

Editorial

Recently, the United Kingdom's 'public flagellation' of one of the most highly respected traditional media organizations has proven wrong the theory that the media are powerful beyond control, or even powerful enough for their task. Curbing the media is not a specific trait of undemocratic states. Worse, a democratic government can deny the media's watchdog role and no public outcry will result. Power should impart responsibility, but it is mostly up to NGOs and the media to expose government or corporate corruption and power abuse. Leaving the watchdogs high and dry, academia primarily keeps to non-committal critic on the media.

If both academia and politics criticize traditional media for their lack of knowledge and depth, the internet promised absolute anarchic horror for the cultural and political elite. In China, the internet enjoys vast popularity and is surrounded by varying political and economic fears and expectations, warranting a theme on the internet as a political forum in China, guest edited by Randolph Kluver. Subsequently, articles on endangered sites and the internet in Mongolia are featured in this issue.

The Chinese government has hardly been a staunch proponent of free public expression in the media. Its original preoccupation with people's minds now gradually yields to its growing interest in their pockets and purses. China is not unique in its policies nor are the results. Western democracies and corporations increasingly use the internet to gauge and influence opinion, mass consumption, and taste.

No one will claim that China's initial resistance and current close watch on the internet signal a struggle against modernity. Information and computing technology originates in the West, but its further development may well take place in the East. Things have changed. In the nineteenth-century resistance to new, Western technologies was interpreted as traditional, non-Western backwardness. Never mind that this confrontation was hardly unique for Asia. At the time in England, the railways and somewhat later the London underground met with adamant opposition. Its arguments could easily be discarded as traditionalist, backward, emotional, or if you would, Eastern. In Europe many a grandmother waved aside the refrigerator as a passing whim. Video recorders were as ludicrous in the late seventies, as was the idea of an office computer for every employee in the nineties...or mobiles, email, the internet.

Due to the present Asian dominance in physical sciences, the future development of internet technology is likely to occur there. The internet will partly determine what China will be in the near future and the other way around. As a medium, it will not become what early enthusiasts had hoped for, but the internet's role for public opinion and for keeping government in check make it a topic that demands academic attention. To conclude on a more personal note, I have much enjoyed producing the previous ten issues and, now leaving the job, I look forward to reading the July issue: David Takeo Hymans' first. – **MS**