

On November 24th, 2004, Shi Tao, a journalist, was officially arrested and given a 10-year sentence by the Chinese government because he sent an anonymous post to a Chinese-language website based in New York. The post summarized a government order that directed Chinese media organizations to downplay the anniversary of the 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy activists.ⁱ What Shi Tao did was essentially watchdog journalism, which is made possible only by independent media — "a highly effective mechanism of external control on corruption."ⁱⁱ One of the most famous examples of the effectiveness of watchdog journalism is the reporting of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein on the Watergate scandal for *The Washington Post*. *The Post's* revelation checked the power of the government and directly resulted in the resignation of President Richard Nixon in 1974.ⁱⁱⁱ

In America, independent media are protected by the Constitution. The right of the press is typically reflected in the famous *New York Times Co. vs. United States* case, which demonstrates the power of watchdog journalism. Although President Nixon forced the *Times* to suspend the publication of the classified information in its possession, the Supreme Court ruled that the press's right is guaranteed by the First

Amendment and that the government had failed to show that the newspaper's actions would cause irreparable danger. ^{IV}

On the flip side, the conditions in countries without independent media show the importance of having media independence. In the *Southern Weekly* incident at the beginning of 2013 in China, the New Year's editorial of the newspaper was significantly altered under the pressure from the Chinese government, and the newsroom staff protested against such censorship. ^V This incident demonstrates that the Chinese people hardly have the right to know. Due to such routine censorships across the Chinese media, few Chinese people know the fact that the famous dissident Liu Xiabo is the very first Chinese citizen who has won a Nobel Prize. What's more, twenty-five years after the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, few people in the generation that I was raised in know about the blood killing. The worst is that the Chinese public's distrust of its government is pervasive and creates tension throughout the country; for example, the accuracy of the reporting on the killing in Kunming that happened earlier this month is questioned by online blogs, and many believe that the government is hiding some pieces of the story.

If the media were independent from the government, the release of Shi Tao on August 23rd 2013 would have come sooner, or his arrest would not have happened. Having independent media is paramount because such media check the power of the government. More importantly, independent media can guarantee the fundamental freedom of speech that is lacking in so many countries today. As Liu Xiabo, the Nobel Peace Prize recipient said: "Freedom of expression is the foundation of human rights, the source of humanity, and the mother of truth." Humanity cannot search for truth without the ability to express truth. ^{VI}

Notes:

ⁱ Amnesty International. Amnesty International USA, n.d. Web. 1 Mar. 2014.

<<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/cases/china-shi-tao>>.

ⁱⁱ Brunetti, A., and B. Weder. A free press is bad news for corruption. Mainz: Elsevier, 2003. Print. Vol. 87 of Journal of Public Economics.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Washington Post. Washington Post, n.d. Web. 27 Feb. 2014.

<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/watergate/part1.html>>.

^{iv} Legal Information Institute. Cornell University Law School, n.d. Web. 25 Feb. 2014.

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/403/713#writing-USSC_CR_0403_0713_ZO>.

^v Bandurski, David. "Inside the Southern Weekly Incident." China Media Project. China Media Project, 7

Jan. 2013. Web. 1 Mar. 2014.

<<http://cmp.hku.hk/2013/01/07/30402/>>.

^{vi} Rauhala, Emily. "Quotes: Liu Xiaobo on Freedom of Speech." Time News Feed. Time News Feed, 10 Dec.

2010. Web. 2 Mar. 2014. <<http://newsfeed.time.com/2010/12/10/quotes-liu-xiaobo-on-freedom-of-speech/>>.