

THREE VOICES OF PATRIOTISM: REPORTING THE BOMBARDMENT OF THE BELGRADE EMBASSY IN THE CHINESE MEDIA

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The embassy of China in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, was hit by NATO missiles in the early hours of May 8th 1999, Beijing time. Missiles killed three reporters inside the embassy complex. Before that occasion, the Chinese media had already urged peace in their reports on the Kosovo war. The television and the press reports had emphasized the human suffering in the war, rather than adopting the common stand in the Western press at the time, which portrayed the necessity of the war for protecting human rights and putting a stop to a genocide. After the missile attack, the Chinese media and public responded immediately with patriotic fervor. Repeating the terminology used to describe imperialist humiliation suffered by their country at the turn of the 20th century, they interpreted the attack as a purposeful violation of Chinese soil by an imperialist power. For several days, the attack achieved the most coverage, sometimes being the only content, in Chinese news broadcasts. The government saw its chance to instigate and use this indignation for uniting the people behind its program, which emphasized the need for an unyielding spirit against foreign intrusion and for putting every effort into economic modernization.

This article is mainly based on the television diaries I kept when I stayed in Beijing at the time and had access to various national and provincial television channels around the country.¹ In this article, I will analyze the media content in

¹ During these days I had access to China Central TV (CCTV) stations and the local channels in Beijing (BTV). In addition, I could see all those provincial TV stations that were available for Beijing audiences through satellite. Of these, I systematically followed CCTV and BTV news as well as Sichuan and Hunan stations, which proved to be quite outspoken about popular movements. In the meantime there was plenty of time to switch through other channels, such as Shanghai, Zhejiang, Hebei, Tianjin and Jiangsu, which, however, received my attention only sporadically. My TV diaries are unavoidably incomplete when it comes to

the first few days after the Belgrade attack. My interest is in demonstrating the unofficial voices in the centrally controlled media. As the center cannot control the totality of media coverage in China, especially since publications and television channels have multiplied during economic reforms, the responsibility for the selection of material is left primarily to journalists and editors. Although they must balance the possible consequences of publishing materials that are too daring, they actually can include their own views and popular opinion as long as the message is not too offending to the government. In this article I will analyze these unofficial messages in the coverage of the Belgrade attack. In the official content in the media, I pay attention to the highly successful political mobilization.

RULES OF THE GAME

In this article I will sketch rules for one kind of political influencing in China, namely, working within the limits of the Chinese public sphere. This sphere is limited – as any sphere of publicity is – but contains a certain amount of freedom. Participants consequently learn to use the rules of publicity in any particular space. With this knowledge and experience, reporters know how to report messages they find important and in a way that strengthens the opinions they want to produce. Moreover, every government shapes a specific public space, both by suggesting what is desirable news content and by limiting the content through licensing, legislation, and possibly censorship, as well as through directly or indirectly promoting aspired contents and disciplining unwanted ones. Such was the case also in China in the early May of 1999.

Although direct state control over the press is stricter in China than in the United States or Western Europe, not all media control is stricter in China. For example, because Chinese legislation is still incomplete, a journalist must be wary of political reprimand, but not libel suits, which give special daring to Chinese investigative reports, for example, in giving out names and details of cases of misconduct or fraud. Thus, rather than simply saying that the Chinese system is controlled, I would like to sketch how control actually shapes political messages in China.

In China the central control of the press may be strict, but it is mostly indirect. Much is left to journalists' and editors' own judgment. Indeed, the government mostly relies on the threat of consequences rather than direct censorship. Therefore, along with centrally initiated messages, the Chinese media contains

the exact time of each statement I refer to. Therefore, I will refer to each program with the channel, the date, and the preceding full hour.

journalists' own voices. Journalists are skilled in using official language, setting the message in the context of an officially approved topic, or bending officially approved limits, when including their own messages or popular opinions into the news content. In spring 1999, television channels, for example, aired messages in which the text read in the broadcast met all official standards, while the filmed materials were in obvious contradiction with the spoken message. Also, the media edits unofficial messages to fit the official environment.² Indeed, journalists in China are by no means passive government mouthpieces, but they actively shape the message they transmit to the public.

THE POPULAR VOICE

Official China condemned the NATO attack against its Belgrade embassy immediately. It soon demanded NATO apologize and investigate the incident and punish those responsible for it. Yet, the official line was under formulation and, therefore, delayed until the second day. This lack of exact guidance from the top left 36 hours for the media to steer reporting. Especially since the government did not immediately state its official and united view about popular demonstrations, the media was able to use its own judgment in its reports.

When people were demonstrating against the attack around the embassies, the media was there gathering first hand opinions about the situation. The midnight news of May 8th televised demonstrations and obviously spontaneous interviews on almost all channels. There was no hint of the model replies which followed the next day: a policeman gave his support for the demonstrators and a middle-aged woman in Chengdu could tell that, after hearing the news, the whole family had come to participate in the demonstrations.³

The last China Central Television broadcast containing street demonstrations was the seven o'clock evening news of May 9th. This was the first main news bulletin after the first official statement about the demonstrations, the Vice President Hu Jintao's speech.⁴ In this speech, Hu Jintao admitted that demonstrators had acted out of laudable motives, but not in the correct way. One should rather concentrate his love for the country in diligent work to build a strong and

² To give one quite ridiculous example: A disc jockey for a Shanghai radio rock program told me how he wrote an article originally titled "Four Underground Rock Bands" and offered it to a Shanghai daily, *Wenhui*, in 1996. A reader can already guess, that the word "underground" did not receive the editors' approval. Nevertheless, the article was published, but the editor had replaced all questionable terms, including the key word "rock" itself.

³ Sichuan, 8 May, 24 hr.

⁴ The speech was printed in all major newspapers on May 10th, e.g., in *Beijing ribao*, 10 May, 1999, p. 1.

prosperous country able to resist foreign aggression, he said. In the seven o'clock broadcast the interviewed participants already stressed their duty to study hard, much in line with Hu Jintao's speech. The nine o'clock news on the central television station had already stopped reporting about the demonstrations.

Although all channels transmitted Hu Jintao's speech that evening, some provincial television stations did not follow suit with CCTV in discontinuing the televising of demonstrations. In Sichuan, the report itself did not deal with demonstrations anymore, but the closing texts ran over a demonstration scene.⁵ Beijing and Hunan even reported about demonstrations with the same openness of the previous day. Along with banners containing nasty hints concerning President Clinton's sexual life, Hunan television even aired a student demonstrator in Changsha demanding exchanging blood for blood,⁶ certainly a view which the government did not share. At noon on May 10th, some stations⁷ continued reporting demonstrations. Some channels reported demonstrations as late as the evening of May 10th: Beijing TV-2 rebroadcast its morning news (11 hr) at 5 p.m. and Hunan reviewed the morning demonstrations, but stressed the orderly studying in campus interviews at 10 p.m. Yet demonstrations were included here and there even later, for example, when CCTV recalled the course of events in May 12th (20 hr). If the domestic demonstration scenes became rare, the media frequently noticed peace demonstrations in Europe and overseas Chinese demonstrations against NATO and the Kosovo war, partly to show foreign sympathies for its own stand and to demonstrate the unpopularity of the war among the common people everywhere, but possibly also as an analogy to the earlier demonstrations in China.

The television had exposed only demonstrations by orderly student columns on the main streets with their banners and slogans. They did not show the angry mob around the embassies throwing stones and rubbish into the embassy areas that I saw on my Chinese friends' videos filmed outside the embassies in Beijing. Yet cameras filmed the broken windows and paint-stained walls of the US embassy in Beijing when the embassy followed the Tian'anmen Square example by lowering the flag half-mast on May 12th to commemorate the dead, when their ashes arrived in Beijing.⁸ There were other implicit hints about disturbances as well. Many interviewees repeated Hu Jintao's demand for guaranteeing all foreigners' safety in China. Several television stations interviewed local foreign students, who offered their consolations to the Chinese, evidently to show that not all foreigners in China are targets of patriotic hostility. In Sichuan, the local

⁵ Sichuan, 9 May, 22 hr.

⁶ Hunan, 9 May, 22 hr.

⁷ Including Zhejiang.

⁸ CCTV, 12 May, 19 hr.

Motorola office joined in condemning the NATO act,⁹ an obvious reaction to contemporary boycotts of American goods, such as demonstrations outside of MacDonald's restaurants.

Depending on the television channel, the time for broadcasting the popular voice continued for a day or two after the incident. After that, the media continued to interview people, but these were model replies and not genuine mass opinion. Even reactions in which it is suggested using missiles against the US received occasional publicity.¹⁰ Even after broadcasting Hu Jintao's speech some television channels continued to deliver contradictory messages by giving the demonstrations a sympathetic evaluation. Beijing newspapers printed contradictory messages as well: although Hu Jintao's words occupied the main place on the front page of the *Beijing Daily* on May 10th, right by its side was another article with a picture hailing the general participation of the Beijing people in the demonstration.¹¹ The same day, the *Beijing Evening News* even carried pictures of demonstrations of that very same morning, i.e., the day after Hu Jintao's speech.¹² The most outspoken Chinese newspaper, *Nanfang zhoumo* ['Southern Weekend'], printed a demonstration scene on its front page still on May 11th. To evaluate the media role in initiating and guiding the demonstrations, one must not underestimate its role in giving both information and a model for demonstrators. Supposedly the government must have felt uneasy about this kind of unscripted messages.

THE MEDIA VOICE

Apart from supporting some popular initiatives even longer than the official view would have preferred, the media had its own voice in reporting as well. As the people killed at the Belgrade embassy were reporters, the dangers of media work and freedom of the press became important topics. No doubt these topics were not coming from the official line. Chinese journalists can debate about freedom of the

⁹ Sichuan, 11 May, 24 hr.

¹⁰ *Beijing wanbao* (May 10, 1999, p. 5) published pictures of demonstrations, including a demonstrator who had written "China has missiles too". The newspaper had titled this picture "China cannot be bullied". This was obviously a common view: I heard two people separately suggesting that China should resort to a nuclear bomb to answer bullying in private discussions on May 12th in Beijing.

¹¹ Notice the revealing title with its implicit message of recommended action: "*Beijing ge jie renshi shengtao yi Meiguo wei shou Beiyue baoxing, shoudu daxuesheng jixu dao Meiguo dashiguan sheweiyouxing*" ['All strata of Beijing people denounce the violence by the US-led NATO, students in the capital continue to demonstrate outside the US embassy'], *Beijing ribao*, 10 May, 1999, p. 1.

¹² *Beijing wanbao*, 5 May, 1999, p. 3.

press in academic and professional journals, but the main television news broadcast is generally not the right place for such discussion. Now, the media found space for promoting its own interests in front of the national audience by labeling the NATO attack as an attack against freedom of reporting.

Reporters were among the first groups to be interviewed about the incident on television. Many channels televised their famous reporters speaking about how important and dangerous a profession they have. History provided earlier examples such as the 1955 airplane sabotage, in which several Chinese reporters were killed on the way to Indonesia.¹³ The freedom of the Western press was questioned by suggesting that the official line, sympathetic to NATO aims, distorted reporting of the Kosovo war in the West.¹⁴

In addition, I interpreted the emotional tone of reporting as a media voice. Arousing patriotic feelings was, naturally, in the interest of the government as well, but during the early stage of reporting it might have turned out to be a Damocles' sword by inciting popular movement, which was hardly what the government wanted. The grave tone of Hu Jintao's speech was in evident contradiction with the contemporary emotionalism: while Hu wanted to calm down popular emotions and to guide them, the media simultaneously repeated film materials showing the removal of bodies from the ruins, or tearful family members and colleagues. Later, after the constant threat of social disturbances had vanished, the government took over this emotionalism; for example, on May 13th and 14th the hour-long evening news showed all leaders shaking hands with the wounded and participating in funerals.

Emotionalism was evident in the abundant presence of blood and tears. Television cameras keenly followed Zhu Fulai, who went to collect the bodies of his daughter and son-of-law. In often repeated shots, the father, with tears and a distorted face, held his daughter's bloody bed sheet or collapsed over her dead body in the mortuary. Family tragedy was displayed with full emotionalism: how Shao Yunhuan's son had lost his mother just before International Mothers' Day; or how the young couple had just been planning to have a baby.¹⁵ Zhu Fulai even wrote to President Clinton to say that he hopes for no other human rights than to have his daughter alive again.¹⁶ In addition to family members, a television watcher could follow tearful recalls by teachers, colleagues and survivors.¹⁷

To be able to define whether the media initiated emotional reporting, one should know whether the government representatives had a role in overseeing the

¹³ BTV-2, 10 May, 11 hr.

¹⁴ *Huanqiu shibao*, 14 May, 1999, p. 2.

¹⁵ CCTV, 12 May, 19 and 20 hr.

¹⁶ E.g., CCTV, 11 May, 12 hr.

¹⁷ E.g., CCTV, 12 May, around 21 hr.

selection of the film materials from Belgrade or whether the media professionals had relatively free hands, as in routine media work. Yet even if the government set the emotional tone, it is evident that the media supported and strengthened this form of patriotic appeal when interviewing relatives in sorrow or visiting the dead reporters' homes and offices. The media even used this emotionalism on its own account when reporting on the dangers of media work.

POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

The attack occurred only four days after the 80th anniversary of the May 4th Movement, a major intellectual movement in early republican China. This movement grew into patriotic anger after the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, but involved also a movement for democratization and cultural reform. This movement resulted in the founding of the Communist Party of China, which makes its anniversary one of the highlights of the official Chinese year. Nevertheless, the symbols under which it is celebrated vary each year. In 1979 and 1989, both years of democracy movements, the main theme was democracy, while in 1999 the theme was patriotism. This atmosphere must have had an influence on how students responded to the NATO attack only four days later. Surely Chinese students have various other sources to draw on when demonstrating against a wrongdoing, but after all the patriotic education surrounding the anniversary they were even more likely to adopt the May 4th forms of action to show that they were worthy members of the nation. But this connection was rather indirect, since interviewees for television seldom mentioned the May 4th Movement, with an exception of the reporting of the special May 4th Conference¹⁸. Nevertheless, popular reactions after the attack were already following a period of official political mobilization.

After the attack the Chinese government took a stand, which demonstrated its patriotism and unwillingness to tolerate international bullying, but without endangering its relations to foreign powers. Its demands for the guilty party were clear, but not such that NATO and the US government could be unable to fulfill them. While the earlier republican government in power during the May 4th Movement, according to official history, ignored popular indignation and prepared to sell China to the imperialist powers, the present government would not give in and would stand with the people against the violators. This must have been the implicit message of the official position. For this stand, the popular demonstrations served a purpose: they demonstrated that the Chinese people stood with its government and gave extra justification for the Chinese government's demands. After there was no more danger for popular unrest, President Jiang

¹⁸ CCTV, 12 May, 19 hr.

Zemin, when meeting Viktor Chernomyrdin, recognized this by presenting the demonstrations as a proof of Chinese patriotism.¹⁹ If the 1989 student demonstrations gave many Westerners a notion that there was wide antagonism between the government and the people, the Western media now had to report the opposite situation.

The 1989 experiences may have influenced the government's mobilization strategy ten years later. In 1989 the government had angered students by labeling the demonstrators as conspirators with ulterior motives,²⁰ quite contrary to the participants' feelings of having demonstrated their political responsibility towards their government. Much of the later movement, then, had demanded repudiating this label.²¹ Now the government carefully avoided irritating the public. The government's official stand concerning the attack, expressed in Hu Jintao's speech, recommended ways in which the government, on the one hand, and the patriotic people, on the other, should pursue justice. Rather than directly condemning them, the government now took over the demonstrations and began to dictate their form. In line with the official view, the media soon advocated campus demonstrations, flag-raising ceremonies and poster writing, instead of massive street demonstrations. The protest movement was played down in the most orderly way, without ignoring popular sentiment, but by monopolizing its outlets within officially approved contexts. The fragile balance in mobilizing political mass activism was well played this time.

Even earlier street demonstrations had had mobilizing elements. For example, in Shanghai, universities had organized transportation to demonstrations and the police had let only students enter the demonstration area outside the embassies.²² These measures were to control the movement, but also guaranteed wide student participation. Arrangements to facilitate control, of course, do not suggest that protests themselves were designed to suit government ends. As an example of conscious mass action, my non-student friends in Shanghai had themselves decided whether to join: one decided to go, not because three people's lives counted much in China, but because every Chinese must protest any

¹⁹ CCTV-3, 11 May, 22 hr.

²⁰ The controversial *People's Daily* editorial of April 26th, 1989, is translated in Li, Mark & Li 1991: 42–45.

²¹ An immediate reaction at Beijing University can be found in an unofficial document collection, *Lishi bu hui wangji. 1989 nian Zhongguo minzhu yundong ziliao huibian* ['History cannot forget. A compilation of the 1989 Chinese democracy movement materials'] (Wiesbaden: World University Service Deutsches Komitee, 1990), p. 51. A good compilation of the Democracy Movement document by Han Minzhu (ed.), *Cries for Democracy. Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), contains many later responses to the editorial on pp. 117, 205, 221 and 243.

²² According to a personal informant.

violation of Chinese soil; another stayed home since she felt that the occasion would have had no more importance for her than excitement (*renao*).

Now all strata of society, from artists to a city cleaning bureau,²³ from academicians to war veterans, from monks to minority nationalities, held meetings to study and comment on the situation. The media reported on these meetings of official consensus building and political education from the first day of the event, but obviously there had been no united and authoritative guideline before Hu Jintao's speech. After this speech, studying its content formed an important part of these meetings which themselves occupied an important part of news broadcasts.

I myself had a chance to follow one such meeting in Shanghai at Fudan University on May 14th. In that meeting a professor analyzed Sino-US relations in depth, while another, with a voice sore from shouting slogans during the demonstrations, gave a sympathetic evaluation for the correct limits of patriotism, which should respect the safety of the university's foreign students, for example. The media did not report violence, but professors knew about incidents such as burning the US consul's residence in Chengdu. One should not violate foreign embassies if one demands that foreign powers should not violate one's own, the professor advised. He warned also against social upheaval with a rhyme "not wanting to be weak nor wanting chaos" (*bu yao ruan, ye bu yao luan*). During the meeting, a television crew picked up certain previously selected student representatives to comment on the situation in front of the cameras.

Apart from meetings and a top leader's speech, the government actively used such long-standing mobilization devices as the *People's Daily* editorials and commentaries. In the days following the attack, several authoritative *People's Daily* editorials, habitually setting the tone of political education, made it onto central television news, sometimes²⁴ even the evening before their publication. Titles such as "The Chinese people cannot be bullied"²⁵ reveal the style of their content.

THE OFFICIAL VOICE

Apart from mobilization, political education aims at transparency. Although China is not very transparent in the sense of public political processes, it has a long and serious tradition of making the government's aims transparent. This kind of transparency serves both mobilization and persuasion. By making its stand and

²³ Shanghai, 10 May, 24 hr.

²⁴ E.g., CCTV, 9 May, 21 hr.

²⁵ The *People's Daily* commentator, "Zhongguo renmin bu ke wu", *Beijing ribao*, 10 May, 1999, p. 2.

rationale public, the government asks for active popular support, or at least the passive acceptance of its line. During the political education campaign after the NATO attack, the government made clear its understanding of the situation, its demands for the attackers and its expectations for suitable public behavior.

Continuing a long tradition to use major crises for promoting production,²⁶ the government used the NATO attack to stress hard work for China's modernization and a personal responsibility over its success by each and every one. China can oppose hegemonism only if it is strong, orderly, and united, was the official message. The media emphasized this message by showing all professions, such as construction workers, peasants, nurses, and bus drivers, putting their patriotic effort into their work. This message was readily accepted by the public, at least this is what my own discussions in Beijing indicated. Although model responses tended to be repetitive, they still represented commonly shared emotions in facing an outside threat. The media lauded certain model examples of successfully contributing one's effort to the nation, ranging from the staging of the Yellow River chorus work²⁷ to launching a rocket.²⁸

The attack offered the government an opportunity to show NATO's hostility to China, demonstrating that a patriotic Chinese must be selective about Western influences. The occasion was readily interpreted as a demonstration of the truth about the US human rights demands. If the US itself was not willing to respect even human lives on the soil of a foreign country, how could it have any right to censure other countries treatment of their own citizens, numerous people asked in the media interviews. A popular saying claimed that the US was not really standing for human rights (*renquan*), but for hegemonism (*baquan*). Another point was the racially selective quality of the US human rights claim.²⁹ This message was adopted on the most concrete level in the streets of Beijing, where even construction workers spontaneously came to tell me how they hated the US. Although a foreigner's personal safety was never in danger, my foreign friends met such instances of personal political action as a Beijing taxi driver who agreed to take only non-American customers.

Anti-American education continued until the end of the Kosovo war. The media continued to analyze all forms of American malice and hidden hegemonial plans in the war. Even popular culture was used to educate the citizens. Cinemas

²⁶ See, e.g., an example of combining political and productive initiatives in the campaign to criticize Lin Biao in Lieberhal 1983: 98–99.

²⁷ CCTV, 12 May, 19 hr.

²⁸ All channels praised the achievement, but anti-NATO tones were most evident in Shanghai, 10 May, 24 hr.

²⁹ *Huanqiu shibao*, 14 May, 1999, p. 7.

showed old patriotic movies,³⁰ while an interviewee noticed that a recent American film, *Saving Private Ryan*, illustrated a typical American disregard for human lives.³¹ A cartoon, in which NATO hit its targets with arrows reading “civilians”, “residential houses”, “news agencies” and “foreign diplomatic corps”,³² depicted the main topics of early criticism after the NATO attack. Later, when analyses grew even more sophisticated, the Kosovo war supposedly became a skillful plan in a US attempt to destroy the rising European power and Euro currency.³³

One reason why the political mobilization after the NATO attack was successful was the government’s ability to guide popular opinion in a direction that made sense to everyone. The state harnessed spontaneous patriotism and kept it aflame for economic progress and pressuring foreign powers. This was a schoolbook example of the mass line,³⁴ Mao Zedong’s mobilization formula, which both respects mass initiative and demands active leadership to steer it into a productive course.

DIFFERENT VOICES CHanneled THROUGH THE MEDIA

There are several explanations for how the media could safely air so many differing views in May 1999. First of all, these views were still relatively united, all were patriotic calls condemning the NATO act. Therefore, the media took no considerable risk in publicizing views which did not exactly fall under the official guidelines. Also, in facing strong popular pressure, the government had to allow some room for it in order to be able to control the situation. Because the government chose to use education and mobilization instead of repression to exhaust the popular movement, even the government affirmed the mass action to a certain extent.

Second, the incident was unexpected and demanded a quick response. The government had no time to prepare its official view beforehand, which left some time before the official view set the official guidelines in the form of Hu Jintao’s speech. Acting before setting the official model, again, involved no considerable risk. In addition, official support for the theme increases the freedom to touch some topics, allowing the media to survey the problem even more sharply than should be allowed. For example, the leadership’s dedication to uprooting

³⁰ BTV, 11 May, 23 hr.

³¹ BTV-2, 12 May, 11 hr.

³² *Huanqiu shibao*, 14 May, 1999, p. 3.

³³ The Xinhua Agency’s view “*Meiguo daodi xiang liyong Beiyue gan shenme*” [‘How the US plans to use NATO’], was published, e.g., in *Beijing ribao*, 7 June, 1999, p. 4.

³⁴ Mao Tse-tung 1967: 117–120.

corruption leaves much space for the investigative reporting now so popular on Chinese television. The demonstrations after the Belgrade attack involved both of these reasons. The government had no united official guidance to offer in the beginning, apart from relatively abstract condemnation for the NATO attack.

Third, demonstrating its strong mass support was most beneficial to the government. For once there was pro-government and anti-Western activism to broadcast as a clear statement to the foreign powers, who had interpreted the earlier demonstrations in 1989 as a pro-Western and anti-government action. In demonstrating mass action, some extreme mass opinions were likely to come out, but they involved a minimal risk compared to the value of the whole campaign in affirming Chinese patriotism at home and abroad.

All three factors must have been evident to experienced media workers. Thus, they were able to select the media content in many ways. Of course they promoted the government's political mobilization, as is one of their tasks in China, but not all of the news followed official guidelines. The supportive broadcasting of the demonstrations at an early stage, the airing of some too extremist comments, and keeping the freedom of the press on the agenda were obviously outside of the official news content. In many other examples the difference was in degrees: both the media and the government were playing with emotions to arouse patriotism, but the media probably chose the tone in the first two days, when the government undoubtedly still had a dual attitude towards emotional incitement to popular protest.

I have thus analyzed the media content after the NATO attack. To explain certain contradictory messages I have adopted the simplest explanation. If I found inconsistencies, I expected that journalists are independent and active shapers of opinion working within the limits of the Chinese media system rather than presumed involvement by the national or local leadership far away from the information channel itself. Of course, the political leadership had contradictory expectations of the media coverage of the NATO attack as well. They feared the extremist consequences of popular protests on domestic order and diplomatic relations, while at the same time they realized the usefulness of protests for domestic political education and for demonstrating a united Chinese indignation to foreigners. Nevertheless, the media actively transmitted the official view, but shaped the message by selection, omission, choice of viewpoint or wording, and introduced new topics and ways to report the situation. The media was even able to resist official initiative for a while by continuing to provide a model for continuing demonstrations, even after the official appeal for appeasing them.

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