

Food Safety: Muckraking Across Cultures
Investigative Journalism in China and the United States

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INTRODUCTION

During my junior year of college, I had the pleasure of studying abroad in China for six months. The language and the culture made an impression on me and cemented my passion for studying East Asia, and my family and friends who came to visit shared my excitement. When exploring a foreign culture, the facet most exciting to me is its unique cuisine. Thanks to the large variety of ethnic groups in China, the cuisine in that country is especially varied, and therefore especially exciting to explore.

Because the facilities available at my program necessitated that students eat out for almost every meal, I had many opportunities to try new dishes. Within a few blocks of my dorm, there were at least twenty different eating establishments. Several were restaurants in the western style, but others ranged from a hole in the wall with a husband and wife team working over two woks to a mobile cart that sold fried egg crepes with an unidentified sauce. Having heard horror stories about the high incidence of food poisoning in China, I ate cautiously at first. I followed all the guidelines, refusing to eat raw fruits or vegetables, and I avoided the visibly dirty places. However, as I settled in and, as one of my professors put it, “became one with the Chinese bacteria,” I became more daring. I tried some of the Muslim-run restaurants, which in northern China specialize in different forms of noodles. I also began to frequent a restaurant run by a North Korean who at first regarded his American clientele with disdain, but later came to enjoy instructing us on the finer points of eating bibimbap. During this period of culinary daring, I also discovered one of my favorite dishes, jidan chao bing, which is thin strips of cabbage and flat bread fried with egg in a light savory sauce.

Much to my surprise, I very rarely had food poisoning in China, but when I did have it, it was severe. This is to be expected anytime one travels abroad, and many travelers to China wear their food poisoning experiences as badges of honor. When I returned to America, I breathed a sigh of relief, believing that I had successfully survived China. I marveled at how clean all the American restaurants were, and at how easy it was to access potable water. I also realized that while in China I had developed a sub-conscious habit of checking all my food for things like insects and shards of glass.

A few months after my return to America, I fell ill and was told that I had a food-borne parasite or virus of unknown origin that had paralyzed my stomach. My doctors could never agree on where it came from, but several of their theories pointed to China. I spent the next few months in bed or in the hospital, trying to figure out how to get enough calories to live while being unable to eat anything. Thinking about this conundrum took up much of my time, but as I slowly recovered, I spent time on the internet researching food in China. Clearly, I was looking for answers regarding my own situation, but what I found out in the end was much more general. Something was seriously wrong with China's food safety system.

My discovery was no secret. By that time in 2006, numerous food scandals had broken in China and were receiving international media attention. In October 2006, Taiwanese officials received a shipment of Chinese crabs that were found to contain nitrofurans, a carcinogenic antibiotic.¹ In November 2006, it was discovered that certain Chinese duck farmers had been feeding their ducks a carcinogenic dye to make their eggs

¹ Reuters. [CHRONOLOGY-China's Food Safety Scares in the Spotlight](#). 7/12/2007

appear fresher. These are just two of the many incidents that managed to leak out of China and into the western media.

China's food safety problems have also attracted the attention of international health organizations, including the World Health Organization (WHO). Undoubtedly in response to incidents of the type mentioned above, the WHO listed food safety as a main concern in a document outlining its strategic priorities concerning China for the years 2004-2008.² The WHO has many initiatives in place for improving food safety around the world, including promoting laboratory-based safety evaluations for foodstuffs and compiling international databases to monitor and track outbreaks of food borne illnesses.³ As a member country of the WHO, China has access to WHO information and resources to improve the safety of its food. According to Jorgen Schlundt, the director of WHO's food safety department, "China is working on it. There is a high-level political commitment to do something about it."⁴ The Chinese government may be committed to working with the WHO to improve food safety, but that does not make the current food safety situation any less alarming.

I have lived in the United States all my life and have always been told that the people have the real power. If there's something wrong, conscientious citizens stand up to discuss the issue and find a solution. In the United States, if food were knowingly contaminated with confirmed carcinogens and still managed to make it to marketplaces, there would certainly be public protest. Due to the magnitude of the problem in China, I was surprised that there had not yet been a mass citizen uprising.

² Office of the World Health Organization Representative in China. Country Cooperation Strategy: WHO China Strategic Priorities for 2004-2008. Pg. 18. 7/31/2004.

³ World Health Organization. Food Safety and Food Borne Illness Fact Sheet. 3/2007.

⁴ Reuters. Food Safety Not Just China's Problem. 7/17/2007.

In an attempt to better understand the situation in China, I looked back on the history of food safety issues in the United States to try and uncover how these once unnoticed problems came to be headline news stories. In almost every case, there was one person, or a small group of people, that exposed the problem and brought it to the attention of the rest of the populace. This new public awareness allowed for people to engage in serious discussions, and even protests, which eventually led to substantial changes in the offending system. During the course of my survey there were two American examples of this cycle that captured my attention. First, the sweeping reforms of food safety policy brought about by Upton Sinclair's 1906 book, *The Jungle*. Second, the current changes in public awareness about food additives and health, which was contributed to by Eric Schlosser's 2001 book, *Fast Food Nation*.

While researching China's food safety regulations, I came across an article that mentioned "the Upton Sinclair of China." Further research revealed that in 2004 a Chinese dissident named Zhou Qing had written a book called *What Kind of Heaven? A Survey of the Current Safety of China's Food*. This book, which exposed many aspects of Chinese food production, is the closest thing to popular muckraking literature about food that China has seen. It is useful to point out that muckraking literature in general is not often seen in China because of government restrictions. According to Reporters Without Borders, an organization that fights for freedom of the press and the rights of journalists, China is ranked 163rd out of 169 countries in terms of press freedom.⁵ While the Chinese constitution protects freedom of speech and press, the document also mentions that the Chinese government also has a duty to defend "the security, honor, and interests of the

⁵ Reporters Without Borders. [Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2007](#).

motherland.”⁶ It is quite easy for the Chinese government to use vaguely worded loopholes like this one to suppress investigative reporting.

My research also revealed that, despite having similar themes, each of these books has had different levels and kinds of impact on Chinese and American society, respectively. This paper explores how each book has affected social awareness about food issues and food safety regulations both nationally and internationally. I was also interested in seeing how writing muckraking literature has affected each author personally. In the first two chapters I give a thorough review of Zhou Qing’s work, under the assumption that not many people will be familiar with it. The rest of the paper is dedicated to exploring the changes and outcomes mentioned above. Where relevant I have included my own thoughts and notes based on my experience living in China.

After reading this thesis, I hope that the reader will come away with a better understanding of how muckraking literature can be seen across cultures. I also hope that the reader has a better understanding of the social and political contexts in which these works were written, and how those contexts have influenced reception of both the books and their authors. Finally, I hope that I have emphasized the courage and tenacity that it took for each author to confront the personal, political, and social challenges they faced before, during, and after writing their books.

As one reads my thesis, it should also become clear that the American books discussed have, to date, had a more concrete and direct influence on American society and government than Zhou Qing’s book has had on China’s. There are many reasons for this, including censorship, distribution problems, China’s demographics, and the structure and interests of the Chinese government itself. I will explore all of these topics below,

⁶ Zissis, Carin. Council on Foreign Relations: Media Censorship in China. 9/25/2006.

and in my conclusion I will discuss what I think must happen in order for Zhou Qing's book to help push China towards much needed change.

CHAPTER ONE: Overview of *What Kind of Heaven?*

In China it is often said, “Food is the people’s heaven.”⁷ This common saying demonstrates that food is important to modern China in several ways. First, regional differences in food preparation styles help people create unique cultural identities in what is considered a largely homogenous country. If one wants to eat something spicy, it would be best to go to Sichuan. If one were interested in noodles, they would have better luck in the northern part of the country than in the south. Even small towns and villages have unique dishes and snack foods that they are famous for, and these traditional foods are an important source of local pride, as well as income. Great importance is also placed on food’s ability to nourish the body, and Chinese medicine often makes use of food’s curative properties. For example, there is a tradition of making a sick person eat the body part of an animal that corresponds to his or her own sick body part.⁸ Therefore, it is not uncommon to see men in Chinese restaurants order dishes including testicles and penises in hopes of increasing their own virility.⁹ In fact, the belief in the connection between food and healing runs so deep that some people are willing to take the extreme step of consuming human placenta in order to strengthen their bodies.¹⁰ Given the widespread cultural and medical importance of food, it is no surprise that people greet friends and family members with the phrase “Have you eaten yet?”¹¹

⁷ Zhou Qing. *What Kind of Heaven?* Pg. 7. 2004.

⁸ Zhou Qing. *What Kind of Heaven?* Pg. 1. 2004.

⁹ Zhou Qing. *What Kind of Heaven?* Pg. 2. 2004.

¹⁰ Zhou Qing. *What Kind of Heaven?* Pg. 1. 2004.

¹¹ Zhou Qing. *What Kind of Heaven?* Pg. 49. 2004.

Someone once asked Chairman Mao what he considered the biggest problem in the world. He responded that food is the biggest problem in the world.¹² As the leader of a very large country, it is logical that Chairman Mao considered feeding the citizenry his main concern, and he would likely not be surprised to learn that food is still one of the biggest problems in China today. However, he might be surprised by how complicated the problem of food has become in China. In the past, the main concern was simply whether or not there would be enough food. Today, that is still part of the problem, but the more crucial question is whether or not there will be enough safe food. In his book, *What Kind of Heaven: A Look at the Safety of China's Food*, journalist Zhou Qing delves into the shady side of China's food production systems and exposes the ways in which China's food heaven has been compromised.

From the farm to the processing plant, Zhou Qing paints a grim picture of Chinese food products. His book tells at least one horrific story about every group in the food pyramid, and after reading it one must wonder whether or not it is safe to eat anything in China. The sheer scale of China's food safety problem is staggering, a fact that will be illustrated in the following food group-by-food group summary of some of China's food safety concerns. This summary includes sections on meat, seafood, produce, dairy, and miscellaneous food products.

Before reading this summary, readers should be aware that China is not necessarily a lawless land in terms of food safety. In fact, one might be surprised to learn that in China there are many food safety laws, as well as a five year plan for improving food safety. However, in China, the creation and enforcement of laws and regulations is done by many different bodies, which leads to problems regarding consistency and

¹² Zhou Qing. [What Kind of Heaven?](#). Pg. 48. 2004.

enforcement.¹³ Additionally, the power balances between these various law-making bodies are ill-defined, and when conflicts arise it is often unclear which agency's law is dominant. Key pieces are also missing from China's jumble of food safety laws, such as rules regarding planting and breeding, and guidelines regarding recalls and crisis management. Finally, Chinese food safety laws are rendered even more ineffective by a lack of severe consequences for breaking the laws. In most cases there is a maximum fine of 50,000 yuan (US \$6,600), which is not enough to discourage offenders. Understanding these difficulties regarding food safety law in China should help the reader reconcile the horrible occurrences discussed below with the fact that China has many food safety laws.

Meat

According to Zhou Qing, meat production is one of the most corruption ridden food industries in China. Even in Beijing, a large modernized city, a recent test by China's Quality Inspection Department revealed that 75% of tested meat products fail to meet government safety standards.¹⁴ This is of particular concern because in 1990 China became the largest meat producer in the world, specializing in pork, and between 1988 and 1998 China's consumption of meat more than doubled.¹⁵ Since meat is so widely enjoyed by the Chinese, it is easy to see that safety problems regarding meat production have the potential to be particularly destructive and widespread. Zhou Qing spends much of his book focusing on the meat industry and its many corrupt practices.

Zhou Qing mentions many facts concerning meat production in China that simultaneously disgust and infuriate. For example, in order to earn more profit on a cut of

¹³ Ying, Hu. China Struggles to Digest Food Safety Laws. Asia Times Online. 8/28/2007.

¹⁴ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven? Pg. 66. 2004.

¹⁵ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven? Pg. 28. 2004.

pork, some Chinese butchers inject the pork with mercury, which is highly toxic and very difficult to detect.¹⁶ Some pig, chicken, and fish farmers are also in the habit of feeding their animals chemically treated scrap leather from tanneries, meaning that the animals are consuming toxic and carcinogenic substances that bio-accumulate in humans.¹⁷ This practice is widespread, according to a leather merchant named Mr. Liang. He says, “In China, many people make a living by buying up this scrap, grinding it to a powder, mixing it with rice powder and salt and selling it off.” As Zhou Qing points out, the consequences to human health of these irresponsible and disingenuous practices are staggering.

However disturbing the above-mentioned facts are, it is still important to remember that those sorts of abuses are practically isolated incidents when compared to the real scourge of the Chinese meat industry, lean meat powder produced from the additive Clenbuterol. Clenbuterol is a common ingredient in cough medicine that was inadvertently added to some animal feed by an American scientist in the 1980’s.¹⁸ Thus it was discovered that Clenbuterol increases the amount of lean meat an animal produces while decreasing the amount of fatty meat produced. As dietary preferences around the world changed to embrace the eating of lean meat and reject fatty meat, raising animals fed with Clenbuterol became very profitable.¹⁹ However, Clenbuterol’s reputation as a miracle chemical quickly turned into a reputation as a dangerous one. In the 1990’s, reports began to surface of people around the world being poisoned by meat raised on

¹⁶ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 18. 2004.

¹⁷ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 18. 2004.

¹⁸ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 27. 2004.

¹⁹ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 31. 2004.

Clenbuterol.²⁰ One famous incident involved the poisoning of 113 people in Spain who experienced nervousness, heart palpitations, muscle pain, muscle tremors, and headaches after consuming meat tainted with Clenbuterol.²¹ France, Ireland, Hong Kong, and Vietnam have also reported public health problems related to Clenbuterol.²² However, it was not until after the rest of the world began to question the safety of lean meat powder that China began importing it for use on its pig farms.²³ According to Chinese sellers of the chemical, the economic benefits of using Clenbuterol far outweighed the health risks of the chemical.²⁴

More and more reports of Clenbuterol poisoning reached government health authorities, and China was forced to re-evaluate the role of the chemical in its agricultural system. By 2002, the government banned the use of lean meat powder in feedstock and water given to livestock.²⁵ Over the course of the next few years, the government continued to denounce the use of lean meat powder and introduced methods that local agricultural authorities could use to detect its presence.²⁶ Given the severe, multi-level government crackdown on the use of lean meat powder, it is unexpected that lean meat powder is still a serious threat to Chinese consumers today.

Seafood

Seafood has always been popular in China because it is believed to be especially nourishing to both adults and children. However, China's seafood industry is laxly regulated, producing a variety of unhealthy, and even deadly, seafoods. In one particular

²⁰ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 31. 2004.

²¹ Salleras et. al. Epidemiologic Study of an Outbreak of Clenbuterol Poisoning in Catalonia, Spain. 1995

²² Son, Hung and Nhi, Cam. "Magic" Steroid in Animal Feed Dangerous to Humans. 2005.

²³ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 31. 2004.

²⁴ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 32. 2004.

²⁵ McGregor, Richard. Beijing Rejects North American Pork. Financial Times. 9/16/2007

²⁶ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 39. 2004.

scandal, prawn farmers in Zhejiang Province were caught adding a mysterious red powder to their prawns during the cooking process. They claimed that it gave the prawns a healthy red color that appealed to consumers. Under closer investigation, this powder was found to be acid red 73, a carcinogenic wood dye.²⁷

Some farmers also sell their fish only after they have been soaked in malachite green.²⁸ Malachite green is a chemical that makes fish scales appear shiny, disguising the fact that the fish are old or sickly. However, malachite green has been suspected of being a carcinogen since the mid-1970's and its use has been banned in the United States and the European Union, and has been severely curtailed in Japan.²⁹ Adding it to food products not only results in the consumption of unsafe fish, it also has the potential to cause cancer. In order to highlight the wide spread use of chemicals in seafood farming, Zhou Qing also tells of how eel farms use potassium permanganate to kill the eels before they are harvested.³⁰ This makes the eels easier for the fishermen to catch, but also increases the likelihood of people consuming the chemical, which has been shown to result in lower pulse, severe gastro-intestinal distress, and possible internal burns.³¹

Seafood in China also has a bad reputation because it is often contaminated with high levels of hormones and antibiotics. In his book, Zhou Qing describes visits to fish farms in four provinces where he witnessed farmers lining the bottoms of growth pools with crushed contraceptive pills.³² The hormonal additives serve to make the fish, especially the eels, grow longer and skinnier and thus appeal more to consumers. In other

²⁷ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven? Pg. 64. 2004.

²⁸ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven? Pg. 17. 2004.

²⁹ Japan Corporate News Network. Kobe Steel's 'Kenifine' Found to be Effective Alternative to Malachite Green; New Antibacterial Coating for Fisheries Reduces Water Mold. 7/29/2005.

³⁰ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven? Pg. 18.2004.

³¹ Mallinckrodt Baker, Inc. Material Safety Data Sheet-Potassium Permanganate. 2/13/06.

³² Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven? Pg. 6. 2004.

cases, high levels of antibiotics have been found in seafood. The Chinese government has an interesting excuse for this finding. Their official response is that women who work in the seafood collection ponds often cut their fingers on sharp shells and rocks and pause in their work to apply antibiotic ointment. This antibiotic ointment enters the water and contaminates the food.³³ Regardless of how the antibiotics get there, the fact remains that it is unsafe for humans to be consuming these tainted foods.

Cancer and other terminal illnesses are frightening consequences of consuming these Chinese seafoods, but Zhou Qing is more concerned with a different health problem. As part of his investigations, he spent time in Beijing gynecological clinics where he encountered several patients suffering from premature puberty. He saw a seven-year old girl who had already begun to menstruate and a six-year old boy with facial hair growth, among others.³⁴ The doctor he spoke with said that such cases were not uncommon and that they were to be expected given the current state of China's food system. There are also long term consequences for the population as a whole, as the prevalence of tainted seafood and other products have been connected to the recent and steady decline in sperm count among Chinese men.³⁵

Produce

Many people eat fruits and vegetables as a way to promote good health, but Chinese people have become suspicious of produce in recent years thanks to several frightening exposures. There are two main points of concern with Chinese produce. First, most Chinese fruits and vegetables are treated with chemical pesticides and growth

³³ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven? Pg. 7. 2004.

³⁴ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven? Pg. 5. 2004.

³⁵ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven? Pg. 8. 2004.

enhancers. Second, Chinese produce is often subjected to harsh chemical treatments before being canned or otherwise processed for sale.

Zhou Qing states that China currently uses 200,000 tons, and over 1,000 different types of agricultural chemicals a year, some of which are illegal.³⁶ As an example, one can look to Lindane, a pesticide banned for its high toxicity and bio-accumulative properties.³⁷ Recent tests by Greenpeace reveal that 70% of the tested tomatoes imported from China to Hong Kong were contaminated by Lindane. While pesticides and growth enhancing chemicals could be seen as boons to the food industry in a country as large as China, this chemical overload also has negative consequences. According to Professor Chen Yishen, the deputy head of the State Council's Development Research Center, in 2003 China produced approximately 440 million tons of vegetables, but 70% of them were thrown away or left to rot due to food safety issues.³⁸ In response to this information, the government has instituted policies regarding pesticide use. For example, according to law, farmers must wait until 15 days after applying pesticides to produce before taking it to market.³⁹ However, these laws are usually ignored.

As part of his research, Zhou Qing visited several different production plants and discovered that the techniques they use are horrifying. His accounts of pickled vegetable factories in Sichuan are especially disturbing. In one plant he discovered that in order to keep bugs off the produce, all the vats are sprayed with a 99% DDVP solution every two or three days.⁴⁰ DDVP is rated as "highly hazardous" by the World Health Organization

³⁶ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 23. 2004.

³⁷ Beyond Pesticides. Greenpeace Alleges China Uses Banned Pesticides on Supermarket Produce. 6/26/2007

³⁸ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 23. 2004.

³⁹ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 63. 2004.

⁴⁰ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 52. 2004.

and is being investigated as a carcinogen by several organizations, including the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the International Agency for Research on Cancer.⁴¹ In some of these pickled vegetable factories, Zhou Qing also found workers using bags of salt marked “Industrial Salt: Not for Human Consumption.”⁴² Industrial salt is commonly used to produce alkali, dyes, and soaps and contains sulphuric acid, which is extremely dangerous, even in small quantities.⁴³ As a result of these practices, only 1/3 of the pickled vegetables produced in Chengdu conform to the regulatory standards of the Chengdu Quality Inspection Department.⁴⁴

Over the course of the book, Zhou Qing mentions other frightening discoveries. In several bean sprout processing factories he found bags of bleach powder and containers of expired chemicals.⁴⁵ He also tells of industrial fruit canning processes, which include removing the fruit skins with caustic chemicals and soaking the fruit in dyes to disguise the fact that it is unripe.⁴⁶ After reading Zhou Qing’s accounts of fruit and vegetable processing, one reaches the conclusion that traditionally nutritious and wholesome food items can no longer be trusted.

Dairy

Dairy products have not traditionally enjoyed popularity in China, but their consumption rate has risen thanks to the increasing influence of the West. However, the dairy industry is not immune to China’s food safety problems. The most publicized, and arguably the most tragic, incident in the dairy industry was the marketing of sub-standard

⁴¹ PAN. Pesticides Database-Chemicals: DDVP. 2007.

⁴² Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 52. 2004.

⁴³ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 61. 2004.

⁴⁴ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 52. 2004.

⁴⁵ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 58. 2004.

⁴⁶ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 64. 2004.

infant formula in Fuyang and many other areas. In these localities, a great variety of tainted milk powders were being sold; some were found to be toxic or carcinogenic while others were found to have almost no nutritional value.⁴⁷

Not surprisingly, the Chinese media has focused a lot of attention on this issue. People are sickened and angered by pictures of babies that have been fed this fake milk powder. In most cases, the children developed “big head syndrome,” which is commonly seen in cases of severe malnutrition.⁴⁸ A child afflicted with the syndrome experiences severe bodily wasting, while the head continues to grow larger. It is difficult to gauge how many cases of big head syndrome have occurred, and it is even more difficult to get an accurate death toll. However, the problem has received a lot of attention in China, and was one of the first incidents to inspire large public outcry about China’s food safety problems. In the next chapter, I will provide more information about the Chinese government’s response to this incident.

Other

As if contamination of the aforementioned food groups wasn’t problematic enough, many other products are also subject to food safety issues. In his article, Zhou Qing speaks of illegal tofu production factories that sell tofu with a protein content of only 4%, compared to 70-80% protein content in tofu from legal factories.⁴⁹ One can also purchase black market soy sauce produced using amino acids from human hair. These hair-based amino acids are cheaper, but they also contain arsenic, lead, and

⁴⁷ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven? Pg. 73. 2004.

⁴⁸ Zhou Qing . What Kind of Heaven?.Pg. 73. 2004.

⁴⁹ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven? Pg. 56. 2004.

carcinogens.⁵⁰ Zhou Qing also reports that many construction companies in larger cities feed their migrant workers stale rice that has grown mold and contains a highly carcinogenic toxin that can very quickly result in liver cancer.⁵¹

Conclusion

From this summary, one can see how wide-ranging and terrifying China's food safety problems are. It is no surprise that, according to a survey done by the China Youth Daily, 82% of the public are afraid about the safety of the nation's food, and 90% of those surveyed have encountered food safety problems of their own.⁵² It is interesting to note that, according to a survey in the US, 82% of people feel confident about the safety of their food.⁵³ Further highlighting the disparity between food safety in China and the rest of the world is the fact that, according to the WHO, approximately 30% of people in industrialized countries are made sick by unsafe food per year.⁵⁴ While this statistic is not exactly a reflection of the statistic about the incidence of food safety problems in China, it still casts a comparative light on the Chinese statistics. At the beginning of his book, Zhou Qing quotes Zhong Nanshan, a doctor who was very outspoken during the SARS epidemic, as saying that "The Chinese people are committing a form of slow mass suicide."⁵⁵ This statement feels melodramatic until one reads Zhou Qing's book and discovers the true extent of China's food safety problem.

⁵⁰ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 15. 2004.

⁵¹ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 71. 2004.

⁵² World Net Daily. Latest China Food Scare: Don't Eat Pickled Vegetables. 7/10/2007.

⁵³ Hitti, Miranda. Americans Heeding Food Safety Issues. 8/03/2007

⁵⁴ World Health Organization Media Centre. Food Safety and Food Borne Illness. 3/07

⁵⁵ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 8. 2004.

CHAPTER 2: Factors Contributing to China's Food Safety Problem

Zhou Qing's book is not merely a collection of gruesome facts and occurrences. He also includes his own theories about the different governmental and social factors that have contributed to the decline of food safety in China. He rails against the lack of a feeling of community among the Chinese people, corrupt officials and lax management, and the media. According to Zhou Qing, the food safety problem is merely a symptom of these more deeply rooted issues.

Along with Zhou Qing's observations and examples, this chapter also includes discussion sections in which I put forth my own impressions of Zhou Qing's ideas. While Zhou Qing has done excellent investigative work, his book does not provide any background knowledge about China or the living conditions there. My hope is that by including my own thoughts, based on my experiences in China, I can provide the reader with a more complete picture of the problems Zhou Qing discusses.

Example: Lack of Community

There are several points in Zhou Qing's book where he records the thoughts and justifications of those perpetrating the offenses mentioned above. At the pickled vegetable factory in Sichuan that uses DDVP in its manufacturing he quotes one worker as saying, "We don't eat any of these pickles in Si Chuan; we sell them to the other provinces."⁵⁶ Zhou Qing also reveals that pig farmers who use lean meat powder know how dangerous it is and do not consume the meat themselves. However, they have no qualms about selling the meat to people in the city because "they have free health care."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 52. 2004.

⁵⁷ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 26. 2004.

Discussion

These two examples reveal that the people involved in questionable food practices are concerned about the health and safety of their immediate communities but dissociate themselves from how their actions affect people they do not see everyday. There are several possible reasons for this kind of dissociation to occur. First, China covers an area of 9,596,960 sq. km., and has a population of 1.3 billion people.⁵⁸ Given the large amounts of both people and space, the events of one province often seem worlds away. Moreover these distances make it difficult to gauge the severity of a problem that is occurring in other provinces and even more difficult to understand how much ones personal actions contribute to the problem. Without this kind of awareness, there is little incentive to change ones behavior.

A general lack of accessible information about the true risks some of these production techniques and materials pose is also to blame. For Americans, much of the accurate, detailed information about food safety is most easily available on the internet. While it is unclear how much technical and scientific information about food safety is accessible from Chinese internet sources, some pertinent information can be learned from reading the online editions of larger newspapers, such as the People's Daily and Xinhua news. However, according to the Chinese Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), only 162 million of China's 1.3 billion people use the internet.⁵⁹ Therefore, it is unsurprising that critical information about the real risks of unsafe production techniques is largely unknown. Additionally, many of the farms and factories where these unsafe products are being produced are found in rural areas. The Chinese rural population is

⁵⁸ CIA World Factbook. [China](#). 12/07

⁵⁹ Miniwatts Marketing Group. [Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics, China](#). 2007.

approximately 737 million, and there are only 37 million internet users in that population.⁶⁰ It is an unfortunate truth that the rural farm and factory managers who could benefit most from this information have little hope of accessing it.

Example: Corrupt Officials

In his book, Zhou Qing often focuses his outrage on corrupt officials, who he believes are largely to blame for the unreliability of the Chinese food safety system. He includes two examples that illustrate the different levels of corruption in the system.

According to Zhou Qing, local government officials are responsible for inspecting food before it goes to market, but many of the officials have capital invested in the very factories or farms that they are meant to oversee. This is an especially serious problem in the meat industry, where invested officials are reluctant to shut down suppliers of Clenbuterol tainted meat.⁶¹ Because of this conflict of interest the Chinese public continues to be exposed to tainted products, even in cases where the dangers of the product are known.

Such rampant corruption on the local level is expected in China, but the problem has also spread to the upper echelons of the government. Zhou Qing's most poignant example involves the previously mentioned sub-standard infant formula scandal. All of China was shocked and outraged by this incident, and government leaders promised to investigate and then punish those responsible. Supposedly, the investigation occurred and those found to be responsible for the lax regulations were fired. However, it was later revealed that the officials in charge of the inquiry, Li Tingjun and Bai Qixiang, fabricated

⁶⁰ Miniwatts Marketing Group. Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics, China. 2007.

⁶¹ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 42. 2004.

the documents pertaining to the investigation.⁶² Additionally, no one was ever fired for their role in the scandal, as the government had promised. The government has since publicly spoken out about these abuses of power and has pledged to punish those responsible for this kind of corruption. To make public opinion of the handling of this incident even worse, the government, which previously promised free healthcare for children affected by sub-standard infant formula, has stopped providing those services.⁶³

Discussion

When I lived in China I was fortunate enough to have very little contact with government officials. However, I had many opportunities to converse with Chinese citizens, both while I lived in Beijing and while I traveled to other parts of the country. Before speaking with a wide variety of people, including businessmen, waitresses, hotel owners, farmers, and day laborers, I had thought that western news sources exaggerated China's corruption problem. Most of what is heard in the news is negative, including reports on how the lax standards of the Chinese government are poisoning our pets with tainted food⁶⁴ and harming our children with toys that contain lead.⁶⁵ However, it seems as though the western media does not exaggerate as much as I thought, and I was surprised by the number of casual conversations I had with Chinese citizens that turned into discussions about governmental corruption. In most cases, the person I was conversing with would ask me about how it felt to live under the Bush regime, which they assumed was filled with corruption. I turned these conversations around and was able to discover that many Chinese people had a personal anecdote about governmental

⁶²China Daily. China Cleans Up Job-Related Human Rights Violations. 05/27/2004

⁶³ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 76. 2004.

⁶⁴ Sivaraman, Arathi. Melamine in Pet Food, Wheat Gluten from China: FDA. Reuters. 3 /30/2007.

⁶⁵ Barboza, D. and Lipton, E. As More Toys are Recalled, Trail Ends in China. New York Times. 6/18/2007.

corruption. These stories were not exclusively about food, but they did indicate to me that corruption is a widespread and serious problem in China that has direct affects on many aspects of people's lives.

Example: Media Issues

The food safety problem has captured the interest of the Chinese people, inspiring the television media to produce many reports on the issue. In terms of encouraging freedom of information, this is a positive step. One television show that enjoys particular popularity is Central Television Station's "Daily Quality Reports."⁶⁶ This television program exposes companies that produce tainted products and gives details about how the products are manufactured. However, Zhou Qing feels that it is dangerous to give people step-by-step instructions on how to produce unsafe food in a society where the government is notoriously unable to regulate food safety.

The media problem extends beyond what kinds of information are televised. It is well-known that the Chinese government frequently censors news reports or issues media blackouts about particular stories.⁶⁷ This makes it difficult for people to know whether or not what they are hearing is true, or if what they're hearing is the complete story. In fact an annual series of face to face interviews of 140 people in China (including investors, government officials, upscale consumers, and media representatives) indicate that only 10% of those interviewed trust the media to do what is right, down from 18% in both 2005 and 2006.⁶⁸ As a result of media corruption, anxiety among the public increases and people are less trustful because they do not know what they can believe. A perfect

⁶⁶ Zhou Qing. *What Kind of Heaven?* Pg. 79. 2004.

⁶⁷ Simons, Craig. *Nothing Fake About It, China Awash in Lies*. COX Newspapers. 8/26/2007.

⁶⁸ Edelman China. *Edelman China Stakeholder Study: Rise of the Skeptic*. 9/12/2007

example of this problem is the steamed pork bun scandal from the summer of 2007. A reporter from China Central Television went undercover at a steamed bun factory that filled its buns with a pork filling that was actually composed of 60% industrially treated cardboard.⁶⁹ The scandal captivated both national and international audiences, and the factory was shut down. In August, 2007 the Chinese government announced that the news report about the buns had been fabricated and the reporter deemed responsible was sentenced to jail for one year.⁷⁰

Responses to the scandal posted on Chinese message boards indicated that the public did not know whether to believe that the pork buns or the news report was fake. One poster said, “We’ll never know whether the journalist made up the (bun) story to become famous or the government forced Beijing television to retract the story to ensure stability and harmony. Nowadays, everyone is trying to trick everyone else, so I don’t think we can trust anything.”⁷¹ People who are involved in analyzing Chinese media are also suspicious of the pork bun story’s retraction. The publisher of Danwei.org, a popular website about media, advertising, and urban Chinese life, is also quoted as saying, “Many people in Beijing believe that the news about the cardboard buns story being fake is itself fake. The way the authorities have gone about stopping the story is exactly the same way they clamp down on real news stories they don’t want circulating.”⁷²

Discussion

During my time in China, I encountered many suspect news reports, especially on television. For example, I was watching a China Central Television report that claimed,

⁶⁹ Associated Press. Beijing Steamed Buns Include Cardboard. San Francisco Gate. 7/12/2007.

⁷⁰ Simons, Craig. Nothing Fake About It, China Awash in Lies. COX Newspapers. 8/26/2007.

⁷¹ Simons, Craig. Nothing Fake About It, China Awash in Lies. COX Newspapers. 8/26/2007.

⁷² Committee to Protect Journalists News Alert 2007. In China, Reporter Jailed for Allegedly Fabricating News. 8/14/2007

“Today in northeastern China, there are no problems and everything is going well.” I thought this was a bit odd, until I received an e-mail from my mother asking whether or not I’d heard about the chemical factory explosion that had contaminated major water sources in northeastern China. I experienced several other similar incidents, and before long I was operating under the assumption that anything I heard on the news was a lie. I began to rely only on foreign news websites or information from my family and friends in the United States.

To me, the lack of reliable news reports and the prevalence of censorship reflect a deep disconnect between Chinese society and the Chinese government. The government does not trust the public to know the truth. It is hard to say whether this is because the government doubts the public’s ability to rationally analyze information, or because they simply wish to avoid the hassle of dealing with an informed citizenry. However, even former senior Chinese officials have become concerned about the government’s obfuscation of certain stories in the media. An open letter written by 13 ex-officials and scholars criticized the current government’s policies, saying, “History demonstrates that only a totalitarian system needs news censorship, out of the delusion that it can keep the public locked in ignorance.” They go on to say, “Depriving the public of freedom of expression so nobody dares speak out will sow the seeds of disaster for political and [social] transition.”⁷³ Regardless of the underlying reasons for the restrictions, it is clear that people at all levels of Chinese society are concerned about media censorship, which creates a confused public that lacks the information needed to feel secure about its food sources.

⁷³ Bright, Arthur. Senior Chinese Officials Slam Communist Party Censorship. Christian Science Monitor. 2/15/2006.

Conclusion

According to Zhou Qing, underlying all of the issues above is a general decline in morality, coupled by an increase in selfishness, among the Chinese people.⁷⁴ He tells of restaurant owners in Guizhou that lace their soups with opium to keep customers coming back⁷⁵ and factory bosses that allow workers to purposely contaminate food with urine and saliva.⁷⁶ Actions that show such rampant and casual disregard for the health and safety of others could only become endemic in a society that is already deeply ill. Zhou Qing's final diagnosis of the problem is that the Chinese government's tradition of lying to and deceiving the public has finally been adopted by the people in general. In a society in which the government has achieved great power through such means, it is only natural for the people to follow suit. There is an old maxim coined by Chinese Army General Lin Biao that states, "If you don't lie, you can't achieve great things."⁷⁷ Zhou Qing bemoans the fact that the Chinese people have taken this advice to heart.

⁷⁴ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 79. 2004.

⁷⁵ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 53. 2004.

⁷⁶ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 54. 2004.

⁷⁷ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 79. 2004.

CHAPTER 3: Changes in Social Awareness

For the past 100 years or so, inspiring interest in the problems they expose has been the main goal of muckraking books from the United States like *The Jungle* and *Fast Food Nation*. *What Kind of Heaven?* is unique in that it is the first of its kind in China. Each book has affected social awareness to different extents, sometimes producing localized results, as in the case of *Fast Food Nation*, and sometimes causing the international community to take notice, as with *The Jungle*. This chapter explores the extent to which the public has taken notice of the food safety problems uncovered in these books and how they have reacted to this new information. Also, in the case of Zhou Qing's book, this chapter explains why the public has failed to respond at all.

Sinclair's *The Jungle*

One passage in *The Jungle* reads:

There was never the least attention paid to what was cut up for sausage; there would come all the way back from Europe old sausage that had been rejected, and that was moldy and white- it would be treated with borax and glycerine, and dumped into the hoppers, and made over again for human consumption...A man could run his hand over the piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*. Bantam Books. 1981. Pg. 134-135.

As a result of such gruesome descriptions, *The Jungle* had a nearly immediate impact on public awareness of food safety problems. As Winston Churchill said, *The Jungle* “pierced the thickest skull and most leathery heart.”⁷⁹ *The Jungle* caused significant public outcry, and President Roosevelt was bombarded with angry letters urging the government to take action.⁸⁰ Additionally, and even more concerning to Roosevelt, domestic and foreign purchases of American meat fell by half after the book was published.⁸¹

The public reaction to Sinclair’s descriptions was predictable and uniformly angry, but the most significant social impact of his work lay outside the realm of public outrage. Thanks to the success of *The Jungle*, both financially and in terms of raising public awareness, many other journalists were inspired to follow in Sinclair’s footsteps.⁸² In fact, Sinclair’s work inspired Theodore Roosevelt to invent the term “muckraking,” which he used to describe socially progressive works of investigative journalism. However, Roosevelt did not intend the term “muckraker” to have a positive connotation. He felt that while muckraking was beneficial in some areas, it could also be taken too far. Specifically, he was concerned that the muckrakers’ sensationalism caused more harm than good to the public, saying, “The men with the muckrakes are often indispensable to the well being of society; but only if they know when to stop raking the muck, and to look upward to the celestial crown above them, to the crown of worthy endeavor.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Blackwell, John. 1906: Rumble Over ‘The Jungle’.

⁸⁰ Cohen, Adam. 100 Years Later, the Food Industry is Still ‘The Jungle’. New York Times. 1/2/2007.

⁸¹ PBS News Hour. Sinclair’s ‘The Jungle’ Turns 100. 12/14/2007.

⁸² Spartacus Educational. Upton Sinclair.

⁸³ Weinberg, A. & L.. The Muckrakers. University of Illinois Press. 2001. Pg. 60.

Despite Roosevelt's critical attitude, Sinclair wore the term "muckraker" as a badge of honor.⁸⁴ His work has since inspired many other authors to shed light on issues as varied as child labor, race relations, and electoral politics. His impact has also reached beyond the progressive era to inspire modern authors, such as Barbara Ehrenreich and Eric Schlosser, to publicly speak out against social ills. Therefore, the largest impact of Sinclair's novel was to affirm the idea that passionate journalism can, and often does, inspire great social change.

Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*

Eric Schlosser wrote his 2001 book Fast Food Nation in the same muckraking spirit as The Jungle. This book, which exposes the dark side of the fast food and junk food industry, could not have been published at a better time. Recently, some startling statistics have gripped the nation's attention. Since 1980, obesity rates in the U.S have increased by more than 60% in adults, while rates have doubled in children and tripled in adolescents.⁸⁵ This means that 34% of adults aged 20 and over are obese,⁸⁶ and children are not fairing much better. According to the Centers for Disease Control's analysis of data taken between 1976 and 1980, and data taken between 2003 and 2004, "for children aged 2–5 years, prevalence increased from 5.0% to 13.9%; for those aged 6–11 years, prevalence increased from 6.5% to 18.8%; and for those aged 12–19 years, prevalence increased from 5.0% to 17.4%."⁸⁷ According to the U.S. Surgeon General, there are many health problems related to obesity, including heart disease, diabetes, cancer, breathing

⁸⁴ York, Barry. Aiming for the Heart. National Library of Australia. 1/2006.

⁸⁵ Evangelista, A. et. al. U.S.A. The Fast Food Nation: Obesity as an Epidemic. 8/13/2004.

⁸⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. New CDC Study Finds No Increase in Obesity Among Adults; But Levels Still High. 11/28/2007.

⁸⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Childhood Overweight Prevalence. 5/22/2007.

problems, arthritis, and reproductive complications.⁸⁸ These facts and statistics have garnered nationwide attention, and have inspired many people to attempt to both explain and halt this trend. Lack of physical education in schools, increased television viewership, and larger portion sizes at restaurants have all been listed as possible culprits.⁸⁹ While Schlosser's book acknowledges that there are several factors involved in the obesity epidemic, readers were most captivated by two of his discussions. First, they were surprised to learn just how much fat and sugar fast food contains. They were also alerted to how cheap and easy it is to access fast food and junk food, which undoubtedly contributes to its popularity and thus the obesity epidemic.

Fast Food Nation has been widely read and has contributed to the large increase in public awareness concerning the issues mentioned above. Generally speaking, Schlosser's book, along with other works including Morgan Spurlock's 2004 documentary *Supersize Me*, has helped to bring about a huge backlash against junk food and those who peddle it. The public outcry against junk food has produced several tangible outcomes in the marketplace.

McDonald's, the largest purveyor of fast food in the world, has phased out super-sized fries and drinks, and has even begun to offer healthier yogurt and fruit side dish choices.⁹⁰ The company, whose U.S. sales had been stagnating, launched its "Eat Smart, Be Active" campaign in 2003 to revitalize sales. According to Walt Riker, a McDonald's spokesman, the phasing out of the super-sized items had nothing to do with works like Schlosser's and Spurlock's, rather, the restaurant was only trying to simplify its menu.

⁸⁸ United States Department of Health and Human Services. Overweight and Obesity: Health Consequences. 1/11/2007

⁸⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Obesity and Overweight Contributing Factors. 5/22/2007.

⁹⁰ Associated Press. McDonald's Ends Supersize, Downsizes Customer Choices. The Houstonian Online. 3/04/2004.

However, an industry consultant disagrees, saying that health concerns undoubtedly factored into the decision.

Thanks to better public awareness about food, Americans have also begun a campaign against trans fats, which are oils that have been found to both increase bad cholesterol and decrease good cholesterol.⁹¹ One manifestation of this campaign was a lawsuit against Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) filed by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI).⁹² However, KFC phased out trans fat usage on its own (a decision than many other fast food companies are expected to mimic), and CSPI has since withdrawn from the suit.⁹³ In similarly unexpected news, Wal-Mart has also joined in the health food frenzy and recently started selling organic produce to sate America's growing appetite for healthier food options.⁹⁴

The attacks against the contents of processed foods have been accompanied by criticisms of how easily available these products are to children. Parents and educators have spoken out against the high availability of junk food in schools, and both school districts and snack food companies have responded to the pressure. In one of the most notable victories, after discussions with both the Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association, beverage companies including Coke, Pepsi, and Cadbury-Schweppes, have agreed to stop selling sugary, high-calorie beverages in schools nationwide by 2010.⁹⁵ While the beverage companies were reluctant to agree to certain standards at first, The American Beverage Association, which was involved in brokering the deal, claims

⁹¹ Mayo Clinic. Com. [Trans Fat: Avoid the Cholesterol Double Whammy](#). 12/21/2006.

⁹² Burros, Marian. [Suit Seeks to Force KFC to Stop Using Trans-Fat](#). New York Times. 6/13/2006.

⁹³ Caruso, David. [KFC To Quit Frying with Trans Fat](#). Associated Press. 10/31/2006.

⁹⁴ Gajilan, Arlyn. [Food For Thought](#). Forbes. Com. 5/16/06.

⁹⁵ Kluger, Jeffrey. How [Bill Put the Fizz in the Fight Against Fat](#). Time. 5/07/2006.

that, “The beverage industry has a long-standing belief that school wellness efforts must focus on teaching kids to consume a balanced diet and exercise more.”⁹⁶

Eric Schlosser never expected his book to have the long-lasting effect that it has.⁹⁷ He refuses to take direct credit for any of the changes mentioned above, but one can easily see that his work is at least partly responsible for the rise in social awareness necessary to bring those changes about. Given that the food-awareness trend is growing stronger and more widespread, one can predict that Schlosser’s book will be well-remembered as a strong catalyst of social change.

Zhou Qing’s *What Kind of Heaven?*

In a passage from *What Kind of Heaven?* Zhou Qing says:

Recently, news has emerged that in China soy sauce is being manufactured from hair. The producers of this fake sauce buy up discarded hair from hairdressers and ferment it....Compared with other amino acids made from fermented beans or grain, these amino acids are not only cheap, they can also comply with the superficial quality standards set for soy sauce...In some areas of Hebei “hair villages” have sprung up, the roads lined with hair wholesale shops which sell hair that has come from all over the country...Amino acids created from human hair contain arsenic, lead, and other dangerous substances which harm people’s liver, kidneys, blood system and fertility, and can lead to cancer.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ American Beverage Association. [American Students to See Changes in Beverage Options as They Return to School This Fall](#). 8/30/2006.

⁹⁷ Gajilan, Arlyn. [Food For Thought](#). Forbes. Com. 5/16/06.

⁹⁸ Zhou Qing. [What Kind of Heaven?](#). Pg. 14-15. 2004.

What Kind of Heaven? is full of these sorts of facts, which allows it to rival *The Jungle* in terms of ability to turn one's stomach. Given the unsettling nature of these anecdotes, people are often surprised to learn that relatively few people have created an uproar over this book. The reason is that the readership of *What Kind of Heaven?* is not very large due to both Chinese publishing restrictions and the fact that the book has not yet been widely distributed in English. Therefore, it is impossible to gauge what kinds of effects the book has had on the people of China and their awareness of food safety dangers. However, Zhou Qing does hope that his book will eventually serve as a wake up call to the Chinese people, inspiring them to demand reforms.⁹⁹

Conclusion

As indicated above, a rise in social awareness of a problem is not the only benefit of muckraking literature. Thanks to the books mentioned above, people have been inspired to investigate and criticize other aspects of society, and to find community level solutions to larger problems. While it is true that Zhou Qing's book has yet to have the impact on China that he hoped for, as we will see later on, his book has contributed to the rise in international awareness of China's food safety failings. The books in this paper may not always have influenced public debate in the ways the authors intended, but they have still made their own distinct impact on the public consciousness.

⁹⁹ Ansfield, Jonathan. Food: It's Even Less Safe Inside China. Newsweek. 7/8/2007.

CHAPTER 4: Contributions to Regulatory Change

Once the public has become aware of a problem, the next step in creating change is for the public to demand those changes. In the cases of Sinclair and Schlosser, their books inspired people to protest dangerous food in America. In response to the public pressure, the government stepped in to enforce new policies that protect people from unsanitary foodstuff.

Zhou Qing's book has not directly inspired sweeping regulatory reforms. In fact, because of Chinese government censorship, his book is not widely read in China.¹⁰⁰ However, information from his book is being used by western news media to inform citizens and governments about the dangers posed by unsanitary Chinese foods. In response to this information, governments have become increasingly demanding regarding the safety of imported Chinese food. While Zhou Qing's book has had little impact domestically, it has helped to focus international attention on China's food safety problem. This international scandal has forced China to change their regulations as a way to maintain economic viability.

Sinclair's *The Jungle*

The Jungle had the most direct and concrete impact on government regulation of all three books featured in this paper. The tales told in *The Jungle* were so horribly grotesque that President Roosevelt did not believe they could be true and he sent two of his own investigators to Chicago to examine the situation.¹⁰¹ Sinclair expected that Roosevelt's team would obscure their true findings, but instead their conclusions

¹⁰⁰ Ansfield, Jonathan. Food: It's Even Less Safe Inside China. Newsweek. 7/8/2007.

¹⁰¹ New York Times. President's Threat with Meat Report. 6/5/1906.

confirmed Sinclair's claims.¹⁰² In response to this confirmation, President Roosevelt immediately passed two new regulations, the Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1906 (FMIA) and the Pure Food and Drugs Act of 1906, which led to the formation of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).¹⁰³

The FMIA fell under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), which was established to eradicate livestock born diseases in the United States. It enforced four major requirements on the meat packing industry.¹⁰⁴ All livestock had to be inspected before slaughter, and there was a mandatory post mortem inspection carried out on every carcass. Additionally, more stringent sanitation requirements were imposed on slaughterhouses, and meat packers were forced to allow federal inspectors inside their facilities. Following passage of the FMIA, the BAI hired more than 1,300 meat inspectors to inspect 163 establishments. By 1907, there were 2,200 inspectors at approximately 700 meat packing facilities. With these new regulations in place the pressure for government action was reduced, and the public was reassured about the quality of the meat products they consumed everyday.

The Pure Food and Drug Act came about after President Roosevelt sent a terse message to Congress expressing his strong desire that such a bill be quickly signed into law.¹⁰⁵ The law forbade interstate and foreign commerce of adulterated and mislabeled food and drugs. It also allowed for those violating the law to be fined or jailed. Some critics of the bill were dismayed that the law did not include certain food standards recommended by agricultural chemists, but they were pacified by the fact that any false

¹⁰² Cohen, Adam. 100 Years Later, the Food Industry is Still 'The Jungle'. New York Times. 1/2/2007.

¹⁰³ U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Milestones in U.S. Food and Drug Law History. 8/2005.

¹⁰⁴ United States Department of Agriculture. Celebrating 100 Years of FMIA. 5/15/2006.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The Long Struggle for the 1906 Law. 1981.

or misleading statement about a food or drug constituted misbranding and fell under the purview of the law. Industry officials, who lobbied against many aspects of the law, were happy that the new guidelines were not more restrictive, but they were still nervous about the stringency of its enforcement. However, most people were pleased with the new law designed to protect the public interest.

Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*

Fast Food Nation alerted the public to many health concerns, and its most direct impacts can be found on the societal level, as discussed previously. While *Fast Food Nation* has not had the same sorts of direct and concrete regulatory impacts as *The Jungle*, it has inspired a few changes. For example, in accordance with a new FDA labeling law, as of January 1st, 2006 food processors are required to list trans fat, one of the substances Schlosser criticizes, on ingredients labels.¹⁰⁶ However, it should be noted that some nutritionists are still critical of the law, as it does not require processors to list amounts of trans fat under 0.5 gram.¹⁰⁷ Nutritionists say that this is misleading and may cause people to consume more of the harmful substance than they realize. Perhaps with further public pressure, this loophole in the regulation will be closed.

Schlosser himself admitted in an interview that he does not envision his work leading to large scale regulatory changes, but he does state that the fast food and junk food industries are incapable of self-regulation.¹⁰⁸ He hopes that his book has helped pave the way for government regulation by raising public awareness about the dangers of junk food. In the same interview he makes these suggestions for future regulations: "I would

¹⁰⁶ U.S. Food and Drug Administration. [Revealing Trans Fat](#). 9/2003.

¹⁰⁷ National Public Radio. [Government Joins Fight Against Trans Fat](#). 9/27/2006.

¹⁰⁸ Selke, Belinda. [Behind Fast Food Nation](#). Green Left Online. 10/14/2006.

ban all marketing of unhealthy food to children immediately, I might even ban all marketing to children...I would kick all junk food and soda out of schools. I would absolutely have very tough food safety laws, very tough animal welfare laws.” In summary, he says, “The government needs to interpose itself in between consumers and these companies on behalf of consumers.”

Zhou Qing’s *What Kind of Heaven?*

While Zhou Qing’s book has made an impact on Chinese government regulations, it has taken a circuitous route to doing so. Rather than the Chinese people demanding change, it has been foreign governments that have pressured China into reforming its food safety systems. The most notable example of this cycle can be seen in seafood, one of China’s notoriously troubled exports. In the U.S., China has become the third largest source of imported food, and much of the food we import from China is classified as seafood.¹⁰⁹ In fact, Chinese seafood imports increased from \$550 million in 2001 to \$1.9 billion in 2006. Although seafood imports from China comprised only 22% of seafood imports last year, it is significant that 60% of the seafood products denied entrance into the U.S. that year came from China. The reasons the FDA provides for rejecting the seafood match up well with Zhou Qing’s reports. Inspectors have found fluoroquinolones, an FDA banned antibiotic, in catfish samples, tilapia tainted with salmonella, frozen eel contaminated with pesticides, and “filthy” yellowfin tuna and monkfish.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Barboza, David. More Questions Raised About Safety of Chinese Seafood. International Herald Tribune. 7/2/ 2007.

¹¹⁰ Martin, Andrew. F.D.A. Issues Alert on Chinese Seafood. New York Times. 7/29/2007.

These troubling statistics and facts brought about a serious crackdown on Chinese imports. In 2007, the FDA announced severe restrictions against five Chinese seafood products.¹¹¹ No shipments of shrimp, catfish, basa, eel, or dace are allowed in the U.S. unless they are all proven to be safe. Other countries have also tightened regulations after receiving contaminated seafood. The European Union announced that it would step up scrutiny of Chinese seafood, and according to one health official in Japan, Tokyo now inspects every eel imported from China.¹¹²

China has responded to the international pressure by unveiling its first five-year food safety plan, allowing officials to track and trace contaminated food, promptly issue recalls, and blacklist offending companies.¹¹³ In another demonstration of intolerance of corruption, China executed the first head of its State Food and Drug Administration, Zheng Xiaoyu.¹¹⁴ Zheng's troubles began after deadly pet food in the U.S., poisonous cough syrup in Panama, and contaminated toothpaste around the world were all linked to China. Investigations related to the incident revealed that Zheng had approved fake medicines and accepted bribes in exchange for foregoing certain inspections.

While the five year plan and the crackdown on corruption are positive steps for China, it is clear that these steps are aimed at protecting China's foreign trade interests, not at improving domestic food quality. The goal of Zhou Qing's book was to raise national awareness of food safety problems, prompting a rise in the safety of the food Chinese citizens consume everyday. According to Zhou Qing, "Zheng Xiaoyu was

¹¹¹ Zamiska, Nicholas & Miller, John. [EU Sets Chinese Seafood Alert](#). Wall Street Journal. 7/2/2007.

¹¹² Zamiska, Nicholas & Miller, John. [EU Sets Chinese Seafood Alert](#). Wall Street Journal. 7/2/2007.

¹¹³ Ansfield, Jonathan. [Food: It's Even Less Safe Inside China](#). Newsweek. 7/8/2007.

¹¹⁴ Associated Press. [China Executes Ex-Food and Drug Chief](#). National Public Radio. 7/10/2007.

sentenced to death because of America's dogs and Panama's cough syrup."¹¹⁵ Despite the fact that Zhou Qing wishes these regulatory changes would have come about differently, it is still hard to see them as anything other than a positive step; a rise in the quality of goods for foreign export could raise domestic quality as well.

Conclusion

As illustrated there are several different ways that muckraking literature can create concrete regulatory change. However, there appears to be no certain formula for success. Much depends on the timing of the publication and on certain external factors, including what kinds of stories are being picked up by news agencies. Each book mentioned above has managed to produce change in very different circumstances, and, with the possible exception of *The Jungle*, they have the ability to continue creating change in the future.

¹¹⁵ Ansfield, Jonathan. Food: It's Even Less Safe Inside China. Newsweek. 7/8/2007.

CHAPTER 5: Changes in the Author's Lives

Authors who take it upon themselves to write muckraking literature about sensitive topics do so in hopes of changing something about their society. The pages above explore the varying degrees to which Schlosser's, Sinclair's, and Zhou Qing's books affected their societies. However, it is important to realize that writing controversial books also has an effect on the lives of the authors, both in the short and long terms.

In this section I will briefly explore how writing their book affected the life of each author. As an early 20th century author, Upton Sinclair has been the subject of biographies and there are several websites dedicated to chronicling his life and achievements. Zhou Qing and Eric Schlosser are more recent authors and there is not an abundance of information available concerning their personal lives. In the case of Sinclair, the information in this section comes from the previously mentioned biographical web pages (for in depth information about Sinclair's life, please consult Anthony Arthur's biography, *Radical Innocent: Upton Sinclair*). For the segments concerning Zhou Qing and Schlosser, I have relied mostly on newspaper articles and press releases.

Upton Sinclair

Upton Sinclair was born into an extremely poor family in 1878. While growing up he spent periods of time with his wealthy grandparents. Experiencing the drastic lifestyle differences between his family members was part of what urged him to support the

socialist cause.¹¹⁶ He was one of the founding members of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, and it was through connections within that organization that he was commissioned to write *The Jungle*.¹¹⁷ The original intents of the work were to expose the harsh working conditions imposed on the employees of the meat packing plants and to increase public knowledge about wage slavery.¹¹⁸ In short, *The Jungle* was originally meant to promote socialism.

The large publishing houses were not keen on promoting socialism, and six publishers rejected Sinclair's book. One publisher commented, "I advise without hesitation and unreservedly against the publication of this book which is gloom and horror unrelieved. One feels that what is at the bottom of his fierceness is not nearly so much desire to help the poor as hatred of the rich."¹¹⁹ Sinclair decided to publish the book himself, and received orders for 972 copies. Once Doubleday learned of this, they agreed to publish the book in 1906, and it has been in print ever since.¹²⁰

Despite the wide-ranging overhaul of food safety policy that *The Jungle* inspired, the public reaction to the book disappointed Sinclair. He expected public outrage to be focused on the inhumane working and living conditions in the stockyards, not the unsanitary conditions of the slaughterhouses. As Sinclair put it, "I aimed at the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach."¹²¹

Dissatisfied as Sinclair was in the reaction to his book, *The Jungle* had a significant and long lasting effect on his life. Firstly, Sinclair became famous as the man

¹¹⁶ Spartacus Educational. [Upton Sinclair](#).

¹¹⁷ Spartacus Educational. [Upton Sinclair](#).

¹¹⁸ Blackwell, John. 1906: [Rumble Over 'The Jungle'](#).

¹¹⁹ Spartacus Educational. [Upton Sinclair](#).

¹²⁰ Spartacus Educational. [Upton Sinclair](#).

¹²¹ Blackwell, John. 1906: [Rumble Over 'The Jungle'](#).

who dared to take on the powerful packing industry. *The Jungle*, which was an immediate bestseller, also made Sinclair wealthy. His wealth and fame allowed him to run for office in several states on both socialist and democratic platforms.¹²² While all his campaigns were ultimately unsuccessful, Sinclair was still able to use the status and wealth earned from writing *The Jungle* to promote his political causes. However, he also made enemies through writing his book and blamed his political adversaries for several misfortunes in his life, including the destruction of his socialist writer's colony by arson.¹²³

Eric Schlosser

Thanks to his exposures of the fast food industry, Eric Schlosser has been dubbed “a modern-day Upton Sinclair.”¹²⁴ According to Schlosser, fast food has infiltrated “not only the American diet, but also our landscape, economy, workforce, and popular culture.”¹²⁵ He wrote his book to expose the ubiquity of fast food in American life, and *Fast Food Nation* has since become wildly popular. It was a New York Times bestseller for over two years and has been on bestseller lists in Canada, Great Britain, and Japan.¹²⁶ His book was also made into a film that debuted at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006. His work has made him into one of the most respected journalists of our time and he is regularly interviewed by a variety of publications and broadcast media outlets. He has also recently co-authored a version of *Fast Food Nation* meant for younger audiences, entitled *Chew on This*.

¹²² Spartacus Educational. [Upton Sinclair](#).

¹²³ Spartacus Educational. [Upton Sinclair](#).

¹²⁴ Gajilan, Arlyn. [Food For Thought](#). Forbes. Com. 5/16/06.

¹²⁵ Russo, Maria. [Unhappy Meals](#). Salon.com. 2/08/2001.

¹²⁶ Houghton Mifflin. [Eric Schlosser](#).

Both of Schlosser's books level criticism at the fast food industry, which includes several large and powerful transnational corporations. These corporations and industry groups have tried to attack the factual integrity of Schlosser's books, but have so far declined to point to any specific errors.¹²⁷ This is most likely because, anticipating significant industry backlash, Schlosser spent three years researching for *Fast Food Nation* and the book includes extensive citations.¹²⁸ So far Schlosser has not been subpoenaed, although he has not ruled out the possibility of being sued out of spite.

Having been unable to attack Schlosser legally, these groups have resorted to making personal attacks. One industry-funded group, the Heartland Institute, has said that Schlosser is trying to trick people and "lead them away from capitalism into his failed socialist ideology."¹²⁹ Another group, the Young Americans for Freedom, have attended his lectures at schools and passed out information implying that Schlosser is anti-immigrant. He has also faced allegations of racism from the National Minority Health Month Foundation, another industry-funded front group.¹³⁰

Despite the controversy and personal attacks, Schlosser still feels gratified by the experience of writing *Fast Food Nation*.¹³¹ As demonstrated in the sections above, Schlosser's work has raised awareness about food issues in America and has contributed to several groundbreaking policy changes regarding food. Writing *Fast Food Nation* has helped him achieve his goal of creating social change, but more importantly it has given him a reputation as a reliable source for information on controversial topics in the future.

¹²⁷ Adamy, Janet & Gibson, Richard. Flak Over 'Fast Food Nation'. Wall Street Journal. 5/18/2006.

¹²⁸ Weich, Dave. Eric Schlosser Knows What You're Eating. Powell's Author Interviews. 1/23/2002.

¹²⁹ Stauber, John. Food Flack Nation Attacks Journalist Eric Schlosser. Center for Media and Democracy. 5/15/2006.

¹³⁰ Gajilan, Arlyn. Food For Thought. Forbes. Com. 5/16/06.

Houghton Mifflin. 'Chew On This' Press Release. 2007.

¹³¹ Gajilan, Arlyn. Food For Thought. Forbes. Com. 5/16/06.

Zhou Qing

Because he lives in a tightly censored and controlled country run by a single, all-powerful party, Zhou Qing is the author who took the greatest personal risk in writing his book. The inherent danger of writing a piece of investigative journalism in China was compounded for Zhou Qing due to the fact that he has already been in trouble with the government. He was jailed for two years because of his involvement in the Tiananmen Square movement, and had eight months added to his sentence for refusing to rehabilitate and attempting to break out of prison.¹³²

Zhou Qing had worries other than the Chinese government. The industries he investigated are cut-throat and profit driven, and they rely on keeping their secrets under wraps in order to make money. In Zhou Qing's own words, carrying out his research was "more dangerous than chasing after drug dealers."¹³³ At one point he was dragged out of a bus by knife point because a powerful businessman suspected he had stolen lean meat powder from him.¹³⁴

Unfortunately, there is little information available about how the government and the industry he criticized have reacted to his book. However, it is known that the government still thinks of him as a traitor and has attempted to restrict his writing career¹³⁵ by heavily censoring the book before its release and warning the Beijing-based publishers against promoting it.¹³⁶ Given this information, it stands to reason that, if

¹³² P.E.N. Club. Zhou Qing.

¹³³ Lettre Ulysses Award for the Art of Reportage. Zhou Qing, China. 2006.

¹³⁴ Zhou Qing. What Kind of Heaven?. Pg. 47. 2004.

¹³⁵ Yomiuri Online

¹³⁶ Ansfield, Jonathan. Food: It's Even Less Safe Inside China. Newsweek. 7/8/2007.

anything, writing *What Kind of Heaven?* has only increased the level of surveillance and danger to which Zhou Qing is subjected.

Conclusion

As seen above, writing books that are critical of powerful industries can have both positive and negative effects on authors. While the positive effects, such as fame and respect, are often intangible, the negative effects can be frighteningly real. Arson, character defamation through published material, and possible imprisonment are all consequences that the authors had to face. Because each author wrote at a different time period or under different governmental systems, the risks they were accepting varied in severity. However, acceptance of any of the outcomes mentioned above indicates that the common denominator at work for each author was a deep passion for social justice. But the clear lesson that can be learned from all three of these authors is that one needs more than passion to write serious social criticism; one also needs bravery and strength of character enough to withstand harsh and life altering consequences.

DISCUSSION

Having read this thesis, I hope that the reader has a clearer understanding of why such similar books have resulted in such different social, regulatory, and personal outcomes. Popular sentiment towards a subject, the timing of publication, the governmental system one lives under, and the amount of social and economic influence wielded by the book's intended audience all play a part in determining how much change muckraking literature will create. I also hope that readers have been inspired by the authors discussed above and will not hesitate to start making changes in their own societies.

As someone who has first hand experience dealing with the consequences of China's food safety problem, another goal of writing this thesis was to explore what needs to change in China in order for meaningful food safety reform to take place. I have come up with several ideas that can be broken into two lists. The first list is made up of very idealistic ways that China can improve both its food safety record and public awareness of the problem. The changes on this list are unlikely to be made in the near or even distant future, but I hold out hope that we will eventually see some of these things come to pass. In no particular order:

- The Chinese government must increase access to books like Zhou Qing's and stop relying on censorship to ensure social stability.

- There need to be stronger links between the public, allowing them to communicate about food safety problems and organize protests. This includes increasing public access to the internet and other forums for discussion.
- The Chinese government must take a strong and consistent stand against corruption. It also needs to operate more transparently and institute review systems that will force government officials and agencies to be responsible for their actions.
- China must form a clearer legal structure relating to food safety. This includes implementing a system for passing food safety laws, which will ease some of the confusion currently surrounding the issue. The legal system must also institute fines or penalties that will successfully deter potential offenders from committing crimes that endanger public health.
- China must see an increase in the number of grassroots organizations dealing with food safety and public health. These organizations are important because they function independently of the government and are more attuned to the needs of local people.

Clearly, barring sudden and massive social upheaval, the changes above will be a long time in coming. However, the good news is that my second list contains actions that are currently being taken to improve food safety in China. While these actions have not

yet created the widespread change that is needed, they are positive steps. I am of the opinion that we, meaning China's trade partners and the international community at large, need to continue taking these steps in order to create change. Again, in no particular order:

- We need to continue using economic pressure to force China to change. Preventable damage to its industries and economy has forced China to change in the past (as seen with the recently implemented five year food safety plan) and we must continue encouraging these reforms.
- China's trade partners need to maintain their resolve and continue to strictly monitor food imported from China. This includes consistently rejecting unsafe foods and reporting these rejections to consumers.
- As the host of the 2008 Olympics, China is very sensitive to any scandals that may cause international embarrassment. The international community needs to use China's desire to have a good reputation to pressure them into improving food safety standards.
- International organizations, like the WHO, need to be encouraged to continue working with China. Developed countries must also contribute any knowledge or expertise they may have that could help China reform more quickly.

It is important to remember that there are many ways to create change, and the ideas discussed above are not an exhaustive list. However, I do admit that it is a daunting list that may not leave the everyday person feeling particularly inspired. Yet the lesson that can be learned from Upton Sinclair, Eric Schlosser, and Zhou Qing is that the average person can, with the right mix of passion and tenacity, start influencing society in one way or another.

It's also important to maintain perspective and celebrate the changes your efforts have made rather than bemoan the fact that you may not have achieved all your goals. Eric Schlosser is still proud of the social awareness his book brought about, even though he does not foresee it bringing about profound regulatory change. Upton Sinclair was disappointed that his book did not result in a socialist revolution, yet he was still able to focus on the fact that he did improve upon a notoriously stubborn regulatory system. Zhou Qing's book may not have brought about change from inside China, but his book has resulted in international attention that has started to improve the situation.

Also, I hope that the authors discussed in this thesis have inspired the reader as much as they have inspired me. Without the efforts of these three men, and other muckrakers like them, contemporary society might be quite different. They deserve credit for the changes they have brought about today, as well as for the changes they may inspire in the future. Finally, I hope that learning about muckraking literature from these varying perspectives has whetted the reader's appetite for further exploration into this topic.

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