

# Interaction and Cooperation Between Alternative and Mainstream:

A Study of an Anti-Domestic Violence Website in China

by Bu Wei

*Initially entitled "The Interaction of the Alternative Website and Mass Media in China: Case Study of www.stopdv.org.cn", this article is a rewritten version by Kristina Gaerlan of the author's presentation during a symposium on Gender and ICT in Amsterdam in January 2003. The author explores the interaction of an alternative website run by a women's NGO with mainstream media, and how it is consequently able to shape public opinion regarding domestic violence.*

## Alternative Media

Alternative media, as defined by UNESCO, refers to a communication system and tradition that can supplement the mainstream media, appearing because the mainstream media fails to meet the communication needs of certain groups.<sup>1</sup>

But I do not think it adequate to define alternative media as a supplement to mainstream media. We should think about "why mainstream media fails to full satisfy the needs of certain groups"? Who are these "certain groups"? What are the characteristics of mainstream media and its relationship with these "certain groups"? The information gap theory of mass communication explains that those in better socio-economic conditions are more skilful in the communication and information process, and have more access to debates on public affairs than those in weaker socio-economic conditions. More important, the nature of mass media is constructed for the use of those in the higher socio-economic status. Many issues in public affairs and science and technology that appear on print media often to the higher socio-economic bracket, and such media is designed for their interest.<sup>2</sup> Mass media could therefore widen the information gap between socio-economic brackets, and "certain groups" in the definition of alternative media are often those in the weaker socio-economic conditions.

As a matter of fact, when we use the concept of alternative media, very often, we use it in reference to mainstream media, i.e., alternative media exists only relative to mainstream media. In "Alternative Media: What Makes Alternative Media Alternative?" Michael Albert writes:

A mainstream media institution (public or private) most often aims to maximise profit or sells an elite audience to advertisers for its main source of revenue. It is virtually always structured in accord with and to help reinforce society's defining hierarchical social relationships, and is generally controlled by and controlling of other major social institutions, particularly corporations. In contrast, an alternative media institution (to the extent possible given its circumstances) doesn't try to maximise profits, doesn't primarily sell audience to advertisers for revenues (and so seeks broad and non-elite audience), is structured to subvert society's defining hierarchical social relationships, and is structurally profoundly different from and as independent of other major social institutions, particularly corporations, as it can be. An alternative media institution sees itself as part of a project to establish new ways of organising media and social activity and it is committed to furthering these as a whole, and not just its own preservation.<sup>3</sup>

Particularly in the China context, the alternative media refers to a "media system advocated and managed by social activists or NGOs for exchange of information concerning marginalised or vulnerable groups with the objective of empowering these marginalised groups and encouraging their participation in the media." Expectedly, the government-controlled official media and commercial media have adopted different attitude towards working with alternative media.

During the 1980s and 1990s, most of alternative media applied low-cost technology, thereby making their output more accessible to marginalised groups. In the 1990s, a large number of NGOs and activists adopted computer and Internet technology or other forms of new media technology to set up or develop alternative media. But new media technology has its own problems. Chris Atton questioned the continuous existence of alternative media in the CMC (computer-mediated communication) era.<sup>4</sup> For example, when every person can become a publisher, how can we distinguish "traditional alternative media" from "CMC alternative media"? Chris Atton says "Perhaps the only significant



constant in print and CMC versions of alternative media is content, particularly the origins of that content. For new social movements that content comes from lived experience. In order to sustain a notion of alternative in cyberspace, we must let the real world break in on the virtual one.<sup>7</sup>

In some instances, alternative media may “supplement” mainstream media as it may represent the interest and voice of marginalised groups that are ignored by the mainstream media. More often, it challenges the perspective, and news and social value of mainstream media. In such instances, the role of alternative media is not just simply to “supplement” but rather, to “substitute” mainstream media. Here “substitute” does not mean “replace” but to represent the voice that the mainstream media fails to represent—a condition that allows alternative media to co-exist with mainstream media or mass media.<sup>5</sup>

Media is a tool of power. In *Agent of Power* (1984), J. Herbert Altschull points out that there is no such a thing as completely independent newspaper. In all social systems, mass media is agent of those who have economic, political and social power.<sup>6</sup> The United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) “1995 World Situation of Women: Trends and Statistics,” on the other hand, notes that “women in media” is not an issue of employment or education or training, but an issue of “power and influence” with the same significance as women’s political participation.<sup>7</sup> From this point of view, the primary role of alternative media is to empower the vulnerable groups and to promote equitable sharing of information in order to create a cultural and social environment that fosters social equality and sustainable human development.

#### Background of Stop Domestic Violence Website *International Women’s Movement and Alternative Media*

The combined impact of the international women’s movement in the 1970s, the International Year of Women (1975) and the UN 10 Years of Women (1976-1985) led to women’s actions in mass media including:

- monitoring of women’s images in mass media to promote the reflection of women’s realities;
- demands that mass media employ more women and increase the number of women in senior positions
- the creation of alternative media;
- the establishment of women’s news websites and news agencies;
- increased research in women and media, not only concerning women’s images and participation in mass media but also influential media policies, structures and new media technologies.<sup>8</sup>

The Forward-Looking Strategy (FLS) issued at the “Assessment Meeting of UN 10 Years of Women” (Nairobi, 1985) considered the increase of women’s participation in mass

media at all levels, the eradication of gender stereotypes and prejudices, as well as increased women’s access to information as priority issues. The Strategy also emphasised the importance of new forms of media and called on national governments and other agencies for bigger budget allocations to support these plans (par. 206). In 1995, The Platform of Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women listed “Women and Media” as one of the 12 priority areas of concern. The document sought “to increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication” (par. 238), and called on national governments to “encourage and recognise women’s media networks, including electronic networks and other new technologies of communication, as a means for the dissemination of information and the exchange of views, including at the international level, and support women’s groups active in all media work and systems of communications to that end” (par. 239f).

In 1980s and 1990s, women’s alternative media included mostly newspapers, periodicals, video/audio tapes, books and publishing houses. These first appeared in North America

Alternative media provides a feminist perspective and analyses and, despite the omissions and weaknesses of mass media, such treatment is certain to influence mass media to some degree. Hence, alternative media is a potent tool in shaping public opinion. Chinese NGOs and women activists are not only users but also creators, actors and facilitators of new technology. Through an alternative website, they can project their voices and world-views to mainstream media.



and Europe, and later spread to other parts of the world including Latin America and Asia.<sup>9</sup>

The 1980s saw the production of alternative media women's magazines such as *Emma* in Germany and *Ms* in the USA, audio/video material such as "Strong Image" (produced by Isis International), women's radio in Europe and North America, the Women's Features news agency funded by UNIFEM in 1978, women's information and media centres such as Isis International, International Women's Forum Center and a number of gender-related information networks and databases. The mainstream women's media had content such as fashion, cosmetics, home decoration, children's education, cooking and home nursing, and targeted the middle class. Alternative women's media, on the other hand, concentrated on more controversial issues related to women's rights such as reproductive health, gender and racial discrimination, work rights of women, history of women's movement, sexual violence, women in development, and women and peace. It also provided information on women's actions, plans and networking. These efforts contributed to women's equal access to information.

After 1995, due to the rapid development of new communication technologies, the application of the Internet as a primary channel of communication for promotion of gender equality and social development issues became an agenda. In 2000, Isis International-Manila carried out a media evaluation of women's NGOs, and listed a number of best practices including the Asia Women Resources Exchange Centre online information services; FIRE (Feminist International Radio Endeavour), an online women's radio; CLADEM (Latin American Commission on Women and Rights), an e-mail campaign for promotion of women's human rights; as well as Toplink Office, a database of women leaders in Holland.<sup>10</sup>

The interactive technology has also been used by the movement to address domestic violence. Examples can be found in anti-domestic violence homepages in U.S., such as <<http://www.now.org/issue/violence>> set up by NOW (National Organization for Women), <<http://www.aidv-usa.com>> set up by American Institute on Domestic Violence, as well as Cybergirl Safety Net <<http://www.cybergrrl.com/views/dv>>. In addition to providing information on domestic violence, these websites also provide training, telephone and e-mail counselling, domestic violence examination, experience sharing and links with other interactive services.

#### ***Chinese Women's NGOs and Alternative Media***

In China, since 1995, women NGOs and activists became more and more active in spreading their own voice via the mass media. Women's publications related to gender equality also began to emerge. These included publications initiated by individuals or women's NGOs, such as "Who is

the Conqueror and Who is the Concubine"<sup>11</sup> by Women's Media Monitoring Network, the Danchun Women's Culture Series "Chinese Women's Culture",<sup>12</sup> as well as TV series produced by women's organisations or individuals.<sup>13</sup> These works can be considered part of the alternative media in China. The rapidly growing women's NGOs paid much attention to setting up their own alternative media including newsletters and publications. Among the more influential NGOs are Centre for Women's Law Studies and Legal Services, Peking University and Maple Women's Psychological Counselling Center, which published books concerning domestic violence<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of 2000, women's NGOs in Beijing started building their own websites including Chinese Women Legal Aid <<http://www.woman-legalaid.org.cn>>, run by Centre for Women's Law Studies and Legal Services of Peking University; Gender and Development <<http://www.chinagad.org>>, established by National Gender and Development Network; China Gender Media Watch <<http://www.genderwatchchina.org>>, run by Women's Media Monitoring Network; and Rural Women <<http://www.country-woman.net>>, run by the Practical Skills Training Centre for Rural Women. It is worth mentioning that in China, compared with radio or a newspaper, a website is much cheaper and more effective to build if one wants to spread information regarding women's rights and development.

#### ***Chinese Women's NGOs and Mass Media***

Since the 1990s, NGOs in China have given much attention to the role of mass media. Generally speaking, media means more than itself. It represents government's recognition of NGOs' work. The "authorisation function"<sup>15</sup> of media has a special effect in supporting small and weak NGOs and promoting their social influence. In fact, friendly relationship-building between NGOs and mass media has already begun. The China NPO Forum successfully organised a dialogue between mass media and NGOs/NPOs in March 2003 to encourage both parties to explore the news reporting issue about NGOs.<sup>16</sup>

Another significant development is that the Anti-Domestic Violence Network includes a media network composed of more than 30 individuals from 26 mass media groups. This "Women Media Monitoring Network," initiated in 1996, aims to promote gender equality through monitoring and bringing change to gender-biased reporting. As a part of the anti-domestic violence project, the network plays two important roles: (1) to participate and report NGO activities against domestic violence and raise public awareness of domestic violence through mass media coverage; and (2) mainstreaming gender in anti-domestic violence through gender awareness training and raising the awareness of media workers and the general public on gender-based violence. The dual role of members as media practitioners



and media network members not only helps in the reporting of domestic violence issues, but also strengthens the liaison between mass media and the anti-domestic violence network.

In general, the international women's moment, the development of Chinese women's NGOs and the practice of alternative media in China led to the development of Stop Domestic Violence website. The constructive relationship between women's NGOs and mainstream mass media provided a stable foundation for the interaction between alternative media and mass media.

### The Stop Domestic Violence Website

In 2000, the project "Domestic Violence in China: Research, Intervention and Prevention" (Stop Domestic Violence Project, in short) initiated by the China Law Society considering setting up a website toward the second or third year of the project. According to the project plan, the Stop Domestic Violence website <<http://www.stopdv.org.cn>> would be one of 15 sub-projects of the main project. Because those involved also set up an NGO called "China Law Society Stop Domestic Violence Network," the website was also meant to be the site of this NGO.

The website's objective was "to provide a platform of information exchange concerning domestic violence inside and outside of the network." Preparations began in March 2001. By October, the website was constructed and by November, it was in operation on trial basis to coincide with a national conference on domestic violence organised by the main project. Within one month of trial operations, the website received 2,300 visits. Two major revisions were carried out in 2002 and one database function was added. By December 2002, the website had already logged 25,600 visits. Due to frequent page design revisions, the website update was irregular.

At the beginning of the website construction, the project did not have a clear vision of its role. A "platform of information exchange" was too general a term. However, with the deepening of the work, the staff developed a clearer understanding of the site's function. We came to the realisation that the Stop Domestic Violence website is not only a platform of information exchange but should also be a form of alternative media run by a women's NGO to empower women. As an alternative media, the website "substitutes" the mainstream media in the following ways:

1. It provides systematic information on gender-based domestic violence at home and abroad. In general (mainstream) mass media, such information is scattered and also processed according to the agenda and routine of mass media. This website, however, considers it its role to provide systematic information about domestic violence, and has therefore become a resource centre on the subject.

2. It provides, in an intensive and systematic manner, the interpretation of domestic violence based on feminist and gender theories. The reporting of domestic violence issues by the mass media very often does not have a gender perspective or feminist interpretation.

A research by Guo Yanqiu and Cai Yiping of newspaper reporting on domestic violence between 1991-1998 found several common problems found in the reporting: a) a denial of domestic violence as a common problem and inability to report the news fairly and objectively; b) exaggerated or dramatised domestic violence stories; c) a tendency to blame women victims for not being self-supporting or independent.<sup>17</sup> These problems distort the issue.

On the other hand, the silence of mass media about domestic violence is a process of privatisation of the issue because it establishes the agenda-setting function<sup>18</sup> of the media that domestic violence is not a public issue that demands the concern and resolution. But when domestic violence is reported by the newspaper, it is depicted as an extreme situation of utter brutality, implying that it is an extraordinary situation that happens only to some women who should be blamed for the consequences of the violence. This kind of reportage makes it hard for domestic violence to enter the public agenda, besides misleading the public through reinforcement that domestic violence is a private matter. The Stop Domestic Violence website provides the public a different perspective of domestic violence by offering interpretations based on feminist and gender theories.

3. The site has established the Stop Domestic Violence Network's "independent voice." The Network is a unique resource of up-to-date research projects and interventions, methodologies using a multi-disciplinary approach. Therefore, the Network is in a position to provide independent and first-hand information that could influence media and society. Independent sources of information may or may not be accepted and publicised by mass media.

4. Through interaction with the users, the website formed a national network of domestic violence. The network is not only an organisational, but also an intellectual and ideological network, making it possible to build a consensus about stop domestic violence in the country.

Another important issue of website is the cooperation with mass media. From the very beginning, this website focused on mass media as one of its strategic target groups. Especially because only 1 percent of the population has access to Internet,<sup>19</sup> it was imperative that we provide intensive and interactive resources about domestic violence through this website to encourage the media to use the information available so that the publics understand domestic violence issues from a gender perspective and introduce



appropriate and timely interventions. Therefore, the women behind the website have to think constructively about how to interact with the mainstream media.

So far, the website's social impact has been mostly via the media. As an alternative media, the website does not regard hit numbers as its most important target; rather, it is more concerned with how the information can be effectively disseminated to society at large through media and how such information can better serve its target audience.

### **Interaction with Mass Media Independence of the Website**

Compared with mass media, the alternative media or "non-official websites" are naturally disadvantaged, which makes the independence of the website an important issue. Though the Chinese are already sceptical and often criticise the bureaucracy, corruption and commercialism, most of them still keep their faith in mass media, which are often government-controlled. Even among the web users, mass media is a more favoured information source. In a survey on *Internet Users in Five Chinese Cities from 2000 to 2001* conducted by the Social Development Center of Chinese Academy of Social Science, the percentage of respondents who "very trust" and "trust" domestic TV news was a high 77.3 percent—76.4 percent for newspapers and 74.3 percent for radio. For web-based news, the confidence figure was only 47.2 percent.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, mass media has accumulated powerful resources. Until 2001, there were 301 radio stations (excluding those in sub-county units) covering 92.92 percent of total population; 357 TV stations (excluding those in sub-county units) covering 94.18 percent of total population<sup>21</sup>; 2,111 newspaper titles and 8,889 magazine titles.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, unless extra effort is put into the site, cooperation with mass media is most likely to be a passive acceptance of existent norms or concepts of mass media. The website thus loses its own voice. It therefore has to provide "interesting" materials to attract mass media into reporting domestic violence. It should be independent from and equal to mass media, creating original information resources and having its own set of agenda. The website can only achieve media's cooperation to share information and advocate against domestic violence on this basis. Only this way can the NGO voice be magnified, instead of distorted due to misinterpretations or commercial reasons.

### **Original Information Resource**

The information from the website comes in two kinds: one is the editing and the use of old information, found mainly in the columns "News Review," "Guideline for Documents" and "Links." The second is the original information resources including "Newsletters," "Project Resource," "Online Training" and "Net Express."

### **a) Newsletters and Project Resources**

The main content of Newsletters and Project Resources is the pioneer theories and practices against domestic violence. The Newsletter is a bi-monthly magazine issued by the project *Strategy Research and Intervention against Women-Targeted Domestic Violence*, and includes News, Work Exchange, Theoretic Thoughts, Legal Study, International Exchange, Suggestions and Feedbacks.

The Project Resources gather the research output from the 15 sub-projects covering training, on-the-spot investigations, legal support, case studies, community-level interventions and medical interventions.

### **b) Online Training**

The training is an original resource created by the website itself that provides basic information on domestic violence in Q&A format. The main content includes:

- Understanding domestic violence (definition of domestic violence; the "myths" of domestic violence; who are the victims and who are the perpetrators; are you in a domestic violence situation; how domestic violence happens; the prevalence of domestic violence; cases of domestic violence in news reports; guidelines for reporting domestic violence)
- Seeking help (the necessary preparations if you want to stop domestic violence or if you are a victim; how you can protect yourself; if you want to leave or have already left the perpetrator; Chinese laws and legal regulations on domestic violence; doctors and domestic violence; judicial evaluation; policemen and domestic violence; hotlines)
- Understanding more (documents on domestic violence; recommendations of the research results on domestic violence; the UN Anti-Domestic-Violence Day; men's involvement in anti-domestic violence; activities and programmes against domestic violence in China)
- Shared experiences in fighting domestic violence among survivors.

Such online training was not included when the website started but the need easily became obvious. Typically, journalists would log on and surf the Internet for relevant information before writing up their reports. Therefore, a site such as <<http://www.stopdv.org.cn>> would naturally attract their attention. After discussions with the journalists, a major target group, the website decided to become more interactive. In terms of interface, a database was set up that visitors can search by key words. In terms of content, the website provides online training to journalists and the public, as well as links to the other online resources. Such online trainings help the journalists report an incidence of domestic violence from a gender perspective. When the journalists are preparing the report with clues provided by the website, we also suggest that they explore the online training, which meets the goal of promoting social awareness too.



c) Net Express

As with the online training, the Net Express is original to the website. It provides updated news and other important information. The "Net Express" is considered the "most strategically positioned" resource of the website, being the only information that could be seen directly on the homepage. It helps users of different social groups to make better use of the website resources. These users include:

**Mass media** - Mass media is an important user for "Net Express". When the journalists get any clue from the news from Net Express, they will start reporting and investigation. Sometimes, newspapers and other media outlets would publish the articles from Net Express. The website has always supported this kind of exposure.

**Anti-domestic violence networks** - As a sub-project of the Fighting Against Domestic Violence Project, the website should reflect updated information on the entire Network's effort against domestic violence. The site includes documentation of such events including a local conference with links to all the paper abstracts, as well as a project appraisal seminar that describes in detail the presentation of one of the main speakers on how to evaluate a project with a gender perspective.

**Concerned publics** - The website had also received letters from volunteers, financiers and other people concerned about domestic violence. Noticeably, the website is capable of mobilising society. As an alternative media, the website aims to be the centre of resource integration and social intervention, from providing information.

**Survivors** - Some survivors or relatives or friends of survivors send letters to the website. Below are examples.

*I am the sister of a survivor of domestic violence. Ever since my sister got married, she had been beaten many, many times. Today her eyes are swollen with blood in them. I forget from when. Her husband would start to beat her, for example, by banging her head against the wall, or using hard things like a wooden stool. Fortunately, my sister was of optimistic temperament... But the many years of torture has changed her. This time, she finally made up her mind to get a divorce. I am wondering if his behaviour is one form of domestic violence. Is it true that small wounds wouldn't be considered domestic violence? And what price should he pay?*

Another letter:

*I've been married four years and my husband beat me twice. But the recent one was quite hard. My ear membrane was broken because of that. Can I accuse him of domestic violence? I am anxiously waiting for your reply!!!*

A woman whose husband works in a court cried for help from the website, having no other recourse.

*All the colleagues or supervisors are so fed up with this and they don't want to have anything to do with it anymore. I went to All Women Federation and other agencies with little effect. Many blamed me instead. What's more, his behaviour doesn't affect his career at all. And he was not afraid of my suing him at all.*

Another survivor was constantly beaten after she gave birth to her child.

*The perpetrator said that "it's reasonable to beat me, and, when one gets mad, one behaves like that." ...I filed for divorce. He admitted to have beaten me for the child. But he wouldn't agree to have committed domestic violence. I asked the judge how to define such phrase as "unless major wrongs (including domestic violence)." The judge stumbled and said that he forgot! Finally, because he served the army and refused to divorce, and my evidence was not enough (the medical record of my wounded soft tissues and photos that show my waist bones), I was denied the divorce because I still looked complete.*

From the letters, the survivors' information needs can be gleaned: the definition of "domestic violence"; help from society, particularly, the agencies they can approach; legal information on the punishment the perpetrator deserves, and; guidance on how to overcome the "cultural" and "political" obstacles.

In helping the survivors know the information they need to know to be able to control their own fate, the website helps in their empowerment. Such work dovetails the other goal of the "Net Express" section, which is to communicate and analyse the needs of survivors for a more supportive environment against domestic violence.

The website takes the following steps to foster an interactive relationship with mass media:

- 1) Participate in planning and reporting domestic violence incidents from a gender or human rights perspective. It requires that the website staff be present when important events take place.
- 2) Generate information that supports gender rights and transfer the information to "Net Express" without delay.
- 3) Inform and encourage journalists to use the website information. Especially when the journalists are able to get leads from the website, their interview needs should be facilitated to facilitate the information flow.
- 4) Discuss the value of certain information with reporters and foster their sense of social responsibility to help broadcast the NGO voice.

The report on the play "Vagina Monologues" is a typical example.



“V” bears rich meanings in this instance. It stands for V-day (victory), and in the case of feminists, victory over violence. It is also the “V” in Valentine’s Day. Last and most important, “V” stands for a woman’s vagina. In “Vagina Monologues,” the female lead narrates many women’s experiences and feelings toward the vagina. In most cultures, the vagina brings about anxiety, humiliation, contempt, even disgust. Even in a seemingly open society as the United States, the word does not evoke positive images, nor respect. Such a view plays a part in women-targeted violence. As long as the word “vagina” is not pronounced out loud, sexual violence will stay unseen and unrecognised; it will remain a secret; and for many cultures, a source of a sense of shame. By reciting the word out loud, however, the shame and fears are dispelled. “Vagina Monologues” is therefore a way to break the silence.

The play is performed around the world every Valentine’s Day. “Vagina Monologues” has become a symbolic V-Day of women’s NGOs fighting woman-targeted violence.

In China, the play was first performed in Shanghai on 2 March 2002. An objective of the performance was the fund-raising for the anti-domestic violence network.

In the run-up to the performance, the website was actively involved. Sexual violence is considered secret, private and shameful. Through the play, the topic could enter public domain and trigger discussion against sexual oppression. After the performance, the website staff interviewed the main actress, Mattie. We kept asking her, “Is it necessary to speak out loud the word vagina?”

She was emphatic. “You must. Because most women-targeted violence is related to vagina. If we still avoid the word, how can we talk about sexual violence in public? Women should use such vocabulary to describe their experience and feelings openly, which will be the beginning to the solution of the issue. The aim of this play is to familiarise its audience with the word.”

The website staff subsequently wrote a commentary entitled “Listening to Vagina Monologues” and published this online. The article featured V-day, the content of the play, the performance, interviews of the artistes, and the performances in other areas such as Singapore.

The article described one scene where after the performer narrates a rape incident, she holds up three cards in silence. Written on the first card is: “The first rape is on the vagina.” On the second card: “The second rape is when you are in court, it happens to the spirit.” The third card asked: “The third rape is by the media. If she were you, would you dare to go to police?”

The article also contained links to other background information.

It yielded considerable response. The writer received calls from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou inquiring into publishing the article on different mass media outlets. However, because the word “vagina” appears in the article, many media outlets did not want to publish it in full for fear of being accused of “pornography.” In this case, the alternative media’s advantage was obvious. Within several days, the number of visitors to the website increased dramatically.

After consultations, the website authorised a number of mass media groups to publish the article with revisions. *San Lian Life Weekly* interviewed the writer and reported on this on 6 April 2002. China Women News published two-thirds of the article on 10 September 2002, as well as a commentary entitled “Be Ourselves.” China Women News and Public Health also published excerpts of the article. Through mass media, a taboo topic successfully became a public one about women’s human rights.

Another example is the reportage on the first domestic TV series reflecting domestic violence, “Do Not Speak to Strangers.”

The website staff were active participants in the conceptualisation of the scenes, introducing concepts of domestic violence, gender analysis, as well as related law and social resources. When the series was to be aired, the website staff did an on-the-spot interview and wrote an article entitled “China’s first domestic violence TV series to be shown.” This article was published by China Women News on 5 March 2002, followed by *Beijing Daily* on 25 March, and *Beijing Evening*. The website’s effort did not end here. Borrowing from the popularity of the TV programme, the website also became involved in selecting the spokespersons in the anti-domestic violence advocacy. When 22 advertisement boards were erected in Beijing advocating against domestic violence, the website published a follow-up report that once again attracted mass media’s attention. The series of reports on the website influenced people’s ideas on domestic violence substantially.

On 20 April 2002, Wu Han Morning News published “Don’t Speak to Strangers’ on in Wu Han; College Teacher Beat His Wife.” The report quoted the survivor: “My life is exactly like the TV programme. If I speak with strange men, I will be beaten by my husband.”

On 10 May 2002, the Beijing Youth published the article “Live Version of ‘Don’t Speak to Strangers’; Heartless Husband Stabbed His Wife 17 Times.” This was followed by another article, “Beating Wife for 34 Years, the Real ‘Don’t Speak To Strangers’ Awaits His Sentence.”



The 30 March issue of *Jiang Xing Daily* also carried the article "Domestic Violence Introduces Black Topic," which attributed the tremendous impact of the TV show to the use of the theme of domestic violence.

According to China Women News,<sup>23</sup> since the TV programme was aired, the Beijing Maple Hotline received more phone calls concerning domestic violence. A woman admitted that before watching the TV show, she had no idea of what domestic violence was and did not realise that wife-beating already was a form of domestic violence. Another woman said, "Have you seen the TV series? I am that leading role woman. I just bear everything."

#### Social Impact

The examples illustrate that:

1. As an alternative media, the website enjoys co-existence with mass media or mainstream media. On the one hand, mainstream media needs alternative media for original information. On the other, the alternative media emanating from NGOs are able to magnify their voice through mass media. The interaction between the two is mutually beneficial. Notably, the long-term cooperation between non-government women organisations and mass media facilitated the interaction between both.
2. The original information created by alternative media such as "Web Resources" "Online Training" and "Net Express" provide rich information and story leads for mass media, thus making more extensive and intensive analyses of domestic violence possible.
3. Alternative media provides a feminist perspective and analyses and, despite the omissions and weaknesses of mass media, such treatment is certain to influence mass media to some degree. Hence, alternative media is a potent tool in shaping public opinion. Chinese NGOs and women activists are not only users but also creators, actors and facilitators of new technology. Through an alternative website, they can project their voices and world-views to mainstream media.

Source: <[http://www.siyanda.org/docs/buwei\\_stopdv.doc](http://www.siyanda.org/docs/buwei_stopdv.doc), January 2003>

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO World Communication Report 1989, translated into Chinese by Foreign News Research Group, News Research Institute, Xinhua News Agency, China Overseas Chinese Publishing House, 1992, p. 393.

<sup>2</sup> Werner J. Severn and James W. Tankard Jr., *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods and Uses in the Mass Media*, 1997, 4th ed. in Chinese, translated by Guo Zhenzhi, 2000, Huaxia Publishing House, p. 276.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Albert, *What Makes Alternative Media Alternative?* <<http://www.zmag.org/whatmakesalti.htm>> and <<http://www.zmag.org/altmediawatch.htm>, October 16, 2002>.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Atton, "Are There Alternative Media after CMC?"

*M/C Reviews*, 12 Apr. 2002, <<http://www.uq.edu.au/mc/reviews/politics/altmedia.html>>, accessed 28 December 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Atton, "Approaching Alternative Media: Theory And Methodology," 24 May 2001, <<http://faculty.menlo.edu/~jhiggins/ourmedia/ica2001/chris%20atton.tx.pdf>>, accessed 28 December 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Severn and Tankard, *Communication Theories*, p. 345

<sup>7</sup> UNDP, *1995 World Situation of Women - Trends and Statistics*, New York, 1995, p. 172.

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO, *1989 World Communication Report*, p. 418

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO, *1989 World Communication Report*, pp. 426-435.

<sup>10</sup> Isis International-Manila, *Alternative Assessment of Women and Media based on NGO Reviews of Section J, Beijing Platform for Action*, 2000, <<http://www.womenaction.org/csm.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> "Who is the Conqueror and Who is the Concubine," compiled by Guo Yanqiu, Feng Yuan, China Women Publishing House, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> "Chinese Women's Culture," compiled by Huang Lin, China Wenlian Publishing House, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> "Gender Bias Taken for Granted," a TV programme produced China Women's College.

<sup>14</sup> "Legal Aid for Women" by Centre for Women's Law Studies and Legal Services, Peking University, Chinese Workers Publishing House; and "Wife Battering—Violence within the Walls" by Maple Women's Psychological Counseling Center, Zhongyuan Farmers' Publishing House, 1998

<sup>15</sup> Severn and Tankard, *Communication Theories*, p. 347

<sup>16</sup> NPO Forum: Dialogue and Interaction between Mass Media and NPOs – Forum Summary 3, March 22, 2002, <[http://www.npo.com.cn/qt/lt\\_nr.asp?id=13](http://www.npo.com.cn/qt/lt_nr.asp?id=13)>, accessed December 29, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Guo Yanqiu, Cai Yiping, "Eradication of Domestic Violence—How the News Media can be Alert of the Issue," included in "Who is the Conqueror and Who is the Concubine." pp. 169-171.

<sup>18</sup> Everett M. Rogers & James W. Dearing, *Studies on the agenda-setting*, edited by Robert M. Ogles, *Mass Communication: An Effects Approach*, in Chinese, translated by Guan Shijie, etc. Chinese Social Sciences Publishing House, 2000, P. 67

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<sup>20</sup> Guo Liang and Bu Wei, *Report on the Usage of Internet and Its Impact in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Changsha in 2000*, Social Development Center, Chinese Academy of Social Science, forthcoming.

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<sup>22</sup> *Statistics of Chinese Press*, compiled by General Administration of News Press. China Labor and Social Security P. 2002. pp4-5.

<sup>23</sup> "Why Maltreated Women Refuse to Leave Their Family?" China Women News, 9 April 2002.