

GOVERNMENT CONTROLS OF AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the controls placed on American news correspondents by the Chinese government during an unprecedented period of transition in China's history. Correspondents were interviewed in Beijing to identify the controls they face; how they handle those controls and the effects those controls have on their work. The results show that despite a recent expansion of freedom for the foreign media in China, many restrictions, most of which manifest as official actions, often frustrate the work of correspondents. Authoritarian controls and attempts to influence foreign reporters through public relations manipulation reveal a campaign by the Chinese government to shape its global image through international news. The methods used by correspondents to handle controls indicate an effort to circumvent the restrictions and stem from a concept of the journalist's role in society that is at odds with authoritarian press models. Nonetheless, government controls and counteraction methods have enough of an impact on correspondents that news content may be affected. The data are considered within the context of China's economic and technological transformation, which is found to both help and hinder the government's control efforts and significantly aid the work of correspondents.