Media and Civil Society in China

Community building and networking among investigative journalists and beyond

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ABSTRACT: Although Chinese journalists are not able to create their own independent organisations, they are engaging in informal networking on-line and off-line that has created a strong sense of community among investigative journalists in particular. [1] **Through sharing experiences, stories, and struggles, journalists create a collective identity and define their roles in society. Earlier studies of Chinese journalists haven't explicitly addressed the issue of how a journalistic community is created and sustained in a society that lacks freedom of the press and where freedom of association is severely restricted, and the importance of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in this context, which is the focus of this article. Furthermore, it is important to study the extent to which and how investigative journalists network with other groups in society, including lawyers, public intellectuals, and civil society organisations. With the development of micro-blogging (*weibo*) we see new forms of community building, more open expressions of solidarity and ironic resistance, as well as increasing levels of interactivity between different groups in society. By reporting on injustices and the situation of marginalized groups in society, and commenting on public events on *weibo*, investigative journalists interact with many different groups in society and become part of a larger community of people who share the same ideals and struggles. Some journalists go one step further and set up or become actively involved in charity work and civil society organisations.**

KEYWORDS: investigative journalism, interpretive community, relationship media and society, civil society, networking, microblogging/weibo, freedom of speech.

Media and civil society interactions: Interpretive communities and fields

In the West, the media are generally expected to play an important role in enhancing and strengthening democracy and civil society, although they are also often criticised for legitimising inequalities, excluding marginalized voices, and benefiting those with economic power. [2] A vibrant civil society and media that serve as watchdogs of public and corporate power are crucial to ensure a well-informed citizenry and genuine participatory democracy. Investigative journalists can in this respect play an important role as they act as watchdogs and push for accountability and justice, and because they also give voice to marginalized groups in society. They are furthermore more likely to network with other social groups and with civil society organisations engaged in the same struggles for a just and fair society. Investigative journalists are therefore often described as "custodians of conscience," although such labelling may give rise to impossibly high demands and verge on hero worship. [3]

Although civil society is weak and the media are tightly controlled in China, it has been possible to carve out some spaces of autonomy, albeit negotiated and conditional, during the reform period. Several studies have drawn attention to the "negotiated" and "contingent" nature of civil society and the creation of informal spaces and networks on-line and off-line. [4] In order to understand the different forms that civil society takes in China when formal organising is difficult and restricted, it is necessary to broaden our perspective to study the role and form of informal communities, networks, and meeting spaces on-line and off-line. In a recent article Callahan has also emphasised the need to study "how civil society emerges through the 'alternative civilities' of citizens' many 'China dreams.'" [5] The media and the Internet today constitute important platforms both for public debates on urgent issues and for civil society developments. [6] This calls for a closer study of the role of journalists in these developments and as promoters of different "China dreams." [7]

There is a growing body of literature on investigative journalism in China. [8] These studies have mainly focused on the possibilities for and institutional

1. The article builds on a research project on investigative journalists undertaken during the period 2008-2011. The extensive fieldwork included in-depth interviews with some 40 journalists, and attendance at and participation in more than 30 lectures, workshops, and seminars organised by journalists themselves, universities, media organisations, and civil society organisations. Funding for this research has been granted by the Swedish research foundation Riksbankens Jubileumsfond. The author wants to thank the two anonymous reviewers as well as all the Chinese journalists and media scholars who so generously shared their views and time with me over the years. The interpretation and analysis as well as any mistakes are the sole responsibility of the author.

2. For a critical reflection on media and democracy, see James Curran, *Media and Democracy*, London, Routledge, 2011.

3. The concept "custodians of conscience" comes from James Ettema and Theodore L. Glasser, *Custodians of Conscience: Investigative Journalism and Public Virtue*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998.

4. For a recent analysis on civil society, see Anthony Spires, "Contingent Symbiosis and Civil Society in an Authoritarian State: Understanding the Survival of China's Grassroots NGOs," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 117, no. 1, July 2011, pp. 1-45. On on-line networking and civil society engagement, see Yang Guobin, *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009.

5. William A. Callahan, "Shanghai's Alternative Futures: The World Expo, Citizen Intellectuals, and China's New Civil Society," *China Information*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2012, pp. 251-273.

6. For different studies on the complex media and society relations in China, see Susan L. Shirk (ed.), *Changing Media, Changing China*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2011.

7. *Southern Weekend* in 2010 organised a special activity called Promoters of the China Dream in which different intellectuals, artists, and one journalist, investigative journalist Wang Keqin, were awarded. See *Southern Weekend*, www.infzm.com/content/48514 (consulted on 13 August 2012).

8. For recent overviews of the development of investigative journalism in China, see Tong Jingrong and Colin Sparks, "Investigative Journalism in China Today," *Journalism Studies*, no. 1, 2009, pp. 1-16, and Tong Jingrong, *Investigative Journalism in China: Journalism, Power, and Society*, New York, Continuum, 2011.

context of investigative journalism in different types of media, including issues of control and censorship, and journalists' work practices and relations to editors and propaganda departments.[9] Many studies also focus on the content of and struggles behind selected stories and scoops.[10] Some works contain more in-depth interviews with journalists on their values, work practices, and representative stories,[11] while a recent survey aims to map this distinctive group by age, gender, geographical prevalence, educational background, job satisfaction, and values, etc.[12] The number of Chinese investigative journalists is rather small, around 300 people according to the extensive survey made by Zhang and Shen, and it is a group with a high turnover rate and mobility. It is also relevant to point out the gendered nature of investigative journalism, with only 16 percent being women, which means we talk about a male dominated community. Although investigative reporting is very remote from the daily work of the majority of Chinese journalists, investigative journalists are often held up as role models and heroes in the journalistic community and in society in general, and thus have a greater impact than their small numbers would lead us to assume.

The aim of this article is to address more explicitly how a community of investigative journalists has been created, and these journalists' roles, struggles, and interactions with other journalists, social groups, and civil society organisations. In order to do so I borrow from two analytical concepts, namely Zelizer's idea of journalists as "interpretive communities" and Bourdieu's "field theory." A community is created by people sharing and circulating certain values and narratives, and through their networking, cooperation and joint struggles. The analytical concept of "interpretive community" is very useful as it explicitly focuses on how journalists share discourses and collective interpretations of public events, and thus takes us away from the more narrow discussions on professionalism.[13] According to Zelizer, journalist communities emerge through all the different ways journalists shape meaning about themselves and their work. An interpretive community is created through story-telling, shared memories, and the circulating of journalistic discourses in different forums and using different communicative forms, including informal talks and lectures, writings in journalism journals, memoirs, and other types of publications, as well as interviews and reports in the media. This also shifts the focus from professional associations to the myriad places and venues where journalists can meet, and where journalistic values and practices can be discussed. I would also argue that the identity and community of investigative journalists is additionally shaped and reinforced through the stories and narratives other actors and the public tell and circulate about them. The image-building surrounding individual investigative journalists, the most well known example in China being Wang Keqin, is thus shaped by both the media and scholars. The circulation of stories about investigative journalists raises the status and glamour of investigative journalism, provides role models and heroes, and shapes the public's expectations of journalists in general.

To study how investigative journalists interact, not only with the state/power, but also with other social groups and with civil society organisations, is crucial for understanding their role and impact in society. Bourdieu's concept of "field," further adapted and developed by media scholars, is useful when studying journalist communities, or the "journalistic field," and their interaction with other "fields" in society.[14] There are many aspects of Bourdieu's field theory that are useful for my purpose. It enables us to look at issues of agency and structure in a more complex way, avoiding the pitfall of overestimating structural constraints, and to understand processes of resistance and possibilities for autonomy within the "journalistic field." Furthermore, a realisation of the complex socialisation of norms and existence of sub-fields within the "field" opens up for an understanding of how investigative journalists can be, in part, differently socialised from more mainstream journalists and able to create new spaces for themselves. However, the "journalistic field" in China undoubtedly remains subject to the constraints of economy and politics, and the sub-field of investigative journalists is quite marginal.

There are many alliances between journalists and other groups, or "fields," in society, that sometimes are problematic as well as contested.[15] Investigative journalists are increasingly networking with many different groups in society, including legal scholars, lawyers, and civil society organisations, and on many different issues. These individuals and groups are also often quite weak and subject to both economic and political pressures. Nonetheless, the networking between investigative journalists and other groups has sometimes put new topics on the agenda and made a real impact in people's life. Journalists' relationship with lawyers take different forms, including getting tips about interesting cases or problems in society, information during investigation of specific cases, and help with analysing the underlying institutional and legal issues behind individual cases. Journalists often interview legal scholars for their expert views, but scholars and lawyers are also invited to write independent comments, op-ed pieces, and blogs. This has led over time to the creation of an informal network of journalists, legal scholars, and lawyers who often share the same ideals and visions, engage in common struggles, and offer moral support when facing difficulties.[16] Investigative journalists also have quite close relations with different types of civil society organisations. Many journalists and media outlets today are interested in reporting on civil society organisations and their work. Civil society organisations are also eager to cultivate good relations with the media in order to get publicity, and they invite journalists to their events or organise workshops to raise awareness among journalists on specific issues.[17] Some civil society organisations have even been established by journalists or involve journalists as active members.[18]

9. See for example Li-Fung Cho, *The Emergence, Influence, and Limitations of Watchdog Journalism in Post-1992 China: A Case Study of Southern Weekend*, Ph.D. dissertation University of Hong Kong, Journalism and Media Studies Centre, 2007; Tong and Sparks, *op. cit.*; Tong, *op. cit.*; and Wang Haiyan, "How Big is the Cage? An Examination of Local Press Autonomy in China," WPCC, vol. 7. no. 1, 2010, pp. 56-72.
10. See for example David Bandurski and Martin Hala (eds.), *Investigative Journalism in China: Eight Cases in Chinese Watchdog Journalism*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2010.
11. See in particular Zhang Zhi'an, *Jizhe ruhe zhuanye: Shendu baodao jingyingde zhiye yishi yu baodao celuo* (Journalists' professionalism: The professional awareness and reporting strategies of in-depth journalists), Guangzhou, Nanfang ribao chubanshe, 2007, and *Baodao ruhe shenru: Guanyu shendu baodao de jingying fangtan ji jingdian anli* (In-depth reporting: Interviews and classical cases of in-depth reporting), Guangzhou, Nanfang ribao chubanshe, 2006.
12. Zhang Zhi'an and Shen Fei, *Zhongguo diaocha jizhe hangye shengtai baodao* (A report on the situation of the profession of Chinese investigative journalists), *Xiandai chuanbo*, vol. 10, 2011.
13. Barbie Zelizer, "Journalists as interpretive communities," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, no. 10, 1993, pp. 219-237.
14. See Rodney Benson and Erik Neveu (eds.), *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, Cambridge (England), Polity, 2005.
15. Zhao Yuezhi, making use of field-theory, has for example argued that there is a neo-liberal bias in *Southern Weekend* and a "discursive alliance" between the weekly and liberal intellectuals. See Zhao Yuezhi, "Your Show's Been Cut: The Politics of Intellectual Publicity in China's Brave New Media World," *Javnost - The Public*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2012, pp. 101-118. However, I would argue that the picture is more complex, as the weekly and other critical media also give ample place to voices that advocate rights protection of marginalized groups.
16. See also Teng Biao in this issue.
17. Personal observations at several workshops and events on HIV/AIDS, children's rights, migrant workers, and environmental issues during the period 2008-2012.
18. For examples from the environmental field, see Guobin Yang and Craig Calhoun, "Media, Civil Society, and the Rise of a Green Public Sphere in China," *China Information*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2007, pp. 211-236.

Agency, autonomy, and structural constraints in investigative journalism: Spaces for negotiation and resistance

Ideological, social, and economic changes have resulted in dramatic changes to the Chinese media landscape. Even so, the existence of investigative and critical journalism might at first glance seem improbable, given structural constraints, censorship, and the lack of independent media. However, one shouldn't dismiss the fact that Chinese journalists may have possibilities for agency and autonomy. It is important to study the complex and evolving interactions between agency and structure, and the moments of and struggles for agency and autonomy among journalists.

Investigative journalism has developed from the official media policy of "supervision by public opinion" (*yulun jiandu* 舆论监督) adopted in the late 1980s. [19] This policy encourages the media to develop a limited watchdog role in order to check and supervise local power abuse. Such supervision is much needed as a result of widespread corruption and difficulties with implementing laws and policies. The target is therefore expected to be limited to local officials and their power abuse, and *yulun jiandu* is often seen as part of the CCP's internal supervision. It is obvious that the current leadership regards the media more as tools to guide public opinion rather than as independent watchdogs. However, one also has to bear in mind that another important driving force behind investigative and critical reporting in China has been the commercialisation and decentralisation of the media. The media today need to publish stories that interest their readers, since they can no longer rely on state subsidies. The important weekly *Southern Weekend* (*Nanfang zhoumo* 南方周末) thus turned to investigative reporting as part of a careful marketing strategy, and metropolitan newspapers such as *Southern Metropolitan News* (*Nanfang dushi bao* 南方都市报) also realise that such reporting attracts readers. [20] Market forces thus initially spurred investigative reporting in China, although the dependency on advertisements can have an adverse effect on such reporting. The fact that a whole range of social and economic ills have appeared in the wake of the economic reforms, such as corruption, environmental problems, shoddy products, and health hazards, also explains the growing attention to these social problems on the part of the media. This development is further reinforced by the fact that many citizens seek out journalists with stories about injustice and problems. The public believes that media publicity is an efficient avenue for redress, as it puts pressure on officials and the courts. [21]

In other words, there exists some scope and acceptance for certain investigative reporting by the leadership, or different segments of it, and during different periods, as well as bottom-up pressure from readers and competition among different media groups, that gives an unpredictable momentum to *yulun jiandu*. This contingent nature of investigative journalism also helps explain its many ups and downs over the past decade. [22]

In some ways, therefore, journalists and the media, like other civil society actors, live in a close and contingent symbiosis with the state, but that doesn't mean they are prisoners of the official media policy and that there is no space for negotiations and resistance. In fact, journalists and editors are making good use of the policies on *yulun jiandu* to push boundaries and engage in critical and investigative reporting that go well beyond the state's original intentions. [23] They are in this context very apt at exploiting the fragmented nature of the Chinese state to their own benefit. As will be discussed in more detail in the article, Chinese journalists are not passively accepting official media policy and propaganda directives. They try to be one step ahead of and outwit propaganda departments and even occasionally defy propaganda directives. One scholar has described this as "guerrilla tactics." [24] This boundary-pushing gives rise to a negotiated space that is shaped by journalists as well as editors, propaganda officials, other officials, and the general public.



Critical newspaper Southern Metropolitan News prominently displayed in a newspaper stand in Guangzhou.
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19. On the concept and development of *yulun jiandu*, see Cho, *op. cit.*, and "The Emergence of China's Watchdog Reporting," in Bandurski and Hala, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-173.
20. On the development of *Southern Weekend* see Cho, *op. cit.*, and on *Southern Metropolitan News*, see Tong, *op. cit.*
21. On the relationship between the media and the courts, see Benjamin L. Liebman, "Watchdog or demagogue? The media in the Chinese legal system," *Columbia Law Review*, no. 105, 2005, pp. 1-157. For examples of how citizens seek publicity in the media to push their cases, see also Marina Svensson, "Heritage Struggles and Place-Makings in Zhejiang Province: Local Media, Cross-Regional Media Interactions, and Media Strategies from Below," in Wanning Sun and Jenny Chio (eds.), *Mapping Media in China: Region, Province, Locality*, London, Routledge, 2012.
22. For an analysis of the ups and downs of investigative reporting, see Tong and Sparks, *op. cit.*; and for a Chinese journalist's take, see Wang Keqin, "Diaochaxing baodao jiben wenti shuli," (Reviewing the basic issues of investigative reporting), http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_655f81d50102dqxy.html (consulted on 13 August 2012), with a partial translation by China Media Project at http://cmp.hku.hk/2011/07/15/13862 (consulted on 13 August 2012).
23. On boundary pushing among lawyers, journalists, and NGOs in general, see Kevin J. O'Brien and Rachel E. Stern, "Politics at the Boundary: Mixed Signals and the Chinese State," *Modern China*, vol. 38, no. 2, March 2012, pp. 175-199.
24. Tong Jingrong, "Guerilla tactics of investigative journalists in China," *Journalism*, vol. 8, no. 5, 2007, pp. 530-535.

The image and identity of investigative journalists: China's conscience?

Although all Chinese media are still state-owned, the once unifying and all-embracing identity of journalists as the "mouthpiece" (*houshe* 喉舌) of the Party is now challenged and competes with other identities and role models. Hassid in a recent article argued that there exist at least four different types of journalists, ranging from traditional "mouthpieces," "American-style professionals," "advocate professionals," and "workaday journalists." [25] Generally speaking, we can distinguish between journalists who operate "within the system" (*tizhi nei* 体制内) and belong to the nomenklatura, and journalists working for the commercial "outside the system" (*tizhi wai* 体制外) media, although the Party press also increasingly employing journalists on a contract basis. The traditional party media and the commercial media nonetheless exhibit quite different institutional cultures and editorial policies that give rise to different value systems in news production. [26] This is reflected in views on the acceptance of "red envelopes" (*hong bao* 红包), objectivity, professionalism, what is considered newsworthy, and the extent to which the newspaper encourages and publishes investigative reports.

Investigative journalists are mostly found within the commercial media, but they are not a homogenous group. They may thus embody ideals that draw from very different role models, including the literati/Confucian one of remonstrating with those in power, the mouthpiece/*yulun jiandu* tradition of providing advice and supervising local officials, or the more professional/adversarial role inspired by Western investigative journalism and "muckraking." We also find differences between investigative journalists at *Southern Weekend*, with their more emotional language and advocacy approach, and the more objective and professional investigative model characteristic of *Finance* (*Caijing* 财经) and *Century Weekly* (*Xin shiji* 新世纪). There are also differences among different generations of investigative journalists, with many of the older generation being more of the advocate type. [27]

When investigative journalists talk about themselves, they usually use the word investigative journalist (*diaocha jizhe* 调查记者) and stress their grassroots background. In describing their work and goals they often refer to ideas of justice (*gongzheng* 公正), equality (*gongping* 公平), protecting weak groups in society (*baohu ruoshi qunti* 保护弱势群体), revealing abuse of public power (*jiekai lanyong gonggong quanli* 揭开滥用公共权力), and protecting citizens' rights and interests (*baohu guomin quanli* 保护国民权利). In an article in *Modern Express* (*Xiandai kuaibao* 现代快报), investigative journalists were described in the following terms: "They are the 'muckrakers' (*pafen gong* 扒粪工) of China's news landscape, they are China's muckraking journalists (*jiehei jizhe* 揭黑记者), they are the conscience of society (*shehui liangxin* 社会良心), and the protectors (*shouwangzhe* 守望者) of our rights." [28] Jian Guangzhou, who broke the story of the Sanlu milk powder scandal in 2008, was described as a "heroic journalist (*yingxiong jizhe* 英雄记者)" and "China's conscience" (*Zhongguo de liangxin* 中国的良心).

While investigative journalists seldom get official journalism prizes, commercial media and Internet portals select and celebrate this type of reporting through alternative prizes and honorary titles. For example, the well-known investigative journalist Wang Keqin was among those awarded the "Honorary Prize for Promoters of the China Dream" by *Southern Weekend* in 2010. Other recipients were economist Wu Jinglian and film director John Woo. In April 2011, the fashion magazine *GQ* published an article with quite stylish photos of ten investigative journalists, thus introducing them to an audience tuned more into fashion than social reportage. One of the young journalists portrayed, Huang Yuhao, then with *Beijing News* (*Xinjing bao* 新京报) and now with CCTV, in 2010 won in the category of young journalists in a competition selecting outstanding young citizens of the 1980s generation. The competition was arranged by the video sharing website *ku6* together with media such as *Southern Metropolitan News*. The identity and image of investigative journalists are thus not only constructed by the journalists themselves but are also shaped by other actors and media reporting.

The emergence of a community of investigative journalists: On-line and off-line networking

In order to understand the community of investigative journalists, one needs to take into account not only how they identify themselves but also how they network. It is interesting to note that they themselves increasingly have begun to talk about the emergence of a community (*gongtongti* 共同体) of journalists. Fu Jianfeng, formerly with *Southern Weekend*, was one of the first journalists to more explicitly elaborate on the idea of a "community" of journalists sharing similar ideals and finding moral support, a sense of home (*guisu gan* 归宿感), a shelter (*bihusuo* 庇护所), and a spiritual home (*jingshen jiayuan* 精神家园) in shared ideals and struggles. [29] While this "community" is not always clearly defined and continues to develop, it is obvious that Fu refers to journalists who write more critical and investigative reports. The idea of a community has taken hold and is today often used to describe the sense of a joint cause, shared ideals, and cooperation among investigative journalists. [30]

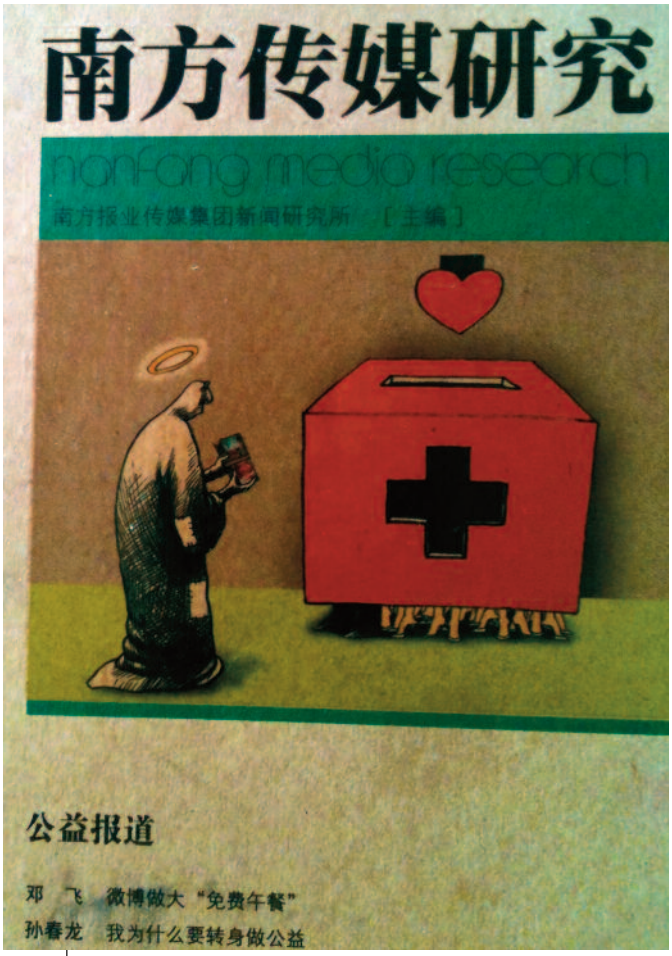
The official All-China Journalists' Association (ACJA), run by the Central Propaganda Department, has not been relevant in creating a sense of community among investigative journalists, who have little or no contact with it. It is neither central to their identity and professional values nor seen as representing them. Given the strict control over civil society, and professional organisations in particular, it has not been possible for journalists to establish alternative or independent journalist organisations. Instead, different types of informal networks have developed over time, which include people with similar visions and ideals who exchange information and support each other. These networks are loose and overlapping in nature, cross

25. Jonathan Hassid, "Four models of the fourth estate: A typology of contemporary Chinese journalists," *China Quarterly*, no. 208, 2011, pp. 813-832. Other scholars have provided other ways to define and categorise Chinese journalists.
26. For an analysis of these differences, see for example Qian Gang and David Bandurski, "China's Emerging Public Sphere: The Impact of Media Commercialization, Professionalism, and the Internet in an Era of Transition," in Susan Shirk (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 38-76.
27. It is important to remember that investigative journalists in the West also exhibit quite different values and ideals, including old-style muckraking, professional ideals of objectivity, and more "leftist" investigative journalism that criticises the capitalist order.
28. See Zhao Yong and Ni Dingding, "Zhongguo jiehei jizhe: Wei jie zhenxiang miandui baoli he guansi" (China's Muckrakers: Meeting violence and being sued when trying to reveal the truth), *Xiandai kuaibao*, 5 December 2010, http://news.sina.com.cn/c/sd/2010-12-05/042421583651.shtml (consulted on 13 August 2012).
29. Fu Jianfeng, "Zhege shidai zhenzai xingcheng de yige zhiye gongtongti" (This era is creating a professional community), *Nanfang zhoumo*, 9 November 2009, http://gcontent.oeeee.com/5/ae/5ae61e13278118c2/Blog/2ba/78431c.html (consulted on 13 August 2012); and, "Dui xinwen zhiye gongtongti de yuanjing" (The vision of a journalistic community), *Nanfang chuanmei yanjiu* no. 26, 2010. See also other articles on the topic of a journalist community by journalist Shen Feike and media scholars such as Zhan Jiang, Tong Xi, and Zhang Zhi'an in *Nanfang chuanmei yanjiu* no. 26, 2010, http://media.nfdaily.cn/cmyj/26 (consulted on 13 August 2012).
30. See the special issue of *Nanfang chuanmei yanjiu* no. 26, 2010.

both media and geographic boundaries, and are nurtured through personal networks, friendships, work relations, and regional ties. New ICTs, such as QQ groups, blogs, and microblogging, have made it easier for journalists to stay in touch, share stories, and offer support across geographic distances and over media boundaries. In 2000, journalist Liu Jianming created the Reporters Home BBS to serve as a platform for journalists to discuss and share information. It rapidly became very popular among journalists, and today there exist some 100 different QQ groups set up by journalists. Investigative journalists have also set up their own QQ groups.[31] These groups are rather exclusive, and one can only become a member through personal introductions, promoting a sense of close-knit community. The fact that so-called "cross-regional supervision reporting" (*yidi jiandu* 异地监督) is easier to do than investigative reporting in one's own locality means that many investigative journalists report from localities other than their own. Chinese investigative reporting is characterised by cooperation across media groups and a high degree of mobility among journalists, which has been conducive for developing a sense of community as well as strengthening the need for networking. In order to be able to report from new and unfamiliar environments, journalists depend on collegial support from local journalists, and in this context QQ groups have proved important. QQ groups are thus used in order to get information and access to local sources, for support and help when encountering problems, and for discussions on work-related issues and methods, and they also enable journalists to connect for off-work and off-line gatherings.

Since 2009, microblogging has appeared as a new and important tool for communication and networking among journalists that also facilitates and encourages communication and networking with other groups in society. Journalists were among the first adopters of microblogging in China. A study of 2,503 journalists showed that already in 2010, 47 percent frequently used *weibo* (微博) at a time when the average percentage of *weibo* use among Internet users in general was only 25 percent.[32] The majority of journalists, 77.8 percent, favour Sina's microblogging service. A recent study of 293 investigative journalists showed that 60 percent use blogs and *weibo*,[33] whereas another study showed that some 200 out of approximately 350 investigative reporters have *weibo* accounts.[34] In my own study of 31 investigative journalists, I found that all but four used *weibo* (but of those four, one used Twitter rather than *weibo*), i.e., 87 percent. Among the 27 journalists using *weibo*, 11 had set up accounts already in 2009, 11 in the first half of 2010, four in the second half of 2010, and one in 2011.

Not all networking takes place online but also leads to or is initiated offline. Journalists have set up several informal journalist saloons on their own or in co-operation with civil society organisations and other groups. These provide an opportunity to meet in real life and discuss topical issues and work practices. The environmental organisation Green Earth Volunteers in Beijing, for example, organises a salon that brings together journalists, other civil society organisations, and experts.[35] In 2006, concerned journalists and legal scholars who wanted to strengthen legal reporting and create a forum for discussions on both legal issues and journalistic practices established the law journalists' salon.[36] The salon has met on an irregular basis over the years and by January 2010 had arranged a total of 17 meetings. The topics covered include problems for investigative reporting, reporting on criminal cases, legal reporting in *Southern Weekend*, and the Open Government Information Act. The salon had a core group of active participants and attracted journalists from some of the country's top newspapers, such as *Southern Weekend*, *Southern Metropolitan News*, *Finance*, and *Beijing News*. It also provided opportunities for journalists to have discussions with legal scholars, lawyers, media scholars, and civil society organisations. In early 2012, a group of young journalists started a new journalist saloon, Blue Media Salon. The salon has so far met three times and has discussed, among other things, disaster reporting and the use of social media among journalists.



Nanfang chuanmei yanjiu is one of the most important journals where journalists write about their work and journalistic practices.
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31. Information from interviews with journalists. See also Ju Jing, "Shendu baodao shengchan fangshi de xin bianhua – Shendu baodao jizhe QQ qun chutan" (A new change in the mode of production of in-depth reporting: A first exploration of QQ groups among in-depth journalists), *Xinwen jizhe*, no. 1, 2012, http://xwjz.eastday.com/eastday/xwjz/node595770/node595771/u1a6319393.html (consulted on 13 August 2012).
32. See Sina Tech's report, "Zhongguo jizhe shejiao meiti shiyong baogao: 78% shouxuan Xinlang weibo" (A report on the social media use among Chinese journalists: 78 percent prefer Sina weibo), Sina Tech, 11 December 2010, http://tech.sina.com.cn/i/2010-12-11/10314971318.shtml (consulted on 13 August 2012).
33. Zhang and Shen, *op. cit.*
34. Zhang Zhi'an, "Xinwen shengchan de biange: Cong zuzhihua xiang shehuihua: Yi weibo ruhe yingxiang diaochaxing baodao wei shijiao de yanjiu" (The reform of news production from organisational to social production: Research on how *weibo* have influenced investigative reporting), *Xinwen jizhe*, March 2011, http://xwjz.eastday.com/eastday/xwjz/node528384/node528385/u1a5749666.html (consulted on 13 August 2012).
35. The organisation has a website with information about their salons and summaries of each event, as well as publications and reports. See http://chinagev.org/index.php/greenpro/huanjingjizhe and http://chinagev.org/index.php/greenpro/huanjingjizhedc (links consulted on 13 August 2012).
36. Information comes from interviews with one of the founders and with different participants, participation in four salons during 2009-2010, and a reading of proceedings from the events.

Other actors, including scholars, media organisations, and foreign civil society organisations, have also been instrumental in the creation of a community of investigative journalists as they provide different meeting places where journalists can share experiences and discuss journalistic practices. The annual conferences on watchdog journalism arranged by professor Zhan Jiang (currently at the Beijing Foreign Studies University) has been a crucial platform for investigative journalists since 2001.[37] At these conferences investigative journalists have an opportunity to discuss and reflect upon their stories and share them with colleagues, media scholars, lawyers, and legal experts.[38] Scholar Zhang Zhi'an (formerly with Fudan University and now at Zhongshan University) has written several books on investigative journalism and regularly invites investigative journalists to give talks to his students.[39] Different media groups also organise or co-sponsor lectures and events at universities. *Southern Metropolitan News*, for example, organises a special university lecture tour.[40] These kinds of activities also ensure that future journalists are exposed to the work of investigative journalists.

The in-house training of China's most critical media groups, such as *Caijing*, *Caixin*, and the Southern Media group, also contribute to creating a community of investigative journalists. They in addition sponsor some cross-media training programmes, workshops, and publications, which ensures that their take on professionalism spread further. The magazine *Finance* (*Caijing*) has thus for many years organised a scholarship programme at Peking University to which outstanding journalists in the fields of economics and law can apply.[41] *Caijing* and later *Caixin* have also organised short training sessions, open to other journalists, on different issues such as environmental reporting. Since Hu Shuli became the head of the media and journalism department at Zhongshan University she has established a three-month scholarship programme that has attracted investigative journalists but also applicants from the Party press.[42] The Southern Media Group publishes an important journal, *Southern Media Studies* (*Nanfang chuanmei yanjiu* 南方传媒研究), which provides a platform for journalists from not only the media group itself but also from other media to discuss their work, journalistic practices and ideals, investigative reporting, the use of *weibo* among journalists, and recent important reports and their background stories.[43]

There have also been some efforts by international media organisations to provide training and platforms with the aim of strengthening journalistic professionalism. The International Center for Communication Development (ICCD) has been working with Chinese partners since 2006.[44] It has provided training and seminars on investigative reporting, media ethics, legal protection of journalists, disaster reporting, reporting on food safety, environmental reporting, and the relationship between the courts and the media. In 2009, the Copenhagen-based International Media Support (IMS) started collaborating with Chinese universities and media organisations.[45] It has to date organised workshops and seminars on investigative reporting, climate change and environmental reporting. It has also sponsored Chinese journalists' attendance at some international investigative journalism conferences.

Linkages, overlaps, and cross-fertilisation are common between these different actors, and many of the more active investigative journalists will turn up at events arranged by different actors. There is a heavy concentration in Beijing and Guangzhou, with only occasional events and workshops taking place elsewhere in the country. However, participants may come from different parts of the country.

Storytelling and community building

Important and epoch-making reports are pivotal for the building of a community, as this helps create a collective memory. The Watergate scandal was such a pivotal affair for investigative journalists in the American context, whereas the Sun Zhigang case in 2003 played a similar role for investigate journalists in China.[46] This case is often mentioned when one asks investigative journalists to list important reports in their field. It also resulted in fame for the reporters who broke the case; in 2003, CCTV selected Chen Feng, one of the journalists from *Southern Metropolitan News* who broke the Sun Zhigang story, as one of the eight best journalists that year. The Sun Zhigang case is also celebrated among legal scholars, lawyers, and rights defenders, who played a crucial role in revoking the provision on custody and repatriation. The case is therefore also important because it brought together journalists, legal scholars, and lawyers in a joint cause that laid the foundation for closer contacts and networking among these different groups. Over the years we have seen this close cooperation in reporting on different legal cases and topics, such as the treatment of petitioners, death penalty cases, the existence of black jails, and reports on the arrest and harassment of lawyers such as Li Zhuang.[47]

The 2008 Sichuan earthquake was another pivotal experience for Chinese journalists. They were able to push for and, at least initially, get unprecedented and unlimited access to the disaster area and the victims, and thus a taste of what it might be like to report without restrictions. In addition, it brought more exposure and contact with foreign journalists and with civil society organisations. However, by late May new directives were issued preventing critical discussions on school construction and protests by parents seeking justice for their dead children. The experience and special challenges of reporting on the earthquake, including the frustration of not being able to probe into the collapse of schools, constitutes a powerful narrative that continues to be discussed among journalists.[48] Many of China's best investigative reporters were sent to the earthquake area. This experience gave rise to further demands on access to information and expectations that

37. These conferences have always been called *yulun jiandu* in order to benefit from the official sanctioning of this type of reporting. But when journalists talk about their reporting they mostly use terms such as *diaocha baodao* (investigative reporting) or *shendu baodao* (in-depth reporting).
38. A couple of books from the first conferences have been published: Zhan Jiang, *Yulun jiandu zipi shu* (The purple book of public supervision), Guangzhou, Nanfang ribao chubanshe, 2004; and *Zhongguo yulun jiandu niandu baogao* (The annual report of China's watchdog journalism), Beijing, Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2006. Later conferences exist only as conference proceedings, on file with the author.
39. The author attended seven such lectures in June 2011. There were also live broadcast on *weibo* from the lectures, ensuring a larger audience.
40. For their projects see http://nd.oeeee.com/nanyuan/news/default.shtml (consulted on 13 August 2012).
41. For information about *Caijing*'s programme, see http://corp.caijing.com.cn/fellowship (consulted on 13 August 2012).
42. For information about this and other programmes, see http://corp.caixin.com/fellowship (consulted on 13 August 2012).
43. The journal is available online at http://media.nfdaily.cn/cmyj/36/default.htm (consulted on 13 August 2012).
44. See ICCD's web site at www.iccd.biz/temp/about.html (consulted on 13 August 2012).
45. See IMS's web site www.i-m-s.dk/content/china (consulted on 13 August 2012).
46. On the Sun Zhigang case see Keith J. Hand, "Using law for a righteous purpose: The Sun Zhigang incident and evolving forms of citizen action in the People's Republic of China," *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2006, pp. 114-195.
47. For a discussion on recent important legal cases, see also Teng Biao's article in this issue.
48. For Qian Gang's take on media coverage of the earthquake, see "Looking back on Chinese media reporting on school collapses," *China Media Project*, 7 May 2009, http://cmp.hku.hk/2009/05/07/1599 (consulted on 13 August 2012).

journalists should work for the public interest. Many other events and reports gave rise to shared experiences and different lessons that were subsequently discussed in meetings and special journals such as *Nanfang chuanmei yanjiu*. Not all events and reports result in consensus, however, and some have led to quite divided opinions and debates among journalists and other groups in society. (49)

Pushing the envelope: Fighting against restrictions and for more autonomy

Journalists are not passive and silent when facing restrictions on their freedom to interview and report, and sometimes they fight back and try to defend or expand their autonomy. Their struggles include both open defiance of restrictions and bans and more subtle and ironic forms of resistance. This is well illustrated by reactions to Hubei Governor and NPC delegate Li Hongzhong's attack on a journalist in 2010. When Li faced critical questions, he grabbed the journalist's recorder and chided her for conduct unbecoming a journalist from a Party newspaper. His attitude was criticised and ridiculed by both ordinary citizens and journalists, and satirical cartoons (*manhua* 漫画) depicting the event were widely circulated on the Internet. Several newspapers such as *Finance* and *Southern Metropolitan News* published critical editorials, and a group of well-known journalists and intellectuals signed a petition criticising Li's attitude and demanding a public apology. (50) Reflecting a similar attitude, an official from Henan who was questioned by journalists about the construction of villas on confiscated land rhetorically asked: "Are you planning to speak for the Party or for the people?" This statement was criticised for revealing how officials expect the media to back them up and write favourable reports, and contrasted with general expectations that the media should supervise public power and speak for the people. (51)

When some journalists were harassed and detained by police when trying to interview relatives after a plane crash in August 2010 in Yichun, a group of some 20 journalists went to the police station to protest. Some of them held up signs with characters that formed the sentence: "Police shouldn't arbitrarily detain journalists." (52) A photo of this protest was widely circulated on journalists' microblogs and in the media and was accompanied by more explicit criticism of restrictions on journalists' right to carry out interviews. Stories like this become part of a narrative of resistance that constitutes one aspect of community-building. In this context, *weibo* have created a new space for ironic resistance and have increased the visibility of these protests outside of the community. (53) The speed and interactivity of *weibo* furthermore means that news spreads faster and is more widely shared than in the past.

Journalists today may make references to and joke about directives and bans on their *weibo*, which again make them more visible. In May 2011, a number of journalists went to Wuhan to report on the case of Xu Wu, a man who had been involved in petitioning and as a result was sent to a mental hospital. (54) While in Wuhan, they received a directive forbidding them to report on the case. Instead of leaving the city, several journalists stayed on in order to follow developments on the case even though they couldn't report. Wang Sijing, a journalist with *21st Century Business Herald* (*Ershiyi shiji jingji baodao* 21 世纪经济报道), decided to post information about both the ban and what happened to Xu Wu and his family on her *weibo*. "Early morning. Seven journalists are waiting at the Wuhan police station. Although the ban (*jinling* 禁令) arrived yesterday, we want to ensure that Xu Wu, who has been put in a mental hospital, can be guaranteed an early release." She made this posting in the belief that even though she couldn't report on his case, she should at least let the public know what was happening. (55)

Struggle, solidarity, and rights protection

The concept of *weiquan* (维权) mostly comes up in connection with lawyers' and rights-defenders' work to protect other people's rights, or in the context of ordinary citizens who try to defend their own rights. Chinese writers and journalists also face various types of harassment and infringement of their rights, and sometimes even imprisonment for their writings. (56) In many cases this is too sensitive to discuss and report, but when it is mainly local officials and businessmen who harass and intimidate journalists, including initiating libel suits, we see more open protests and shows of solidarity within the journalistic community. (57) Although the ACJA has a special committee working to safeguard journalists' rights, and on some occasions speaks out when journalists have been harassed, journalists do not generally look to the ACJA as an ally in protecting their rights. (58)

An important aspect of a community of like-minded journalists is that they not only share similar ideals and aspirations but also speak out in support and solidarity with fellow journalists who have been harassed, dismissed, or charged with criminal offences. (59) Many journalists feel that the

49. The Deng Yujiao case, for example, led to soul-searching among some journalists who were initially too uncritical of both the defence lawyers' statements and those of netizens. See special issue of *Nanfang chuanmei yanjiu*, no. 19, 2009. I also base this on my interviews with journalists involved in the case and from attending seminars discussing it.
50. See analyses and reports put together by China Digital Times, http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2010/03/journalists-twitterers-and-the-media-demand-apology-from-hubei-governor-li-hongzhong (consulted on 13 August 2012), and China Media Project, http://cmp.hku.hk/2010/03/14/4936 (consulted on 13 August 2012).
51. His statement was also criticised by Party media worrying about his juxtaposing of the Party and the people. See for example an editorial in *Workers Daily,* 19 June 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/house/2009-06/19/content_11566778.htm (consulted on 13 August 2012).
52. See reports in *Beijing News*, http://news.qq.com/a/20100829/000525.htm (consulted on 13 August 2012), and *Caijing*, www.caijing.com.cn/2010-08-29/110507663.html (consulted on 13 August 2012).
53. On ironic forms and resistance on the Internet in general, see Yang, *op. cit.*
54. Interviews with a number of journalists following the case and a reading of their microblogs.
55. See the microblogs of Wang Sijing's and others, as well as Wang's article "Jinling hou, jiu gai jinsheng ma?" (Should one remain silent after the ban?), http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5408ee8501017xaj.html (consulted on 13 August 2012). For discussions on this case and how journalists use weibo see also the no. 26 and no. 30 of Nanfang chuanmei yanjiu, including Wang Sijing's articles.
56. Currently some 27 writers, net activists, and freelance journalists are imprisoned in China. See Committee to Protect Journalists, http://cpj.org/imprisoned/2011.php (consulted on 13 August 2012).
57. See, for example, "Jizhe caifang lüzao baoli zurao: Jiu wei zhuanjia xuezhe fabiao kanfa" (Journalists facing repeated violence and obstruction when interviewing: Nine experts express their views), *Zhongguo xinwen chuban bao*, 30 August 2011, http://news.sina.com.cn/m/2011-08-30/140223075438.shtml (consulted on 13 August 2012); and "Jizhe caifang pinpin yuzu, 2010 nian zhijin 70 yu qi" (More than 70 cases of harassment of journalists during interviews from 2010 to today), *Zhongguo xinwen chuban bao*, 30 August 2011, http://news.sina.com.cn/m/2011-08-30/121423075126.shtml (consulted on 13 August 2012).
58. The ACJA in 1998 established a Committee to Protect the Rights and Welfare of Journalists. It gathers information on abuse of journalists and occasionally speaks out when journalists' rights are violated. See, for example, Fan Yicha, "Jixie weiquan, neng geng you zuowei ma?" (Can ACJA work better to protect rights?), *Nanfang chuanmei yanjiu,* no. 26, 2010, http://media.nfdaily.cn/cmyj/26/02/content/2010-11/09/content_17426510.htm (consulted on 13 August 2012). See also Chen Yingqi, "ACJA calls for better protection for reporters," *China Daily*, 9 August 2010, www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-08/09/content_11117523.htm (consulted on 13 August 2012).
59. On journalists' attempts to speak out when their rights are violated and the limitations of such struggles, see also Jonathan Hassid, "China's contentious journalists: Reconceptualising the media," *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2008, pp. 52–61; and Madeline Earp, *In China, A Debate on Press Rights,* Committee to Protect Journalists, October 19 2010, http://cpj.org/reports/2010/10/in-china-a-debate-on-press-rights.php (consulted on 13 August 2012).

community of journalists should offer support in the face of harassment and also link up with other groups such as lawyers. At a meeting on the occasion of the detention of author Xie Chaoping in September 2010, a group of well-known lawyers, scholars, and journalists also discussed other cases of harassment and arrests of journalists, and what could be done to offer support and protect journalists' rights.[60] As one legal reporter put it: "Journalists should have a sense of community [*gongtongti*]…Professional communities of journalists, lawyers, and scholars should come together when they face an 'opponent' [*duishou* 对手]." Another journalist described his experiences when two journalists from his magazine were briefly detained by the local police: "I discovered that a professional community had already been created. When these two events took place [I] made a posting on *weibo* and immediately it was on the front page of Sohu, and journalists then called the county Party secretary and the head of the police…When we are facing a dangerous situation we need to unite."

One of the earliest examples of collegial support among journalists was the case of Gao Qinrong, a journalist with *Shanxi Youth Daily*. Gao had investigated corruption in connection with an irrigation project, but was arrested in December 1998 and then in May 1999 was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment on charges of bribery, embezzlement, and soliciting prostitutes. Several journalists, legal scholars, lawyers, and NPC delegates protested this sentence because they believed the charges were false, but to no avail. Journalists such as Guo Guosong, then with *Southern Weekend*, continued to write on Gao's case and called for justice after the sentence was passed.[61] After Gao was released, several newspapers such as *Southern Weekend* and *Southern Metropolitan News* also published articles on his experience in prison.[62] Several major cases in the period 2004 to 2006 showed the willingness of journalists to defend principles of autonomy and critical reporting in the face of repression and restrictions, albeit often with little effect. In 2004, *Southern Metropolitan News* was generally perceived as being punished for its outspoken and critical reporting on the Sun Zhigang case when several editors were charged with corruption and sentenced to imprisonment. The charges against them caused great concern, and several prominent lawyers volunteered their services, while many journalists signed a petition protesting the detentions.[63] This so-called "Nandu affair" was a critical event for Chinese journalists, as it showed both their vulnerability in the face of power and their growing sense of community and solidarity.

The development of microblogging has made it easier for journalists to protest and show solidarity when their colleagues face harassment, and they do so with little risk to themselves. When the police in 2010 turned up at the office of *Finance* after the magazine had published a report on black jails, the news spread quickly on *weibo* and the journalist community voiced strong concern. In January 2011, when Luo Jieqi, an investigative journalist with *New Century* who was investigating a sensitive case in Ningxia, was followed, harassed, and accused of doing "illegal interviewing" because she didn't have a valid press card, colleagues and lawyers rapidly posted information and the police phone number on their *weibo* to secure her safety. In another case, Ji Xiguang of *Southern Metropolitan News*, who broke the story of a man arrested for holding sex slaves in Luoyang, was questioned by local police about his sources and accused of "revealing state secrets." He rapidly posted information about this on his *weibo* that was forwarded more than 17,000 times and drew 5,833 comments. Ji believes that the postings and resulting phone calls from netizens asking after his whereabouts were very helpful.[64] Other recent cases where journalists have been dismissed or have not had their positions renewed, such as Chang Ping, formerly with the Southern Media Group, have also led to comments and criticism on *weibo*. Although such vocal concern in many cases has not changed the situation, as in Chang Ping's case, the moral support is nonetheless very important.

A recent case that elicited an outpouring of sympathy and debate was that of Shi Junrong, a reporter at *Xi'an Evening News* (*Xi'an wanbao* 西安晚报) who was suspended after publishing a story revealing how an official kept a pack of costly cigarettes beside him during a meeting. Sun wrote about his suspension on *weibo*, where it drew considerable sympathy from ordinary citizens as well as fellow journalists. The investigative journalist Cao Lin at *China Youth Daily* (*Zhongguo qingnian bao* 中国青年报) responded with an editorial that reflected on the general implications of the case.[65] The editorial strongly argued for journalists' right to report, and linked powerless and weak journalists with a weak citizenry and nation. Cao Lin also made references to the public's strong support of Sun and watchdog journalism in general.

These different cases show that harassment of journalists not only draws concern and protests from within the community, but also sometimes engages other professional groups such as lawyers and public intellectuals, as well as the general public. Several well-known lawyers, such as Pu Zhiqiang and Zhou Ze, have taken on cases related to freedom of speech and the arrest of journalists. In 2009, Zhou Ze compiled a dossier of cases related to violations of journalists' rights that was reported on in *Southern Weekend*.[66] Journalists have likewise expressed concern about the harassment of lawyers. Several well-known investigative journalists forwarded information on blind lawyer Chen Guangcheng on their *weibo*, which probably helped make his case better known among a broader group in society.

Journalists on weibo: Creating new communities and closer interactions with other social groups

A growing and diverse group of Chinese citizens, including ordinary people, journalists, lawyers, scholars, and activists, are today using *weibo* to link up with like-minded people. They post, read, re-post, and comment on current events, protests, and disasters that are often not reported in the traditional media but which lead to public debate that then may find its way into the media. They also use *weibo* to campaign for certain social causes and help

60. Observations from the event and quotes from the proceedings.
61. See Guo Guosong, "Fan fu jizhe pilu zhenxiang yihou" (What happened after an anti-corruption journalist disclosed the truth), *Nanfang zhoumo*, 11 January 2001, www.people.com.cn/GB/shehui/20010112/377151.html (consulted on 13 August 2012); and "Guanyu Gao Qinrong shijian de linxing jiyi" (Scattered memories of the Gao Qinrong case), http://bbs.gz163.cn/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=129655 (consulted on 13 August 2012).
62. Ma Changbo, "A journalist's eight years in prison," *Nanfang zhoumo*, 14 December 2006, English translation available at www.zonaeuropa.com/20061218_1.htm (consulted on 13 August 2012).
63. For information on this, see China Digital Times, http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2005/06/journalists-protest-detention-of-colleagues (consulted on 13 August 2012).
64. See Ji Xiguang, "Luoyang 'xing nu' shijian shui de 'guojia jimi'?" (Whose state secret is the Luoyang sex slave case?), *Southern Metropolitan News*, 23 September 2011, http://gcontent.oeeee.com/d/20/d20be76a86c0d71c/Blog/712/56778f.html (consulted on 13 August 2012).
65. For an analysis and full translation of the editorial, see David Bandurski, "No power for media, no power for citizens," China Media Project, 3 July 2012, http://cmp.hku.hk/2012/07/03/24929 (consulted on 13 August 2012).
66. See He Zhongzhou, "Yulun jiandu zhengzai zaoyu xin weixian? Jizhe quanyi de minjian guancha baogao" (Is public supervision meeting new dangers? A civic investigative report on journalists' rights and interests), *Nanfang zhoumo*, 11 November 2009, www.infzm.com/content/37222 (consulted on 13 August 2012).



The campaign journalist Deng Fei started has become a full-fledged organisation, *Mianfei wucan* (Free lunches), that in the spring had big advertisements at the Capital airport.
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individuals as well as to engage in philanthropy. Microblogging by its very nature opens up and demands some level of interactivity among its users. The investigative journalists in my sample follow between 100 and 2,000 people (the maximum on Sina).[67] Although they mainly follow other journalists and each other, further strengthening their distinctive community, they also follow and are followed by other groups that are crucial for their work, such as lawyers, legal scholars, public intellectuals, and famous bloggers. Three of them had as many as 1.7 million, 273,426, and 180,764 followers, respectively (March 2012).[68] Journalists mainly use *weibo* to get information about the latest news, follow hot topics and current debates, and publish and circulate their own reports or those of fellow journalists that they find particularly important. The more active investigative journalists follow more people, re-post more postings from outside of their own media group, are more prone to offer opinions and critical comments on current issues and sudden events, and are more likely to post or re-post calls for help and news about charity work posted by both individuals and civil society organisations. The convenience of posting and reposting microblogs (although they often are censored or deleted) strengthens and expands informal networking beyond the core group of investigative journalists.

It is interesting to note that journalists play a central and important role on *weibo*. Their privileged position and high level of trustworthiness means that their postings are often commented upon and re-posted. Journalists may also find crucial information on *weibo* that is provided by ordinary citizens. The use of smart phones enables people to take photos and upload postings in an instant with low cost and little technological know-how. They can thus provide important input to traditional news production as well as alternative and critical information not found in the traditional media. Recent cases include the high-speed train crash outside of Wenzhou. Many citizens involved in struggles for justice have also set up their own *weibo* accounts, and they also use *weibo* to get the attention of journalists; the active involvement and help of journalists and other actors are often crucial for their *weibo* postings to have an impact. The case of demolition and self-immolation in Yihuang in September 2010 was probably among the first and at least the most widely published case where journalists and ordinary citizens worked together using *weibo* to publish information about the case. In fact it was two journalists reporting on the case, Liu Chang then at *New Century* and Deng Fei at *Phoenix Magazine* (*Fenghuang zhoukan* 凤凰周刊), who spread information about the case through live broadcast on their *weibo* and also taught family members how to use *weibo*.[69] The investigation into the death of Qian Yunhui in Yueqing, Zhejiang Province, in late December 2010 was also played out on *weibo* and led to cooperation but also divisions among journalists, legal scholars, lawyers, and ordinary citizens, who came to take different positions as the events unfolded.[70]

With the advent of *weibo* we are seeing a tendency among some investigative journalists to write and forward posts about different urgent individual cases and social causes, and various activities in the civil society sector. An even more striking phenomenon is their active involvement in different forms of charity work, with some starting fund-raising campaigns that have later developed into registered organisations. In early 2011, two campaigns to help trafficked children were launched on *weibo*. One campaign was organised by the investigative journalist Deng Fei at *Phoenix Magazine*, and the other by Yu Jianrong, a sociologist with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Deng Fei later went on to start a fund-raising campaign aimed at providing free lunches for rural children (*Mianfei wucan* 免费午餐) that later developed into a full-fledged organisation. He strategically built on his extensive network among fellow journalists, who came to take a leading role in the campaign and organisation.[71] One of China's most famous investigative journalists, Wang Keqin, has long been interested in and spoken out on different social issues, many of which are rooted in his earlier reporting, such as his work on people with HIV/AIDS and the treatment and imprisonment of activist Tian Xi. He has also reported on the plight of mi-

67. Marina Svensson, "Chinese Journalists on Weibo: New Journalistic Identities, Practices and Challenges," Unpublished paper presented at a conference organised by the British Academy, London, 9 March 2012.

68. It should be noted that it is rather problematic to measure public impact by the number of followers, as followers don't necessarily read the postings or actively engage with what they read. A more interesting measure of popularity and impact is therefore the extent to which postings elicit comments or are re-posted.

69. For Deng Fei's own account of how the Yihuang case developed, see "Jizhe zongjie weibo tuidong Yihuang chaiqian zifen chengwei gonggong shijian quancheng" (A journalist summarises the whole story of how *weibo* turned the Yihuang self-immolation case into a public event), *Shidai zhoubao*, 14 October 2010, http://news.ifeng.com/society/special/yihuangzifen/content-2/detail_2010_10/14/2780291_0.shtml (consulted on 13 August 2012). See also information on the case provided by Global Voices, http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/09/21/china-yihuang-self-immolation-incident-and-the-power-of-microblogging (consulted on 13 August 2012).

70. On this case, see Xiyun Yang and Edward Wong, "Suspicious Death Ignites Fury in China," *The New York Times*, 28 December 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/12/29/world/asia/29china.html (consulted on 13 August 2012); and the citizen report, "Gongmeng Qian Yunhui zhi si diaocha baogao" (The Citizen Alliance's investigative report on the death of Qian Yunhui), http://xuzhiyong.fyfz.cn/art/874568.htm (suppressed; accessible at http://laws.fyfz.cn/art/902361.htm [consulted on 13 August 2012]).

71. For Deng Fei's own account of the development of the organisation, see *Nanfang chuanmei yanjiu*, no. 31, 2011, http://media.nfdaily.cn/cmyj/31/03/content/2011-09/06/content_29460449.htm (consulted on 13 August 2012).

grant workers with pneumoconiosis and then used his *weibo* account to spread information about their situation. He gathered a group of dedicated volunteers, many of them journalism students and interns, and eventually took the step to set up an organisation that is now officially registered and involved in collecting money to help these workers and their families. [72]

Conclusion: The limitations of freedom of speech and networking in China

Chinese investigative journalists have created their own informal meeting spaces and forms of networking that has helped create a sense of community. Their own networking and the spaces provided by other actors, such as scholars, media organisations, and civil society organisations, have enabled them to share experiences and discuss values and journalistic practices outside of the ACJA. Although the informal and ad hoc nature of these meeting spaces makes them easier to sustain, it is also a weakness, as it is not possible to develop full-fledged organisations due to restrictions on setting up professional associations. Furthermore, the fact that the community is fluid could also be seen as a problem. Many investigative journalists leave their work for other professions after some years, an indication of the pressure they are under and the structural constraints that prevent the community from becoming fully embedded in media organisations and society. The stories and shared values within the community also evolve and are constantly re-defined and negotiated as a result of new developments in society, so that both new identities and new communities emerge. The development of *weibo* is a good case in point. It has created new spaces for community-building among journalists, and even more strikingly has enabled closer interactions between journalists, other professional groups, and ordinary citizens. But although it is natural for investigative journalists to have close contacts with civil society actors, including lawyers, they also need to keep a distance and supervise non-state actors in the same way as state actors and corporate actors in order to fulfil their aspirations as investigative journalists. The new possibilities for journalists to post critical comments on *weibo* and their involvement in charity work may lead to a blurring of their different roles as journalists and citizens. This has also recently begun to be discussed among investigative journalists as they continue to debate and define their roles in a restricted media environment and under the impact of new ICTs. [73]

Stern and Hassid have drawn attention to how uncertainties about the boundaries of the permissible create fear among both journalists and lawyers, and they argue that this leads to an "amplifying of silence." [74] Although I wouldn't dismiss the existence of such fears and silences, I argue that we can detect a growing sense of shared ideals and community-building among and between investigative journalists and other groups in society, and that this is facilitated by and made visible through the use of *weibo*. To some extent we can thus talk about an amplifying of resistance and solidarity. But it needs to be acknowledged that these shows of solidarity and protest are rather limited and often quite ineffective. More sensitive cases of imprisoned journalists and net activists are rarely raised, and shows of solidarity cannot rectify underlying problems related to freedom of speech and the press in an authoritarian society. Whereas the agency of Chinese investigative journalists shouldn't be underestimated, and is demonstrated by their ability to negotiate and push through with critical reporting and independent community building, they face formidable structural constraints both at the meso-level of media organisations and at the macro-level of political and legal institutions. Finally, on a more general note, whether *weibo* can facilitate the creation of a genuine public sphere in China is open to debate in view of the ad hoc and fragmented nature of public debates on *weibo*, the marginalization of certain voices, and the precarious connection between on-line debate and off-line mobilisation. [75] The fact that domestic microblogging providers have increasingly come under pressure to curtail and censor communication flows on *weibo* and the way different government bodies, including the police, now also try to use *weibo* to get their messages out, reveals the logic and strength of "networked authoritarianism." [76]

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72. For information on the organisation Love Save Pneumoconiosis and its activities, see www.csaf.org.cn/cn/dust_lung/index.html (consulted on 13 August 2012).
73. A debate on journalists' roles and use of *weibo* has been underway since 2011; see, for example, the articles in *Nanfang chuanmei yanjiu*, no. 30, 2011.
74. Rachel E. Stern and Jonathan Hassid, "Amplifying Silence: Uncertainty and Control Parables in Contemporary China," *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. XX, no. X, 2012, pp. 1-25.
75. For discussion on the Internet and social mobilization, see Hu Yong, "China: The Internet and Grassroots Mobilization," in Ip Iam-Chong (ed.), *Social Media Uprising in the Chinese-speaking World*, UP publication, Hong Kong, 2011.
76. For the concept and workings of "networked authoritarianism," see Rebecca MacKinnon, *Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide Struggle For Internet Freedom*, New York, Basic Books, 2012.