

"Government and Media Should Be Partners in Cooperation"

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2006 has passed, and the echoes of promise give us cause to anticipate more bright things to come. For the media, the new relationship State Council Information Office minister Cai Wu has forged between the Chinese government and international media is a self-confident, professional and worldly action. If this brilliance shines in all directions, touching domestic media too, this will earn worldwide respect for the position of Chinese media.

According to the Chinese News Service, Information Office head Cai Wu announced that China would relax its restrictions on foreign media reporting activities in China, that it would explain Chinese policies and release information "as quickly and accurately as possible" through a more comprehensive and normalized press announcement system. Moreover, [Mr. Cai said] contacts for press spokespeople would be publicized for media and society, allowing spokespeople to "go out" and directly meet with reporters and answer questions. He said China would better accommodate the trends of globalization, internationalization and information exchange, taking the initiative in providing the public and media with authoritative and accurate information.

This active initiation of a new strategy for media meets international practice and displays self-confidence. It is also beneficial in molding the image of a China opening up. Of course, the thing to most take notice of is this new conceptualization of the relationship between the government and the media. Cai Wu described the relationship of the Information Office with foreign media as one of "constructive and cooperative partnership".

"Constructive" means Chinese officials recognize foreign media play a positive role in constructing an image of China and advertising its policies, and that they no longer view them [foreign media] entirely as vehicles for disparaging [China] with negative news. "Cooperative" means Chinese government officials will "not be afraid of having contact with media", that they will help media to carry out reporting in a public, transparent and timely way, avoiding the release of inaccurate, incomplete or false information by foreign media. "Partnership" means the government and the media are on equal terms, that there are no hierarchies of status but rather mutual respect and responsibility.

Viewing the international media in such a broad-minded and rational way is sure to draw the respect of the world. It goes without saying that this policy will

have a major affect on China once it goes into effect ... and [the policy] has already been reported widely and with enthusiasm by international media.

If this [concept of] "constructive and cooperative partnership" were extended the government's relationship with domestic media, this would not only gain more respect for China internationally, but would also allow the media to take a more active and professional role in the building of a harmonious society. Speaking in terms of their abilities as media, there is fundamentally no difference between domestic and international media -- both are fast, accurate ways to transmit various kinds of information, particularly concerning government affairs, letting the people know the true state of things and the true meaning of policies. If the government uses domestic media as a professional and duty-bound equal partner, then many of the careless remarks of Western media about China will disappear automatically.

Actually, domestic media are more constructive than international media. In the first place, domestic media do not have an ideological and cultural gap with the government, and share with the government a lofty sense of responsibility to protect the country and the interests of the people. For this reason there's no need to set up defenses, and even less need to worry about impure motives. Moreover, the media can be more comprehensive and in-depth than the government in gathering of facts about society. What they see and feel (their news reports and editorials) not only help the people better understand the situation at the national, provincial and city levels, but also can inform the government in a timely way about what is going on in society, serving as a reference for officials in making government policy. If the government relaxes its hand and allows the media to independently realize a professional spirit, then many of the crooked paths of contemporary history will be avoided, not to mention numerous accidents in everyday life.

In the same way, domestic media have greater capacity than international media to "cooperate" with the government. After going through decades of opening and reform experience and political training and experience, domestic media are no longer colored with a Lu Xun-style critical complex, nor do they blindly admire the West. Rather they deal more with the concrete matters of their work, meeting all manner of social problems and breaking news with seriousness, pursuing the truth. They are most contented when employing their own professional vision and a spirit of reason to help the government solve all sorts of social problems, when they raise public confidence by getting an accurate grasp of policy and the facts. In terms of their value orientation and the fundamental interests of the people, the government and the media are in fact united -- and this is especially the case in China.

Right now what we need to work harder to redefine ["recreate"] is the question of the [relative] standing of government and the media. In China, the political system determines that government and the media are intimate "partners". But for reasons of historical legacy, the media's subordinate status has meant it cannot carry out news reporting and commentary in a professional and timely way. As a result it happens that media are in the doubly embarrassing position of [A] not being able to transmit the government's will quickly and in an easily understandable fashion and [B] not being able to provide an accurate picture of government policies. When public confidence in the media is weak this actually damages public confidence in the government. If the government relaxes its hand and allows the media to use their own principles to carry out reporting and the transmission of information, this will go a long way toward promoting government effectiveness in dealing with change [emergencies, etc] and the accuracy of government policies. At the same time it will help the government more quickly and comprehensively understand the political situation and the will of the people, making [relevant] policies and promoting the project of building a harmonious society. (The writer is a journalist).

[Posted by David Bandurski, January 5, 2007, 6:20pm]

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