean figure of the post-Mao Chinese intellectuals in the media of the 1980s degenerate into the target of a cynical anti-intellectual radicalism in the Internet after more than two decades of “direct dialogue” with the West? How did Chinese liberal intellectuals who had not only envisioned a “direct dialogue” with their Western academic counterparts, but also advocated China’s assimilation into “mainstream civilisation” end up accusing “Western” intellectuals who came to Wang Hui’s defence of “interfering in Chinese academic affairs” (Yin 2010)? What has made Dai Qing, a brave individual who has fought for her own intellectual independence, to utter with such personal conviction of Wang Hui and his type of

“new left” intellectuals’ political identity as “accomplices to tyranny” (*zhuangzhi de bangxiong*) and thus of the justice of Wang Binbin’s and the *Nanfang Weekend*’s academic norm-masqueraded personal and political attack, even though she conceded that if it were others, the kind of technical shortcomings in Wang Hui’s footnotes would have been forgiven?<sup>4</sup>

Symbolised by the *Nanfang Weekend* and liberal intellectual alliance and Zhu Xueqin’s depiction of how liberalism had finally made a breakthrough in Chinese intellectual publicity, the Chinese intellectual field as represented by elite liberal intellectuals and market-oriented media outlets with liberal-oriented gatekeepers – have worked together to gain some relative autonomy vis-à-vis the domestic political field. From the perspective of those in the intellectual and media fields who have had to fight against the CCP’s central censorship regime, this is a liberal story of struggling against an authoritarian state. The story is certainly a compelling one. After all, not only individuals such as Dai Qing have long been banned from domestic media publicity, even the *Nanfang Weekend* and its liberal intellectual contributors have been censorship victims or have had to exercise self-censorship. It is perhaps this victimisation experience and a binary logic of “you are either with us or against us” that have underscored the *Nanfang Weekend* and Wang Binbin’s McCharthy-esque hunt against Wang Hui. This has posed a serious question regarding the power of media itself and the danger of what I call “liberal media instrumentalism” in a media system that ostensibly continues to be dominated by the CCP’s own instrumentalist mentality. Along with the struggle for relative media and intellectual autonomy vis-à-vis the state, there are intersecting struggles within the media and intellectuals fields not only over professional norms, but also over the terms of intellectual and ideology hegemony.

In short, a one-dimensional anti-authoritarian narrative pitting reified and unitary media and intellectual fields on the one hand and the Chinese political field as represented by a monolithic central party state on the other no longer, if ever, fully accounts the politics of intellectual publicity in today’s China. Within this context, it is important to underscore once again that the *Nanfang Weekend* and similar newspapers are themselves part of the party-state’s highly-praised and protected media conglomerates, and thus part of the dominant market authoritarian social order. Similarly, it is no longer, if ever, adequate to conceptualise the political field exclusively in terms of the powers that be at the CCP central propaganda department and posit this field in opposition to the media and intellectuals fields. Within the sub-national level, the *Nanfang Weekend* and its sister publications within the *Nanfang Daily* conglomerate have not only benefited from the political protection of the Guangdong provincial authorities, but also even powerful forces at the CCP central leadership. At the transnational level, from the *Nanfang Weekend*’s “reward” by U.S. President Obama to Liu Xiaobo’s Nobel Peace Prize to the international scholarly networks rallying behind the *Nanfang Weekend* and Wang Hui respectively, Chinese media and intellectual struggles over visions and divisions are deeply implicated in global political, media, and intellectual power relations.

Clearly, the pre-1989 days when a single media/intellectual text not only dictated the terms of debate over vision and division but also played into the highest level power struggles in the Chinese political field are over and perhaps for the good. The implosion of *River Elegy*’s self-inflated and unitary image of Chinese intellectuals as the singular and dignified spokesperson for the Chinese people (or even the

savoir of the Chinese people, in competition with the CCP) or the “chosen” group to conduct a “direct dialogue” with the West, is also perhaps not only inevitable, but also a healthy development toward a more democratic society and culture. The age of experts and the age of critics are perhaps not necessarily mutually exclusive. Just as professional intellectuals need a public, the public, despite all its intellectuality in the Gramscian sense, could still benefit from professional intellectuals – as long as the division between mental and manual labour exists and as long as the issue of representation in both the political and discursive realm remains. The question of who speaks for whom in what forum with what authority thus continues to be critically important. Within this context, the ascending power of the *Nanfang Weekend* and liberal intellectual alliance within China’s CCP-controlled media system raises a number of questions regarding the new games of Chinese intellectual publicity: while the paper and its liberal intellectuals have been and may continue to be the victims of party censorship, does this necessitate the paper’s instrumentalist and highly partisan approach to journalism in its treatment of “new left” intellectuals? If what China’s media and liberal intellectuals struggle for is the relative autonomy of the academic and journalistic fields and their mutual constitution into a “public sphere” vis-à-vis the CCP’s historically class-based claim to representation, can they accept that there could also be relatively autonomous “new left” voices within such a “public sphere”? Or does the unspoken “bourgeoisie” nature of this “public sphere” necessarily mean the exclusion and suppression of radical socialist voices? And, for China’s “new left” intellectuals wishing to act as a thorn on the left side of the party state in imagining a democratic socialist alternative to the current market authoritarian social order, is it possible at all to find a relatively open space in a party-dominated and market-driven media system with a systematic bias against them? Or, will they be condemned to marginal leftist websites and the blogger sphere? Finally, fast forward to spring 2012: with the dramatic explosion of elite division with the Chinese political field and the CCP censorship regime’s closure of marginal Chinese leftist websites sympathetic to the more socially-oriented reform policies of deposed former Chongqing party chief and Politburo member Bo Xilai, one wonders, what kind of new configuration of political, intellectual, and media power is emerging in China?

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### Notes:

1. Author’s personal email correspondence with a prominent left-leaning scholar, supported by a conversation with another scholar who was included in a preferred mailing list maintained by one of the *Nanfang* papers to promote a core groups of media sources and to cultivate a particular editorial line.

2. For one of the key articles that refuted Wang Binbin's accusations, see Shu (2010); for English excerpts of the main arguments on both sides, see Lam (2010).
3. According to Wang Hui in an interview, the *Nanfang Weekend* did not contact him for his point of view when it twice published lengthy accusations of Wang Hui on March 25 and April 8, 2010 respectively. Moreover, when Shu Wei, Wang Hui's book editor at Sanlian Press, submitted her article refuting Wang Binbin's accusations, the paper said that it would not be able to publish till after two weeks, and moreover, it would drastically cut her article. Shu Wei eventually published her article on the April 3 issue of *Beijing Youth News* (Shu 2010). It was also clear that Liu Xiaolei, the *Nanfang Weekend* editor involved in the initial publication of Wang Binbin's article, was actively leading an anti-Wang Hui mobilisation outside his normal journalistic duties. See Han (2 August, 2010).
4. Author's personal conversation with Dai Qing, November 9, 2010, Vancouver.

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