

*Human Communication.* A Publication of the Pacific and Asian Communication Association. Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 1 – 16.

**Covering “The Lord of the World”: Chinese Sense-Making of the U.S. 2004  
Presidential Election \***

Wei Sun, Ph.D.  
Bowie State University

William J. Starosta, Ph.D.  
Howard University

## 2 Covering “The Lord of the World”

### Abstract

The U.S. presidential campaign drew international attention before, during, and after the 2004 election, as Chinese media intensively covered this foreign political event. While historically, Chinese media coverage of domestic issues of other nations fell under stringent censorship, for the most recent presidential campaign a “free speech zone” was created. Not only did local newspapers and TV stations report the election, but government-owned, conservative CCTV and *the People’s Daily*, two core Chinese media, did so also. How did Chinese media report the U.S. political campaign? How did the Chinese public interpret the U.S. election? What are the implications for Chinese culture, media, and society? A content analysis supplemented by critical discourse analysis documents the Chinese media agencies’ performance and portrays Chinese public reaction during the 2004 U.S. presidential election.

## Introduction

The U.S. presidential campaign tends to draw considerable attention abroad. Before, during, and after the 2004 election, Chinese Central Television (CCTV) and the *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*) newspaper, the two major state-owned media, intensively covered this foreign political event. Taking their lead from these official media, local TV stations and newspapers likewise reported on the U.S. election. Chinese audiences watched and read the news, and voiced their reactions by means of Internet discussions (e.g., sina.com.cn; and peopledaily.com). This built on a liberalizing trend begun with a virtual memorial website for a downed Chinese pilot, Wang Wei, through which Chinese Internet surfers inaugurated Sino-U.S. intercultural communication in an Internet age (Sun & Starosta, 2001a).

Before Election Day 2004, a Chinese delegation of 37 officials from National People's Congress, officials from all levels of civil administration, scholars, and experts, was dispatched to the U.S. to learn from the U.S. election experience and improve the Chinese local election process (Northern Network, 2004). Surprisingly, a “free speech zone” was offered for this foreign political event. This gesture indicates a change of Chinese governance of media and a reinterpretation of the Chinese public interest in a global society. This analysis depicts the variety and underlying meanings of Chinese media coverage and the sense-making of a Chinese audience who observed U.S. politics through their media portrayals.

## Literature Review

The reviewed literature covers traditional Chinese media roles, Chinese media reformation in the Internet age, and free speech regulations in China. In Mao's era, Chinese media practiced “thought work” to promote the Communist Party's ideological hegemony (Kalathil, 2003; Lee 1990; Lynch, 1999). Government owned media were called “the Throat of the Party.” Radio, television, newspapers, and magazines each represented a different official bureaucracy. Since the new era, especially when China started its “Open Door Policy” to the western world from the late 1970s, fast economic development, an information revolution, and commercialization exerted tremendous pressure on China's media policy. Especially since 2003 under the “Marketing Economy” initiative, Chinese media retailored its media policy. For example, in the press industry, excepting the “Five Big Publications” of the party—*People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, *Economic Daily*, *Liberation Daily*, and the magazine *Seeking the Truth*—all other media no longer received direct financial support from the government and, thus, responded to market demand (Huang, 2000; Lin, 2004; Polumbaum, 2001; Ren & Barry, 2003; Yong, 2000). Changes in media financing heralded China's change in local media role from mouthpiece to watchdog of the government.

Even though China's Constitution Article 35 states, “Any citizen of People's Republic of China has freedom to express, to publish, to assemble, to protest, to demonstrate, and to show grievance to the government,” these freedoms were seldom practiced, and freedom of speech was merely a concept. Even though there is no “Press Law” in China, media entities, especially news agencies, follow the doctrines of “Four

#### 4 Covering “The Lord of the World”

Principles” enunciated by Deng Xiaoping. To persist (unwaveringly follow) four principles means, “First, China must persist the socialist road; Second, China must persist the proletariat dictatorship; Third, China must persist the leadership of communist party; and Fourth, China must persist Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong ideology.” The four principles propose to render China a highly prosperous and modern country. For those who disregard the doctrines, the punishment is severe because, in the Chinese constitution, Article 28 states, “It is the government’s responsibility to keep the society in order, to suppress treason and other counter-revolutionary activities, to punish those who endanger the social security and those who destroy the socialistic economy and other criminal conducts.” Media has responsibility for “correct guidance of public opinion” (Lin, 2003), promoting the ideology of the central government.

In the late 1990s, China entered the Internet era; millions of Chinese use PCs to connect to the Internet. Indeed, in less than 10 years, China has grown to become the second largest online population, with approximately 10% of China’s population online (Baran, 2007), and it has proven difficult to control news stories as tightly as in earlier years. The rapid spread of the Internet can defy regulation by the ruling party in China, and creates a more democratic atmosphere in the public sphere. Compared to the former media era, media liberation has followed with the onset of technological changes (Byrne, 2000; Cukier, 2005; Harwit & Clark 2001; Freedon, 2006; Hay, 2006; Kalathil, 2003; Qiang, 2003; and Sun & Starosta, 2001a). In recent years, advocates for Chinese journalistic freedom have included journalists both in China and the Western world. Since no government can censor completely in a digital age, it is forced to be more open in certain areas of public interest. The best example is the SARS crisis in 2003 (Heymann, 2004), where information was leaked from Chinese cellular phone text messages and Internet to overseas sources. When SARS became a public secret, the UN got involved, and it became hard and unwise not to cover the crisis. It was then that the Chinese government chose an open policy, reporting and revealing daily on possible SARS cases, actual death numbers, and proposed ways to address the disease.

The rationale has been stronger for international issues than for domestic ones to cover events according to established journalistic canons (1923). China always maintained “no interference” with foreign countries’ domestic affairs and always hoped that international society would reciprocate this courtesy for China. China-U.S. relationships had many ups and downs since the two countries established diplomatic ties in the 1970s. Since the 1990s, mixed with undercurrents of nationalism and anti-Americanism, the Chinese public remains curious about the U.S. Polls among the Chinese college population indicate that Chinese youth hold contradictory feelings toward this “hegemonic” western country. Sun and Starosta’s (2001) analysis of the death of a Chinese pilot after a collision with U.S. military plane in 1999 is typical of these mixed feelings. Chinese web site comments indicated that in matters of “national interest,” many Chinese computer users largely accept the government line, and show aggression toward U.S. hegemony.

Under these circumstances, it is surprising to see that Chinese major media sources reported the U.S. presidential campaign during prime time. It was “soft news,” and it was safer to report a foreign political event than to report a domestic political event or controversy. When dealing with the U.S. political campaign, few signs of government censorship appeared. A “free speech zone” appeared all over the country during the time

of the U.S. election; thus the Chinese public was able to get updated information, and digested the news with curiosity, excitement, and some misgivings.

Research questions for this study include: (1) How did Chinese media report the U.S. political campaign? (2) What are the implications of the U.S. presidential campaign for Chinese culture, media, and society? (3) What are cultural and political implications of Chinese media expression for U.S. politics? The analysis supplements a content analysis with an in-depth critical media analysis.

### **Research Procedures**

One major Chinese newspaper, *People's Daily's* online version *People's Online* at [www.people.com.cn](http://www.people.com.cn) and its BBS discussion at <http://bbs.peopledaily.com.cn>, was chosen for this study. The selected medium is the number one newspaper in China, and is strictly directed by the central government, and the website kept a record of IP address numbers of Web surfers who visited and provided opinions here. That guaranteed that the web server could trace the respondent's identity if necessary. The study chooses *People's Daily's* online coverage on U.S. presidential campaign, and its BBS, specifically, *Forum for a Prosperous China*, as its sample for analysis.

#### **About People's Online**

*People's Daily* went online in 1997. *People's Online* currently has more than 40 sections in operation, each section focusing on a particular genre, e.g., politics, international, local, multimedia, sports, education, and the like. *Forum for a Prosperous China* was created in May 1999, and is the first China news BBS, claiming 400,000 registered users, with more than 10,000 posts each day, rendering it the "Most Famous Political News BBS of China."

Regarding the U.S. campaign, *People's Online* received more than 1000 articles and analyses. The earliest article was published in May 2003, the last one on December 22, 2004. The collections of articles on the U.S. 2004 campaign is categorized in 9 sections: Information bank on U.S. presidential campaign, Bush the Republican, Kerry the Democrat, Prelude of Election, Election in Process, Final Competition, Reactions from the World, New Actions from Bush Administration. Each section contains about 200 articles, except Prelude of Election section, which contains 339 analyses/articles.

#### **Forum for a Prosperous China**

*Forum for a Prosperous China*, one of *People's Online* forums, focuses on international news and international relations. *Forum for a Prosperous China* was created on May 9, 1999, right after NATO "accidentally" attacked the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia, during which 3 Chinese journalists were killed (see the memorial homepage at [http://www.ssreader.com/zhuanli/znsq5/wz\\_xj.html](http://www.ssreader.com/zhuanli/znsq5/wz_xj.html)). The initial anti-American hegemony and patriotism feature make this BBS a "free speech zone" for people who hold different opinions toward international issues. *Forum for a Prosperous China* hosted 46 pages of discussion reflecting Chinese readers' concerns about the 2004 U.S. presidential election, reflecting 960 comments and responses from readers.

## 6 Covering “The Lord of the World”

This study provides a brief summary of *People’s Daily Online* coverage of 2004 U.S. presidential campaign, analyzes *Forum for a Prosperous China* postings, and determines what kind of articles stir up argument and concerns. By doing so, it is expected to disclose the dynamic relationship between Chinese media and audiences, and offers a cultural interpretation of Chinese media coverage and public opinion concerning the 2004 presidential campaign.

### Content analysis and critical discourse analysis

This study combines content analysis and critical discourse analysis to describe and interpret Chinese media coverage and public opinion. Starosta (1988) and Sun and Starosta (2001a & 2001b) offer qualitative content analysis as an approach to signify recurring themes in a text. Its requirements include: (1) the unit selected for analysis should be rich in meanings; (2) the researchers should offer groupings of references and discuss their formation and meaning; (3) the research should offer examples from the themes, and illustrate how they are significant in cultural, historical or contextual terms (Sun and Starosta, 2001, p. 64).

Critical discourse analysis creates an integrated understanding of a text in social interaction, of mediated discourse analysis, and of the problem of social action (Scollon, 1999). Wodak & Meyer (2004) offer a four-step strategy for critical discourse analysis: researchers should establish the specific contents of topics of specific discourse with strong ideological ingredients, before examining argumentation, linguistic meanings and contextual meanings of the texts.

### Data Analysis

After locating related coverage available online, the nine categories used by the *People’s Online* on 2004 U.S. Election are treated as distinct dimensions:

#### 1. Information Bank about American Election.

This session includes 200 reports/articles, introduces historical presidential campaigns and general information regarding U.S. presidential campaigns such as College of Election, the Poll, how the candidates have been nominated, and history about Democratic and Republican Parties.

#### 2. Prelude of Election

This category includes 339 reports/articles. This is the largest section among the categories. It intensively follows each important stage leading up to the 2004 presidential campaign.

#### 3. The Voting in Progress

This category includes 197 reports/articles, vividly illustrating the voting on the election day from different angles.

#### 4. The Final Battle/Competition

173 reports/articles are included in this category, counting down each important state’s vote, especially Ohio and Florida, on Election Day.

#### 5. Kerry—the Democrat

200 reports/articles introduce candidate John Kerry's background, his policy, his advantages and disadvantages in performance, his character and public image, and if he is liked or disliked.

6. Bush—the Republican,

203 reports/articles introduce President Bush, his background, his policy, his advantages and disadvantages in performance, his character and public image, and if he is liked or disliked.

7. Commentary/ analyses

200 commentaries/ analyses, editorials report on the result of the election

8. Responses from the world

200 articles/ reports on how the world reacted to President Bush's reelection.

9. The New Policy of Bush Administration

10 articles appear on the Bush administrations new policies and personnel changes within the cabinet.

This totals 1,122 articles/ reports on the campaign. From the distribution and features of each category, it is significant that *People's Online* has been very careful in selecting news coverage, and has the intention to provide audiences with an objective picture about the U.S. presidential campaign.

*Forum for a Prosperous China* hosted 960 commentaries (894 leading, 66 replies) on the U.S. presidential campaign over the same range of time. As listed above, over one thousand articles have been offered by online newspapers, and readers chose to respond to some of them. And several articles drew especially heated responses.

A total of 46 web page BBS postings contain about 20 messages per page. The first and the last few pages fall outside the date range for this study. The earliest messages appeared in August 2003, the latest in December 2005. This analysis discloses the dynamic interaction between media and readers during and after the campaign period. This analysis covers Chinese media coverage starting from Nomination stage to President Bush's inaugural speech, postings from February 7, 2004 to January 23, 2005.

From the initial perusal of the web posting, the researchers saw that certain topics repeatedly appeared in the postings. They decided that closely reading every fourth page of postings, recording the recurring themes, and reading an additional 30 messages before, during, and after the Election Day, noting any additional themes, would produce a reasonable sampling of the postings. The authors then interpreted messages under each theme, to characterize the voices of the Chinese writers. The original messages on BBS are input in Chinese, and were translated to English by the first author.

A close reading of more than 200 messages, with constant comparison sorting of themes, produced the following seven thematic categories: (1) No matter which candidate wins the election, China-U.S. relations will remain the same; (2) President Bush and his colleagues are war criminals. They are the real terrorists; (3) Posters admire the democratic political system of USA, wishing some day that China would become a democratic country also; (4) American democracy is hypocrisy, and politics is a dirty game played by monied interests; (5) Patriots call for a prosperous China to resist a U.S. hegemony; (6) Writers express disappointment with the election result; and (7) Respect Bush, Americans' choice.

Actual words from the postings follow to show readers' reactions from the Chinese Internet audience. Since online censorship exists, if anyone feared to put their

## 8 Covering “The Lord of the World”

sentiments on-line, this could affect the representativeness of the sample. This should be a limitation of this study.

### **Theme 1: No matter which candidate wins, China- U.S. relations will remain the same.**

The Chinese public always is concerned where U.S.-China relations will go if either candidate is elected. Many believe that the importance of the relations between the two countries will make any U.S. president maintain ties. However, many readers do not believe that China-U.S. relations would change after this presidential campaign. The public sensed the hostility of U.S. toward China. One reader comments on the candidates' foreign policy (comments are unedited, as they appeared):

No matter Bush or Kerry, whoever is elected, there is nothing to do with Chinese! It will be same with either as president!!! Why should we concern so much? They wouldn't change their policy to China. They still would sell advanced weapons to Taiwan, and let those Taiwan separatists resist unification. The current U.S. policy always supports to maintain a separate China, then U.S. could take advantage of it. Some of you may say that when Powell was in China, he had threatened Taiwan with shocking warnings. That's an effort to comfort China, and a threat to Taiwan separatists. Didn't you see? As soon as Powell went back to the USA, he changed his tone of speech immediately. (Nov. 3, 2004, an anonymous ID, p. 20)

Another reader supported what the above reader said, and added:

U.S. Election is an important issue for Americans. To get China admitted by the world, and to solve Taiwan issue, we have to depend on ourselves. I agree with what Chairman Mao said: when all the people have one determined heart, we could move Mount Taishan. As long as we do our domestic affair fairly, we would not be afraid of any offense from the world. (Nov. 3,2004, P.20)

Surprised that 2004 presidential campaign didn't make any statement about the candidates' China policy, one reader commented:

Some U.S. politicians are always unhappy to see friendly China-U.S. relations. They always want to make trouble, actually they ring the wrong bell. No one can stop two countries' friendship. A healthy China-U.S. relation not only benefits two countries, but also [is] beneficial to the world peace and prosperousness. (p.29)

### **Theme 2: President Bush and his colleagues are war criminals. They are the real terrorists.**

The Iraq war was protested by many countries. Many Chinese readers show their concern about the war, and view President Bush's war as the real terrorism:

The weapon merchant background of Bush Cabinet determined why Bush government is fond of war. Plus, within a hundred years, U.S. always got benefit in wars but never had had a war in their own territory. That built up Americans'

war dream. Is there anything more terroristic than a war, in other country? War-loving America is an absolute terrorist country. (November 1, 2004, comments on one article why American Weapon merchants donate lot of money to Bush Campaign)

In September 2004, one reader predicted that Bush would win the campaign:

Bush will be re-elected the president, and there is no doubt at all. This is a tragedy for Americans, we have nothing to help. American voters are so excited about their so called “victory over terrorism,” even though this war is doomed. Take a look of history of American invasions, most were failed... The history (like Vietnam War) will be repeated. Actually Bush’s “War to Terrorism” has made American people unsecured much more. (September 30, 2004, p.29)

Another reader expressed concerns in August 2004:

The United States uses anti-terrorism as an excuse to invade and occupy other countries, so that they can eliminate those countries who are against its policies. The war to terrorism is just an excuse for American politicians to punish those disobediant countries. U.S.’s real purpose is to become a bully of the whole world. Russia is also engaged in a war to terrorism, but it’s domestic war, the nature is totally different: one is violently invading of other countries, another is seeking stability within a country. One is a fake anti-terrorism but true invasion, another is necessary control over their own territory. (Aug. 30, 2004, p.29)

**Theme 3: Posters admire the democratic political system of USA, wishing some day that China would become a democratic country also.**

Many Chinese readers believe that the U.S. presidential election opens a window for Chinese public to see the possibility that some day China will be a democratic country. One reader responded to an article entitled “Fortune-telling about U.S. Campaign”:

I personally admire democratic presidential campaign of the USA. Basically it represents people’s will. I wish we could develop our country toward this direction. Regarding this election, if I could vote, I will vote for Kerry, because Bush is a criminal who invaded Iraq. (Oct. 28, 2004)

Another person indicated the U.S. presidential election has a global meaning:

This is a globalized era. A change in a country could impact other countries, couldn’t it? It is why that we Chinese concern about U.S. election. On the same token, foreigners also have concerns about our domestic policy and reformation, because Chinese policies also have a great impact on global economy and politics. (Oct. 28, 2004, comment on Bush’s Second Term Plan).

Another reader added days later:

So many people concern about the U.S. presidential election, that reflects their desire for a democratic political system! (Nov. 3, 2004)

## 10 Covering “The Lord of the World”

For a similar opinion, two additional quotes are listed here:

No matter who wins, China should learn the useful information, to make our country more open minded, more efficient, and let every one of our citizen enjoy the equality. (Nov. 30, 2004)

You cannot deny that the level of the U.S. democracy is much higher than China. Have any of you see that our leader election so unsure? (Nov. 30, 2004)

### **Theme 4: American democracy is hypocrisy, and politics is a dirty game played by monied interests.**

Some readers display their mistrust about U.S. democratic system:

The power change of U.S. should be closely watched by governments around the world. As about public opinions, you can forget about it, I don't see the necessity. Our media shouldn't pay so much attention to this event, and it became many tabloid newspapers' attracting point. If our media professionals are so dedicated to political affairs of the USA campaign, why not so when our country had leadership transition? (Oct. 22, 2004)

It's so unbelievable! How come Bush this war tyrant and incompetent leader gained higher poll than Kerry? Might Americans be so blind? (Oct. 22, commentary about an article reporting that Bush led the poll by 2%).

America always regards itself as the lord of the world. It's just a piece of cake for them to intertwine other country's domestic affairs. It is just natural that the whole world pay attention to this election. U.S. elections in the past and present have proved that democratic voting is superficial, it's always a competition of personality, capability and money! The trade behind the table rules everything! Look at the huge financial budget for campaign. The path leads to the White House is made by the gold.

American voters has been extremely divided. It's easier for a sitting president to be reelected. If the two candidates have similar ideas about the politics, it's difficult to tell who wins and who loses. It is a pity that so many Chinese admire Americanized democracy, it's nothing good at all! To me, America is just a self-boasted country (Nov. 5, 2004).

Comment on candidates' attacks to each other during TV debates:

This democratic hypocrisy is so Americanized. The candidates did not use fact to tell the truth, instead, they attack each other viciously. We should keep a clear mind about American capitalist political system, U.S. has always blamed China for human rights and Taiwan issues, we should be aware of the nature of capitalized democracy. Persist on our socialism road, and make progress on our own modernization construction. (Oct. 2, 2004)

**Theme 5: Patriots call for a prosperous China to resist a U.S. hegemony.**

Interestingly, Chinese patriots always make connections between resistance of U.S. hegemony and a prosperous China. One commentary was made on the Bush administration's plan for a second term policy:

What happened to us Chinese? Those Americans are electing a president, why should we concern about who wins and who loses? Can you guarantee whom we supported will support us on Taiwan issue? Do you think that he will not support a separate Taiwan? Can he release trade sanctions about so called "military weapon trade sanction" Don't dream, fellow Chinese. We should develop our own economy, and let Americans leave us alone. I think it's stupid to discuss American politics in a Chinese website (Oct. 26, 2004).

After the election, a reader addressed as "A Patriot College Student" commented that since U.S. is a hegemonic country, now that Bush has been reelected, that China should hasten military development, since nuclear weapon and military power are two determining forces to challenge the world:

We do not want to be slaughtered by others. We do not want to see this result. So we have to fasten our military construction. By doing so, all the disadvantages toward our country will disappear. (Nov. 4, 2004)

**Theme 6. Disappointment about the election result.**

After the result came out, many readers showed disbelief and disappointment. The following comment is typical:

Uncle Sam's arrogant descendants again send arrogant Cowboy Bush to the throne of the president. American voters are just so so, "democratic election" is just so so. You cannot use normal logic to analyze whatever happened in the USA. If you want something to die, you have to make it insane first. This election signified the decline of the U.S. empire. The whole world would become more unstable because of this election, because this is determined by Bush's value system. American voters helped so. (Nov. 3, comments on an article Bush entered the second term)

**Theme 7: Respect Americans' choice, Bush's re-election is Americans' will.**

Before and after the election result, some readers expressed understanding and respect about the choice American voters would make. Following are several examples:

A good president seeks best benefit for his people and contributes a lot to his country. If Bush is elected, that means American people support him. People from other countries opinionated differently, but it's void regarding American politics. (Oct. 24, 2004, comments on Bush's Second term Plan)

## 12 Covering “The Lord of the World”

No matter how do we comment on Iraq war, President Bush remains to be a hero to American people. This is his uniqueness. (Dec. 18, 2004)

Two reasons I have concern about U.S. election: first, as the most democratic country in the world, U.S. is the best example to demonstrate how the democracy works. The second, the result of the election proved that my judgment about American political ideal is correct. (Nov. 4, 2004).

### Discussion

American international policies have long been generated negative perceptions around the world (Fordham, 1998; Freedon, 2006; Heisbourg, 2005; Meernik & Waterman, 1996). Especially after the second Gulf war with Iraq, international critics have been viewing the American image with more disapproval. From a sampling of BBS postings concerning the U.S. election, it appears that Chinese readers are more likely to process the new information in accordance with their existing values and attitudes. They welcome reports that reflect negative aspects of the election, especially favoring those analyses with negative implications for President Bush. The articles provoking reader responses almost always have these characteristics.

The Chinese Internet public has no confidence toward U.S.’s policy toward China. In the past decades, several severe conflicts between the two countries have stirred up patriotic emotions among China’s younger generation. NATO’s bombing of the Chinese Embassy (1999) in Yugoslavia and the collision of U.S. and Chinese military planes (2000), as two examples, aroused an angry mass protest in China. In terms of international affairs, the Chinese public has always maintained sensitivity about U.S.’s hegemony and China’s “weakness” economically and militarily (Sun & Starosta, 2001a). Because China’s colonial history has been regarded as a national stigma, in textbooks students have been taught to always remember the shame of colonialism. The founders of Communist China always called for a “prosperous China” to enhance China’s status in the world. Even during the observation of a typical U.S. presidential campaign, Chinese patriots are still able to voice the “prosperous China” ideal. The criticism of U.S. hegemony is a direct outcome of the “patriot act.” Patriotism and U.S. hegemony are the two most intense themes among the seven.

Besides patriotism and the accusation of U.S. hegemony, the authors learned that Chinese audiences have a tendency to echo criticism of the election. Differences emerge over the meaning of the concept of “democracy.” While some of the readers believe that American democracy is the ideal democracy, some express grave doubts. Reading the dark side of the election, these readers vote no confidence in American democracy. They believe the articles show the inefficacy of U.S. policy, unfair play, mistakes, attacks, poll results disclosing only American dissatisfaction, and chaos in the process.

The media have the tendency to report the U.S. election news as entertainment, jokingly criticizing the democratic election as a competition between parties instead of as a people’s choice. That might impact the audience interpretation.

### Implications and Limitations

It is reported that many Chinese audiences had paid attention to the U.S. presidential campaign using national media channels such like CCTV, *People's Daily*, and local media channels, and also websites both in China and overseas. Many were disappointed and surprised about President Bush's reelection, and thus suspected the invalidity of the Western Democracy concept. This simply reinforced the Chinese government's criticism of the U.S.'s criticism of China's Democracy and their Human Rights policy. They referred to "so-called" western democracy.

Even though many Chinese believed that Bush had not improved the China-U.S. relationship during his first term of presidency, few doubted that anyone who would be elected would make the China-U.S. relationship worse. Some suspected if there is real democracy, then it is money and big corporations that eventually shape politics and international relations.

It was a celebration of Chinese media during a U.S. election, that freedom of speech had for the first time been realized in reporting this foreign political campaign. It was a huge step in China's journalism history. Some readers even suggested it could be applied to China's leadership election and urged Chinese journalists to report domestic issues as accurately as they reported a foreign issue. Those comments have remained in a national online newspaper, and signaled that the governmental agencies were not overly sensitive toward this issue. They did not overtly censor readers for criticizing China politics, though an occasional reader may have remained quiet rather than to risk censure.

An analysis of *Radio Free Asia* on Nov. 22 2004 claimed that U.S. Presidential Campaign is an inspiration to China. The Chinese media coverage of the U.S. election demonstrated a perfect example of how a democratic leader been chosen in a democratic country. The process showed the Chinese leaders that power comes from people, and does not last forever. A leader should do things according to the people's wishes. During a presidential campaign, the candidates' intelligence, personality, family, and policy are exposed to the public. At the current stage, China's democratic elections have only been limited to a "village" and "company" level. Chinese people have political passion in terms of state affairs. They do not have the opportunity to get involved with the decision-making of choosing a leader. The people's right to know and their participation in political decisions should be on the agenda. Also, it tests the water, how far can expressions of media freedom go? It shows the world the possibilities and promises that a Chinese Democratic era is on the way.

The limitations of the study include the implied and explicit existence of censorship over Internet in China. Actually, under certain circumstances in China, media and journalists perform self-censorship to comply with governmental opinion (Hay, et al., 2004; Lucas, 1996). The researchers were unable to tell if any content had been censored on either *People's Online* and for the BBS discussion. Because of the anonymous feature of BBS, there is no way to find out the demographic information of the readers and respondents, or if the government had "planted" any messages on the service. Future study should reach "real people" for interpretation of their perceptions of the U.S. electoral process.

## References

- Baran, S. J. (2007). *Introduction to mass communication*. McGraw-Hill.
- Byrne, A. (2000). Toward a world of free access to information and freedom of expression. *IFLA Journal*, 26 (4), 255-259.
- Cukier, K. N. (2005). Who will control the Internet? *Foreign Affairs*, 84 (6), 7-13.
- Freeden, M. (2006). Ideology and political theory. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11 (1), 3-22.
- Fordham, B. (1998). The Politics of threat perception and the use of force: A political economy model of U.S. uses of force, 1949–1994. *International Studies Quarterly*, 42 (3), 567–590.
- Hay, W.A (2006). What is democracy? Liberal institutions and stability in changing societies. *Orbis*. 50 (1), 133-151.
- Hayes, A.F., Glynn, C.J., & Shanahan, J. (2005). Validating the willingness to self-censor scale: individual differences in the effect of the climate of opinion on opinion expression. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 17(4), 443-455.
- Harwit, E. & Clark, D. (2001). Shaping the Internet in China. *Asian Survey*, 4 ( 3), 377-409.
- Heisbourg, F.(2005). American hegemony? Perceptions of the US abroad. *Survival* 41(4), 5–19.
- Heymann , D. L. (2004). The international response to the outbreak of SARS in 2003 One contribution of 15 to a Discussion Meeting Issue 'Emerging infections: What have we learnt from SARS?'. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 359 (1447), 1127-1129.
- Huang, C.(2000). The development of a semi-independent press in post-Mao China: An overview and a case study of Chengdu Business News. *Journalism Studies*, 1 (4), 649-664.
- Lee, C.C. (1990). *Voices of China: the interplay of politics and journalism*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Lin, J. (2004). China’s media reform: Where to go? *Harvard China Review*. Vol. 5 (1), 116-121.
- Lucas, S. (1996). How a press censors itself? *New Statesman*, 130 (12). 14-15.
- Lynch, D. (1999). After the propanganda state: media, politics and “thought work” in *Reformed China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kalathil, S. (2003). China’s new media sector: Keeping the state in. *Pacific Review*, 16 (4), 489-501.
- Meernik, J., & Waterman, P. (1996). The myth of the diversionary use of force by American presidents. *Political Research Quarterly*, 49(3), 573-590.
- Polumbaum, J. (2001). China's media: Between politics and the market. *Current History*, 100 (647), 269-278.
- Qiang, X. (2003). Cyber Speech: Catalyzing free expression and civil society. *Harvard International Review*, 70, pp. 70-75.
- Ren, J.& Barry M. (2003). Media management in a market economy. *Beijing Review*, 46(46), 28-29.
- Scollon, R. (1999) Mediated discourse and social interaction, *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 32 (1&2): 149-154.

- Starosta, W.J. (1988). A national holiday for Dr. King?: Qualitative content analysis of arguments carried in the Washington Post and New York Times *Journal of Black Studies*, 18 (3), pp. 358-378.
- Sun, W. & Starosta, W. J. (2001a). As heavy as Mount Taishan: A thematic analysis of Wang Wei's memorial website. *World Communication*, 30 (3 & 4), 61-79.
- Sun, W., & Starosta, W. J. (2001b). A thematical analysis of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Classical Chinese Fairy-tales Collection, with an implication for conflict management. 73-84. In G. M. Chen & R. Ma (Eds.), *Chinese conflict management and resolution*. Greenwood.
- Unanimous. (2004). US Election: What do we learn? *Northern Network November 4, 2004*.
- Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (2004). *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. Sage Publication.
- Yong, Z. (2000). From Masses to Audience: changing media ideologies and practices in reform China. *Journalism Studies*, 1 (4), 617-635.