ABSTRACT

After three decades of economic reform, mass media in China have had to meet the challenges of political pressure and fierce market competition. These challenges have produced ideological contestation between media discourses. This study focuses on the coverage of the torch relay incidents prior to the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 by the *Global Times* and the *Southern Metropolis Daily*, both of which set the boundary of official tolerance over media discourse on issues of political controversy.

The *Global Times*, a subsidiary of the *People's Daily* that reflects the Chinese government's foreign policy, constructed the torch relay as a showcase of the prowess and achievements of the party-state so as to justify the legitimacy of the regime as well as to arouse nationalistic emotions against foreign criticism. It seeks to commodify official ideology as profitable information goods through sensationalized discursive strategies.

On the other hand, the *Southern Metropolis Daily*, which is widely regarded as the most liberal and outspoken newspaper in China, framed the same event as an opportunity to reflect on how China can be a member of the international community. It adopts the professional convention of balance reporting to champion the universal values as embraced by the Olympic Games.

Finally, the study maintained that marketization has partially expanded the ideological boundary of media discourses in China.