Changing Climate of Chinese Journalism: A Frame Analysis of Earthquake News by *People’s Daily* and *Southern Weekend*

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【Abstract】

This present study, based on the assumption that the institutional changes of China’s newspaper industry will be reflected in news content,

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examines whether Southern Weekend, an exemplar of market-oriented newspapers, covers the 2008 earthquake differently from the party-organ newspaper People’s Daily in terms of news frames. A framing analysis of 422 news stories covered by the two newspapers revealed that Southern Weekend presented more human interest, economic consequences, and conflict frames, while People’s Daily was more dependent on leadership frame. No difference was found in responsibility and morality frames between the two newspapers. Implications of these findings on news frames of the two papers are discussed.

Key words: news-framing, Chinese journalism, party-organ newspapers, market-oriented newspapers, earthquake news, People’s Daily, Southern Weekend

1. Introduction

Since the Communist Party took power in 1949, the Chinese press has been tightly controlled by censorship, detention, legal action, and arrest (Beach, 2004). However, as a result of powerful economic and political reforms in China and the influential information globalization, some important changes have recently taken place in Chinese journalism. Since the third plenary session of the eleventh Party Congress in December 1978, rapid and highly successful steps have been taken toward a market-driven economy (Sparks, 2008). Zhao (2000) phrased this transition in Chinese journalism as “communist party-controlled press commercialization” (p. 3) and concluded that these developments were counterintuitive to the laissez-faire of the free market versus